The dynamics and character of management in France

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THE DYNAMICS AND CHARACTER
OF MANAGEMENT IN FRANCE

by

Jean-Louis Barsoux

A Doctoral Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of
Doctor of Philosophy - Ph.D.
of the Loughborough University of Technology

September 1988

© by Jean-Louis Barsoux 1988
To John, Yuri,
Jeff & Austin.
An undertaking such as this would not have been possible without the assistance and cooperation of many people.

Firstly, I am very grateful to M. Carron de la Carriere, of the French Embassy, together with John Ardagh and David Marsh for setting the ball rolling by providing a list of recommended contacts. Secondly, I must thank all the companies which participated in the study - and more particularly, the managers within those firms who gave up their valuable time. I am also indebted to Marion Aitkenhead, in the Department of Management Studies at Loughborough University, for her secretarial help throughout the research.

All of this research was carried out under the auspices of the ESRC. It is customary in these circumstances to thank the research sponsors for their generous financial support. But, over and beyond this, I must praise the Council for its flexibility and responsiveness to the demands of international research.

I should also pay tribute to Professor Geoffrey Gregory, Director of Research, who has had sufficient faith in the researcher to allow him to proceed as he saw fit - and where necessary has provided additional funds for the research.

Notwithstanding these contributions, I believe the supervisor-student relationship to be the critical one in completing a doctoral thesis. Peter Lawrence's ideas and comments as the work progressed have significantly enriched this thesis. His intellectual contribution and verve can be detected between the lines. I have been lucky to have had an extremely helpful, patient and supportive supervisor. His unfailing encouragement and advice allied to his ability to thought-read have spurred me on where I lacked inquisitiveness or audacity.

I hope that he has found the process and its product as rewarding and satisfying as I have myself. I should like him to consider the few hundred pages that follow a sort of "hommage en action".

Finally, a doctoral thesis can prove quite an emotional as well as an intellectual odyssey and I must thank my parents for their unfailing support in that department.
ABSTRACT

This study attempts to characterise what is particular about the style of management and the nature of management jobs in France. In essence, the research sets out to explore the following themes:

- Is Crozier right - just how formal, hierarchic and bureaucratic is French management?

- To what extent is French management education responsible for the singularities of French management?

- How do socio-cultural factors affect the French management style?

- Is there a convergence of national management styles, a universal model which transcends national boundaries?

- What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of French management?

These questions are answered in part in terms of the literature and in terms of the evidence from non-participant observation and direct interviewing.

The study ties together several disciplines which have often been treated separately - management, sociology, anthropology - to give a better overall picture of the interaction between French management and society.
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<td>APEC</td>
<td>Association Pour l'Emploi des Cadres</td>
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<td>Bac</td>
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INSEE  Institut National des Statistiques et des Etudes Economiques
ISA  Institut Supérieur des Affaires
ISSEC  Institut Supérieur de Sciences Economiques et Commerciales
IUT  Institut(s) Universitaire(s) de Technologie
LEST  Laboratoire d'Economie et de Sociologie du Travail
PCF  Parti Communiste Français
PDG  Président Directeur Générale (equivalent CEO or MD)
PME  Petites et Moyennes Entreprises (equivalent of SME)
Prepa  Post-baccalauréat preparatory school and sine qua non for entry to grandes écoles
Sciences-po  Institut d'Etudes Politiques (Paris)
X  L'Ecole Polytechnique
1. INTRODUCTION: AIM AND ORGANISATION OF RESEARCH

"When Peter talks about Paul, if you listen, you can learn more about Peter than about Paul."

This ancient aphorism seems to sum up the case of French management which tends to be somewhat maligned in the comparative literature. The criticism is not unrelated to the fact that many of the more respected works have been by foreigners, and a fortiori, by Americans. Seen through their culturally-tinted spectacles, certain characteristics of French management are regarded as dysfunctional when all they really are is different. As Jean-Paul Larcon (head of HEC) pointed out in conversation with the researcher, "often what is seen as the only way, turns out merely to be the American way."

Taken out of context there is no denying that French management lends itself somewhat to caricature. Particular institutions or practices can easily be ridiculed as archaic or rigid. Yet, the evidence that France "must be doing something right" in managerial and/or educational terms is there for all to see: it has undergone a very rapid final phase of industrialisation (à la suédoise); it is substantially richer than some of its European neighbours including Britain; and it boasts a qualitatively better interface between industry and government.

So, to gain a proper appreciation of French management, its constituent parts must be examined in relation to each other, and the composite picture considered in the wider perspective of French culture and society.

In order to tackle this characterisation of French management, the researcher has dismissed the idea of an all-out assault on the subject and opted instead for a series of tactical 'raids' on strategic points, which encapsulate a number of themes. Thus, the chapters are not really sequential and are intended to be virtually self-contained. This is also true of the literature review and the methodology chapters which aim to go beyond scene setting and take an interpretive position.
It is hoped that by providing a series of overlapping snapshots a more coherent and realistic picture will emerge than might have been achieved using comprehensive aerial photographs.

Broadly speaking, the discussion chapters fall into three sections. Chapters 4-6 (inclusive) explore the educational background, career progress and nature of the managerial population. Chapters 7-9 (inclusive) consider the attitudes of French managers and their relations with one another. Chapters 10-12 (inclusive) examine French corporate leadership, including its labour relation aspects, and French corporate culture. Some of the recurrent themes are then discussed in an audit chapter and the thesis concludes by placing French management in some sort of social, economic and historical perspective - looking at where it has come from and where it is heading.
"Now that you've seen what it's really like you can go back and clear about 50 feet of shelving." Ted Marsh (Production Director, Brush Switchgear Ltd) after the author had spent an exploratory spell of non-participant observation.

The present chapter is something of a reconnaissance exercise aimed at identifying the space which the thesis should furnish. Of course, it is not possible to appraise the literature on French management without some preliminary groundwork. Thus, the chapter begins with a discussion of a few selected texts which provide a scaffold for the research: starting with an examination of the nature of management work, followed by a close look at comparative management as a discipline. And these lead in to an in-depth study of the literature on French management per se.

The Nature of Management Work

In order to engage in a characterising study of French management it is necessary to have a 'point de repère' - that is, a clear idea of management work. Of course, the study of managerial work is, in itself, worthy of a doctoral thesis, so only the edited highlights can be set out here. And although this means sacrificing detail, the advantage of an abridged account is that it brings out the substantial shift in our perception of management work - its portrayal having evolved considerably, whilst the core activity remains essentially unaltered.

Views of managerial behaviour were, for a long time, coloured by Henri Fayol's ideas on executives. According to him, managerial work could be distilled into five activities namely, "planning, organising, commanding, co-ordinating and controlling" (1949; 6). At the time (1916), management was a fledgling discipline and in dire need of scientific credibility, so to couch it in these rational terms was to enhance its status and lend it a much-needed veneer of scientific respectability.
Management writers latched on to this enticing definition and touted it so that even practising managers began to perceive their work in these neat, academic terms. Indeed, Fayol's legacy has been so enduring that some management texts still employ these words as chapter headings. The manager was presented as a rational information-handler and decision-maker operating in a well-regulated environment.

Broadly speaking, this view of management as an imperious task went unchallenged for several decades until Sune Carlson (1951) exploded the myth by revealing a less cerebral side to managerial work. He reported that managers were not bureaucratic automatons engaged only in analytical decision-making - and nor did they display any real aspiration in that direction. Indeed, they seemed willing supporters of the chaos they outwardly deplored. Fayol's description was exposed as a case of wishful thinking, or at best a statement of objectives, but certainly not a description of the reality of managerial work.

Having freed management from its classical and idealised shackles, the path was cleared for others to develop the arguments. Dalton focused upon the social and political aspects of managerial work. He offered an insight into the various forms of skulduggery and machination which take up a manager's time - and in doing so, contributed to our appreciation of the managerial underlife of organisations in which informal arrangements replace, impede and combine with official procedures. As far as he was concerned, the successful managers were those who felt most at ease in this ambivalent system:

"Persons able to deal with confusion came to the fore as leaders, with or without the official title. They became the nucleus of cliques that work as interlocking action centres and as bridges between official and unofficial purposes." (1959; 68)

Dalton was clearly flying in the face of conventional wisdom by suggesting that these managerial practices were conducive not detrimental to 'proper' managerial work - and that informal practices were the lubricant of organisational operation and preservative of managerial sanity.
In 1967 Wrapp reiterated Carlson's original analysis by denouncing the lack of authenticity in conventional accounts:

"I guess I do some of the things described in the books and articles, but the descriptions are lifeless, and my job isn't." (1967; 8).

However, Wrapp was not entirely in agreement with Carlson. Carlson's tone had been mildly exhortary — lamenting the fact that managers were victims of what he termed "administrative pathology" (that is, aware of their operational involvement but powerless to extricate themselves from it). Wrapp took a more pragmatic view of the situation, regarding everyday entanglements as an antidote to "the sterility so often found in those who isolate themselves from operations" (1967; 9). Implicitly, he was confirming Lawrence's opinion of Carlson as "an academic looking at 'men of action' and seeking to order and constrain where this is not appropriate." (1986c; 24).

It was a measure of the lack of progress since Carlson's work that Wrapp's article was condemned as heretical, with many practising managers taking exception to his subversive argument that "good managers don't make policy decisions" (1967; 8). But it paved the way for Mintzberg's classic study.

Mintzberg gave an added twist to the portrayal of management work by asserting that chaos was the work of managers. Like Wrapp, he did not bemoan this hectic disorder but instead proclaimed that this was what management work was all about since the essence of management is dealing with the unexpected, the routine being able to take care of itself — Consequently, management work was intrinsically interactive, not contemplative. He also drew attention to the unstructured nature of management work, encapsulating its disjointed and frenetic nature in the claim that management work is characterised by "brevity, variety and fragmentation" (1973).

The foregoing studies tended to treat management in a rather monolithic way, as though managers were subject to the same constraints and animated by the same dynamics. Stewart took a tilt at this homogeneous view of management by pointing out the dimensions along which managerial work patterns vary
(1967, 1976, 1982) - in terms of work, behaviour, management styles, both between and within functional specialisms, economic sectors and hierarchical levels. She has drawn attention to the scope for personalising what are nominally identical jobs. In pointing out this element of discretion (in terms of content and method) in management work, Stewart implicitly refuted the lingering "one best way" view of management.

More recently, Kotter (1982) has further refined our understanding of how managerial work is depicted. Kotter goes further than his predecessors in acknowledging and stressing the central importance of social relationships and power in the routine accomplishments of managerial work. Kotter has peddled the notion of managerial work as a kind of camouflaged planning - in other words, Kotter rather cleverly reconciles contemporary and orthodox views on management work by saying that action management is merely a disguised version of contemplative management. He maintains that managers plan implicitly, "on their feet", and reactive behaviour is, in fact, an opportunistic way of achieving much in a short time. Similarly, disjointed interactions are not a sign of impulsiveness but a means of scanning a range of problems rapidly.

Lawrence too, has been instrumental in legitimising the erratic, verbal and apparently non-decisional aspects of management. However, his interpretation is rather different from Kotter's "efficiency hypothesis". Kotter justifies action-oriented management by maintaining that deep down, it is a more efficient means of getting the job done - the implication being that managers act in this way by necessity. Lawrence does not deny the existence of method in the madness, but is unsatisfied by the explanation.

He prefers to invoke humanistic reasons for the 'chaos'. Lawrence refers, on the one hand, to the basic need for contact and managerial predilection for other humans as sources of information, inspiration and support (1986c; 81); and on the other hand, he points to the need for the intellectual stimulus of social and political confusion. According to Lawrence, chaos is sustained for primarily selfish reasons - as confirmed by the old quip that "action is the opiate of the manager." Thus, Lawrence's critical contribution to our understanding of management work is in highlighting the significance of the process as well as the product - a fire-fighting approach is chosen by inclination as well as imposed by necessity. Given the option, managers
favour the oral medium to the written medium. Not only is flitting about more efficient, it is also more enjoyable. In this respect, Kotter may be guilty of the same crime as Carlson in trying to foist logical reasoning on emotive processes.

What emerges then is a picture of management work as technical, tactical, reactive and frenetic. These are recurring themes in the literature. Many managers spend little time on planning or abstract formulation, are subject to constant interruptions, hold short face-to-face meetings which flit from topic to topic and respond to the initiatives of others far more than they initiate themselves.

Taking a historical perspective, a clear progression emerges in the portrayal of management work - from idealised to realistic. Initially, managers were depicted as strategists, planners and thinkers. Carlson exploded that myth but left us with the nagging feeling that managers were allowing themselves to be diverted from their 'real' work by constant interruption and capricious interpersonal contact. Mintzberg rehabilitated their image by saying that this was their real work. And the pendulum has swung to its limit with Kotter maintaining that management involves no identifiable reflection - since it is incorporated into the action itself.

The shift is strangely reminiscent of the American post-mortem on Vietnam. The war has been the subject of a fundamental reappraisal. An initial unwillingness to face up to the truth has given way to a frantic search for it - the War is currently the most popular history course in US colleges. This about-turn in portrayal, and acceptance of shortcomings, is paralleled by what has happened to management. Whilst the substance remained unchanged, our perception of it underwent a radical turnaround - something which should not be dismissed as a quirk of fate.

The increasing boldness of the case for action and away from reflection no doubt mirrored the growing confidence of management the discipline. As an emerging discipline, it was in dire need of the scientific kudos of its constituent disciplines. But having established itself as a respectable discipline, with its own body of knowledge and praxis (not simply derivative), it has been able to discard the crutches of pseudo-scientific legitimacy.
Comparative Management

An examination of the past research in comparative management is an essential preliminary on two grounds. Firstly, it serves to determine whether there is any sense in undertaking a study of French management. In other words, is there such a thing as a national style of management within companies, or do the principles of management cut across national boundaries?

Secondly, assuming there is something to investigate, the literature review will familiarise the researcher with the dimensions along which cultures can be compared. This is important, since existing differences are likely to be of degree rather than kind. Few of the distinctive characteristics of French management would be unique - they would simply be more or less pronounced versions of traits present in other countries. The researcher must therefore equip himself with what amounts to a photofit kit, in order to identify the distinguishing features of French management.

It is worth adding, as a prelude to the next chapter on methodology, that the literature will provide an insight into the various research tools and their uses, as well as ideas on innovative research designs. Similarly, it may alert the researcher to some of the methodological pitfalls in the area.

Universal or culture bound?

Researchers, in their attempts to examine the implications of culture for management practices and organisation structures have, in the past, arrived at contradictory conclusions. There are those who argue for universal, culture-free management, and there are those who argue that culture is the determinant of management styles.

Systematic cross-cultural research on organisations and those they harbour is of relatively recent origin. The topic attracted very little attention before 1960, but flourished with the development of multi-national companies around the world - and the inevitable blunders resulting from foisting American management theory and practice onto existing approaches.
One of the first attempts to test out the universality of management was by Harbison & Myers. They came to the comforting conclusion that, "there is a general logic of management development which has applicability both to advanced and industrialising countries in the modern world" (1959; 117). The notion of convergence was endorsed by Kerr et al. (1960), who argued that the organisational and institutional patterns of industrial societies were destined to follow a common life cycle. Indeed, Farmer and Richman (1965; 400), went as far as to suggest that the immutable logic of technology and management were destined to render studies in comparative management obsolete.

Haire et al. (1966), in their extensive cross-cultural study, also gave their qualified support to the standardising effect of industrialism, believing that it had considerable impact on managerial attitudes. They substantiated their argument by pointing out the similarity of managerial responses in three countries whose cultural traditions were disparate namely, Argentina-Chile-India. According to cultural logic, managerial attitudes in these three countries should have resembled those in the Latin or Anglo-Saxon clusters. Again the emphasis was on convergence: "the imperatives of the business situation and its values and traditions seem to bring about a uniform response to problems of management" (1966; 178). And whilst the authors acknowledged the influence of cultural heritage on a person's attitudes, they dismissed it as subordinate to the occupational input (1966; 9).

Hickson and his colleagues were less reserved in revoking the cultural explanation. They had no qualms in postulating that "relationships between the structural characteristics of work organisations and variables of organisation context will be stable across societies." (1974; 63). Their findings corroborated the notion of orderly progress along a single industrial track.

The universal school of management reigned supreme for a long time. Even those who acknowledged management's need for cultural contingencies tended to play them down and portray them negatively. Negandhi, for instance, was aware of widely different management philosophies in the countries he studied yet expressed "hope for future convergence" (Lammers 1979; 332). In other words, Negandhi was prepared to recognise that cultural factors could impinge on the industrialisation process, but regarded these as a brake
which would eventually be worn away:

"...the logic of technology is taking over man's differing beliefs and value orientations. Increasingly, the road is becoming one". (Lammers 1979; 332)

What lay behind this reticence to recognise, and then to accept the culture-bound approach? A number of underlying causes can be invoked:

Firstly, as a derivative of economic theory, management was deemed to possess an inherent logic, based on economic imperatives like profit. There was a belief in what Sorge calls "a natural way of managing" (Lawrence, 1985; 243) and a consequent assumption that management could/should not adopt different cultural guises.

Secondly, universality conferred scientific legitimacy upon the discipline of management. Therefore, to suggest that management was in some way multiform was to deny it scientific status - or, as far as management writers were concerned, to bite the hand that fed them.

Thirdly, there must have been a measure of self-doubt among potential critics. Brought up on a staple diet of Taylor and Fayol there may have been some reticence to challenge their classical precepts. Thus, it was not until Mintzberg had pronounced his momentous "there is no science in managerial work" (1973), that the floodgates for alternative visions were opened.

Fourthly, the universalist lobby had the implicit backing of organisational writers who simply ignored societal determinants. By their 'conspiracy of silence', they inadvertently pledged their support for the universalist model.

Finally, along with excessive faith in the globalisation of markets, the convergence theory may have been a reflection of the times (post-war optimism and unadulterated consumerism). Peter Lawrence (HES Journal; 1981) has posited that the convergence theory was the product of assured economic growth. Stagnation led to a questioning of the 'great truths' which seemed to hold true during the expansionist phase.

Given these factors it is perhaps easier to understand why opposition to the convergence theory was muted. Yet there were isolated attempts to promote a
Among the precursors of divergence theory, it is worth drawing attention to Crozier's contribution. He rounded off his case studies of a clerical agency in Paris and three plants of the French tobacco monopoly by comparing "l'organisation à la française" with organisational systems in the USA and Soviet Russia (1964; Chapter 8). Crozier was quite explicit in his support for a culture-bound approach, stating, "As soon as one embarks on the study of the pathology of organisations, cultural analysis becomes an indispensable tool which permits the delimitation of the global theory and its applications in different cultural contexts" (1964; 7).

Later, he reiterated the point, "Intuitively, people have always assumed that bureaucratic structures and patterns of action differ in the different countries of the Western world and even more markedly between East and West" (1964; 210). Unfortunately, in spite of Crozier's pioneering lead, social scientists failed to take the cue. Perhaps, as Crozier himself points out, authors believed "too easily in the universalistic value of American experiences" (1964; 211).

In actual fact, it was not until the mid-70s that the gauntlet of universality was finally picked up. It was conspicuous that many of the proponents of a culture-bound approach were European in origin. Perhaps, it had taken them a few decades to find the courage to square up to American managerial imperialism.

Among the challengers to the mainstream view were Marc Maurice and his colleagues (1976). They ascribed the differences between matched companies in West Germany and France to socio-cultural factors. Maurice clearly believed in a high level of consistency between people's attitudes and behaviour 'outside' and 'inside' work organisations. He maintained that companies were firmly entrenched in their national cultures, and that managerial ideology was a product of the prevailing educational system and degree of social stratification. (Lammers 1979; 56).

Child and Kieser (Lammers 1979) were also inclined towards cultural interpretations. In their comparison of British and German companies, they affirmed the influence of culture upon organisational form and regime. The differences in form included levels of centralisation, whilst those in régime concerned aspects such as managerial discretion. The authors
concluded that, "a sociologically valid theory of organisation must take cultural settings into account" (Lammers 1979; 267).

More recently, Hofstede has proved the staunchest advocate of the culture-bound approach. His book, "Culture's consequences" has become a classic in the field and isolates four dimensions which serve to classify national cultures. Hofstede categorically relates the international differences found between subsidiaries of a large MNC, to their societal environments.

Inspite of Hofstede's influential work, support for the culture-bound approach is still far from wholehearted. The problem lies with the fact that cultural explanations have too often been employed as a 'cop-out'—a sort of 'catch-all' category which accounts for all the unexplained differences. Inevitably, the cultural thesis has been discredited through overuse. Perhaps the pendulum has swung back too far.

The implications for the researcher is that he should proceed with caution and avoid using culture as a 'failsafe' category, in the absence of alternative causal factors.

Dimensions

Having ascertained, with certain qualifications, that the endeavour is worthwhile, the researcher is faced with the question of dimension—not in specific terms of content, but rather in their form.

Two basic approaches emerge—one quantitative and objective, the other more qualitative and personal. Haire and Hofstede tend to favour the former, based on questionnaires and statistical analysis; whilst the latter is represented by the likes of Weinshall (1977) or Lawrence (1980, 1986a, 1986b), who opt for a more interactive approach.

The former approach, which has characterised most of the comparative research to date, rests on abstract dimensions such as masculinity, need fulfilment, authority or uncertainty avoidance. In marked contrast to this, Weinshall or Lawrence opt for arguably more meaningful phenomena such as mobility, conflict, careerism, status differentiation or degree of managerial interaction—inferring values and attitudes from behavioural manifestations rather than responses to broad general questions, not relating to specific identifiable current behaviour.
Of course, the differences in dimensions stem from fundamental differences in approach. By using the statistical approach the sample can be much larger and the scope for international comparisons is enhanced, since direct contact is not required. What is more, the results are quantitative and therefore irreproachable. But there are serious drawbacks too. An obvious one is referred to by Haire et al: "though many managers subscribe to such beliefs in responding to an attitude questionnaire such as ours, they seldom put them into practice when dealing with subordinates in actual job situations" (1966; 24).

It is far harder to pull the wool over the researcher's eyes when he is in a position to verify the answer. So, based on the premise that "actions speak louder than words", some researchers have opted an approach based on actual rather than perceived behaviour.

Taking their cue from organisational theory, Weinshall and Graves have followed Sune Carlson's lead and applied the diary method to executives in different countries. Similarly, Lawrence has borrowed Mintzberg's shadowing technique and applied it to different cultures. In transferring their study of management work to an international setting, they have helped to bridge the perceived gap between the conventional study of management/management studies and comparative management - and put an end to articles which refer to "...linking the two" (Nath; 1974/75) and "...a marriage needed" (Negandhi; 1975).

Of course, this qualitative approach is more complex in execution - it makes contradictory demands of intimate knowledge of management work, and an absence of managerial preconceptions. It also requires sound linguistic skills and an ability to pinpoint the significant detail - as well as a good dose of imagination and audacity.

Notwithstanding this rather improbable mix of skills, the researcher is attracted by the approach described in the previous paragraph which seems better suited to an in-depth and pragmatic study. An all-out quantitative assault smacks of taking a sledgehammer to a nut, since cultural subtleties are likely to be forfeited in the process. After all, the researcher is not anticipating Darwinian revelations - he is merely attempting to tease out evidence of what Sorge neatly described as "ingenious and judicious tinkering." (Lawrence; 1985; 244).
French management

A characterisation of French management cannot confine itself to a study of the strictly managerial since this would only reveal a small, albeit central, detail in the jigsaw. The net has to be cast wider to embrace related disciplines such as economics, sociology and anthropology which provide an explanation of the socio-cultural underpinnings of French management. The literature review should resemble a Venn diagram whose common denominator is French management.

Given the mass of literature explored it would be easy to submerge the reader under a plethora of titles, which would be suitably impressive and inaccessible. It seemed preferable to opt for a more restricted look at the key findings. For this reason the review is laid out thematically, starting with the more peripheral disciplines or studies and gradually honing in on the target area - in other words, moving from the general to the specific.

Background texts

There is no shortage of characterisations of French society and culture since the French seem to enjoy looking in their collective mirror. This penchant is confirmed by the regularity with which the media have recourse to "sondages" (opinion polls). Indeed, two firms of survey consultants regularly publish a selection of the opinion polls conducted that year. "L'Etat de l'opinion" (S.O.F.R.E.S.) and "Les Français tels qu'ils sont" (I.F.O.P.) provide interesting snapshots of the prevailing mood within the French public. The figures are accompanied by commentaries by journalists who try to interpret the findings. A more in-depth, if less up-to-the-minute look at the French psyche and society comes in a series of essays edited by Jean-Daniel Reynaud, "Français, qui êtes-vous?".

Three books, which share the same imaginative title ("The French") have also provided rapid brushstroke insight into French culture and civilisation. All three are at least in part anecdotal in style, but present a consistent picture of the national character. François Nourissier (1968), delves into the dilemma of being French; Sanche de Gramont tries to isolate what is specific about the French and their values; and Theodore Zeldin gives a very revealing outsider's view of the attitudes and behaviour of the French.
Perhaps the most comprehensive study of French society is John Ardagh's "France in the 1980s", justifiably sub-titled, "the definitive book". It is a fascinating examination of French society in transition since the war. Another engaging analysis is Georges Santoni's edited volume, "Société et culture de la France contemporaine". It contains transcripts of a series of seminars conducted at the State University of New York - and probably because it was originally intended for the oral not the written medium, it is a very readable description of French culture and society.

What in very broad terms emerges from these books is a portrait of a nation which is simultaneously looking into the future and turning back to some of its deepest traditions - essentially, a people of contradictions. This same tension between past and present is also a theme in our characterisation of French management.

A stalemate society

Alongside these multi-disciplinary characterisations, there are a series of works, generally by French authors, which are equally wide-ranging but rather more critical in outlook. For the researcher these works are of considerable interest since their authors tend to be less cautious. They range audaciously across the centuries, and are concerned with deep underlying causes rather than superficial phenomena. They venture wide (and sometimes wild) generalisations and their work relies more on secondary sources than on detailed research. Yet their readiness to be opinionated provides greater intellectual stimulus.

These critiques of French society are perhaps epitomised by Alain Peyrefitte's "Le mal français". The author tries to identify the reasons for a 'French malaise' whose symptoms are the inertia, divisions and confusion "d'une nation réputée intelligente" (of a people renowned for its intellect). Likewise, François de Closets' "Toujours plus!" criticises the cumulative inequalities and ossification of French society. Another dissident author is Michel Crozier who grinds his axe in the books "La société bloquée" and more recently in "On ne change pas la société par décret". Crozier is sceptical as to whether social change in France is possible with a people attached to privileges, hierarchy and job security. The thrust of these popular books is that French society is a victim of its religious background, administrative centralisation and flagrant elitism.
Elitism

The last theme, elitism, is in itself the subject of a substantial body of literature. It is an area which has fascinated French and foreign sociologists alike. Among the latter, Ezra N. Suleiman's, "Elites in French society: the politics of survival", Jolyon Howorth's "Elites in France" and Jane Marceau's "Class and status in France" are fascinating accounts of the mechanics of keeping power 'in the family'.

Indigenous writers have also analysed the phenomenon, but their stance has tended to be more begrudging, as indicated by the titles used - "Les héritiers" and "La reproduction" (both by Pierre Bourdieu); "Tel pere, tel fils" (Claude Thélot); "La classe dirigeante en France" (Pierre Birnbaum) or "Le gaspillage des élites" (Saint Guillaume). The main argument of these authors is that the ruling class is perpetuated and legitimised by the accumulation of various types of capital - financial, social and educational. A more popular version of the same argument is presented by Alexandre Wickham who likens the French élite to the soviet ruling caste in "La nomenclatura française". The book is more a catalogue of the powers and privileges of the élites than an academic analysis of its foundations, but it contains a wealth of interesting anecdotal evidence.

An institution which comes in for particular attention in its perpetuation of élites is the body of grandes écoles. Typically these are criticised on an individual basis by former pupils. Jacques Mandrin set the ball rolling by attacking his old school in "L'Enarchie". In 1973, Jacques-Antoine Kosciusko-Morizet repeated the trick of biting the hand that fed him with "La mafia polytechnicienne". Since then, several other books have been written condemning the very top grandes écoles and the privileges they confer upon their alumni. Needless to say, these vitriolic attacks tend to reinforce the image of the schools which, in a roundabout way, merely adds to their prestige.

Macro-Economic & Industrial Analyses

A useful introduction to this area is Charles P. Kindleberger's "Economic growth in France and Britain". It fills in the background of French economic history as well as taking a serious look at the social and cultural determinants of economic growth.
Analyses of French industry have changed considerably over the last two decades - not so much in thrust, as in outlook. In the late 60s there were a spate of books condemning French industry for its backwardness in relation to the US. Octave Gelenier set the tone in "Le moral de l'entreprise et le destin de la nation" by declaring that French management's attitudes and culture were out of step with modern industrial requirements. Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber ("Le défi américain") took a similar stance by pointing out that Europe's lag had less to do with a deficiency in industrial or financial resources than with a lack of intellectual ones, namely managerial effectiveness.

The analysis was confirmed by researchers from the other side of the Atlantic, such as MacArthur and Scott ("Industrial planning in France") who saw weaknesses in strategic planning and organisational structure lying behind French underperformance. But beyond this they also corroborated Gelenier's analysis - a lack of explicit economic objectives, tolerance of poor performance and inadequate management education.

Since the mid-seventies, the tone has been more positive with less emphasis on the weaknesses of French industry than on what it should do to improve. This change is reflected in the choice of titles which are infused with rampant optimism: "La réforme de l'entreprise" (Pierre Sudreau); "La nouvelle économie française" (Jacques Attali); "Le pari français" (Michel Albert); or "l'après-crise est commencé" (Alain Minc). The thrust of these books is that France 'can do better' in matters industrial - and the authors try to lay down a blueprint for action (what amounts to an industrial manifesto).

**Industrial sociology**

Again, this area is best subdivided thematically, since the books themselves fall rather neatly into socio-occupational categories - perhaps a sign of the stratification of French organisations. There is one study however, which is worth singling out. Renaud Sainsaulieu's "L'identité au travail" is a thorough examination of each occupational category as well as the dynamics of the relations between them. The author makes an attempt to transcend the hierarchical barriers, unlike the other texts in this section.
Workers

Perhaps the most useful contribution to the researcher's understanding of French workers is the work done by L.E.S.T. Marc Maurice and his team have produced several comparative studies of French and German workers. The recently published "The social foundations of industrial power" reveals that French training is more firm-specific than its German equivalent, that promotion is more dependent on seniority, and that workers tend to stay longer with their firms.

"Cadres"

The most authoritative account of the cadre in French society is Luc Boltanski's "Les cadres". It describes the making of the social class, the space it has taken up in the industrial and social landscape and its cohesion. This was supplemented by Gerard Grunberg's "L'Univers politique et syndical des cadres" which helped to refine the sociological profile of the "cadre" and further confirmed the idea of the "cadre" having a very definite image in society.

Another study of particular interest is "Recherche sur la fonction d'encadrement" by G. Benguigui et al. The researchers examine the work of French managers and attempt to identify what distinguishes their activities from the rest of the organisational population.

As regards the managerial apprenticeship of the cadre, a very clear description of their educational progress is provided by the recently published NEDO report, "The making of managers". A more interpretive account (though narrower in focus) is that of Whitley et al., "Masters of business" which compares the links between educational backgrounds and career paths for French and British business school graduates. And if we take managerial apprenticeship in its largest sense, it is worth mentioning Alexandre Wickham's, "Les carriéristes" - a tongue-in-cheek inventory of the machinations and ploys used by ambitious cadres to get to the top. The political games they play turn out to be quite different from those favoured by their Anglo-Saxon counterparts.
Employers

André Harris presents a series of interviews with actual bosses in his book "Les patrons". Their testimonies are fascinating for the recurrence of certain themes, notably the contradictory themes of a dislike for bosses as a class and a certain paternalism on the part of individual bosses – which is probably best explained by Harris' opening phrase, "Les Français n'aient pas 'les patrons', mais ils aiment plutôt bien le leur" (the French do not like 'bosses', but rather like their own).

Of course, since the bosses are part of the ruling class there is a certain amount of overlap between the body of writing discussed here and that on the theme of elitism. This overlap is exemplified by three books in particular, whose titles acknowledge the reproductive element in the higher reaches of French business; they are 1) "Tu seras président, mon fils" (Gaillard), 2) "Patron de droit divin" (Roger Martin) and 3) "Les 200" (Michel Bauer). The last title deliberately evokes the 200 noble families which have dominated France – even though in this case it refers to the bosses of France's 200 largest companies.

Management style

As mentioned in the thesis introduction, many of the most respected accounts of French management are the work of non-French writers. A notable example is David Landes' "French business and the businessman: a social and cultural analysis" (in "Modern France" by E. M. Earle). This oft-quoted work portrays French management as dominated by family firms and essentially cautious, introverted and unconvinced by American managerial values.

One of the earliest indigenous contributions to our understanding of French management was Michel Crozier's "Le phénomène bureaucratique". Crozier painted an enlightening picture of the power relationships between groups and individuals – but over and beyond that, he showed that bureaucratic organisations need to be understood in terms of the cultural context in which they operate. Crozier posited that French management tended to be 'bureaucratic' because that was what the mode with which the actors felt most comfortable.
Theodore Weinshall's "Managerial communication" uses communication patterns as a basis for making wider assumptions about French attitudes to authority and responsibility. He tends to support Crozier's view of the French manager as keen to avoid conflict, face to face relations and responsibility where it is not attached to the office held.

David Granick's "Managerial comparisons of four developed countries" also concurs with Crozier's view of French management as undynamic and attributes this inertia to a closed promotion system. Granick maintains that with pre-selection based on academic achievements, career horizons and initiative suffer accordingly. The author also considers the impact of centralisation, which is another theme discussed by Crozier in terms of the preference for resolution of conflicts by higher (and unseen) authority. The centralisation of authority theme is also covered by Jacques Horovitz in "Top management control in Europe". Horovitz concludes that French corporate management is often a 'one man show'.

Future

In the 80s, with the emergence of a new enterprise culture, there have been many home-grown spin-offs (cynics might suggest 'rip-offs') of the Tom Peters' "Excellence" books. One of the better examples is "Service compris" (Philippe Bloch et al.); or "L'entreprise du 3e type" by Georges Archier and Herve Serieyxd which tries to identify the keys to corporate success.

More pragmatic examples are books such as "Le management pratique de l'entreprise" (Max Moreau) which gives recipes for successful management from a practitioner; or compilations of management success stories eulogising the new breed of manager such as "Les héros de l'économie" (Autrement) and "Ces patrons qui gagnent" (Jean Baumier). Such is the enthusiasm for these success stories a new genre has emerged. Business biographies which have long been accepted in other countries are now finding their way onto the best-seller lists in France - the most striking success being "Gagner" (Bernard Tapie).

Articles

It is worth devoting a short paragraph to the periodicals and newspapers which have enhanced the researcher's understanding of management in France. At the top of the list come the eminently readable "Gérer et comprendre"
and the more academic "Revue française de gestion". More topical information has been found in "L'Expansion", "Le Monde" and "L'Etudiant" - as well as the more general journals, "L'Express", "Le Nouvel Observateur" and "Le Point" which were regularly panned and relieved of their managerial nuggets.

Conclusion

The review of the evidence in the previous section has taken, so far as is possible, a neutral and non-evaluative line. I have endeavoured to address the evidence with one question - what do we know about French management? - in mind. The aim was to be reasonably comprehensive in breadth, if not in depth - since the particular arguments taken selectively from the literature will be developed as and when they are relevant in the main body of the thesis.

As is clear from the literature review, the character of French management is not uncharted territory, but what the researcher hopes to do is to tackle the subject in the round rather than in the partial way it has been treated by many writers and, if possible, to emphasise the connections rather than the divisions between the issues involved - in short, to set French management in some sort of social and cultural context.
3. METHODOLOGY

"Il faut reconnaître les aspects aléatoires d'une démarche de recherche: chercher, c'est tâtonner." Conversation with Michel Berry, Directeur du Centre de recherche en gestion de l'Ecole polytechnique.

(We should not forget the essential randomness of the research process: to investigate is to fumble).

Most doctoral methodologies give the impression that the research was the culmination of a deliberative decision-making process. Researchers are reluctant to admit that they were not fully in control of the process. Yet personal experience has shown that the researcher has only partial say over the choice of subjects. Similarly, what information is gleaned from those subjects depends on their co-operation, not just careful preparation.

Generally, management research has some difficulty in emulating the controlled conditions of scientific research. This is particularly true of non-participant observation as a method which is the flagship of the present research and also of interviewing, a component of this study. These generate broad propositions rather than testing identifiable hypotheses.

The observational approach is in keeping with the exploratory nature of this research. It is a method likely to throw up unexpected insights and whose unpredictability and intensity provide a wealth of evidence. This idea is supported by, for example, Kotter who states that "real progress" in the study of managerial work depends upon the use of unstructured observation methods (1982; 153). These, Kotter indicates, are essential if the researcher is to gain real appreciation of how managers construct and maintain their relationships with others. In adopting this approach I would allow the findings, rather than predetermined dimensions, to structure the thesis.

Of course, the approach also has its drawbacks. For instance, the influence of judgment can lead to circularity - the researcher finding what he set out to find. What is more, the method relies upon the researcher's ability to decode what is happening in an interaction between participants in the managerial communication process. This is of particular concern when
observing managers abroad since the pace of the action precludes "slow motion replays".

It is sometimes suggested that observational research lacks 'scientific' credibility. The environment is too uncertain, the findings haphazard and the interpretation personal. There may be an element of truth in this but putative disadvantages can in fact be attenuated through practice. In order to gain this experience, the researcher underwent an intensive training period aimed at eradicating certain inconsistencies.

**Pilot Studies**

The dress rehearsals were undertaken locally in order to familiarise the researcher with the intricacies of shadowing and interviewing. The 'guinea pigs' included several senior managers and an assortment of middle managers following the Institute of Personnel Managers course at Trent Polytechnic. A number of vital lessons were learnt regarding both interview technique and non-participant observation:

**Interviewing:**

When looking for subjects to interview, it is worth looking for a captive audience (at a course or conference) thereby economising effort rather than squandering it in the pursuit of individuals.

There are some points of etiquette which seem to affect the success of a meeting. Arriving late can have an almost disastrous impact (from observation rather than experience). Top managers believe that time is their most precious commodity, and to waste it may be taken as something of a personal insult, although their attitude is not always reciprocal - such is the nature of social inequality. Patience is the only viable response. It is wise to aim at arriving at the organisation perhaps twenty minutes early, and to ask for the subject at reception about ten minutes before the appointment time. This allows for security arrangements such as signing of books and putting on of badges to be undertaken, as well as giving subjects time to finish whatever they may be doing. It also gives one a moment to compose oneself and familiarise oneself with the company literature.
When getting the interview under way it was found useful to commence with a few direct, factual questions to break the ice which the subject could answer from memory. Hopefully this will encourage brief, accurate and specific responses and will set the tone of the session with the researcher leading the way rather than the manager running away with the interview and more mindful of image than reality.

In conducting the interview, it is important not be afraid to digress from a schedule, even at the expense of continuity. The researcher should be prepared to pursue asides which are thrown up by the discussion. On a psychological level it can prove disastrous to cut off interviewees in full flow since they may interpret this as a sign of disinterest - when the real cause is lack of confidence on the researcher's part.

On the other hand, there is always the threat of managers giving an idealised version of their job. The subject may be more interested in conveying some organisational or personal image than in answering the researcher's questions. It is possible to curtail this wishful thinking and whimsy by referring to concrete activities, for instance, "I believe that managers are often at a loss to enumerate their daily achievements. If I asked you what you did yesterday, what would you answer?"

It is essential to know how to handle reluctance to make discrediting admissions. Politically charged issues such as departmental rivalries can be introduced by suggesting that friction is commonplace elsewhere. By prefixing the questions in this way the threshold of defensiveness is lowered - what harm can there be in simply confirming the researcher's suspicions? Another possible counter is to resort to abstraction. By offering a hypothetical situation it is possible for the respondent to be frank yet avoid self-incrimination.

During early interviews structured standardised questionnaires were used, but it soon became clear that the standardisation of the questions elicited equally standardised answers, and that the articulateness of the respondents simply disappeared behind uniform clichés - thereby falling into the trap of the "circular response". It was decided to change tack and opt instead for an 'aide mémoire' approach to interview planning. A topic would be introduced and subjects invited to describe their experience in relation to it. The interview took different paths according to responses to early questions. Where subjects made interesting or cryptic points they would be
asked to clarify or expand on them. The sequence of topics would then be dictated by the flow of the conversation which allowed managers to digress and give full vent to their ideas. Finally, the researcher would refer to the check-list to ensure that the desired topics had been covered.

At its best this method resulted in an excellent rapport with the subject providing clear and reflective material. At its worst, it could degenerate into a vague monologue which was difficult to stem.

Having experimented with a tape recorder, it was found that note-taking could be just as effective since it avoided problems of microphone shyness, particularly on sensitive organisational or personal issues. It also enables the subject's responses to be pre-analysed to some extent by the nature of the note-taking process. The disadvantage is of course that some subjects talk rapidly but this is gradually overcome as the researcher learns to anticipate responses, allowing concentration on significant or exceptional items.

**Observation:**

It is important to start on the right foot at the beginning of the assignment. At the moment of greeting the subject, the researcher is momentarily in charge of the situation. Some subjects acknowledge this dominance with such comments as "What can I do for you?" This is an opportunity to be seized and the moment for the researcher to outline the purpose of the visit and to state what will happen next. Timidity at this stage can prove detrimental to the course of that research and to one's control over it.

As with interviewing, it is essential to have a battery of arguments to defuse potential objections to the researcher's presence. For instance, sitting in on the dressing down of a third party might be considered inappropriate voyeurism. The researcher can always claim precedence. It may reassure the manager to know that the researcher's presence in similar situations has not caused undue embarrassment.

During the course of the observation, opportunities arise to make the research an enjoyable or beneficial process for the subject - these should be grasped. For instance, managers may seek a sympathetic ear for their woes or the informal feedback of a neutral observer. They may also welcome the
opportunity to discuss the day's events in a reflective way, to philosophise about their managerial experiences or to demonstrate manipulative genius. The researcher should indulge them in these asides since they represent a useful reward for the manager's time expenditure and help build up a rapport.

Experience also showed that there are means of attenuating the play-acting which is often considered detrimental to observation studies. The first is to opt for prolonged shadowing periods with a single person, rather than short stays with different people. As with a bad smell, managers soon become oblivious to the researcher's presence and drop their guards.

Another means of minimising one's impact on proceedings is by judicious positioning in the office. It is essential to be as unobtrusive as possible since sitting opposite the subject will suggest a meeting and may put off casual intruders. The same is true when the researcher sits in on meetings — it is important to remain outside the fray or else unfamiliar parties will try to involve the researcher out of politeness.

Difficult as it is, the researcher aims to play no part in the dynamics of managerial communication. This requires self-control in terms of non-verbal communication such as eye contact or facial expression which can encourage individuals to appeal to the researcher as an arbitrator rather than an observer. Not only would this provoke distortions of interaction but it might also irritate the chosen subject who sees the researcher stealing the limelight. For these reasons placing oneself in a corner of the room should help minimise the researcher's latent influence on the process.

**Setting up the fieldwork and access**

Having digressed to describe the research apprenticeship, we return to the main thrust of the research. Perhaps the greatest difficulty in a study of this sort (that is, where contacts have to be manufactured ab initio) lies in gaining access to target subjects within a reasonable time scale, and at a reasonable cost. Fortunately, the present research benefitted from ambassadorial backing and the number of positive responses actually exceeded expectations, with a fifty per cent success rate on recommended contacts. Approbation from a company's Président Directeur Général (PDG, CEO) prompted the drafting of another letter, destined to give additional information to
the nominated managers - and to arrange at least one telephone call (and on many occasions several) to set a firm date for the visit.

As regards negative responses, these were systematically "relancées" (recycled). Persistence is essential since, as one PDG later admitted, it can be an integral part of the sifting process, a means of distinguishing mail which is worthy of serious attention. Incidentally, it is also a trick used by direct mailing prospectors in France who falsely allude to previous correspondence simply to grab the reader's attention.

**Breaking Down Barriers**

Having gained an agreement in principle from the head of the company or the actual subject, the researcher is almost home and dry. But a few hurdles remain.

Often managers will seek a reassuring preliminary interview which requires a special trip to the company. In such cases audacity has been found to pay off. The researcher should schedule the visit like any observation period and hope that the shadowing can take effect on completion of the interview. Usually the manager in question is taken by surprise and having boasted his openness, is at a loss for excuses.

A formidable barrier is the secretary, who is guardian to the appointments' diary. Many managers use the diary to structure their working lives. Indeed Lawrence tells us, "If you want a senior manager to do something, make sure it goes in his diary." (1986c; 23). So getting the researcher's name into an appointment slot is a crucial event. The secretary's role often includes that of gatekeeper and this involves staving off undesirables who wish to waste the manager's time.

Needless to say, the researcher falls into this category and is therefore a prime target for the "no pasaran" (thou shalt not pass) manoeuvres of a direct or indirect nature. An indirect manoeuvre may take the form of an offer to 'co-ordinate' the researcher's interviews with other managers; the net result being that the researcher never sees the senior manager. Or, it may be an offer to make an appointment to see somebody else who is an 'expert' on the researcher's subject. A direct manoeuvre may involve the researcher being told: "Well of course you can see him, but certainly not
this year, and next year looks difficult." When faced with such attempts, the researcher can only remain politely firm in his resolve to see the subject, keep patient and negotiate the best possible outcome.

It may also be necessary to tell a white lie when a secretary asks what length of appointment is needed when observation is at stake. The researcher should plum for a one hour interview in the hope that the manager will acquiesce when faced with the "fait accompli". If the secretary is unaware of the exact nature of the research, there is no point in arousing her protective instincts by alluding to day-long observation.

On the up side, the researcher will often find that the more protective the gatekeeper, the more valuable the subject. There are signs in this partnership at least, that opposites attract. It stands to reason that the manager and the secretary should, for sound practical reasons, constitute an antithetic entity - an affable manager needs a hard secretary; a chaotic one, an organised secretary. One manager was quite explicit in his acknowledgement of this complementary relationship: "Elle a les forces de mes défauts". So one can expect that the greater the resistance to one's advances the more worthwhile the eventual prize.

As mentioned earlier with regard to correspondence an essential requirement is persistence. It often pays off to possess, or pretend to possess, a thick skin. Researchers should construe everything said in the most optimistic light and not respond too readily to hints that they should discretely go away and leave people in peace. Should the manager directly request the researcher to leave a delicate situation, the latter should promptly suggest alternatives to whatever obstacles are put in the way. Caution must be taken however where the subject risks losing face. It may be wise, under these circumstances to negotiate subsequent discussion of the issue than render the meeting a sham by one's presence.

The Sample

The sample population is almost certainly skewed in favour of successful companies and towards senior managers. The rationale behind this is that top level personnel can provide greater insight into events and processes within the organisation since they are privy to confidential information, and are in a position to synthesize various sources of information. What is more,
they usually make excellent interview subjects. They are generally knowledgeable, intelligent and highly articulate and are often prepared to discuss important issues with a freedom and openness which may not be found at other levels of the organisation.

As regards company type, the sample includes a disproportionate number of large companies. This overrepresentation is based on the notion that large companies tend to act as opinion leaders - it is they which are regularly featured in the media. They therefore offer greater insight, diagnostic and predictive power than responses from more numerous small companies.

In general, the process of gaining access to senior managers may be difficult and time consuming and one over which the researcher clearly does not have complete control. The choice of subjects was partly dictated by circumstances. But the fact that the sample was not set in tablets of stone has enabled the researcher to make the most of spontaneous inputs and include them in the findings. Around the core of subjects from well-known companies, there are managers from lesser-known companies as well as views solicited from individuals not in industry - informed observers such as journalists, management consultants and academics.

Having dealt with the major faults during the pilot study, only fine tuning was required in between the three phases of actual fieldwork.

Fieldwork in France

French companies are notoriously reluctant to expose their inner workings. As one manager put it, "Monsieur, les entreprises francaises sont fermees comme des huîtres" (French companies are as shut tight as clams). Under these circumstances, observation research was perhaps risky since it involved introducing a total stranger to a company and hoping for immediate 'chemistry'. The idea of trying to convey the subtleties of this delicate process is difficult and describing it in rational terms seems flatteringly scientific.

Because non-participant observation as a research method was more of a novelty in France than in say North America or Great Britain, several companies had organised what were little more than glorified factory visits whereby the researcher would be shunted around carefully by-passing the more
'colourful' aspects of the organisation. This happened once. Subsequent attempts to programme my visits were politely refused and my own preferences offered up instead. These did not receive universal acceptance.

Indeed one manager openly confessed (after denying me the access approved by the PDG) that he did not think that French companies were ready for that sort of research: "Je n'y crois pas à votre méthode - on est pas mûr pour ça en France" (I don't really like your method - we are not ripe for it in France). He felt that subordinates would be suspicious of me - even if he explained my presence (vive la confiance!).

In general though, after initial apprehension the managers warmed to the nature of the research and seemed only too happy to have an 'ally' alongside to act as an apolitical sounding board for their ideas. It seems that the mere fact that someone was interested enough to come from England to learn about their jobs was reason enough to co-operate with the endeavour. Though some took more time to get used to my presence: "J'ai l'impression que je devrais m'occuper de vous" ("I feel I should be looking after you") - which tends to corroborate the novelty of the situation. In any event, most enjoyed talking about themselves and their jobs and the prospect of contributing to an academic research project constituted the icing on the cake.

It is worth returning to the issue of play-acting, mentioned earlier in the lessons from the pilot study, when under observation. As with the presence of the documentary camera, there is no way the subject will act entirely naturally. It takes the training of a gifted actor (or a child) to appear natural on TV. Managers will be out to prove how likeable, cynical, politically aware or, in the case of French managers, how intellectual or cultivated they are. But this does not unduly tarnish observational research since the nature of the distortion will, in itself, tell us something about the population examined. The image the manager seeks to put across is revelatory - does it bring out the showman in him or does he lay his claim to ultimate rational man. The way managers react to the researcher's presence is also loaded with information to be decoded.

Yet, try as they might, managers will be unable to keep up a show for long. They will be thwarted in their attempts to put across an idealised image, by the very nature of management work. Lawrence points out that the interactive
nature of management, together with its unpredictability make it impossible to keep up a show for a sustained period. "How can you 'put on the style' if the supporting cast do not go along with the performance?" (Lawrence; 1988).

Further Leads

Having found a willing subject, it is worth adopting a 'foot-in-the-door' approach and asking the interviewee for the names of colleagues who might be of interest to the researcher. This is particularly important with subjects on whom the researcher has made a good impression - goodwill should be capitalised. The researcher should ensure that the interviewee's name can be used as a reference in order to smooth the way with the prospective contact.

By systematically asking for the name of other persons the researcher is able to establish a pyramid of contacts which may contribute substantially to the research project. The present research benefited from a number of knock-on interviews and observation periods, not least with the heads of two prestigious grandes écoles (l'Ecole Nationale d'Administration and l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales), the general secretary of the Fondation Nationale de l'Enseignement de Gestion des Entreprises, a prominent head-hunter and the heads of several management development centers.

With a modicum of initiative and awareness of what is going on, it was possible to use even weekends to attend conferences and job fairs. The latter proved a researcher's dream in that they were brimming with people just itching to engage in sensible conversation rather than repeat corporate spiel to uninterested students. And with their compulsory presence on the stands they were sitting ducks for the researcher - the lack of time constraint meaning that discussions could follow their natural life cycle.

Transcription

At the end of each day of interviewing or observational fieldwork a detailed transcription of the events was made - with data partially analysed into common themes and categories. In parallel with this a journal was kept which acted as a repository for thoughts and ideas which did not fit anywhere else in the research records.
Follow-up Correspondence

Thank you letters were particularly important since the researcher has nothing concrete to offer as a mark of appreciation for the manager's cooperation. The letter makes it possible to offer some psychological recompense to individuals, so that the exchange is not so one-sided.

Firstly, a simple letter of thanks to the observed manager's superior may enhance the participants' standing within the company a little. Secondly, a letter to the subjects themselves, expressing one's gratitude and their vital contribution to the research will generally provide some recompense to make the investment of effort seem worthwhile. But over and beyond the matter of protocol - the letters should be worded so as to leave open the chance of another visit should it become necessary - either for follow-up studies or for help on the draft.
Selected Bibliography:


"Les' cadres, grammaticalement, passent encore. Mais 'le' cadre, c'est plus intriguant. Cette personnalisation, cette singularisation du terme, et puis des expressions telles que 'cadre moyen, supérieur', 'petit cadre', 'il est passé cadre', correspond au besoin de désigner une catégorie sociale nouvelle."
(Jean-François Revel, l'Express, 12/06/67)

(The plural "cadres" is just about acceptable grammatically. But in the singular, it is far more intriguing since the term is personalised. Moreover, the emergence of phrases like "middle manager", "senior manager", "junior manager", "he has been named 'cadre'" indicate the need to identify a new social group).

* - Literally speaking, "cadre" is a noun meaning frame (of a painting or mirror). In the industrial setting, Harrap's gives the definition, "salaried staff"; Larousse suggests, "officials"; whilst Collins opts for, "executives, managers and managerial staff". Over time the noun has extended its application and can now be employed as an adjective. For instance, "un emploi cadre" (a management level job), "une femme cadre" (a woman manager).

What is a cadre?

The term "cadre" is one which has no equivalent in other languages (other than Italian where the word "quadrì" was adopted by business in the 1970's). Basically, it corresponds to "manager" in English, though with rather different legal and sociological connotations, which will be explored in this chapter.

The origins of the term in a business setting date back to the 1930's. Prior to that, the only references to it are in the military context, where it was used to denote the ensemble of commissioned and non-commissioned officers. In 1937, the word made its first appearance in the title of a professional organisation - la Confédération générale des Cadres de l'Economie (Grunberg; 11).
The emergence of the term coincided with the industrial unrest of the mid-thirties (le Front Populaire & the 1936 strikes) and the consequent desire on the part of graduate engineers to distinguish themselves from the employers, on the one hand, and the workers on the other. Initially then, this new socio-professional category was composed essentially of graduate engineers, and to assert their position and status in negotiations. But over time, it has attracted disparate groups (Boltanski; 52) in search of status and representation and has extended its boundaries to include "others enjoying some level of authority" (NEDO; 63).

The thirties therefore represent a critical stage in France's managerial evolution. This is the point at which historical forces pushed France into creating a buffer group between workers and employers, rather than attempting to reduce the fissure between the two factions, and treating them as mere strata within a unit. The LEST studies point to the German model as an expression of the unitary approach (Benguigui; 466). The West Germans distinguish only between "Angestellter" and "Arbeiter", and endeavour to minimise organisational hierarchies, and to reconcile differences through consultation (Lawrence; 1980; 42-49). The French, on the other hand seem to have opted for a tri-partite solution which includes a fleshy intermediary class: "les cadres".

How to become one

There are basically two ways of achieving cadre status; either by virtue of educational credentials or else through loyalty to a given company.

Those fortunate enough to graduate from a "grande école" (bac + 5*) can look forward to immediate "cadre" status on entering professional life. A person with only two years post-baccalauréat education (vocational course such as DUT or BTS) is likely to have to wait 5 or 10 years. As for an "autodidacte" (self-taught person), the only real chance of turning "cadre" is to prove himself over several years*2 in a company and hope to be named

*1 - Higher qualifications are generally designated by the number of years the course lasts after the baccalaureat eg. Bac + 2 for DUT, BTS, DEUG & DEUST; bac +4 for a maîtrise or some business school diplomas; and bac + 5 for engineering schools and DESS.

*2 - Decades even, since it is often a nominal, end-of-career gesture to reward "bons et loyaux services".

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an "ingénieur-maison" - a title which is company specific. In other words, by changing companies the "cadre" of this second type is likely to relinquish his status.

Qualifications are clearly the favoured currency, and 'time' is the price paid for those who are in short supply of this currency. This trade-off between time and qualifications gives rise to a remarkably stable continuum, with particular qualifications corresponding to an implicit "apprenticeship" (socialisation and selection) period, before one can have pretentions to "cadre" status.

Needless to say, this produces two distinct populations of "cadres" - those with educational legitimation, and those without. This divergence gives rise to mild disdain on both sides: those 'with' will secretly deplore "le manque de culture générale" (that is, the lack of intellectual refinement based on superior education); whilst those 'without' bemoan the automatic handing out of "cadre" status. One "autodidacte" half-jokingly confided, "Soon they'll be naming them "cadre" on admission to the "grandes écoles"."

**Defining the population**

Exactly what defines a "cadre", rather like, what constitutes a "grande école", is a subject of some debate. No account of the French managerial class seems to be complete unless it opens with a long and confusing synthesis of the alternative definitions. Most authors seek support from the official texts, but even these offer no standard definition (Grunberg; 212) - a most unsatisfactory situation from the stance of Cartesian logic. What is more, the static nature of the texts makes them particularly inappropriate for defining what has always been a changing category. The only practical solution is to take an evolutionary perspective.

In attempting to single out the "cadre" population, we can immediately set aside the categories of shopfloor ("ouvriers") and office workers ("employés"). However, a more contentious issue, is whether the foremen ("la maîtrise") and directors ("les dirigeants") belong to the class. This

* - The term "employé" only includes office workers, not "cadres". 50 years ago a cadre would have been "un employé supérieur" but they have managed to discard that association & distinguish themselves from the rest of the office personnel.
depends on different industrial sectors and even individual firms - some choose to distinguish these categories even though the nature of their work is comparable to that of the "cadres". Certainly, it is more or less impossible to identify the differentia specifica of their work as distinct from the foreman or directeur - and any differences in activity are differences of degree rather than kind.

Attempts at self-definition elicited various responses. Some cadres saw their collective identity in terms of general responsibility - vis-à-vis the personnel or in terms of completing a task. Others felt that the common denominator was a state of mind rather than a type of activity - as one cadre put it, "a blend of adaptability, 'esprit de synthèse' and initiative". However valid these answers, they proved rather unsatisfactory criteria for distinguishing "cadre" from "non-cadre". So the term "cadre" starts to look like a status and a state of mind rather than a set of distinctive and usefully identifiable tasks.

Collectively, the various stabs at definition by French authors are perhaps more interesting for what they tell us about themselves than what they reveal about the "cadre". In effect, this preoccupation with delimiting the contours is perhaps a manifestation of, "the French obsession with labels, and the mania for confining people to airtight social categories". In fact, this national propensity to dissect, compartmentalise and classify is something which Zeldin (p.336) also observes, "the government's sociologists, not frightened of being schematic, have divided French people up into five different species". Reynaud (p.13) too, comments on this penchant for taxonomies: "on célèbre volontiers le culte d'une raison déductive et classificatoire plutôt que le respect de l'expérience et de ses diversités" (we are far more impressed by deductive reasoning than empirical evidence).

There can be no formal definition since the precise frontiers of the group are vague. Everyone knows where it starts, but no-one can tell where it ends. One is reminded of Lord Denning's celebrated judgment: "like many other beings, a banker is easier to recognise than to define" (Dominions Trust v. Kirkwood, House of Lords, 1966). Thus, the scope of the term "cadre" must be ascertained through its connotations - by examining the meaning it has acquired over time.

* - Fabienne Pascaud reviewing Francoise Dorin's play "l'Etiquette".
Homogeneous body?

Given the diverse backgrounds of the "cadre" population and the confusion over requirements for eligibility, it would seem fair to assert that they form a heterogeneous mass. Certainly, this is the verdict most French authors seem to return (Doublet; 121). They point out for instance, that the national statistical service (INSEE)*1, places "cadres supérieurs" in the same socio-professional category as "profession libérales", whilst "cadres moyens" are allotted a separate category, alongside school teachers and qualified nurses.

The diversity of the population embodied is largely the result of a massive increase in the number of "autodidactes" (self-taught cadres) throughout the 1960's (Boltanski; 48) - and the consequent drift away from a neatly defined population of "grandes écoles" graduates. This in turn has provoked an inevitable "vulgarisation" (devaluation) of the title.

But, by drawing attention to the internal subdivisions, between commercial and engineering graduates, between 'divine right' cadres and non-graduate cadres, indigenous observers give a one-sided view of the situation. Rather like Chinamen boasting Chinese heterogeneity, their case sounds rather hollow to the outsider who perceives a unity not apparent from within. The fact is, that their attempts to dissect the population tend to detract from the underlying cohesiveness of a common appelation.

The definition is perhaps vague from a researcher's point of view - but out in the field all plant managers questioned were able to provide an exact list of their "cadres". So the definitional problem which poses itself at a macro-level is largely academic from a micro-perspective - even if the only practical working definition has to be a tautology: a "cadre" is anyone belonging to the "encadrement"**2.

The problem for the researcher stems from the fact that all companies do not use the same criteria for admittance to the group. But this should not detract from the strong sense of belonging, associated with the category - as well as the difficulties involved in gaining access. The barriers to

*1 - INSEE - Institut National des Statistiques et des Etudes Economiques.
*2 - Though as Sorge (1986;78) rightly points out "encadrement" can be used more loosely than cadre, to describe anyone in a position of authority.
entry, mean that for many employees "passer cadre" is a real achievement or aspiration. To cross the threshold involves sacrifice and enhances status.

The title therefore has a motivational aspect - and for employers, represents a means of duplicating available rewards/reprimands. The system of material rewards and sanctions doubles up with a system of symbolic rewards and sanctions. In effect, the "passage-cadre" (transition) is the critical transition in the French hierarchy since it represents a change of status (unlike UK where the manager has no legal status) and allegiances - from union to company (Maurice; 1977; 770-771).

This notion of "cadres" as an entity is endorsed by newspapers which are quick to bestow a collective identity upon the group: "les cadres sont...", "les cadres font...", "les cadres veulent..." (Boltanski; 407). A selection of recent headlines should help appreciate this sense of cohesiveness:

- "Ce qui fait marcher les cadres" (The cadres, what makes them tick) - Le Point; 18/05/87; 32.

- "Pouvoir d'achat: oui, les cadres ont perdu" (Purchasing power: yes, the cadres have lost out) - Le Point; 13/04/87; 60.


- "La vérité sur la retraite des cadres" (The real retirement prospects of cadres) - Le Nouvel Economiste; 7/11/86; 48.

- "Salaires des cadres: 1987" (their salaries) - L'Expansion; 14/05/87; 113.

- "Cadres: comment réussir sa carrière" (Cadres: tips for career success) - Le Nouvel Economiste; 29/05/87; 81.

- "La grande tentation des cadres: décrocher" (The great temptation - opting out) - L'Expansion; 18/10/79; 121.

- "Un allègement de la fiscalité pour les cadres" (A lightening of their tax burden) - Le Monde; 22/06/87; 13.
The preceding clearly convey a degree of homogeneity unparalleled in the Anglo-Saxon context. The word "manager" would be an uneasy substitute for "cadre" in the chosen headlines. This suggests that French "cadres" have a much more focused identity than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts. Newspapers talk of them in a way more befitting of a far more restricted group - executives, for instance.

It appears that in spite of their dispersal in terms of social and educational backgrounds, and revenue, "cadres" do share a number of core characteristics which unite them - in much the same way as the modern agribusinessman shares an underlying cohesiveness with the small time farmer. These distinguishing features are primarily legalistic - their own status, retirement scheme and placement service (APEC*), different probationary periods, and fixed monthly income. But there is also an intangible element - the much-vaunted, yet indefinable "état d'esprit", as well as an undeniable sense of pride and "belonging".

**Consumer group**

Seen from outside, "cadres" are clearly perceived as a homogeneous group, and referring to them as such enhances their unity. Politicians for instance, will angle for the "cadre" vote "en masse", in a way which would be totally ineffectual in Britain. A British politician would never look upon managers as some sort of "block vote". Indeed, if the cadre has a British equivalent, it is more likely to be the 'yuppy'. British politicians may try to attract the Yuppy vote.

The notion of the "cadre" as the original yuppy is not without interest. Both, after all, are manufactured social groups, with their own particular identity and values. It was the "cadres", in the mid-50's, who helped introduce and legitimise acquisitive American values in France:

"L'attachement au biens matériels qui s'exprimait chez le bourgeois par le désir de la conservation, se manifeste chez lui par le plaisir de la consommation." (Bleton; 1956; 200).

* - APEC - Association pour l'emploi des cadres - a placement service for unemployed cadres.
(The bourgeois demonstrated his fascination for material possessions by his eagerness to save; the cadre shows his, by his desire to spend).

Cadres became a prime target for advertisers, who created an image and ascribed a specific lifestyle to them: "le mode de vie des cadres" (their way of life) became a stock phrase which conjured up visions of a voracious consumer of goods and services:

"La logique du système de consommation tend à lui faire croire qu'il existe un style de vie, un 'standing' qui lui est propre, et que ce serait le déchoir que de ne pas l'atteindre." (Doublet; 111)

(The cadre has been hyped up into thinking that there is a certain lifestyle and standing which befits him and which must be attained at all costs).

The socio-professional identity of this group was shaped and reinforced by specialist journals inspired by the American journal Fortune. Thus, l'Express (1957) dubbed itself "le journal des cadres" (the magazine for cadres) - and was followed in 1967 by l'Expansion which also specified the "cadre" as its target reader. These journals signalled a change of tack for the French economic press, which until then had provided financial information for owners and shareholders - from the late 50's onwards it focused on the "cadre", and on encouraging a new business-literate generation of managers (Boltanski; 184).

These journals show no sign of stemming - only during the researcher's last visit to France (1987), the first issue of "C comme Cadre" ('M' as in Manager) was launched, showing that there is still a large, untapped readership.

A latent malaise?

Ironically, the unity of the group is further enhanced by the existence of a much-vaunted 'malaise'. Virtually every text dealing with the managerial population devotes a section to this notion (notably, Grunberg, Doublet,
Boltanski) — indeed, the phrase "le malaise des cadres" has become something of a cliche.

Ever since their first appearance in 1936, cadres have been presented as a population that is "misunderstood, humiliated, unpopular ... caught in a pincers between patronat and prolétariat" (Boltanski; 244; Eng. trans.). Obviously, this has a lot to do with the nature of the group which is, by definition, a buffer group. It was precisely because engineers did not fully identify with either employers or workers, that the notion of the cadre emerged. The sense of being shut out, experienced by graduate engineers at that time, was described by Georges Lamirand:

"Abandoned by both sides, engineers discovered that they were neither fish nor fowl, that they constituted a third party imperilled on two fronts, in the sad position of an iron caught between hammer and anvil" (Boltanski; 1987; 40; Eng. trans.).

To some extent, the situation has still not been resolved. The ambiguity of the cadre's position manifested itself most clearly in the events of 1968. Some cadres sided with the workers by striking while others were held 'hostage' by angry workers. This simple antithesis reveals the rival pressures exerted on cadres — their divided loyalties were a sign that they still did not know where they stood. The same predicament continues to haunt the cadre today — and in a roundabout way, it is this uncertainty which defines membership of the group (see Exhibit 1).

Besides this rather abstract reason for unease, concrete reasons, relating to the prevailing economic environment, were also invoked by the managers interviewed. Some referred to the loss of purchasing power, the loss of job security and, more particular to the French context, the loss of social standing of the cadre.

It appears however, that the problem may be overstated. One cadre from the interview sample suggested to the researcher that the cadre has little to grumble about, in relation say, to the foreman. After all, the cadre still enjoys a privileged social position, albeit slightly tarnished by the 'proletarisation' of the group ("privilege" is a word which appears frequently in advertising directed at cadres). This leads one to wonder whether we should we pay heed to this alleged malaise — is it not stronger in people's imagination than in reality? There is a case for speculating
that the said malaise is little more than a defensive mechanism aimed at
shielding the group from potential intruders who would swell the numbers,
leading to further 'proletarianisation' - or perhaps a means of promoting group
solidarity among a fairly disparate mass of salaried workers.

Social esteem

Notwithstanding the existential uncertainties which have led many
commentators to speak of a 'malaise' (previous section) at a more
straightforward level the term cadre has been viewed as status enhancing.

The collective identity of the "cadres" has spilt over from its professional
confines, and taken up a social position. The "cadres" have become the
social group to emulate, French society's trendsetters. The creation of the
category offered an unprecedented degree of social mobility in France.
Previously, the only bridges between the "petite" and the "grande
bourgeoisie" had been via "l'artisanat" and commerce. The new category
offered possibilities of upward mobility on a massive scale, in what remains
a notoriously "viscous" social environment (Santoni; 134).

At the top end of the scale the "cadres supérieurs" enjoy a social status
which is on a par with the professions - doctors, lawyers, architects. This
can be attributed to their education levels which are not very far removed
from their professional counterparts. The "cadre" is the latter-day
bourgeois - well-off, known and respected in his neighbourhood:

"Héritier du bourgeois, le cadre recherche la distinction, il
aime le luxe, il est obsédé par le "standing", et il recherche
le classicisme. Un certain snobisme caractérise son comportement." (Blazot; 157)

(As a descendant of the bourgeois, the cadre is obsessed by
distinction, luxury, standing and he yearns for refinement. His
behaviour is typically snobbish).

Of course, the social esteem enjoyed by "cadres" is also a product of the
education system and the general standing of management. The "grandes
ecoles", which supply graduates to the blue chip companies, are able to
attract the brightest students, since their label is virtually an "open-
sesame" to all careers. But this requires the collusion of French companies which tacitly guarantee immediate cadre status and early responsibility. As long as this complicity works, "we'll select them, you buy them", the "grandes écoles" will continue to attract a very high calibre of undergraduate recruit - thereby contributing to a virtuous circle in the status of the "cadre" (Ardagh; 1982; 43).

Role of the "cadre"

Just as the manager must manage, so the cadre is there to "encadrer". Yet, the accepted translation of "to manage" is "gérer". Benguigui (p.IX) refers to "une mission spécifique: gérer - et plus précisément encore encadrer" ("a specific mission: 'gérer' - but even more precisely 'encadrer'"). It is possible to infer from this nuance that there is a difference in the conception of French and Anglo-Saxon managers.

The fact that the French term was borrowed from military circles is not without significance in this respect. The verb "encadrer" has a notion of policing, which Horovitz (p.86) suggests is reflected in the French approach to management control. And if we trace back the word, its literal meaning (as a frame) also reflects the constraining role of the "cadre" which is implicit in the following quotation from a practising manager:

"Nous avons beaucoup de mal à nous faire à l'idée que la résolution de conflits, la conduite, la correction, voire la contrainte des autres, font partie intégrante de la fonction de cadre." (Emilio Fontana; Points de Vente; no 316)

(We have great difficulty in coming to terms with the less savoury aspects of our work - namely, conflict resolution, leadership, punishment and even constraint).

But setting semantics aside, the role of the French "cadre" has always been different from that of the Anglo-Saxon manager. From the outset "cadres" have had a specific mission which went beyond corporate expectations. Initially, in 1936, their role was to act as a stabilising force in the increasingly confrontational worker/employer discussions. Then, when de Gaulle returned to power in 1958, he put the onus squarely on "les cadres de la nation" to rebuild the French economy, thereby restoring France to her
former glory. Justifiably, they have come to be regarded as the prime architects (and beneficiaries) of France's economic success and the rise in living standards over the 3 decades known as "Les Trentes Glorieuses" (the thirty years of glory - 1945-75).

Of late the national socio-economic responsibility of the cadre is less explicit, but lives on:

- "La vocation des cadres est de guider la classe ouvrière dans la voie du progrès." (to act as a beacon for the working classes in their journey down the road of progress) - (Blazot; 12)

- "C'est lui qui fait le niveau de vie de la nation." (it is they who maintain the nation's standard of living) - (Blazot; 13)

- "Les cadres sont les artisans de la mutation sociale en cours." (the cadres are the facilitators of on-going social change) - (Le Monde; 23/06/87; p.44)

The "cadres" see themselves as privileged partners of the economic and political powers that be. Their union (CFE-CGC) prides itself on its clout in high circles and recently stated that:

"La confédération s'est toujours fait entendre et, dans bien des cas, a obligé patronat et gouvernement à tenir compte de ses options." (Le Monde; 23/06/87; p.44)

(One way or another, the employers and the state are forced to take account of the preferences of this management confederation).

An even more explicit description of the "cadre's" socio-economic mission is encountered in a report by the Fédération Nationale des Syndicats d'Ingénieurs et Cadres (National Federation of Managers' Unions):

"Il ne suffit pas d'exister; il faut vivre et plus encore avoir des raisons de vivre. Ce sera demain le rôle des ingénieurs et cadres de fournir ces raisons, de participer à leur mise en place dans la société, d'animer et d'entrainer les autres, de
transmettre connaissance et idéal, de s'engager résolument dans l'action civique et sociale afin que le progrès se confonde avec la civilisation dans le coeur des hommes." (Blazot; 94)

(Mere existence is not enough. We must live and have a reason for living. And the onus falls upon the cadres to provide these reasons, to implement them, to motivate others and show them the way, to communicate, and to take an active part in society, so that progress and civilisation may become one in the hearts of men).

This mixture of management role and philosophy might appear excessive by Anglo-Saxon standards, but corresponds to the quasi-divine mission with which the "cadre" has been entrusted (self-appointed?). The French seem to regard their managers as the moral, as well as economic saviours of the nation. They have a responsibility as rôle models, which others seek to emulate. It is difficult to know to what extent this is merely rhetoric, but there does seem to be a distinct awareness of their social responsibility as an example to the workforce, and their contribution to the nation's wealth. This was clearly expressed at a conference by the Confédération française de l'encadrement (formerly the CGC), which described its members as:

"le moteur économique, le promoteur social et le garant de l'avenir du pays." (Le Monde; 23/06/87; p.44)

(The social and economic force which guarantees France's future).

The likelihood is that their future rôle will be boosted by the need to prepare for the unified European market planned for 1992. The same article in Le Monde refers to:

"une convergence sur certaines préoccupations essentielles, comme l'échéance de 1992 et le rôle et la place de l'encadrement."

(The role of the cadre in the success of a unified European market).
Masculine aura

There are a number of factors which contrive to give the term "cadre" a masculine connotation. Historically of course, the term was borrowed from the military - the male preserve par excellence. Inevitably, this has had repercussions on popular perception of the cadre. The macho a priori was reinforced by the fact that the category was initially composed almost exclusively of graduate engineers, and with even the most prestigious engineering school (l'Ecole Polytechnique) remaining single-sex until 1972, male engineers have left their "virile" imprint on it. Finally, the term is lumbered with a masculine tag - le cadre - which merely exacerbates the problem, acting as a perceptual barrier to the inclusion of both male and female in that category. Incidentally, this is a problem not encountered in Anglo-Saxon countries where the neuter gender has swept all before it.

Many books and journals are now addressing the issue with a token section rather clumsily entitled "cadre au féminin". In addition, as noted earlier, the noun "cadre" has actually been deformed so that it can now be employed as an adjective. This makes it marginally easier to include women in the appelation - "une femme cadre". However, it will be some time before the historical preconceptions surrounding the term are overcome.

Restatement:

In this chapter, I have attempted to convey the meaning of the word cadre and to point out the divergence which exists between its abstract and its practical usage. Like an elephant, a "cadre" is difficult to describe but easy to recognise.

Whilst French researchers seem obsessed with the diversity of the category, the outsider is struck by the degree of psychological and sociological homogeneity exhibited - a cohesiveness corroborated by journalistic references to "cadres" as an entity and further characterised by a common sense of malaise. One is also struck by the way they have been entrusted with a wider mission - or are they self-appointed? - as the nation's economic and social figureheads, especially in terms of legitimising materialistic values. They are held up as the model for the nation to emulate - and as such are perhaps fore-runners of the Anglo-Saxon Yuppy. The chapter also alludes to the gender colouration of the term, a product of its historical antecedents.
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EXHIBIT 1

The cadre as 'pig in the middle'.

Extract from Lauzier's album "Les cadres" (Dargaud, 1981).
5. THE MAKING OF FRENCH MANAGERS

"Les grandes écoles sont rendues abusivement responsables de tous les maux dont la France est affectée et en même temps créditées tout aussi abusivement de tous ses succès." Conversation with Roger Fauroux, former head of l'Ecole Nationale d'Administration.

(The grandes écoles are falsely blamed for all France's vices and just as wrongly, credited with all its virtues).

The aim of this chapter is to explore the nature and influence of French management education. The chapter begins with a brief look at the importance of education in France. This is followed by an in-depth examination of management education which includes two sections: the first is devoted to pre-entry management education and considers the dynamic relationship between student, educational establishment and employer; the second part looks at the relative importance of post-entry management education. To round off the chapter we will discuss how well the French system prepares would-be managers to fulfill their function.

Education in France*

A long-standing feature of French society is the high premium it places on intellect. Where America extols money, West Germany work and Great Britain blood, France has nailed its flag to the post of cleverness. It is achievement in the educational field which determines inclusion among the decision-makers of French society. The nation is governed by its star pupils, and the higher reaches of management are no exception. Brains are deemed an acceptable means of procuring social eminence - and as Vaughan points out, they are certainly "a less invidious ground to invoke in a democracy than either hereditary privilege or the acquisition of wealth" (1980; 99).

* - Readers who are not familiar with the French education system may find it helpful to read the descriptive section at the end of this chapter before confronting the particular interpretation presented here.
Educational credentials are ideal props for authority since they are verifiable discriminators of the organisational hierarchy. In France, they indicate status and competence in much the same way as an individual's salary situates a person in the US. The graduate of a prestigious "grande école" is demonstrably 'better' than his organisational subordinates and this justifies inequalities of power. Thus, elitism and the French preoccupation with egalitarianism are reconciled, since the systematic testing of intellectual merit gives everyone (in theory) the same opportunity of access to the elite.

In keeping with this desire for objectivity, mathematics is the central feature of French selection methods in education. From secondary school onwards, a priority is given to the mastery of mathematical tools and to the quality of logical inference. The maths input provides the basis for the pecking order in baccalauréat options and determines admission to the top flight "grandes écoles" - both in engineering ... and management.

French higher education is based on a two tier system which is rooted in France's history and distinguishes the exclusive "grandes écoles" and the sprawling universities.

The appellation, "grande école", is a general and not an official term. The "grandes écoles" are a diversified ensemble of small or medium-sized autonomous establishments, which were created outside the traditional university stream in response to precise sectoral needs - notably in engineering, applied science and management studies. The precise criteria for acquiring the precious label are not at all clear. For the same reasons, it is hard to specify the exact number of these schools, though about 160 lay claim to the rank, with an average of a mere 400 students each.

In comparison to the "grandes écoles", the universities have a distinctly lacklustre image. Part of the reason for this lies in the need to cater for too many students of differing abilities. This is primarily due to the fact that universities have no control over the quality of intakes. A "baccalauréat" gives automatic entry to university - as opposed to the highly selective régime operated by the "grandes écoles". The contrasting systems will be discussed more extensively in the following section.
Paradoxically, whilst education in general has been exalted, management education has had some trouble in gaining legitimacy. The universities, which specialised in classical education were, until recently (1955), particularly reluctant to embrace this vocational discipline. The 1980s however, have witnessed the belated emergence of an enterprise culture, in a society which has traditionally been hostile to the ethos of wealth creation — and nowhere is this turnaround more apparent than in the attitudes of students. In 1968, they were busy trying to burn down the Bourse (French stock exchange); today, every self-respecting business school has its own investment club. There is a new-found willingness to treat business as socially acceptable, and essential to the life of the country.

Pre-career management education: Games people play

There is something distinctly mercenary about pre-experience management education. Each party involved seems more concerned with beating the system than achieving a common end. Students seem to repress their sense of vocation, schools are obsessed with pecking orders and companies pay inflated salaries for raw graduates. The whole edifice seems founded on abstract values which are only tenuously linked to the production of well-adjusted managers.

The extent to which the system has assumed a logic of its own is perhaps best illustrated by the saga of lengthening siorality. In order to ward off fears of unemployment, there is a student demand, which schools and universities are meeting, for longer courses. But the value of protracted studies is relative, and because the tendency is generalised, companies have merely responded by adding two years to their recruitment benchmark. Posts which were filled by "baccalauréat" entrants are now reserved for people with two years higher education, typically from an institute of advanced technology (IUT). Consequently, students delay their entry into active life and companies recruit individuals who have no desire to undergo a further period of induction training — it seems like a no-win situation.

Yet the games in which they engage, have a sense of coherence and compatibility — the system works because the parties complement one another and play by the same rules.
Games Students Play

Devil take the hindmost:
Effectively, management education begins when pupils choose their baccalauréat options. Although there is a management option, pupils with real managerial aspirations will steer clear of it. They will choose instead the maths & physical sciences option (commonly termed "le bac C") which affords the best chances of admission (entrance exam permitting), two years after baccalauréat, into both engineering and commercial grandes écoles. The irony that the management option leads to anything but a high powered managerial position is compounded by the fact that there are over 20 baccalauréat options but only one which really counts. This situation has been condemned as the dictatorship of the "bac C".

On completing the baccalauréat, it is accepted that those who can, will proceed to the "prépas" (preparatory schools) to be coached through the "concours" (entrance exam) to the grandes écoles. Competition to enter the most successful Parisian "prépa" (Louis-le-Grand) is said to be tougher than the subsequent entry into one of the prestigious trio of management schools (HEC-ESSEC-ESCP), collectively known as "les grandes parisiennes". Students are kept informed of relative success rates of the various "prépas" by annual 'hit parades' published by the journals l'Etudiant and Le Monde de l'Education, thereby instilling an early notion of career strategy.

In the preparatory schools, the students are subjected to an intense work rate, based essentially on maths, which can make the subsequent pace at the grande école seem decidedly slack*1. For most students "l'enfer préparationnaire" (the hell of the preparatory school) represents the peak effort since, having reached the inner sanctum of the grande école, the diploma is de facto guaranteed*2.

*1 - In fact, the high pressure experienced during this training period prompted the Guardian to dub preparatory schooling, "the cram de la crème" (Ardagh; 1982; 511).
*2 - It is worth pointing out the contrasting situation of the universities which have to carry out substantial reductions at the end of the first and second years to compensate for the impossibility of selection at entry. At some universities, less than 50% of those admitted will actually graduate (L'Expansion; 7/3/85; 81).
As one 'Polytechnique' student put it:

"De toute façon, il faut avoir tué père et mère pour sortir sans diplôme," (L'Expansion; 11/11/82; 121).

(Anyhow, in order to fail one would have to commit patricide).

In other words, the gains stemming from admission to a grande école are so automatic that students are wont to perceive entry as a landing point rather than a launch pad.

The notion of career strategy manifests itself again in the choice of grande école. Students display precocious awareness of their own limitations, so they will only enter exams they feel capable of passing. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that it is not necessarily the top grandes écoles which attract the most candidates. The students engage in a large measure of self-selection to avoid paying costly exam fees where there is a low likelihood of success. They are sensitised early into optimising their chances and cutting their losses.

Charades:

What is more, students will renounce vocational preferences in favour of instrumental disciplines. In order to keep their options open, students are best advised to pursue maths to the limits of their potential. The route to the top is clearly signposted which minimises the risks of losing potential talent through misinformation. But the price paid is a snubbing of vocational courses and a sheeplike procession towards the same grandes écoles because of the tremendous career advantages they confer. This reaffirms a calculating approach to education which seems especially pronounced among French students. Indeed, the student magazine, l'Etudiant, constantly reinforces this notion - with references to tips, short-cuts, success rates and tactics in gaining access to the various establishments (for instance, dec. 86 issue, p. 120).
For nigh on two centuries, the top engineering grandes écoles, spearheaded by l'École Polytechnique, have groomed their alumni to take up positions as "les cadres de la nation" (the nation's organisers), in spheres as diverse as business, politics and public service. Not surprisingly, the schools' legitimacy as suppliers of the nation's business élite does not rest on the curriculum (albeit generalist in content) but on the type of education they impart. The French graduate engineer is not only knowledgeable or well versed in engineering; he is, first and foremost, the product of a mind-stretching system which has nurtured him for leadership positions in industry. More than in other countries, French engineers enjoy a priviledged social status, which can be seen by their widespread presence in upper management.

The seal of approval from a prestigious engineering school endorses its holder's capacity for rapid learning and intellectual virtuosity. The quality of the raw material is guaranteed by a highly selective recruitment process, which requires two years additional schooling beyond secondary education - and the finished product has the added feature of three years of intensive study. In short, the graduate engineer is endowed with the necessary resolve and analytical ability to tackle any problem.

On top of this, the schools bestow on their students the social wherewithal and an influential old boy network to enhance their career chances (the institutionalisation of school links is discussed in more detail in the next chapter). For instance, by the time he graduates, a "polytechnicien" (student of l'École Polytechnique), has assembled a battery of real or assumed advantages that ensure speedy professional ascent. To add to that, he will have inherited a network of contacts which transcends all sectors. Indeed, the engineering schools have been so convincing in promoting themselves as 'surrogate management schools' that one can understand in part the belated emergence of American-style business schools in France. The success of the engineering schools also explains the tendency for commercial grandes écoles to emulate them.

Follow the Leader:
The first signs of emulation were seen in the explicit attempts by l'École des Hautes Etudes Commerciales (HEC), the foremost commercial school, to don the apparel of the engineering schools at its inception. The school was set
up in 1881 with the express intention of breaking the engineers' stranglehold over large sectors of business in the expanding industrial climate of the late 19th Century. From the outset, HEC espoused what were considered the most prestigious aspects of the state-sponsored engineering schools, notably a socially biased, post-baccalauréat recruitment policy. Furthermore, HEC's curriculum rested firmly on the cornerstone of law, a noble discipline which lent commercial education a veneer of academic respectability. In terms of image it looked to l'Ecole Centrale for guidance since this was the only private engineering school which had managed to stamp its identity among the state grandes écoles (the very first head of HEC was in fact a "centralien").

Naturally enough, HEC spawned its own imitators, a network of provincial commercial schools (ESCAE*) which, by association, tended towards the nec plus ultra, l'Ecole Polytechnique. Perhaps the most striking legacy from the engineering schools was the widespread adoption of maths as the critical entry determinant. This tribute to engineering influence is justifiable as an objective measure of merit for selection, but it would appear that the elements of scholastic success are poorly matched with those of professional success.

The less prestigious commercial schools (mostly private rather than sponsored by the Chambers of Commerce like HEC and the ESCAE network) are also faithful to the HEC model. These lesser schools are forced into reducing the maths input (concession) in order to recuperate those who fail the "concours" (entrance exam) owing to a weakness in maths. But, in other respects they do their best to imitate the more prestigious establishments.

The prime manifestation of this lies in their names which are reminiscent, not to say replicas, of the more venerable establishments. They are abetted in this, by the French penchant for acronyms which lends itself to abuse. Lesser schools capitalise on the confusion in order to imply similar status to the provincial commercial schools (ESCAE). One personnel manager from the interview sample speculated that new commercial schools were named by

* - ESCAE - Ecole(s) Supérieure(s) de Commerce et d'Administration des Entreprises, more prosaically referred to as the "Sup-de-Co".
picking out three of the following at random: "école, institut, supérieur, hautes études, gestion, finance, direction des entreprises, affaires", and translating the result into English if needs be. There is undoubtedly an element of deliberate 'trompe l'oeil' in many appellations - to dupe potential students, their parents and employers alike. The profusion of acronyms can prove quite bewildering, even to the initiated.

The same goes for the popular confusion surrounding the various degrees of state accreditation. Some of the less scrupulous schools shrewdly exploit the billing "homologué par l'état" (state registered) knowing that the uninitiated will equate it with the more exclusive, "diplôme reconnu par l'état" (state approved qualification). The former merely indicates the level of the qualification, whilst the latter is an attestation of quality. It implies that the Ministry of Education has some say in the syllabus and teaching methods as well as naming the Chairman of the Admissions and Examiners' Board.

Further evidence of mimicry can be seen in the necessity for the most embryonic business school, whose future still hangs in the balance, to set an entrance exam. This is intended to set them apart from the universities and, by implication, identify them with the grandes écoles. Generally, the said exam is more than a touch symbolic since meeting entrance requirements has less to do with exam marks than parental funds. The schools demand high tuition fees since they do not have the same ability as the grandes écoles to attract financial support from companies ("taxe professionnelle"). These private schools also have some difficulty in attracting permanent academic staff and generally resort to a mixture of part-time teachers and visiting staff. But that is not to say they do not know how to market themselves. On the contrary, their less prestigious position makes it essential to maintain a high profile. Guaranteed selling points like an international perspective, old boy networks, sporting associations and "junior-entreprise" (student-run consultancy) invariably feature prominently in their seductive literature.

* - Established in 1925, "taxe professionnelle" is a levy on companies (0.6% of the payroll) which they may donate to any pre-entry training establishment. Responsibility for prospection and collection of the funds is left to the students themselves who act on behalf of their institute.
Universities are limited as to the extent they can copy the grandes écoles. For instance, the universities must operate an open door policy whereby any holder of the baccalaureat is eligible for admission. The fact remains that the most successful universities are precisely those which have found a way round these constraints. Foremost among these universities is the management university of Paris IX-Dauphine created in 1968 in response to student discontent and housed in the recently vacated NATO headquarters.

Dauphine's selection, competition and professionalism give it all the hallmarks of a grande école. By law it should not practise selection - yet, in reality, only people with a "bac C" (maths) need apply and 95% of the intake in fact obtained a distinction in their baccalauréat. This is deemed preferable to selection "par la file d'attente" or "par la règle de l'autobus" (first come first served). As a result Dauphine's reputation among employers is enhanced and its students can expect increasing numbers of unsolicited job offers. Although the university clearly flouts the principle of non-selection, the state is prepared to turn a blind eye to uphold the reputation of this jewel in a lacklustre university system.

Dauphine also pays the same attention as the grandes écoles to industrial placements - demonstrating full awareness of the importance of these initial contacts between students and companies. In the same vein, Dauphine has followed the example of the grandes écoles and organised annual job fairs, as well as a yacht race whose teams are composed of students and executives, and which amounts to a floating job fair. The teaching methods too, are reminiscent of the grandes écoles in that they are based on group work rather than the staple university diet of lectures. Thus, it has taken on many of the accoutrements of a grande école education, as regards length and format of studies, but most importantly in terms of recruitment. It would seem that any university which seeks to emulate this success is destined to follow Dauphine's lead and renounce its university origins in order to gain credibility in the business community.

What appears to be universal convergence towards the Polytechnique blueprint even extends to the Institutes of Technology (IUT) which were destined to replenish the ranks of middle managers by providing a short and practical apprenticeship to management. Like certain universities, the institutes have resorted to selection by introducing a mini-"concours" which, according to a head teacher interviewed, has turned them into scaled down grandes écoles.
Moreover, with the top commercial schools extending the period of preparatory schooling to an obligatory 2 years in order to align themselves with engineering studies, the institutes have found their vocational two-year courses devalued in relative terms. Once again the influence of the top engineering schools has prompted emulation with each educational establishment lengthening its curriculum - partly for image purposes and partly to attenuate student fears of unemployment.

Rather than trying to respond to demand in a pluralist fashion, each establishment strives more or less consciously to attain the Polytechnique ideal. They seem undeterred by its relation to a bygone age and its oblique approach to the acquisition of management skills. L'Ecole Polytechnique remains the archetypal model, the universal 'point de repère' which renders comparison between the various establishments easy and apparently legitimate. This gives rise to another game.

King of the Castle:
The predilection for hierarchies is a familiar feature of French culture and the facile ranking of educational establishments provides the press with an eager readership (incorporating students and their parents, teachers and employers). Each category of establishments is regularly scrutinised and classified in league tables compiled by l'Etudiant or Le Monde de l'Education. There are even cross-category (all-comers) surveys conducted by l'Expansion based on starting salaries offered to graduates. The higher the league position, the higher the signing on fee commanded by its graduates. Irrespective of their initial accuracy, these comparisons tend to prove self-fulfilling since employers use them to align their salaries on market trends thereby reinforcing findings presented as neutral.

Of course, conventional bases of comparison always favour the same schools, so the lesser schools endeavour to find new criteria which will upset the traditional pecking order and put them to the fore. Certain schools will point to the number of times they are oversubscribed as an indication of exclusiveness. They will publicise the low chances of admission and on this basis will claim to rival the top schools - carefully neglecting to acknowledge the perspicacious self-selection in which prospective students engage.
However spurious, such comparisons fuel intense rivalry among the various establishments. Some student interviewees suggested that the heads of the schools were actually more attentive to the starting salaries of their students (as quoted, for instance, in l'Expansion's, "Combien gagnent les débutants", 18/6/87) than to the contents of the curriculum. Indeed, one observer of the system was of the opinion that:

"Les responsables de l'école surveillent la moyenne des salaires d'embauche avec une passion comparable à celle du petit porteur sur les cours de la Bourse." (Le Nouvel Observateur; 21/01/83; 16).

(Those who run the school scrutinise the going rate for graduates with the zest of a small shareholder checking the prices of stocks and shares).

This concern for image has implications for the extent to which schools can afford to err from the path cut by HEC/Polytechnique. Schools are reluctant to take initiatives which diverge excessively from the accepted norms. In short, form outweighs substance.

In spite of the jockeying for position, the level of consensus surrounding the intricate pecking order is high and counter-jumping is minimal. Some measure of the immutable nature of the hierarchy can be illustrated by the fact that, when the Barre government (1976-81) decided to upgrade French technical education, the only policy it could come up with was to make it easier for the best pupils in the technical high schools to enter the grandes écoles. The point is, that there is only one hierarchy in France.

The leading three commercial schools, HEC-ESSEC-ESCP, are closely followed by the regional "Écoles Supérieures de Commerce" (led by Lyon) mingled with a few of the private schools mentioned earlier. The attraction of these prestigious schools is that their label is a guarantee for life. In particular, the stamp HEC-ESSEC-ESCP is a passport to a prosperous career. But the stakes are not negligible. The failure rates in reaching these schools is high and the preparatory system leaves many people bitter or demotivated after two years of sustained effort and not even a concrete qualification to show for it - their only consolation being direct access to the second year of university courses.

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Furthermore, the schools are not only intellectually elitist, they are also socially discriminating. Based on a traditionally hierarchic society, management education in France is a distinctly class-bound affair. The pattern of socially biased recruitment was set by the engineering schools in the 18th century using Latin as a social filter. The discipline has since changed, but the mechanism lingers on even in the business schools.

Marceau's analysis of the socio-professional origins of the alumni at the business school, INSEAD, revealed that the higher social strata are strongly over-represented, suggesting "a high degree of inheritance of occupational aspirations" (Whitley; 1984; 86). This concurs with Gerard Vincent's view of France as a 'high-viscosity' society, where upward mobility is a generally slow process — notwithstanding the much publicised rise of exceptional individuals like Pompidou whose humble backgrounds serve to diffuse criticism of elitism.

Certainly the top schools are reluctant to divulge statistics on the socio-professional composition of intakes. At HEC, the offspring of employers, senior executives and the liberal professions, account for 70% of those admitted (L'Etudiant; dec. 1986; 112). A number of sociologists maintain that the educational achievements (power merited) of the "classe dirigeante" (ruling class) simply serve as a smokescreen to mask its origins (power inherited). Bourdieu and Passeron (1964) in particular, contend that by requiring managers to be supernumerate, access is biased towards well-to-do students who benefit from an earlier and easier apprenticeship to abstraction.

Whatever the exact mechanism, management education remains heavily biased towards the higher social classes and does not appear to be making any great contribution to the democratisation of management. Nor are there any signs of change, with the grandes écoles jealously guarding their prestige by limiting the growth of successive intakes*. The barely perceptible rise in output of grandes écoles graduates is in stark contrast to the continual increases in university subscriptions. The elitist tradition shows no real signs of weakening.

* - The total numbers in the grandes écoles are less than 5% of all those in higher education, but their influence is large out of all proportion.
Games Employers Play

Baiting:
On the face of it, employers would appear to be the prime victims of the 'trivial pursuits' of schools and students alike. But they appear willing victims since they pull out all the stops to lure in the top candidates. IBM-France for instance has a section specifically concerned with the schools, "Relations grandes écoles" (a title which consciously omits the universities). The blue chip companies will start their pursuit of the best talents early by visiting the schools and conducting 'dog and pony shows' - presentations by senior people who outline career path opportunities. It is not uncommon for the best graduates to receive more than ten offers of employment which enables them to play hard to get (and raise the bids).

Whilst the salaries demanded are often exhorbitant, companies tend to play along, dangling guilt-edged carrots to attract the brightest available talent. Companies are apt to look upon the grandes écoles as elaborate sifting systems rather than purveyors of knowledge - and some make no secret of the fact that they are primarily purchasing the "concours" (entrance exam):

"La qualité des élèves n'est pas un produit de l'enseignement mais de la sélection." (L'Expansion; 11/11/82; 121).

(The quality of the graduates is due to the selection process not the teaching).

Although the salary gap between commercial and engineering graduates is constantly being eroded, companies still continue to favour the engineering schools which are entrusted with the making of French managers, even if they no longer hold a monopoly. There is no shortage of companies ready to pay back (to the state) the fees of a "polytechnicien" in order to capture him immediately on graduation and spare him 10 years forced labour in state service.

Company indifference regarding the transmission of occupationally relevant management skills, merely endorses the view of qualifications as 'entry tickets'. Access to business is not associated with qualifications embodying a job-specific content, in the same way as access to architecture, medicine,
or law*. But French companies seem to push this argument to excess. Most employers would still favour products of Polytechnique (engineers) or l'ENA (civil servants) to their HEC counterparts (managers). Strictly speaking, the former were not designed to train managers for private enterprise, but both students and employers treat them as such. Students intent on a career in industry will have no qualms about heading for these schools, whose label is an open sesame to all careers. Moreover, their legitimacy is enhanced by the philosophical viewpoint that the practice of management (as opposed to its theoretical concepts) cannot be taught.

To develop this last idea, there is a deep rooted belief in France that managers are born not made. As Dominique Xardel, the head of l'ESSEC (part of top trio of management schools), put it:

"Let's be clear; in a school one acquires information, one can develop aptitudes already existing in an embryonic state, but one can hardly create them." (Whitley; 1984; 67)

Training can only bring out innate talent, it cannot generate it spontaneously. A grande école education of any sort is regarded as a useful apprenticeship to management. What the products lack in technique they make up for in intellect and application. In spite of a slight erosion of the gap between engineering and commercial schools, the former remain dominant on employers' hit lists - and have shown their intentions of retaining pole position by including business options in their curricula.

It has already been noted that universities, with the notable exception of Dauphine, suffer the brunt of company mistrust because of the alleged inapplicability of their teaching or research. In spite of attempts to become more vocationally relevant, the university system is still tainted by a reputation for authoritarian, non-interactive teaching, which does not lend itself to the teaching exigencies of management education. As far as many employers are concerned, the products of the universities are still synonymous with the teaching profession and the dole queues.

* - The importance and relevance of management qualifications was neatly summed up in the epigram, "With one you can do nothing, without one you can get nowhere" (L'Expansion; July/August 1977; p.66).
There is a slightly brighter picture for the IUTs (Instituts Universitaires de Technologie which are roughly equivalent to British polytechnics) with their vocational two year management courses. Their reputations are rising as witnessed by shortening lead times for their students to reach "cadre" status. Yet, the IUTs remain "Cinderella" establishments. This makes them a favourite hunting ground for the large retail stores (like Auchan or Carrefour) which are themselves snubbed as "vendeurs de sardines" (sardine sellers) by grandes écoles graduates. One might say that the large retailers get their recruits at a discount.

**Post-experience management education**

This section will firstly consider the state influence on the demand for management education and will then explore the supply and demand aspects of the equation.

**State Influence**

State intervention in the field of management education was fairly limited until, in typical French style, it was decided that management training warranted formal national commitment. A levy was imposed on companies with more than ten employees, whereby expenditure on training had to be equivalent to 1.1% of the payroll. Companies were left with entire discretion as to how, and on whom, the money should be spent ("cadres" are typically allocated 30% of the budget). Setting compulsory spending levels has underlined state enthusiasm for training, as well as providing it with annual statements of progress and a database to fuel the long term thinking of government, corporations and educational institutions. However, creating a legal requirement to spend was hardly a declaration of faith vis-à-vis the companies, since it implied that they would not undertake training on a voluntary basis.

Companies were forced to pay more attention to training since they had to draw up a training plan to be submitted to and discussed with the "comité d'entreprise" (works council). If a company falls short of the statutory requirement, the balance is forfeited to the Treasury. For this reason, the levy was initially perceived as an extension of the tax burden. But gradually firms have started to look upon it as an investment which can be integrated into the firm's strategy. Needless to say this legislation,
provoked an immediate rash of consultancy firms hoping to cash in on obligatory spending.

**Company Approach:**

National commitment to adult education inaugurated in 1971 is starting to bear fruit. Initially, companies were prone to treat this as an unwelcome chore because of the difficulties associated with application, not least the compilation of statistics for the government. Small firms, in particular, are unable to detach someone full-time to deal with the administration, so the PDG (general dogsbody in small companies) is obliged to take the task upon himself.

Deciding who should attend which course and when, is quite onerous as well as politically explosive, and must be reconciled with conflicting pressures on the PDG's time. Trying to please everyone is not easy especially without full information about available courses. Consequently, in one of the small companies visited, the training budget had become a slush fund used to indulge meritorious or restless cadres by sending them off on courses. A provincial cadre will look upon a few days in Paris as a perk and notification that he is on the fast track. Alternatively, the training budget may be used as a panacea for a longstanding problem - an individual may be sent off on what is termed "un stage alibi", whereby subsequent foul-ups will not be attributable to inadequate training. So training becomes a piecemeal affair destined to and keep individuals and the works' council happy.

The problem is compounded for smaller companies by the fact that they can ill afford to be deprived of their top cadres for lengthy spells. What is more, training represents a danger for the company since it puts its prime talent on display and at the mercy of potential poachers. The reaction of one PDG interviewed was why release a cadre into tempting environment where he will sound out opportunities and more importantly, gain a qualification negotiable on the open market? Worse still, those sent on courses might return in a position to challenge existing practices and either cause upheaval or feel frustrated at not being given free reign to apply what they have learnt. For sound practical reasons therefore, many small companies have dispensed with the burden in the most expeditious way, by paying the balance to a recognised training body or, as a last resort, to the Treasury.
Increasingly though, even small companies are beginning to come to grips with the training levy. Gone is the era of folkloric courses (improve your memory or faster reading) which conveniently satisfied the legal obligation. Companies are starting to realise that practical gain can be derived from incorporating training into their long-term strategies. This is corroborated by the appointment of training personnel, to prepare statements of intent (submitted for works' council approval) and make more efficient use of the budget through better information of training opportunities.

A professional association (Groupement des Agents Responsables de la Formation) has even been created to lend weight to the function. Nonetheless, the title "responsable" (as opposed to "directeur") betrays the fact that this remains a low prestige function - one to be avoided by budding directors.

**Provision of post-experience courses**

It had been anticipated that the MBA would become as big in Europe as it was in America. In fact, its popularity was overestimated, and the business school, INSEAD, has had to diversify in order to subsidise its ailing MBA programme. Originally set up in 1958 specifically to provide MBA courses, INSEAD now devotes two-thirds of its faculty time to short courses for in-service managers. INSEAD has had to respond to company demand for more specialised programmes. It has done so by offering a wide range of short courses for actual or prospective senior managers. Increasingly, INSEAD is liaising with the companies which support it, and designing tailor-made programmes destined to sort out specific corporate problems - presumably a reflection of the desire to use the compulsory expenditure more strategically.

This is a general trend in French management development programmes. More and more establishments are finding they have to move closer to the work place, both intellectually and physically - not least because customised courses are highly profitable. The tailor-made course is a booming business. Even the large consultancy organisations (CEGOS, CNOF) have been forced into providing intra-company programmes since demand for standardised programmes is waning. Needless to say, this fast-developing activity has engendered a new rash of small firms whose speed and versatility is well suited to tackling company-specific problems.
The schools too, are keeping up with fashion, by being more attentive to the needs of their customers, the companies. They are developing more creative links with local companies; primarily through well-honed executive development programmes and by encouraging staff to engage in consultancy work. Most of the leading grandes écoles boast some sort of centre for management development. For the schools this is a lucrative activity which helps to supplement income from undergraduate fees and the "taxe professionnelle" from the companies. It only represents a marginal cost since they have the facilities and staff at their disposal, not to mention a ready-made reputation. The school's renown will be exploited to attract executives to it - sometimes in search of a label they missed out on earlier in their education.

Well-prepared managers?

Does the French system manufacture a good product? In answer to that question, it is worth reviewing a number of the points touched upon in the preceding discussion.

Firstly, we must consider the basis for selection. Maths, as a culturally neutral and precisely quantifiable criterion, is used as an objective measure of merit for entry into the grandes écoles - including the top flight business schools*. This raises questions about compatibility of means and ends. Does France really need supernumerate managers? In terms of subject matter the answer is probably, no. But if we consider the depth and rigour of the study process, the apprenticeship looks more appropriate.

To start with, maths is deemed a faithful indicator of the ability to synthesize and to engage in complex abstract reasoning, qualities which are highly prized in all spheres of professional life. The mind has been trained to grasp complex problems and assimilate new knowledge quickly. Thus, employers are confident that the specific expertise needed for the job and the graduate's potential as a manager can be brought out by the company's own training and development programme.

* - In 1985, only 4% of the ESSEC (business school) intake had taken a non-maths baccalauréat option.
In addition to this, the intensity and duration of the grande école training equips the would-be manager with essential mental and physical capacities: the ability to cope with pressure and to work long hours, a lengthy span of concentration, an analytical mind and a tried and tested work method. To fully appreciate the qualities and mentality of the grandes écoles graduates, one must consider the obstacles they have overcome, the uncertainty and competition they have faced, and the sacrifices they have made. Their odyssey will also have brought out their tactical awareness and their single-mindedness which will serve them well in the cut and thrust of the business world.

But perhaps the most important psychological asset which the grandes écoles confer upon their students, is confidence. The atmosphere within the schools prepares its incumbents for leadership. Secure in the knowledge of where they are heading, anticipatory socialisation tends to operate. Individuals assume the values, outlook and poise of the "ruling class" from an early age. They may not be au fait with the technicalities and jargon of management, but they have the social wherewithal and psychological authority to take up positions of power.

In terms of concrete advantages, the schools provide their protégés with a ready made network of contacts which can prove especially supportive in times of trouble (unemployment). Career minded students can start to establish links before even entering the fray of the business world, safe in the knowledge that their cohorts are also bound for the nation's executive suites. To a greater extent than most nations, France pools its elites from an early age which fosters the solidarity born of a common educational experience.

It would seem that despite the fact that the grandes écoles were not specifically designed to train managers, that is the rôle they have assumed. Indeed, it is a rôle they have successfully fulfilled, though this success is largely a product of their unique evolution in parallel to the great economic surge of the 19th century. The likelihood is that they could not be replicated outside the peculiar French context. For instance, if the schools did not benefit from such historically-based esteem, they would no longer attract their proper proportion of the cleverest people in each age group.
Perhaps the best testimony to the quality of their products is that employers will frantically outbid each other to secure the services of a grande école graduate. It could of course be argued that a popular product is not necessarily a good product and that the influence of networks might be artificially boosting the continued demand. However, if the schools really were failing to enhance the raw material then employers could easily acquire the same talent by recruiting at the preparatory stage. The fact that this is unheard of, suggests that the schools do provide added value of some sort.

The real problem is that the supply does not satisfy the demand. One interviewee from the sample likened it to the picking of wild fruits which, though tastier, could not satisfy universal demand in the same way as large scale agriculture. Consequently, the top firms have no recruitment difficulties, but the smaller ones which offer less 'traced out' career opportunities are deprived of what is presumed to be the top talent.

Of course, by keeping supply low, the grandes écoles are ensuring the marketability of their products. But this can prove detrimental to the graduates themselves who are guaranteed preferential career advancements and can, if they choose, treat their diploma as "une rente éducative" (an educational annuity). For this reason, there is a tendency to look upon admission to the grande école as a swan song rather than a 'point de départ'. The net result is that grandes écoles graduates are generally not inclined to risk their talents in an entrepreneurial way to stimulate new business, but exploit them instead to gain authority in bureaucratic hierarchies (the theme is treated in more detail in the following chapter).

Needless to say, if the system puts a brake on the motivation of the successful, it is doubly the case for those it rejects. The nation is deprived of the individuals whose talents or disposition are not suited to the strict régime of preparatory schools, notably the late developers, the pragmatic or the artistically-inclined who are eliminated from the running at an early stage. Later, they are joined by all those embittered by their failure to meet the exacting requirements of the "concours" (entrance exam for the grandes écoles). This combined population of potentially excellent managers must resign itself to impoverished salary and promotional expectations since the top places are virtually reserved to grandes écoles graduates - and sometimes to graduates from a particular school.
It is presumably to counteract the negative effects of this 'irreversible' selection system that the state chose to instigate compulsory expenditure on training. However, it will take more than that to seriously open up access to the nation's boardrooms.

Restatement

The French system of management production, has traditionally relied on a small number of highly-educated individuals to provide the large companies with a core of senior managers. There is little doubting the intellectual quality of the output, though aspersions can be cast on their managerial aptitudes. Still, the French system is an alternative to the American vision of what constitutes a suitable managerial apprenticeship.

More worrying however, is the wastage of talent resulting from this hyperselective system. In the last two decades, there has been a recognition that there needs to be more than one route to top management. It is this realisation which has prompted the state to enforce corporate spending on management education, to provide opportunities for those who may have 'missed the boat' first time round.
Note on French Education System

This brief descriptive section sets out to fill in the basic details for readers unfamiliar with the French education system. The reason it is not incorporated into the main body of the chapter is stylistic, since it would have disrupted the intended argumentation.

Baccalauréat

There are nearly thirty baccalauréat options, which are sets of pre-packaged subject combinations. For instance, the "bac C" is the highly rated maths and physical sciences option, the "bac D" the maths and natural sciences option, the "bac G" the management option, the "bac H" the computing option. Whilst each option has a particular focus, each also carries traces of all the other subjects - the aim of the baccalauréat being to provide a high level of "culture générale". For instance, the main arts option ("bac A") includes maths but the subject is given a lower weighting.

The formalised grouping of subjects has made it easy to make comparisons - and a hierarchy of prestige has emerged which is essentially determined by the maths content of each option with the "bac C" ruling the roost. Such is the importance attached to some combinations of subjects that parents may prefer to see their children repeat a year, or pay for private tuition in their weaker subjects, rather than encourage them to follow less demanding courses, for which they may be better suited.

Taken at eighteen or so, "le bac" is far more rigorous and brain-taxing an exam than its its English equivalent, A-level GCE, and even more essential as a passport to higher education.

Higher education

Higher education is provided in institutes of advanced technology, universities, grandes écoles (see Exhibit 2). A baccalauréat gives automatic entry to university where courses comprise three cycles. The first lasting two years, leads to a general university studies diploma, the Diplôme d'Etudes Universitaires Générales (DEUG) which covers both compulsory and
optional subjects. After this students may leave or stay on for the second cycle. This also lasts two years, the first of which leads to the 'licence' (equivalent of a BA) and the second to the 'maîtrise' (MA). The third cycle involves either three years leading to a doctorate or a one year Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures Spécialisées (DESS) in a highly specialised area.

In an attempt to ease the overcrowding and remedy the absence of vocational training in the universities, the government created Instituts Universitaires de Technologie (IUT) in 1966. These were intended to provide a more practical grounding and fill a manpower gap at middle management level. Like the universities the IUTs recruit baccalauréat holders; but unlike the universities, they offer intensive vocational training over a two year period, they include industrial placements and the failure rates are lower.

For many years industry did not recognise the qualifications gained in the IUTs because of a traditional bias against technical education, still considered the poor relation in the French educational system. After initial prejudice against technical education, the IUT diploma has since gained recognition in industry. Many employers now prefer it to a DEUG or even a 'licence' whose teaching, even in science subjects is perceived as too theoretical.

The grandes écoles are a feature of the French educational landscape which has no equivalent in any comparable Western country. Students are selected by competitive entrance examinations, having been subjected to two or three years of intense preparation in special post-baccalauréat classes. Some of the grandes écoles are under the control of the Ministry of Education, for example the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA). Others are sponsored by bodies such as the chambers of commerce, for example the Ecole des Hautes Etudes Commerciales (HEC), while others are controlled by different ministries, for example the Ecole Polytechnique by the Ministry of Armed Forces.

Not all the grandes écoles enjoy the same prestige. Perhaps the most sought after places are at l'ENA which is neither an engineering or a business school, but a civil service training college. Entrance to l'ENA is extremely competitive, and most candidates have undergone training at the Paris Institut d'Etudes Politiques (commonly known as Sciences-Po), a private
institution created in 1871 and superseded in practice by l'ENA. The position achieved in the final examination at l'ENA determines the choice of appointment, and the spirit of rivalry is maintained throughout the course, as an individual's whole career may be determined by a quarter of a mark in the final assessment.

While the number of students at the universities has been increasing in an uncontrollable way since the war, the intakes of the grandes écoles have remained almost static, and their students have continued, albeit perhaps not so easily as in the past, to find satisfying employment.
Selective bibliography


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ENSAIGEIMENT SUPÉRIEUR EN FRANCE : FORMATIONS UNIVERSITAIRES ET FORMATIONS DANS LES ÉCOLES

CONFÉRENCE DES GRANDES ÉCOLES

SIGNIFICATION DES SIGLES

D.E.U.G. : Diplôme d'Études Universitaires Générales
D.U.T. : Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie
D.E.A. : Diplôme d'Études Approfondies
D.E.S.S. : Diplôme d'Études Supérieures Spécialisées
M.S.T. : Maîtrise de Sciences et Techniques
M.S.G. : Maîtrise de Sciences de Gestion
M.I.A.G.E. : Maîtrise d'Informatique Appliquée à la Gestion des Entreprises
6. DESTINY

"La concurrence ne joue qu'une fois, au moment des concours, à l'entrée des grandes écoles, vers 22 ans." Conversation with Nicole Bastrentaz, Fondation Nationale pour l’Enseignement de la Gestion des Entreprises.

(Competition occurs just once, when students take the entrance exams which determines admission to the grandes écoles, at about 22 years of age).

Careers are a subject of tremendous interest for cadres, as witnessed by the popularity of salary surveys and 'career pull-outs' published by the likes of L'Expansion, L'Express and Le Point. This chapter sets out to examine the various influences on a managerial career in France. Of course, the differences which exist between France and, say, Britain are of degree rather than kind. Themes like education, performance and functional choice automatically affect an individual's career, but their relative weightings vary between corporate and national cultures.

Recruitment procedures

By way of introduction, it may be worth taking a look at the French recruitment process which contains a number of tell-tale signs regarding ways to the top in France. The form and substance of careers adverts, curriculum vitae and covering letters all provide insights into the critical influences on career success.

A cursory glance at managerial job advertisements reveals a low emphasis on drive or initiative, by Anglo-Saxon standards at least. On the other hand, advertisements typically refer to more cerebral qualities, "l'esprit critique, la rigueur, la capacité de synthèse" (analytical mind, application, perceptiveness). To caricature the situation, the French seem to focus on qualities of reception (analysis, synthesis, agility of the mind) at the expense of qualities of emission (charisma, pugnacity, capacity to communicate and motivate).
The advertisement is also likely to specify a particular type of education identified by the number of years the course lasts after the baccalauréat: for instance, "bac + 2" for DUT, BTS, DEUG (short vocational courses); "bac + 4" for a "maîtrise" (masters) or some business school diplomas (increasingly "bac + 5"); and "bac + 5" for engineering schools and the university-based Diplôme d'Études Supérieures Spécialisées. All this is in stark contrast to the rather vague call for "graduates" which prevails in the UK. French companies are precise in their requirements and at least give the impression that they will get what they are asking for, typically demanding "a degree in..." not simply, "a degree".

Sometimes the advertisement even goes as far as to mention a particular set of schools* (see Exhibit 3). This is associated with the fact that each school is regarded as producing a very identifiable product with stereotypical qualities and defects. L'Expansion (August 1977; 66), actually published a list of the spontaneous impressions of businessmen about the graduates of individual schools. Among the shortcomings, graduates of Polytechnique were deemed too elitist, those of Centrale unimaginative, those of HEC overambitious, those of Sciences-Po superficial and those of l'ENA too theoretical. Clearly, the French indulge in a high degree of type-casting.

The tone of the advertisements is generally subdued by Anglo-Saxon standards. Salaries are rarely quoted or perks brandished as part of the headline (see Exhibit 4). Rather the advert will speak coyly of "appropriate salary" and although there may be general references to fringe benefits, they are not likely to be itemised. Possibly this is a manifestation of the Catholic reticence to talk about money (see chapter on management ethos) or may reflect the fact that the salary depends on the incumbent rather than the post. In effect, remuneration tends to be based on criteria which relate to the person - age, training, experience, contacts even - rather than the functions assigned or the results obtained.

The adverts generally close with a request for, "lettre manuscrite, CV, photo". These too, are highly revealing on closer inspection. The fact that a hand-written letter is often requested implies that it will probably be

* - Challenges (mars 87; 32) reports the chief of a large company telling a head hunter, "This post is wide open ... any candidate is eligible ... provided he is a Polytechnicien".
subjected to the scrutiny of a graphologist. This is surprisingly commonplace and even one of the small firms visited had recourse to such an expert. The implement used, the style and spontaneity of the writing are all analysed to determine the suitability of a candidate—and as one graphologist explained to the researcher, neatness, application and conformity are not always interpreted favourably. The hand-written letter also indicates moderate commitment to the company in question since it precludes the 'leaflet drop' approach to job hunting.

The style of the covering letter is generally more deferential and indirect than is the case in Anglo-Saxon countries. According to Tixier in an article in La Revue Française de Gestion (Oct. 87; 63), candidates tend to refrain from using action oriented verbs 'organising', 'leading', 'deciding' and so forth. Instead they opt for verbs which are passive in their form or meaning: "être embauché comme ..." (to be placed as); "chercher un emploi de ..." (to seek employment as); "collaborer, aider" (to be involved, to assist). This linguistic bias is also noted by Laurence Wylie who maintains that it is instilled very early on in childhood. He suggests that if we look at the table of contents of a French geography textbook, we will find that all the chapters have nouns as titles (the soil, the vegetation, the climate and so on). In contrast to this, an American social studies book uses participles, indicating some kind of action, for its headings: growing rice, mining coal, etc. (Santoni; 1981; 30).

Requiring a photo betrays the fact that the French have no equivalent of the label "equal opportunity employer". This is in contrast to typical job adverts in Britain or the US which generally refrain from asking for photos for fear of accusations of discrimination.

As for the curriculum vitae itself, its content and format provide further clues. To start with, facts are stated in chronological order, unlike the American-style CV which starts with the career objective, then states current situation and works backwards. This difference is important in that one presentation emphasises current achievement and motivation, irrespective of origins, whereas the other is concerned with the individual's background and verification of passage through 'obligatory' check-points. In other words, the French approach is less concerned with where you are now, than where you have been.
Another feature of the French CV is the relative absence of personal information. The contents are fairly dry and impersonal, stating qualifications, training and work experience but dispensing with the paragraphs of personal notes or details on sporting and social activities which are deemed so essential in Britain. Nor are referees included, presumably because the school attended is reference enough. As a result, the whole document need not exceed a single side of A4 paper (see Exhibit 5).

**Education**

The most striking feature of French management is the way in which one's education impinges, either directly or indirectly upon one's entire career. As Alain Peyrefitte put it:

"Il n'y a sans doute pas de pays au monde où les diplômes soient mieux respectés, leur validité aussi persistante" (1976; 320).

(I cannot think of any country in the world where qualifications have greater power or longevity).

**The royal road**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, getting on the right track ("la voie royale") is something which starts with baccalauréat options at secondary school. The "bac C" (maths option) is the first vital step in one's bid to reach a grande école. However, having reached the sanctum of one of these venerated establishments, lifelong career success is virtually guaranteed. In most countries, educational pedigree is simply an entry ticket into a company. But in France it is an employment passport which often constitutes an assurance for life (a so-called "rente éducative"). Grandes écoles graduates can look forward, not only to a "golden hello", but to rapid promotion, not always based on results. As Peyrefitte explained:

"En France, le diplôme est une fusée longue portée qui, sauf accident, vous propulse jusqu'à la retraite" (1976; 320).

(In France, the diploma is an open-sesame which, barring mishaps, will see an individual through to retirement).
France's top executives are reputedly the best educated in Europe. Students with high level managerial aspirations as executives or administrators, know they are best advised to attend the most prestigious grandes écoles for, even if they intend to set up business alone, it will enhance their credibility.

The generalist education provided by these schools is deemed to equip the graduates with the overall view to make it to the top, and that is reinforced by the companies themselves. Far from attenuating educational differences, companies accentuate them with elitist practices, notably high flyer schemes and promotional ceilings related to qualifications, which help perpetuate the established order. Many of the cadres interviewed revealed that, with hindsight, they could quite easily have predicted their current situation simply on the basis of their educational luggage. By the same reckoning, they felt they could forecast the way their careers would unfold from now until their retirement. This suggests an unusually stable relationship between academic credentials and promotional ceiling - or as one cadre rather poetically explained to the researcher, "stellar trajectories are rare".

This extensive (not to say exclusive) reliance on pre-experience education as an indicator of management potential, allows the brightest prospects to be creamed off early and no doubt facilitates the apprenticeship to general management. "Fast trackers" can be cosseted and given a secure setting in which to acquire the necessary skills, as personal assistant ("attaché de direction") to a senior manager. They are given training missions, encouraged to visits plants in the provinces or abroad - all this under the tutelage of a mentor who will help them make contacts and oversee their leap from specialist to general management. So, whilst educational capital may yield its best return early on in the career, it is used to beget other forms of capital, such as rapid experience. This skilful conversion strategy enables the holder to cast aside the crutch of education and point to an 'authentic' track record.
Graduation from the 'right' school also has repercussions on behaviour. Pre-conditioned into believing that they are bound for the boardroom, the would-be leaders start to act accordingly. Anticipatory socialisation ensures that they acquire the demeanour and outlook of leadership. This self-belief is merely reinforced by firms which are eager to give them preferential career advancements, thereby establishing a well-padded CV and legitimising their leadership positions. The implication is that bright young executives are perhaps encouraged to look good and keep their noses clean rather than fulfill their creative and intellectual potential. Critics might develop the view that those who reach the top are perhaps better at getting promoted than they are at running organisations.

From a positive viewpoint, the policy of using the grandes écoles to form pools of versatile talent obviously promotes healthy mobility and facilitates dialogue between educational, business, financial, and public sectors. Indeed, the pervasive influence of the grandes écoles can be gauged by the comment of the Vice-President of Centrale's alumni association:

"Si l'on regroupait tous les anciens élèves des grandes écoles, on aurait devant soi la classe dirigeante de ce pays" (Le Monde de l'Education; April 1986; 10).

(A list of all grandes écoles alumni would read like a roll call of France's ruling class).

The institutionalisation of grande école links

Another way in which education affects career progress is through old boy networks. In many schools the durability of school links is institutionalised. At l'Ecole Polytechnique for instance, all graduates high and low call each other "camarade" whether they have met before or not, and the lowliest "X" can write out of the blue to a famous colleague and be sure of help and sympathy. Having such an extensive network of contacts from the very start of one's active life is an immeasurable advantage.

Similarly, at l'Ecole des Arts et Métiers, which reputedly has the most efficient old boy association, to which graduates are automatically affiliated. Members receive regular journals and newsletters on salaries or
career paths, to supplement the annual directory listing alumni by name, region and company. One consultant in the interview sample admitted that before visiting any company he would check the association directory for a fellow "Gadz'arts"* in that firm to fill him in on the prevailing situation. One production manager from the observation sample even confessed to having illicitly invited a colleague from a rival firm into the plant to show him how to solve a recurrent production problem. The graduates' freemasonry can clearly transcend corporate allegiences.

The purpose of alumni associations is basically three-fold: to promote the school's reputation, to help out in the search for a first job, and to facilitate mobility. Each association therefore runs a careers service which offers jobs to new graduates and restless old boys alike. The HEC association allegedly offers 2,500 posts to the 300 or so students who graduate each year. More impressive still are the efforts made when alumni fall upon hard times. The association will pull out all the stops to find a job for ("recaser") an unemployed member.

Likewise when it comes to promoting the school's name the associations can prove very helpful. For instance, the INSA (Institut Nationale des Sciences Appliquées) association put pressure on the French electricity corporation (EDF) so that the company would recognise in its recruitment salaries, the fact that the school had lengthened its curriculum to 5 years. Similarly, the Arts et Métiers association managed to persuade the French railways (SNCF) to open up certain posts previously reserved to the highest rated schools. On a less savoury note, the old boys' association may also have some impact on the schools' own admissions policy. The head of a small business school actually confessed to setting a 30% ceiling on the number of girls admitted to the school (Challenges; May 87; 32). The reasoning behind this policy was that girls were a poor investment for the association since they were more likely to stop working which would dilute the school's active network.

* - "Gadz'arts" is a contraction of "gars des arts et métiers" (alumni of l'Ecole des arts et métiers).
Bereft of these close knit ties, university graduates in particular, find it
difficult to infiltrate the higher reaches of business. As the head of one
university put it:

"Souvent, dans les grandes entreprises, les mafias d'anciens des
écoles sont pour nous un mur infranchissable" (L'Expansion;
7/03/85; 83).

(The old boy networks in the large companies often represent an
insurmountable obstacle for us).

Their lack of contacts in high places works against the university students
when they seek industrial placements which means they fail to gain an
initial foothold. Thereafter, their absence from positions of authority in
the more traditional companies becomes pathological. In contrast to this,
the "gadz'arts", say, are renowned for their stranglehold over the
automobile industry: Peugeot harbours 461 "gadz'arts" out of 5 000 cadres
according to figures published in Challenges (March 87; 34) - something
which cannot be explained away by distinctive competence. These collegiate
ghettos are regularly condemned in the press, but the criticism has the
unwitting effect of boosting the popularity of schools which guarantee
employment.

What is more, the situation seems destined to deteriorate since emulation is
perceived as the only way forward. As a university head explained:

"Nos formations étant récentes, nous n'avons pas encore nos
propres mafias" (L'Expansion; 7/03/85; 83).

(Our courses are recent so we don't yet possess our own mafias).

One can understand the desire to fight fire with fire, but the situation
seems rather hypocritical: on the one hand, the universities condemn
neighbouring networks, and on the other they try to constitute their own.

**Adult education**

As an adjunct to the present section, it is worth mentioning the area of
adult education. Since 1971, companies have been compelled by law to devote
just over one per cent of total wage bills to training. The motivation
behind this legislation seems to have been a desire to introduce some leeway into the rigid relationship between pre-experience educational credentials and jobs. However, the anticipated impact on careers has not really materialised. More often than not, it is the senior management which decides who to send on management development courses, which means that lack of training provides ready justification for lack of promotion. So, post-experience education has done as much to reinforce the educational pecking order, as it has to break it down.

Of course, many cadres do upgrade their skills by attending management training courses, but these have little impact on career progress. In France, no label earned at post-entry level will really make up for inadequacies in pre-entry education. Even the most prestigious establishments for senior executives such as the CPA, INSEAD, ISA, ISSEC, CRC or CEDEP will only partly compensate a "second rate" education. A post-entry diploma has a remedial aspect to it. It may give an engineer a managerial veneer but it will do nothing to augment the marketability of a graduate from the top grandes écoles. This is not an indictment of the pedagogy of these executive development centres but is a sign of the deference accorded to the top schools. It is also indicative of the attitude towards perfectability in France.

In contrast with the US, the acceptance of perfectability in France, is low. French education is directed towards the acquisition of a well-established body of knowledge and attitudes. This finite view of knowledge carries over into management education where, to burlesque the situation, the best grandes écoles impart comprehensive knowledge which need never be up-dated. Those who attend these schools are deemed "formés à vie" (trained for life) which renders further training superfluous. This attitude perhaps explains the pre-eminence of pre-experience education in relation to post-experience education.

Performance

In terms of career influences, the constant counterpoint to education is of course, job performance. Any managerial selection system involves an implicit trade-off between performance in professional life and performance prior to entry (as measured by qualifications). The aim here is to try to assess the weight accorded to each element in the French context.
Track record

Most corporate recruiters genuinely believe that the value of a qualification is quickly eclipsed after initial admission to the company. One personnel manager from the interview sample explicitly stated:

"Franchi le cap du démarrage, le rôle du diplôme tombe vite à zéro". (Having cleared the first hurdle, the power of the diploma soon disappears).

Many of the cadres interviewed corroborated that idea, the general consensus being that a qualification could not be relied upon for support for more than five years. That is probably true insofar as the formal knowledge enshrined by the diploma becomes obsolete. However, what remains is a high level start and the acquisition of a rapid and varied experience which the diploma has helped procure. This supersedes educational credentials as a promotion criterion but serves to promote the same population. What is more, should the grande école graduate find himself unemployed, he can count on an old boy network to minimise the period of 'cold turkey' between jobs. So, the claim that diplomas count for nothing, after initial recruitment, appears tenuous to say the least.

That is not to say that qualifications allow their holders simply to freewheel to power. Educational credentials must be allied to effort, to produce their full effect. But assuming that grandes écoles graduates can successfully negotiate the early stages, they will have the edge over less qualified colleagues, in making the transition to general management. The reason for this is that the responsibility for high level appointments falls in the hands of those already in power, rather than the personnel department. So, ceteris paribus, a chief will elect to surround himself with like-minded individuals who have emerged from the same mould, who speak the same language and have the same work methods. That way, the adaptation period is curtailed and the working relationship is more efficient. Co-optation in such cases probably has less to do with conscious discrimination than a feeling of intellectual empathy.
Social or technical competence?

As mentioned above, it is argued that after five or so years of professional experience, the diploma becomes irrelevant. This points to a shift in performance criteria whereby social competence gradually takes over from technical competence.

The relative importance of technical and social competence varies between firms - and more importantly, between strata within a firm. Consequently, the type of competence expected of individuals will depend upon the particular stage they have reached in their managerial career. The value of technical knowledge, know-how and energy tend to diminish with age. Conversely, the socially acquired skills needed not to produce per se but to administer the production processes (such as the ability to delegate, resolve conflicts and motivate) increase as the cadre climbs up the organisation.

It is in the latter half of one's career that the effects of attending the 'right' school come to fruition, as some individuals move from line jobs into positions of power that put a premium on such qualities as distinguished appearance, good manners, tact, and good taste. Emphasis on social competence tends to favour the products of the grandes écoles who possess the necessary self-confidence and social wherewithal. So while companies ostensibly drop educational credentials as a means of selection, they replace them with credentials which elevate members of the same population.

In truth, the criteria for recruitment and promotion are easy to fudge. Companies can easily shroud qualification-based promotion in terms of 'behavioural' traits. The relative emphasis on technical or social competence is in the hands of the company and, in France, companies generally put a premium on social skills. This is most visible in the treatment of certain high flyers who are nursed through the obligatory period of operational effectiveness, skating over the surface until they are sucked up to the boardroom.
The acid test: 'self-made' men

Having ascertained that educational credentials will help establish an accelerated track record, how do those without qualifications fare? Or, to put the null hypothesis, is it possible to succeed without educational credentials?

The new, action-orientated mood in French business makes much of the fact that it is possible to do well without educational credentials. The more progressive journals have featured articles publicising the successes of so-called "autodidactes" ('self-made' individuals). Recent issues of Le Point and Challenges have each devoted substantial pieces to those who have 'made it' without qualifications. But, since both articles trot out the same set of success-stories, one is left with the impression that these are merely exceptions which confirm the rule - and serve as alibis for a premature and hyperselective system.

In truth, a person's schooling (or lack of it) will always overshadow subsequent achievements. The primacy of the diploma is easily corroborated by taking a look at the appointments' sections in newspapers or magazines. Newly appointed chiefs will place a diploma gained several decades past, ahead of their penultimate posting in a prestigious company. The cryptic triumverate of details, "Jean Dupont, X, 53" tells initiated observers all they need to know about the individual, namely sex, school (X represents the crossed cannons of l'Ecole Polytechnique) and class (i.e. year of graduation).

It would seem that "la diplomite" (qualification-itis), as it is popularly known, is more acute than ever. Perhaps the greatest testimony to the pre-eminence of education comes from autodidactes themselves who, having 'made good', are still reluctant to admit to the appellation. Even in the wake of a new pro-business climate (see chapter on top management), the tag 'self-made' is a skeleton to be concealed rather than a source of pride.

An example from the observation sample makes the point exquisitely. The head of public relations had prepared a short résumé describing his chief. On reading it, the PDG in question remonstrated quite violently with its composer for mentioning his lack of higher education. The PR man explained
in all sincerity that nowadays 'self-made men' elicit nothing but respect and admiration. To which the worldly PDG replied:

"N'en croyez rien. On ne leur pardonnera jamais de n'avoir été que des primaires!"

(Don't you believe it. You're never forgiven for failing to go beyond primary education).

The experience of René Monory, the former education minister who tried (unsuccessfully) to introduce selection prior to entry into the universities, is also revealing. He used to show off about not having passed his baccalauréat ... until the day, last December, when disrespectful students starting chanting a set phrase borrowed from anxious parents, "Monory, passe ton bac d'abord!" (first pass the exam - then we'll see).

The stigma associated with a lack of education clearly persists irrespective of fashions - and there are perhaps good reasons (other than snobbery) for wishing to hide the fact in France. A 26 year old, self-taught chief outlined two particular handicaps:

"Quand on va voir pour la première fois des banquiers, ils trouvent qu'on est pas crédible. De même, on ne peut pas embaucher immédiatement des diplômés, car, souvent, ils se méfient d'une entreprise dirigée par un autodidacte" (Le Point; 24/08/87; 26).

(The first time you go to see bankers, they feel you lack credibility. The same goes for taking on graduates who are wary of companies headed by a non-graduate).

On the other hand, autodidactes perhaps have the drive and courage which, according to one headhunter, their graduate counterparts tend to lack:

"Ne réussissent que les élèves un peu placides, tenaces, attachés à un seul objectif: obtenir le diplôme. Les grandes écoles forment des gens doués d'une formidable force de travail et de concentration, mais peu préparés à prendre des risques" (L'Express; 24/01/86; 27).
Those who succeed are generally calm, tenacious and hell bent on obtaining a degree. The grandes écoles produce individuals with a tremendous work rate and concentration, but ill-prepared to take risks.

This view of grandes écoles graduates as rather timorous individuals was supported by a cadre interviewed who believed that, in France, competition was not seen as an end in itself, in the American tradition - but rather a means to an end. Competition, as he saw it, was essentially aimed at achieving security. He explained that the French are prepared to expose themselves to great risks provided that the reward is guaranteed security and cited admission to the grandes écoles as a prime example.

Whilst autodidactes have certain advantages over graduates, primarily as a result of having nothing to lose, it was generally acknowledged that success would increasingly require a formal framework of theoretical knowledge. As one self-taught PDG explained to the researcher:

"À l'avenir, il ne suffira plus d'avoir du bon sens dans l'analyse et de l'audace dans l'action."

(In future, analysis will require more than basic common sense and action more than mere daring).

This view of autodidactes as a dying breed was corroborated by a recent survey of company directors in Le Point. The article heralded, "La fin du règne des autodidactes" (the era of the self-made man is past - 5/10/87; 54) which implies, perhaps misleadingly, that the autodidacte was previously in favour. The piece revealed that higher education, especially in a grande école, is virtually a sine qua non for rising to the top of large firms. Of the 200 top managers sampled 90% were the products of higher education and of the remaining 10% all had acquired some sort of legitimising qualification in their professional life.

As regards the initial question about the possibility of success without qualifications, the answer has to be a qualified "no". It is unusual for individuals to make headway in traditional French companies without the official seal of higher education. On the other hand, in the less viscous environment of small or provincial companies, it is possible to climb by proving one's worth (company types are discussed later in this chapter).
Career strategy

The notion of career strategy seems fairly weak in France. The managers interviewed tended to be vague about what they hoped to achieve by what age. No doubt this has something to do with a certain reticence to 'count one's chickens' or to appear overtly ambitious. To give some idea of the attitude, professional aspirations would generally be couched in terms of intellectual satisfaction or increased independence rather than more money, power or prestige. The few who did reveal specific goals and time-scales had to be prompted to do so. It could be posited that this toned down view of careerism is related to the rather predictable nature of career progression — and the fact that one's education holds sway over all other possible variables. This said, there are still a number of choices which will determine how quickly individuals reach their allotted station.

Company type

One of the prime decisions facing a new graduate concerns the sort of company to join — and depending on the school attended the choice can be quite vast. The lowliest of grandes écoles engineers is likely to receive an average of two offers of employment on graduating, whilst a product of Centrale can expect up to fourteen (L'Express; 24/01/86; 26).

Different companies offer different salaries, different career tracks and different responsibilities. Some promote on seniority, others on profits recorded. Ambitious young graduates therefore have to pick their way through a complex field of proffered opportunities. They have to judge which are the real opportunities and which are 'voies de garage' (sidings). The fundamental question for new graduates is whether to opt for the safety of a large corporation or chance their hand in a smaller company where they may be given wider responsibilities.

There is a distinct sense of separate circuits in the managerial job market. On the one hand, there are the small companies, based in the provinces, with a higher incidence of autodidactes and an older age range. On the other hand, there are the larger companies, with their Parisian headquarters and a high concentration of young graduate personnel. This idea of a dual job market for cadres was confirmed by a production manager interviewed who suggested that joining a small company was virtually an irreversible move.
He claimed that opting out of the race for top positions in major corporations was tantamount to admitting that one was not cut out to work in an overtly structured and competitive environment. Consequently, large companies may have a few qualms about taking on someone with a small company background. Needless to say, the reverse is not true since small companies will be only too glad to hire people with experience of the way things are done in the major corporations.

One possible career sequence was summed up by one of Jane Marceau's INSEAD interviewees as:

"One must make one's mistakes in a big company, prove one's efficiency in a medium-sized one and finish by earning a lot of money in one's own business" (1980; 126).

There is a general consensus regarding the companies which provide the best springboard into the business world as well as a blacklist of companies to avoid. At the top of the heap according to a survey in Le Nouvel Economiste (29/05/87; 87), is IBM; though a number of other companies are rated higher in particular fields. For instance, Arthur Andersen or other consultancy firms are considered ideal for acquiring the coveted 'generalist' label without having to manoeuvre between functions, for computing or management specialists; l'Oreal for research and marketing; Procter and Gamble for marketing; Rank Xerox for sales; Rhône Poulenc for production and research.

The high ratings of these blue chip companies is largely related either to security of employment within the company itself or the security of employment they confer upon those who pass through them. Colgate-Palmolive for instance, is renowned for its high turnover of cadres, 50% of which leave the company within 5 years (L'Expansion; 18/06/87; 127). However, those who acquire its "étiquette" (label) emerge with a valuable "carte de visite" (calling card) which they can use anywhere. Accor is another such firm. A commercial director interviewed at the company was quite candid with the researcher about the reasons that young graduates chose Accor:

"Ce ne sont pas les salaires qui les attirent - ils viennent ici pour faire leurs armes."

(They don't come here for the money, but to gain their wings).
Either way, the real appeal of these firms lies directly or indirectly in the security of employment. The primordial importance of security was corroborated by the findings of a recent survey in *l'Usine nouvelle* (19/03/87) which revealed an overwhelming desire by young engineers to join a large group which would provide well traced out career possibilities. In many respects these preferences are latter-day manifestations of the French obsession with the security of civil service employment. The dream of many French parents, until quite recently, was to see their offspring enter state service - and even as late as 1982, a survey revealed that 40% of the youths themselves hoped to become civil servants (de Closets; 1982; 328).

In two of the small companies visited the heads were highly critical of this security-consciousness. The attitude of the grandes écoles graduates was condemned on two scores: firstly, for its sheer snobbishness and secondly, for the lack of adventure. They saw the graduates as conformists, unwilling to try their luck in a post which would grow with them - opting instead for a future which was clearly mapped out from the outset.

What the small companies offer is a chance of wider responsibility. They are of course less concerned with qualifications, though that is probably through force rather than choice. One of the company heads visited was particularly pleased to have attracted a graduate engineer (albeit from one of the less prestigious schools) on to his staff. And this snob factor was noted by *l'Expansion*:

"Dans les PME, plus d'un patron est tout fier de se payer 'son' HEC ou 'son' polytechnicien, comme il se paierait une Rolls" *(l'Expansion; August 1977; 69)*.

(In many small companies, the boss will take on a Polytechnique or HEC graduate, in the same way as he would treat himself to a Rolls).

**Mobility**

The importance of manager mobility in France is largely dependent upon the prevailing norms within the sector or company. Personal mobility will be interpreted unfavourably in sectors such as heavy industry, banking or nationalised companies. On the other hand it is generally viewed positively.
by PR firms, consultancy, computing, 'Americanised' companies and, generally speaking in the sales function. Whilst this pattern is ostensibly the same as in Britain, there is perhaps an underlying difference between the countries. The UK attitude, coloured by American views, is favourable in principle to mobility - whilst in France it is generally frowned upon.

In France mobility is a not a universal sign of professional success and ambition. Indeed it is just as likely to be construed as the result of successive failures, or even instability as suggested by the rather disparaging reference of one headhunter interviewed to "les papillons aux CV tourbillonnants" (butterflies with whirlwind CVs). Indeed, bright young graduates are warned not to be too anxious to respond to the offers of headhunters since they may get a reputation for instability. In the words of one headhunter:

"Je me méfie beaucoup des gens qui collectionnent les employeurs. Celui qui change trop souvent d'employeur fait naître d'horribles soupçons, ou tout au moins soulève des questions bien légitimes." (Challenge; January 87; 50).

(I am extremely wary of people who 'collect' employers. Changing jobs too often is bound to arouse suspicion, or at the very least legitimate queries).

Even where mobility is known to be motivated by ambition rather "flightiness", it may be regarded negatively. For instance, the career-minded financial director at one large company visited was described to the researcher as "un escargot" (a snail). The implication was that he had 'no fixed abode' which made him slightly suspect and placed a question mark over his corporate loyalty.

Of course, the light in which mobility is interpreted depends to some extent on the age of the manager. Early on in a career, playing the field will probably be viewed positively, particularly since a young cadre may be anxious to shed the new graduate image by changing companies. However, later on (after 35), mobility is likely to be frowned upon.
Few of the cadres spoken to, envisaged a change of company as part of their career strategy. Mobility was regarded as a last resort, when there is no other way out, rather than a positive means of gaining promotion or greater responsibility. They seemed unwilling to take a risk and relinquish the protection afforded by length of service in a company. Many cadres pass up salary or promotion opportunities for the security of immobility.

The desire to stay put was even more acute among autodidactes for whom changing company was synonymous with loss of responsibility, salary and status. The reason for this is that they lack an officially sanctioned degree to certify their value to prospective employers. The fate of the autodidacte is basically tied in with his employer's and promotion relies on the firm's growth. This is in contrast with, say, Britain where the self-taught individual would, firstly, get credit for having done the job, and secondly, be less disadvantaged in a culture which is not so self-consciously intellectual.

By the same token, grandes écoles graduates possess the official seal of approval which allows them to roam freely in the job market. Again we see the ubiquitous effect of qualifications which enable their holders to accumulate experience in different companies. This, in turn, provides justifiable grounds for discrimination when they apply for senior positions - something which is confirmed by a report in Le Point (5/10/87; 54) citing a diversified career as a common trait among those who reach the top. Ironically, the widespread immobility at middle management level serves to legitimise the right to power of the few who are mobile. So, whilst French managers cannot make a career out of mobility alone, mobility can assume the role of distinctive competence which justifies a senior position.

If French companies do not place a very high premium on mobility in general, there is one form of mobility which can prove particularly 'rewarding' namely, mid-career transfers from the public to the private sector. Of course, this form of mobility is not exclusive to France. Similar migration patterns occur in Japan from government to government-related industry and in Israel where transfers from military to business circles prevail. However, there is a sharp contrast between France and her two biggest neighbours, Britain and West Germany, neither of which really indulges in this practice - with the possible exception of the British penchant for appointing status lenders to non-executive positions on boards.
In France then, added value may be obtained from entering public service*1 and using one's privileged knowledge of its workings as a springboard for a second career in industry, and the donning of 'golden slippers' ("pantouflage"). It is a sign of their relatively smooth transition that the extent of the phenomenon is so little known. The one-way irrigation of the business elite by civil servants is eased by the social and educational proximity of the two groups. The passage amounts to professional mobility, but within the same social field - hence its success.

The headline-grabbing instances of "pantouflage", associated with nationalised companies and changes of government are simply the tip of the iceberg. Beneath the surface there is a steady, osmotic flow from the public sector (including the armed forces) to the private sector. The pattern is a classic one: transfer usually takes place in the mid-thirties, by which time the cadre has ample public sector experience to offer, as well as an appreciation of career limitations (in public service), yet sufficient drive left to make an impact in the private sector.

The circumstances for leaving vary. Some respond to an offer, others take the initiative, having carefully cultivated contacts when in office (see Exhibit 6). Customer firms often save posts for those who have placed state orders with them*2. Either way, ex-civil servants have numerous trumps to play with a prospective employer. They possess intimate knowledge of the rules and regulations. They have friends in high places and can facilitate dialogue with those who administer - and even if they cannot play on personal contacts, they are "au fait" with the way political and governmental networks operate; they know how to lobby and, having themselves been on the receiving end, know when and where to apply pressure. What is more, their high level training permits a rapid grasp of complex problems. In the French context then, perhaps as a result of state involvement in company affairs, ex-civil servants clearly have something to offer most employers.

*1 - A civil service career is still prestigious but increasingly it is regarded as a short-cut to senior positions in the private or nationalised sectors, rather than an end in itself.

*2 - This in spite of legislation (art. 175 of the Penal Code) prohibiting entry into client companies within five years of resignation (L'Expansion; 8/10/87; 153).
The most sought after specialists are the "inspecteurs des finances" who virtually monopolise the higher reaches of the banking sector (Société Générale, Crédit Lyonnais) and nationalised insurance groups (UAP, GAN), not to mention political spheres. The reason for their popularity has less to do with the skills they have acquired from verifying public accounts (to ensure that State funds are not misspent), than with their intellectual and social attributes. Each year the top five graduates of l'ENA invariably opt for the "Inspection des Finances" which is considered the best of the élite "Grands corps de l'Etat" (senior branches of the civil service). It therefore has a prestige without parallel in the UK - even entering the foreign service can not hold a light to it. So, to bag an "inspecteur" is considered a real coup for any company which manages to do so.

At a somewhat lower level, the foremost "pantoufleurs" in terms of number, are ex-service personnel, who can foresee their likely "bâton de maréchal" (promotional ceiling) and find an escape hatch in the armaments or electronics sectors. A few large companies can even boast their own clan of "St Cyriens"* to go alongside groups from Polytechnique, Centrale or Arts et Métiers. Occasionally, civil servants will equip themselves with a legitimising managerial qualification prior to making the transition.

Functions

Social prestige ("noblesse") is an important notion in French industry. On a sectoral scale, the noble domains are those with a high capital intensity in which the problems of manufacture are secondary to those of conception such as aviation, space, nuclear energy, télécommunications.

The same attitude manifests itself at functional level where the perceived nobility of an activity, its interest and its variety often outweigh remuneration factors. Conception functions, which are cerebral rather than manual, have higher status than execution functions. But the level of differentiation goes further than that. Perhaps the most striking example is the technical domain with its ambivalent antecedents. On the one hand, there is the scientific tradition and the pure and disinterested quest for knowledge where mastery of the world is based on the power of the mind. And

* - St Cyr - French equivalent of West Point or Sandhurst.
on the other hand, it is rooted in the world of labour, of work which makes man subservient to machines, which dirties the hands and wears out the body. The distinction between these two traditions even materialises with mechanical engineers developing hard, calloused hands while electrical engineers develop fine fingers for dexterous work - a real throw back to peasants and aristocrats (La Revue Française de Gestion; Oct. 87; 45).

The essential criterion in determining prestige seems to be the degree of immateriality of the task. In engineering, electronics has an element of abstraction and therefore purity and nobility, which places it above electrical engineering with its high currents, and way ahead of mechanical engineering which requires brute force! The same goes for other functions. In the commercial function for instance, dealing with immaterial flows of funds is more prestigious than dealing with tangibles. As one student from the renowned business school INSEAD, put it to Jane Marceau:

"It is nobler to sell money than socks" (1980; 113).

The degree of immateriality also appears to be the foundation for the functional hierarchy. The more ethereal specialities like finance, marketing or the current vogue function, communications*, are deemed more uplifting than the utilitarian functions like purchasing or production. In fact the greater the physical, as well as intellectual, distance from the shop floor, the higher the prestige of the function. The point is reinforced by Boltanski:

"The highest positions are those in which one need not be aware of labour, labourers, or production but only of such abstractions as commodity and cash flows, high technology processes, and investments." (249; Eng. trans.).

British readers might justifiably question whether France is any different from the UK in this respect - after all, the view of production as low status and finance as high status is by no means exclusive to France. This is true, but we may posit that different causes lie behind the same

* - The communications function in France is responsible for internal and external corporate communications - functions discharged in Britain by PR and personnel departments.
reality. What is valorised in France is abstractness as a concomitant of intellectuality. Thus, finance has high standing because it is associated with maths and cleverness whilst production is a victim of its perceived lack of intellectual challenge. In Britain on the other hand, a similar pecking order has a very different basis. The pecking order is determined by traditional anti-industrialism. It follows that the most prototypical industrial functions such as production, evoking the 'dark satanic mills' of the industrial North, are devalued. And at the other end of the spectrum, functions like finance, with their professional affiliations, are high prestige.

Unfortunately, in the French context, this rather neat intellectual stratification of functions has been upset by two recent trends. One is the ambiguous position of computing. Computing is not considered a particularly noble area, not least because experts in the field tend to be products of the university system (data processing is one of the very few areas along with, say, law and taxation in which recruiters might specifically seek out a university, as opposed to a grande école graduate). On the other hand, the introduction of computing into departments like engineering design and operations management has rendered these more abstract and has helped to raise their status.

The other influence is the action-orientated mood which has emerged in the last decade (see section on the new breed of managers in chapter on "Those who set the tone") and seeks to promote results, performance and ability in the field. This has raised the profile of functions like sales and production in which young graduates square up to practical problems and show concrete results. It has become fashionable among young pretenders to show that their grande école background has not impaired their pragmaticism. So, although a function like production is not the way to the top, a spell in production can be a useful career move. The only problem is when to break out of the production function in order to pursue one's ambitions. As one engineer explained in l'Express:

"Si vous restez à la fabrication trop longtemps, on vous enferme dans un ghetto. Aucune chance de faire partie un jour de l'état-major de l'entreprise" (24/01/86; 26).
(If you stay too long in production, you get locked in to a ghetto and you can kiss goodbye to your chances of ever reaching the higher échelons of the company).

Or as one production manager from the sample explained:

"Quand on a les mains sales on a les poches vides".

(Dirty hands go with empty pockets).

This view of production as fairly low status is of course not exclusive to France - a similar case has been made in Britain. However, we may posit that different influences lie behind the same reality. In the UK, production is tarnished by the low status of industry. In France, production suffers from its lack of intellectual standing. This pattern seems to prevail throughout French organisations with a devaluation of functions not associated with cleverness or intellectualism.

There are other functions which are best avoided if one hopes to make rapid progress. Until recently, these included the management of human resources (or personnel) as it was known, which came low on the list of priorities in a firm. This could be seen in the quality of recruits to the function (often ex-NCOs). The subsequent rise of this function is mirrored in the titular evolution of those in charge, starting with "chef du personnel", moving on to "responsable des relations sociales" and latterly "directeur des ressources humaines".

Purchasing, on the other hand, still appears to be the Cinderella function in French organisations. It is often left to non-qualified technicians and occasionally serves as a final resting place for 'old retainers' for "loyal and faithful service". The same used to be true of the training function, which benefits in France from obligatory expenditure (just over 1% of the payroll - see section on adult education in chapter on "Destiny"). As with personnel, there are signs of a realisation of the strategic value of these functions (particularly in the large companies) but their heads remain relatively underqualified.
The best paid functions, according to Le Nouvel Economiste survey (29/05/87; 83) are still finance and marketing. In the late 1960's marketing was considered the up-and-coming function. Today, communications has taken up that mantle and is regarded as a useful professional springboard since it offers a global perspective of the company and privileged relations with the PDG.

Sales too is well-paid but lacks prestige because it is the domain 'par excellence' of the autodidactes. Sales, in France, is one of the more 'open' functions in which personal qualities and performance outweigh educational references. The problem for those who choose this function is to switch to another function before they reach forty and lose the energy and ambition which sales demands.

The main priority for anyone who goes into manufacturing (or, for grandes écoles graduates, research*) is to look for complementary functions to try to gain a 'global' view of the company and help them make the transition to top management. This brings us on to the question of whether it is it best to stick to one function or to zig-zag — in other words, whether to be a specialist or a generalist.

The foremost engineering schools like Polytechnique and Centrale have always prided themselves on their breadth of teaching. Indeed, the training received at Polytechnique is so broad that its graduates generally go on to more specialised post-graduate "écoles d'application" of which the most superior are the Ecole des Mines and the Ecole des Ponts et Chausées. Even in the face of increasing knowledge, the engineering schools have resolutely avoided focusing on particular specialties. As one head of personnel from the interview sample put it, "moins un diplôme sert, plus il est recherché" (the less use the qualification, the greater its market value).

And Weiss confirmed that notion in his description of l'Ecole Centrale:

"In the generality and comprehensiveness of his curriculum lay the basis of the Centrale engineers' claim to industrial

* - The paratypical career path, according to Benguigui (1970) is: grande école - R & D - general management.
aristocracy, the right to direct large enterprises, the possession of qualities radically different from the 'skills in certain specialties' taught in the less exclusive schools." (Weiss; 1982; 255).

To this day, the intricate grande école hierarchy (as witnessed by starting salaries or job offers), still ranks the most general scientific schools ahead of their more specialised counterparts. The distinction even extends to the top commercial schools which pride themselves on their generalist ethos. Their curricula are geared to giving the students an overall appreciation of company matters, and the bias towards general management features prominently in their literature. They aim to produce polyvalent products capable of filling posts in any sector - leaders for every occasion.

Clearly, the tradition of generalist engineers who oversaw France's early industrial expansion in the latter half of the nineteenth century still taints French corporate perceptions. The cadres interviewed were fairly unanimous in their belief that it is the 'generalists' who make it to the top. This means that at some point in their career, ambitious young cadres must make a break from the specialist niche which they occupy and demonstrate their skills in other areas. Of course, not just anyone is deemed capable of switching functions at the drop of a hat. It requires the sort of adaptability instilled by the top schools.

This raises an interesting point concerning the French perception of the universality of management. On the face of it, the French notion that its grandes écoles produce a universal élite shares something with the American notion of managerial man, who can manage any industrial or commercial undertaking. Both approaches claim universality - however, on closer examination the foundations for managerial polyvalence differ radically.

For the Americans, universality resides in the training. Conventional wisdom in the United States is that management is a discipline that can be taught and learned and has principles which are generally applicable. For the French, on the other hand, it is the man who, by virtue of his intellectual quality, can adapt to any situation. Polyvalence stems from the person as an 'intellectually-finished product', not the imparting of particular skills.
and techniques. In some ways, the French manager is closer to a professional version of the British tradition of the 'gifted all-rounder' who can turn his hand to anything - but in France the raison d'être is measured intellectual performance, and in Britain a diffuse notion of leadership.

Overview

From the preceding description of career influences, it is apparent that education is the linch-pin. Without qualifications, horizons will be limited; but with them, other trump cards such as wide experience and healthy mobility, are easily accumulated. So, while companies maintain that a qualification counts for little after initial admission, it in fact provides an unassailable head-start which becomes self-perpetuating. The intention of this section, is to look at some of the consequences of such a system.

Grandes écoles graduates are expected to be competent when joining a company and are often appointed directly to a position of cadre. Ironically, this rather premature allocation of responsibilities can be just as demotivating for the lucky few as for those excluded. The former see little need to prove themselves since they are already guaranteed preferential career advancements; whilst the latter must resign themselves to an atrophied career. As Pierre Mannoni, himself an autodidacte, put it:

"Pendant encore des décennies, ce Moyen-Age scolaire dans lequel nous vivons va étouffer des personnalités, des potentialités de façon irreversible." (Challenges; avril 1987; 36).

(We are still living in the educational Dark Ages. For how many more decades are we going to sit idly by while great talents and potential are permanently stifled?)

A multitude of candidates are discouraged from applying for posts simply because they come from 'inappropriate' backgrounds. The discrimination becomes self-fulfilling, with autodidactes not applying for jobs formally open to them but, de facto, reserved for grandes écoles graduates. They
learn to tailor their expectations to organisational realities. As Boltanski explained:

"Self-taught cadres, especially those of middle- or lower class background, have almost no hope of obtaining positions of power, which are monopolised by graduates of the grandes écoles and/or cadres of upper class background with inside contacts" (Boltanski; 261; Eng. trans.).

This lack of career opportunities may also help to account for the longstanding malaise, often referred to in the press, among middle managers (see discussion in the final chapter). Deprived of career aspirations, one would expect this postulated lack of motivation (or damage to morale).

What is more, not much has come from management 'catch-up' programmes which have been used to justify promotions rather than encourage managers to improve their skills with the incentive of promotion. Irrespective of the way companies try to sell management training, the general feeling is that access to the corridors of power is on a one-shot basis. If one misses the boat as an adolescent, the chances of recovery later are remote. Whilst it appears unfair, this practice is more or less accepted because the criteria used are unequivocal and known to all. The road to the top is well sign-posted which means that dispersal of talent through misinformation is minimised.

On the upside of course, the notion of predetermined career paths probably limits unproductive political rivalry since only a few can have pretensions of power. What is the point of jockeying for position when the race is a foregone conclusion? It also renders promotion of autodidactes a particularly powerful signal.

There are obvious social and political advantages to promoting autodidactes in a country where they are generally kept down. For a start it advertises effort as the way up. Secondly, the risk involved is minimal since loyalty and conformity to company norms have been ensured by a lengthy process of socialisation and selection.

The few autodidactes who rise through the ranks are unlikely to condemn the workings of a system from which they have emerged with more than they could have expected. Furthermore, they may have gained access to their position at
a high cost to their private lives - those who have more obstacles to overcome tend to overinvest in their new rôles and positions. They are likely to be hyper-sensitive to withdrawal of the trappings of cadre status which they have worked hard to acquire - so dissent will not come from this quarter.

This brings us on to another point. It could be posited that it is the very paucity of career opportunities for the vast majority of middle managers which causes the excessive attachment to status symbols and acquired rights. Bereft of real career aspirations, the cadre finds surrogate 'achievements' to motivate him.

The attachment to status symbols is revealed by Boltanski in his description of the way companies coerce an individual into resigning. He suggests that this can be achieved simply by withdrawing some of the previously granted privileges but without touching the salary. For instance, not being invited to meetings or informed about events are exclusionary processes which soon become unbearable. Ostracism will render the cadre paranoid and his belief in his worth will be undermined to such an extent that he will either resign or end up making mistakes which justify the attempt to get rid of him. Boltanski quotes a cadre who outlines the procedure:

"They'll transfer you from one department to another. Or they'll assign you work below your level. You're supposed to be an executive and they'll treat you like an errand boy. If the man's got a weak character, he'll resign. To hold on you've got to be tough. They don't invite you to meetings and conferences, they don't tell you what's going on, so you look like a jerk." (264; Eng. trans.).

Instances of this kind would seem to point to an underlying flaw in the French management selection process which condemns the majority of the population to the 'scrap heap' before entering active life, whilst guaranteeing the 'lucky few' uninterrupted career progress. In fact, there is growing concern voiced about the psychological effects on French society of such a system. It leaves a disillusioned and frustrated majority with the demotivating prospect of limited advancement, since the upward limits on promotion are basically determined by the diplomas held at the start of a career.
As one personnel director explained to the researcher, a more diversified management recruitment base seems desirable on two grounds. Firstly, to recapture those talents which have somehow strayed from the "porte principale"; and secondly, to introduce a little more rivalry into competition for the top posts.

The dangers of the existing system which sets excessive store by qualifications were perhaps best exemplified by another personnel director from the sample of companies visited. He explained to the researcher that the number of cadres recruited last year fell almost evenly into three categories: those taken on by the personnel department, those poached from other companies by headhunters and those recruited "par relations" (on personal recommendation). Of the three categories, the highest turnover was among executives recruited by headhunters (75% of whom had already left); next came those recruited through recommendations (30% had left); finally came the managers recruited by the personnel department itself, of which none had left.

Although there was undoubtedly an element of bragging about these revelations, the varying success rates underlined a very important fact: the best qualified people, who corresponded ideally to the headhunter's spec (based on academic qualifications), were not the best suited to the company's needs. In other words, educational credentials may not be the best means of testing managerial potential, or as the personnel manager put it:

"On ne doit pas chercher les meilleurs, mais les mieux adaptés".

(Our aim is not to find the very best, but the best suited).

Restatement

This chapter has attempted to show how, in France, pre-career education holds sway over subsequent training or achievements. Most large companies, officially or officiously, use educational credentials as a selection mechanism governing entry to different posts and vary the salaries offered to successful candidates accordingly - and, although other influences impinge on career progress, they are invariably tied to educational credentials.
The highly selective educational system earmarks high flyers for early responsibility and rapid promotion. This facilitates their learning process but leaves those excluded with the prospect of limited advancement. The grandes écoles have therefore contributed to the academisation of management at the expense of a broader recruiting base.
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L'Usine nouvelle, "Ingénieurs: la nouvelle vague", 19/03/87, No. 12, pp. 56-70.

If you are a high calibre, commercially orientated graduate determined to succeed in a highly competitive marketing environment, our client is offering the challenge to match your ambition.

A subsidiary of a leading multi-national oil company, they have openings for a number of young and highly numerate graduates. Those appointed, initially to undertake a broad range of marketing-related roles, will be expected to possess the outstanding ability that is a pre-requisite of progress into key managerial positions.

Your degree discipline will have a business or scientific bias and you will already have gained 2-3 years' commercial experience. A high level of computer literacy is essential, as are well developed analytical and communication skills.

The rewards begin with a salary of c.£15,000, together with excellent company benefits. The future? Your own drive and determination will set the pace and direction of your progress.

If you believe you have the potential to meet the challenge of this demanding environment, please write with full career details, quoting reference 632/NJB/88, to: Nigel Bastow, Consultant, Austin Knight Selection, 17 St. Helen's Place, London EC3A 6AS. Alternatively you can telephone for an application form on 01-437 9261 (01-256 6925 evenings/weekends).
EXHIBIT 4

Comparative emphasis on remuneration in job advertisements.

Responsible production

Intégrée à un groupe important et performant, cette société (130 personnes - 80 millions de francs de chiffre d'affaires) est spécialisée dans la fabrication en très grande série de petits composants mécaniques. Sa compétence technique, ses innovations permanentes et ses nombreux brevets lui permettent de répondre d'une manière très adaptée aux exigences de ses marchés et de jouir d'une excellente image de marque. Elle recherche le responsable de son unité de production. Sous l'autorité de la direction générale, il encadrera plusieurs ateliers regroupant une centaine de personnes et sera chargé de toute la gestion et l'organisation de la production, des services connexes et de l'animation des hommes. Ce poste s'adresse à un candidat âgé d'au moins 30 ans, ingénieur mécanicien diplômé d'une grande école (Arts & Métiers ou équivalence). Homme de terrain, il aura déjà réussi une première expérience d'encadrement d'une unité de production et maîtrisera bien les problèmes liés aux grandes séries. La rémunération proposée, fonction de l'expérience ainsi que l'évolution à l'intérieur du groupe, sont motivantes pour un candidat de valeur. Poste basé en banlieue Ouest de Paris. Ecrire à B. COULANGE en précisant la référence A/2643UN.

L'Usine Nouvelle - 28/2/88

Production Executive
North Midlands
To £22,000

An autonomous member of a major multinational Group, this very successful company manufactures high quality products for industry on a continuous basis in a modern plant at a pleasant North Midlands location. A major expansion programme aimed at maintaining the company's position at the forefront of manufacturing technology is taking place and a talented Production Executive is required to lead and motivate a team of production supervisors. You will play a leading role in improving productivity and further enhancing the company's automated manufacturing processes. Aged 28/48, you will be a graduate in a Mechanical/Production/Materials Science discipline with comprehensive knowledge and experience of the latest Industrial Engineering and Manufacturing techniques—gained in a modern continuous process environment. Above all, you must possess drive, determination and total commitment to achieving targets and goals. If you can make an early impact, the job will provide a springboard to higher management.

Please send a comprehensive C.V. to J.N.B., Link Management Selection, P.O. Box 7, Neston, South Wirral, L64 7UG.

Times - 17/4/88
BOULNOIS Karine

Née le 21 mars 1965 à Soulac (33)

12 rue Edouard Lefebvre
78000 Versailles
tel : 953.96.96

24 ans
Célibataire
Etudiante

FORMATION

1983 Baccalauréat C - Versailles
1985 : Admise à l'Ecole supérieure de commerce de Paris

LANGUES

- Anglais : courant
- Allemand : bonnes notions

STAGES – EMPLOIS TEMPORAIRES

- Juillet 1985 – Monitrice d'enfants
- Mai à septembre 1987 – Assistante Export chez l'Oreal.

DIVERS

- Fréquents séjours en Angleterre
  2 séjours d'un mois en Allemagne

- Présidente du Bureau des élèves (1986/87)

- Permis de conduire B

OBJECTIFS

- Dans l'immédiat, assistante au service du personnel,
  pour évoluer, à moyen terme, vers les responsabilités
  dans cette fonction.
EXHIBIT 6

Alternative strategies for the 'pantoufleur'.

La stratégie du pantoufleur

Voie tranquille

Voie risquée

aller dans les chasses gardées
En, CEA, Suez, Société générale etc...

aller dans des territoires protégés
CGE, Saint-Gobain, Peugeot, Renault, etc...

l'idéal
chercher un patron d’environ 55 ans, sans dauphin, dont on peut espérer devenir l’héritier.

à défaut
aller dans une jeune société, à forte croissance, où il n’y a pas encore de grands corps et où on peut penser que la matière grise fuit défaut. Cette voie commence à être très prise.

Vade-mecum

1 et 2 : Faire attention à ce qu’il n’y ait pas de concurrence inutile, c’est-à-dire s’assurer qu’il n’y a pas de corps d’un âge équivalent en place.

3 et 4 : Utiliser au mieux les contacts professionnels noués au cabinet et dans l’administration.

Le Monde Affaires - 19/3/88
7. THE NATURE OF WORK RELATIONS

"C'est sûr qu'à l'égard des rapports de travail les Français sont plutôt constipés." Conversation with Pierre Salbaing, Vice-President, Conseil d'Administration, L'Air Liquide.

(There's no doubt that in terms of work relations, the French are pretty tense).

Although much of this thesis is indirectly concerned with work relations in French companies, we felt it would be helpful to devote a short chapter to restating and summarising some of the distinguishing features.

The chapter takes its cue from the seminal work of Michel Crozier on work relations in a bureaucratic context. He identified a number of themes which characterised French organisational interaction, notably the isolation of the individual, the avoidance of face-to-face relationships, the compartmentalisation of the organisation, the struggle for privileges and the lack of constructive solidarity. The aim of this chapter is to put our view side by side with that of Crozier.

Impersonal

An immediate impression of the ambiance of the traditional French office is that it is less chummy and relaxed than the equivalent in Britain. An obvious manifestation is the relative absence of joking around (ribbing, running jokes, self-deprecation), probably because humour exposes one's personality. Or again, 'slouching' (sitting on or putting one's feet up on desks) is uncommon. Interestingly, the only individual who actually provided evidence to the contrary was a trainee store manager at Carrefour, who happened to be an English ex-patriate and readily rested his feet on the nearest available surface. The theme of non-verbal expression is explored in
much detail by the American sociologist Lawrence Wylie who maintains that the French are far more upright in their posture and controlled in their movements than the Americans:

"The French have a sense of vulnerability about their bodies that is greater than that of Americans who are less worried about their body boundaries." (1981;38)

Social interaction in France makes a clear distinction between personal and professional relations. The rôle played in the office can easily be kept distinct from the person occupying the rôle through the use of a battery of props (explored in the chapter on rituals). At its extreme French cadres can exhibit astonishing awareness of their own 'split personality'. For instance, a production manager from the observational study who explained his actions to the researcher by saying, "qu'est-ce que vous voulez, je suis bête et discipliné - je fais ce qu'on me dit" (what do you expect? I'm well disciplined but unthinking - I do as I'm told). In this assertion the cadre was demonstrating an ability to pull away from, and judge, his professional actions. An even more striking example of this distinction between the individual and his function was provided by Lawrence Wylie who quotes Montaigne's approach: "Montaigne et le maire de Bordeaux sont deux" (Montaigne and the mayor of Bordeaux are separate) - which provided convenient justification for his leaving Bordeaux at the time of the plague (Santoni; 1981; 61).

The notion of impersonality is developed by Desmond Graves who suggests that the French tend to regard authority as residing in the rôle not the person. According to Graves, it is by the power of his position that a French manager gets things done (what Chester Barnard termed structural authority). This is in contrast to the Anglo-Saxon view that authority is vested in the person (personal, charismatic or moral authority). The distinction between the two cultures implies that a Frenchman will accept responsibility so long as it is attached to his rôle but will not actively seek responsibility, as a British manager might, for it adds nothing to his stature. As Graves puts it:

"He is 'le responsable' - but not, as in our culture, 'the person responsible'." (1973; 293).
The desire to keep function and personality separate has repercussions upon the nature of social contact. It is not possible to reconcile cordial relations and formal (as opposed to personal) authority. Consequently, office colleagues do not often try to meet each other socially, and there are few signs of fraternisation between staff of differing grades. This is corroborated by Renaud Sainsaulieu who states:

"En ce qui concerne les relations interpersonnelles d'amitié, elles sont assez faibles et fragiles, en ce sens qu'elles ne débordent pas les limites des catégories formelles des rangs et des statuts officiels." (1977; 245)

(Interpersonal friendship ties are fairly weak insofar as they rarely transcend the formal boundaries of rank and status).

It is noteworthy that even in the more homely environment of a firm "à dimension humaine" (of human proportions), the boss still insisted his staff call him "Monsieur".

The low social openness finds spatial expression in the office layout where personal space seems to be a matter of some importance. Open-plan offices are scarce at cadre level and can cause quite a stir if they are imposed. Again the only exception encountered was an American subsidiary whose corporate culture is based on egalitarianism, an integral part of this being the total absence of personal offices. The French like to have a 'territory' to call their own - and the impregnability of the sanctuary tends to increase with organisational status. Three of the PDGs observed had soundproofed doors, great unwieldy things which were almost permanently closed and which simply encouraged people to seek access via the secretary's office. At lower levels glass partitions tended to be blocked out with posters and doors were generally closed - and one maintenance manager even had a spring-loaded door which shut automatically. Such clues tend to indicate low emphasis on dialogue, teamwork, confrontation of opinions as well as a negative view of conflict.
The pattern of interpersonal relations is formal. The French seem to adhere to a classical conception of management which favours work in isolation, punctuated by formal meetings. Such an approach restricts exchanges to a highly codified framework which precludes the need for personal involvement. This is in contrast, say, to the American approach, highlighted by Kotter (1982; 88) which is more interactive and unstructured.

A number of cadres in the sample commented on their preference for getting things done through formal meetings. One PDG went as far as to say, "c'est la seule façon de faire avancer les choses" (it's the only way to accomplish anything). Meetings were seen as an opportunity to bring conflicts to a head ("déclencher l'orage" - to start the storm) or to obtain firm commitments from individuals thanks to peer group pressure. Meetings also constitute an economy of effort in that they allow information to be given quickly and clearly - particularly messages which are not transmissible in an office or casually.

There is therefore a case for suggesting that the French cadre is a meeting specialist, in much the same way as his Anglo-Saxon counterpart might be considered an adept trouble-shooter. Certainly, meetings provide the cadre with a stage on which to display his oratory skills (see chapter on management ethos). The whole event is a sort of microcosm of organisational life where status can be enhanced by skilful advocacy and stylish expression or lost by poor eloquence. The agenda is known in advance as are the people attending and the proceedings are formalised - this reduces uncertainty and provides a perfect occasion for furthering personal aims or doing down opponents.

In some companies, there were complaints that the number of meetings was in fact becoming excessive - these companies were deemed to be suffering from "la réunionite" (meeting-itis). One PDG, whose American MBA gave him different terms of reference, posited that meetings were in fact status-lenders since they reduced access to the person in question. There were also hints that meetings were a means of self-justification - as one cadre explained, "ça meuble une journée" (it fills up the day). In this respect,
meetings are comfortingly tangible and make what one has done at the end of
the day easy to recall. This view of meetings as showy rather than
functional was put more forcefully by a cynical production manager who
revealed, "parfois on parle pour le compte rendu" (sometimes we talk in
order to have something to record in the minutes). In such cases the
importance of the meeting may lie elsewhere, for instance in terms of who
has not been invited.

Another sign of the attachment to classical principles can be seen in the
continued distinction between thinkers and executors. Corroborated of the
lingering influence of Taylorism is perhaps seen in the way the French have
embraced quality circles and discussion groups - working groups outside the
normal 'hierarchical channels'. The alleged intention of these new means of
participation was to tap the resources of the entire personnel. Unfortunately,
these groups have not provided the anticipated antidote -
they have reinforced existing hierarchical relationships rather than opened
up the way for wider involvement. Instead of using these informal work
groups to designate their own spokesmen, many companies have imposed
hierarchical heads - thus, underlining from the start a lack of faith in the
personnel to elect sensible leaders and the fear that it would give rise to
"une hiérarchie parallèle" which might undermine the so-called "hiérarchie
naturelle" (chosen by the laws of nature?).

Furthermore, management still appears unconvinced by the capacity of those
at the base to think for themselves. The entire management group at one
company attended an expose on quality circles. The organiser started by
detailing a handful of 'irrefutable' principles, along the lines "we can
improve productivity if we increase worker commitment". When he reached the
principle about each worker being an expert in his own work, the meeting hit
a sticking point. A protracted discussion ensued about the validity of the
statement, and the outcome was a redefinition which did away with the word
'expert'. What is more, this could not be dismissed as a one-off case of
linguistic 'nit picking'. It represented a serious lack of faith in worker
aptitudes - something which was reiterated by the reaction to a subsequent
statement: "Il existe des reserves d'intelligence inemployées" (there are
untapped intellectual seams). Once again, the cadres felt they could not let
the proposition pass unchallenged and suggested that "intelligence" be
replaced by "ressources".
Thanks in part to Taylor, the popular conception of an organisation is that of a human pyramid, rather than, say, a well-oiled machine, a market or a beehive. This layered view of the organisation can be seen in the nature of work contacts which are faithful reflectors of rank. For instance, one cadre explained to the researcher that, as a rule, he would telephone a subordinate, but go and see a superior. Another manifestation of this desire to avoid contact with lesser mortals can be seen in the widespread use of secretaries to set up calls in other companies. In this way embarrassing rejections and lengthy explanations can be avoided. This practice is generally justified by the preciousness of the boss' time, though as one PDG rightly pointed out, no sooner has he resumed work than his secretary will interrupt him. What is more, the use of an intervening filter to save time begins to look dubious when one considers the following exchange between a cadre and secretary:

"It's Mr. Smith on the line." - "Not now, I'm busy." - "He says it's urgent - something to do with tomorrow's trip." - "What does he want to know?" - "If Mr. Jones will be coming along too" - "Tell him no!"

The duplication of effort together with the possible misinterpretation given the intervention of a third party makes the use of a secretarial barrier look less than necessary. But as one PDG from the sample explained:

"C'est pour les gens un peu pêteux qui veulent se faire annoncer."

(It's for people who are a bit full of themselves).

This keen sense of hierarchy militates against the mixing of various strata. For instance, the decision by a senior cadre from the observation sample to take his son skiing on a works council holiday, was greeted with much surprise by colleagues and subordinates alike. Such trips are for the benefit of all personnel but hitherto no senior managers had ever 'deigned' to mix with subordinates on such an intimate exercise.

Status consciousness was also visible at a company visited which refused to send senior and intermediary cadres on the same training courses. The logic behind that decision was that the benefits of training might be lost if the
participants felt inhibited by the presence of superiors or subordinates — particularly in view of the potential loss of face which accompanies the learning situation.

In-house training can prove particularly disruptive with the trainers moving about between hierarchical levels and upsetting the established order. Computing is a notable example of an area which has thoroughly confused the neat 'intellectual/manual' boundary. Indeed, it has caused so much trouble that, as the head of a computing department explained to the researcher, it was the subject of rare consensus among the departments:

"Ils peuvent tous se mettre d'accord pour dire du mal de l'informatique."

(Slagging off computing is about the one thing they can all agree on).

At a group level, status consciousness is made explicit by the collective designation of the management ensemble as "la hiérarchie". It is a term which is borrowed from the bureaucratically organised hierarchy of the church. An example of its usage in business is:

"En France c'est l'appartenance à la hiérarchie qui légitime l'autorité de l'agent de maîtrise. Il commande parce qu'il a été choisi par la direction à cette fin, choix qui le distingue et l'éloigne des ouvriers." (Revue Internationale du Travail; Jan/Feb 1985: 1-16)

(In France a first line supervisor derives his authority by virtue of belonging to the management group. He gives the orders because he has been chosen to do so, a choice which sets him apart from the workers).

Segregation could also be seen in the existence at most companies of separate canteens for workers and management — and even where there was a single dining hall, it was not uncommon to see unofficial 'territories'. This 'intellectual apartheid' was sometimes cloaked in practical considerations — for instance, one company had a notice which designated one canteen for "people in civilian clothes", the aim being to avoid mixing overalls and suits. Yet, it transpired that production managers would change
out of their overalls whilst secretaries would eat with the workers. Perhaps more striking was the fact that in the cantines people would generally eat in small groups rather than fill up tables with spare seats - again with very obvious layering by rank.

This awareness of hierarchy is reinforced by constant references to "la voie hiérarchique" (the formal chain of command). Individuals were discouraged from by-passing intermediary levels when communicating since it undermined the authority of intermediary levels and in some cases robbed them of their raison d'être (information passers). Confirmation that French managers actually adhere to formal channels of communication is provided by Desmond Graves. He noted that the actual contacts of the French manager were very much in line with what one would expect after examining the organisation chart. This, incidentally, was in stark contrast to British managers who showed few qualms about breaching organisational protocol and whose "patterns of communication bore no relation to the 'official' organisation chart" (1973; 296).

In France, circumventing is only permissible if the person who should have been informed does not hear - or else it constitutes a loss of face. This notion is confirmed by Boltanski (1987; 263 Eng. trans) who maintains that one of the prime means of 'encouraging' a cadre to resign is to deprive him of information.

In effect, the hierarchy is as much supported from the base as it is maintained from the summit. Those on the bottom see emulation of those above as the only way up - so they mimick the attitudes of those at the top and unwittingly bolster the existing system. The notion of a professional pecking order permeates every stratum right down to the base. Even workers think in terms of more or less honourable professions. Skilled workers are referred to as "l'aristocratie ouvrière" (the manual aristocracy) in relation to unskilled workers. Thus, the workers are merely echoing the distinction higher up in the hierarchy between say, graduate engineers in the noble specialty of electronics and graduate engineers in the 'common' field of mechanics.

Of course this stratification rests upon more than the historical distinction between what is 'noble' and what is not. Maurice drew particular attention to the qualification hierarchies and wage structure with the evocative "grilles de classification" (classification matrices) which pit
Manual versus non-manual, skilled versus unskilled, supervisory versus non-supervisory and line versus staff cadres (Maurice; 1986; 252).

Partitioned

Segregation within French firms is not merely horizontal but also vertical. This is perhaps a collective manifestation of the way individuals seek a personal 'territory'. There were numerous allusions to "le cloisonnement" (partitioning) at the firms visited. The clannish nature of interpersonal relations is partly due to the alumni of prestigious grandes écoles who tend to congregate in particular companies. But the practice is not restricted to the élite. Indeed, François de Closets names taxi drivers, bakers and pharmacists as three of the prime offenders in the perpetuation of 'numerus clausus' (closed shops - 1982; 280). And Crozier supports this view when he says:

"At all levels of society the French, once they gain entry into an influential group, instinctively try to keep others out" (1982; 26).

The French propensity for forming cliques was mentioned spontaneously by a number of interviewees. They alluded to "l'esprit de clan" (clannish mentality), "les chasses gardées" (preserves), "les petites bastilles" (small fortresses), "les querelles de chapelles" (warring factions), "les castes" (casts), "les fiefs" (feudal estates). The head of one small company in the survey explained how he was forced to continually reshuffle the personnel around the offices in order to break down cliques.

The essential function of the above-mentioned cliques is to protect and empower their members. It was noticeable, for instance, that once a right had been gained by a group, there was no way it could be abolished - it became "un droit acquis" (an acquired right). Two examples from the sample involving bonus payments illustrate the point:

One PDG was trying to find a new appellation for a "prime de période de pointe" (a bonus for rush jobs) since the title no longer corresponded to reality. Another head was tackling a similar misnomer - "une prime qualitative" (a quality bonus) which had become institutionalised and had lost its exceptional nature. In both cases, suppressing the bonus was out of the question since it would be equated to a drop in salary. They had become
acquired rights, and the only option was to rename them in order to show awareness of the situation.

So in spite of the much-vaunted egalitarianism associated with the French Revolution and the First French Republic, the French are deeply attached to the accumulation of privileges and distinctions which divide them. As René Rémont put it:

"L'attachement à l'égalité et la course aux privilèges" (Reynaud; 1982; 37)

(A passion for equality and a race for distinction).

Functional differentiation too is strong, as reflected by interdepartmental relations. The following complaints are culled from observation and interviews:

- "Le siège ne connaît pas nos problèmes" (they don't understand our situation at head office).
- "La filiale cache tout et fait n'importe quoi" (they put up a smokescreen and do what they like at our subsidiary).
- "La production s'en fout" (production doesn't give a damn).
- "Le personnel fait du social sans mesure" (the personnel department is obsessed with social considerations).
- "Les ventes ne pensent qu'à faire du volume" (the sales department only think about their sales figures).
- "Le marketing crée ses produits sans écouter l'avis du terrain" (marketing doesn't pay a blind bit of notice to those in the field when it dreams up its products).

These informal complaints are not all that different from what Keith Lockyer identified in British industry. He established a sort of functional 'who hates whom' which mapped out interdepartmental friction in British companies. What is surprising then, is the apparent absence of corresponding French research into interfunctional conflict. The only real exception to
this is probably the well-documented division between production and maintenance which Crozier first depicted in his classic study of a cigarette company. More recently, Maurice produced similar findings when comparing France and Germany. He quotes a cadre who explains:

"At informational meetings for all personnel you have to be very careful when you mention either maintenance or production, because you get the feeling that one false step can arouse two hostile armies. (1982; 264).

From the present research too, there were signs that the conflicting interests of the two departments have not yet been resolved - and with the gradual takeover by production of routine maintenance the situation was sometimes aggravated - "chacun tire la couverture de son côté" (everyone's pulling the covers their side).

At one particular production plant in our sample efforts were being made to integrate the two functions in order to ease authority problems. These problems stemmed from the fact that maintenance men were geographically isolated from their boss, and unaccountable to the production supervisors - which meant they did very much as they pleased. As one neutral cadre explained to the researcher, "le médecin se fait attendre" (everyone awaits the doctor). The production manager in that plant reiterated the point by referring to the maintenance department as "l'état dans l'état" (a state within a state) - suggesting that little had changed since Crozier's classic study from the 1960s.

**Political**

Manifestations of political behaviour were less overt than in Britain and French managers did not seem to derive the same sort of pride in divulging their political manoeuvrings as their British counterparts. However, there were signs that political games were being played.

If we take written communications as an example, we can see that the coded nature of the interaction need not impair political thrust. To start with, opting for the written form, particularly in companies with a mainly oral culture, is in itself a powerful signal - it can be seen as "une agression" (an attack). One administrative director from the sample sent the purchasing
manager a memo expressing his annoyance over some misdemeanour - this in spite of the close proximity of their offices and the fact that they saw each other regularly. The note was obviously motivated by the desire to register displeasure without overt confrontation. The administrative director knew he had made his point ("marqué le coup"), but by restricting the communication to the two parties (no other copies), the receiver knew there was no real malice.

In terms of contents, it would seem that almost anything is a good enough pretext for a memo, even if it is not adapted to the nature or the value of the information. The researcher came across an interesting example at one of the large companies visited. The memo, which every single cadre had received, urged all personnel to cut down on the number of unnecessary photocopies (there's nothing like leading by example) - this in spite of the fact that the boss in question saw the entire management staff each morning for a meeting. Here the aim had been "de laisser une trace" (to leave a trace) so that no-one could claim they had not been informed. In view of such excesses, it is hardly surprising that one cadre complained of "incontinence en matière scripturale". The resulting inflation of archives is tremendous because no one dares throw anything away - to wit, a manager who, on cleaning out his new office found four drawers - each one packed with the archives of one of his four predecessors, like prehistoric strata.

Besides the contents, hidden messages can be transmitted in 'anodine' form in the list of recipients or date - details which the French manipulate with subtlety. One cadre explained to the researcher that in certain cases, the importance of a memo lies in its timing rather than its content. The author may be trying to prove speedy reactions to events or a recent development.

As regards who the memo is dispatched to, there are a number of categories. Firstly, there are the immediate recipients ("destinataires") who are meant to act upon the information. Secondly, there are those who are not intended to take action but simply need to be informed, covered ("une note-parapluie") or flattered. Finally, there are the unofficial recipients who receive an extra copy, sometimes termed a 'blind copy'. Whilst these categories appear fairly clear-cut, one cadre explained that it may well be that the key recipient is in fact camouflaged in the category headed "copies". Another important point about the list of recipients is that it should reflect organisational status. Woebetide a cadre who places the PDG below a head of department, even his own, in the list of "copies".

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Further evidence of political behaviour in communications were the rumours which seemed to preoccupy several bosses. There were several references to "les bruits de couloirs" (rumours) or "le téléphone arabe" (the grapevine). Indeed a survey in Le Nouvel Economiste (12/5/80) placed rumours ahead of one's immediate superior as a means of gaining information.

The importance of this form of information in the French context may be a reflection of the relative inefficiency or rigidity of normal channels of communication. It is only natural for rumours to flourish when there is an imbalance between the supply and demand of information. The rumour in France perhaps has a democratising influence in an otherwise elitist system of communications - as one cadre put it, "c'est le marché noir de l'information" (it's the information black market). The speed of propagation easily outstrips official channels and responds to dual needs of the personnel: to be informed early and to make out one is privy to 'inside' information. It is from these needs that rumours derive their efficiency - they are sucked up by avid receivers and immediately re-emitted, though not always intact.

The managers interviewed were aware of the possibilities of deliberately starting rumours but they showed wariness about indulging in a practice over which they had no control and which could easily backfire. The head of one production plant was particularly annoyed that every piece of unofficial information released, however positive, was somehow twisted to sound negative by the time it reached grass roots level. He surmised that people heard what they wanted to hear, not what they were told - though he conceded that they (the cadres) did not always make things clear when they had something unpleasant to say. So any complaint that messages were not being received properly was partly "une autocritique". What is more, the speed with which the message spreads depends on its content - as one cadre explained it is one thing intimating there may be a pay rise; it is quite another trying to get safety procedures respected.

The fact remains that beneath a formal exterior, French work relations make way for more supple practices - which probably serve to make the formal system workable and therefore contribute to its persitence.
Work versus social relations

One might be tempted to say that the above description shows a relatively low carry-over in France from the social to the business setting— with individuals maintaining a permanent façade at work. This assumes that the professional persona is something which is donned before going to work in the morning. That is not the case. The relative impersonality and formalism found in organisational relations is echoed in French social life. If one looks at the traditional pattern of interpersonal relations inculcated in the basic associative life of a village, one can see the roots of the work relations described above.

The principle that indiscriminate friendship exposes one to manipulation, that property should be enclosed, that outsiders are not to be trusted, the defensive solidarity are all legacies of the village mentality which still has a strong hold over French social relations. As Wylie points out, the basic social arrangement in France is the circle—a person is responsible only to people in his own 'cercle' and indifferent to people outside it. French dislike for people outside their own 'cercle' is epitomised by Sartre's phrase, "l'enfer c'est les autres" (Hell is other people—"Huis clos", scene V).

Overview

Whilst it would be foolish to suggest that the above description is universal, it certainly prevails in French companies. French work relations are, on the whole, more highly structured and more detached. From an Anglo-Saxon stance this may appear like a tremendous indictment of the French organisational model. However, in the French mind this lesser investment of the self is considered a means of preserving personal choice, independence and individual dignity.

It is noticeable in France, that those companies which do try to impose a more informal style of work relations are often unpopular. There is a widespread belief that cordial relations merely serve as a means of motivating (and manipulating) cadres, of dismantling hierarchical and functional cleavages, and of encouraging a certain freedom of expression which facilitates decision making—in other words, as an instrument which cleverly subordinates the interests of the individual to the interests of the firm.
This resentment towards informality as a manipulative device may explain the relative flop of Kenneth Blanchard's "One minute manager" in France. The transparency of his proposals was rather too much for French managers. Indeed, one cadre explained: "I would not take kindly to being patted on the shoulder - not in the professional context at least" - which reinforces the idea put forward earlier in the chapter that the French do not like their body space violated.

Clearly, in the French context, the desire to avoid conflict and to be protected from arbitrary decisions and manipulation are more important than the immediate gratification provided by social contact. The idea is supported by Wylie who studied a French village in the Vaucluse. He describes a boy who wasn't bright, never got into trouble and worked very hard. Why? "Pour qu'on me laisse tranquille" (so I'll be left in peace - Santoni; 1981; 60). The desire for independence, even at the expense of not doing what you want, seems important in France.

Restatement

This chapter basically concurs with Crozier's view of French work relations as impersonal, formal, compartmentalised ... in short, predictable. There is certainly an undercurrent of informal circles which help to 'oil the wheels' but that influence is better concealed than it is in Britain or America. Finally, it is posited that the dual roles played by French managers do not reflect a split between social and professional circles - but rather a broader distinction between public and private life.

This chapter helps to set the scene for the ensuing chapter on business rituals - the desire for ritualisation being a manifestation of the desire to preserve distance and independence.
Selected bibliography:


8. R Rituals in French Business

"L'informalité est un aspect du management à l'américaine qui n'a pas achevé la traversée de l'Atlantique." Conversation with Philippe Loridan, PDG of Treffus-France S.A.

(Informality is one aspect of the American managerial model which has not completed the Atlantic crossing).

Any attempt to characterise French management would be incomplete without an examination of the country’s business rituals. For the researcher, they are reassuringly conspicuous, often physiological, manifestations of differences between cultures. They are concrete not abstract, and do not rely on value-laden interpretation but on simple observation. This adds to their intrigue; they go unquestioned by the initiated - only an outsider is likely to be struck by their existence or draw attention to them. Indeed, the inclination to dismiss business rituals as anodyne trivia (unworthy of serious study) is perhaps another motive for delving deeper.

Closer examination suggests that these ceremonial singularities of French management in fact represent the visible part of the proverbial iceberg - and, as such, are inextricably linked to the submerged part which supports them. They are more than benign symptoms. They actually serve to reinforce many of the deeply-rooted traits of French management - and can only be interpreted in the light of wider issues such as hierarchy, networks and cliques, formality, respect of the individual and the role of women in organisations. In this respect, the investigation of rituals acts as a focus for some of the themes already discussed.

Greeting

Perhaps the most striking ritual for the business visitor to France is the shaking of hands on meeting and parting. This gesture, together with kissing as a form of greeting* are renowned as typically French customs. In the formal business setting the procedures regulating handshaking are fairly rigid and institutionalised.

* - Occasionally kissing is seen in organisations - primarily between women, but sometimes mixed sex and more rarely involving 'cadres'.
Etiquette demands that the superior stretch out his hand first*, or if a woman is involved, that the initiative come from her (even if she is the junior party) since it might be construed as forward for the superior to offer his hand. If the individuals are of equal hierarchic status, the onus is on the entrant to approach the others and they are required to make some semblance of rising to greet or bid farewell. In practice, individuals only rise when confronted by a superior (or visitor) - colleagues are treated to a summary lean forward or nod of the head, and a token hand on the arm of the chair (as if to rise).

According to Sanche de Gramont:

"The hand should not be squeezed, brandished or slackly dropped; nor should the shake be too brief (discourteous) or prolonged (familiar). It must be straightforward and without brusqueness." (1969; 295).

Ostensibly a plain dichotomous (either performed or not) gesture, handshaking in fact offers managers considerable scope for passing on messages - whether reflecting moods or relationships. Consider the following examples all taken from the observational periods of study:

- A maintenance manager offered his hand to one of his foremen. The latter responded by holding out his wrist, indicating that he had a dirty hand. The maintenance manager symbolically insisted on shaking his hand irrespectively. In doing so he earned respect and enhanced his image as a robust manager who, in spite of his 'grande école' education, was not too proud to dirty his hands alongside his subordinates. An interesting twist on the theme was witnessed at another factory where a disgruntled worker displayed a subtle lack of respect for his superior (and the visiting researcher) by stretching out a dirty hand, which the manager (having instigated the salutation) was committed to take.

- After losing face in front of his boss because of a peer's criticism, a head of department marked his anger the following day by delaying his handshake with the "provocateur". The rules

* A 'directeur' refused to acknowledge a subordinate who had the affrontery to extend his hand unsolicited - a cardinal sin.
governing salutation are so compelling that a minor transgression is highly significant; and by momentarily withholding acknowledgement upon entering the office, the offended party had clearly registered his displeasure - ostracism in France is not to be shaken by the hand. Boltanski quotes a graduate engineer who engaged in political activity embarrassing to the firm. His colleagues made their feelings known to him through exclusion: "After a while some guys refuse to shake your hand" (1982; 262 English trans.). All this seems to reflect a wider cultural need to acknowledge the existence of people around you - a mark of respect for their individuality.

- A popular 'cadre' (executive) returning to see old colleagues following a promotion to another sector was greeted with an 'augmented' handshake; in other words, a double-handed clasp which went beyond the expected formality of a simple handshake, thereby expressing closeness after a lengthy separation.

- A production manager carried out systematic tours of the works three times a day with the 'sole' purpose of shaking hands with every foreman on each of the three shifts. He did not have to concoct some pretext for dropping in on them since "pour faire un tour de mains" (to shake their hands in turn) was reason enough. Needless to say, it also helped him to manage pro-actively since it both allowed him to "prendre la température" (test the water) and to pass on messages "entre quatre yeux" (man to man).

In a similar vein, Theodore Zeldin cites a teacher who complains, "In my lycée the headmaster shakes the hands of the 'agregés' (highest qualified teachers), holds out two fingers to the 'certifiés' and merely nods distractedly to all the other teachers" (1980; 386). Less caricatural versions of this "physiological segregation" were witnessed with people greeted more or less cordially depending on their rank. Favouritism based on intellectual accomplishments or longstanding association, was explicit in terms of the people a top manager would deign to acknowledge.

Clearly, the handshake acts as a channel for expressing moods or reinforcing authority relationships which go far beyond the basic signal of lack of hostility - though it has retained this essential aspect of partnership or conciliation at the end of a tempestuous day. It also signifies respect for
colleagues and enables the superior to boost morale among workers who rarely get a chance to see him and set much store by "la poignée de main du chef" (the boss' handshake). It is a psychological stroke (literally) which has shades of Ken Blanchard's "hand-on-the-shoulder" recommendation (1983; 41) - but even this gesture is not a viable substitute since it can seem patronising or out-of-place. In fact, managers in cultures where handshaking is not the norm have to resort to other, less tactile means (such as tone of voice) to convey the same messages.

In this respect, French managers are blessed with what amounts to an uncontrived point of contact. Unlike their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, they do not have to engineer a convoluted excuse to see someone, or wait vigilantly to "catch them doing something right" (Blanchard; 1983; 41). The French manager can legitimately go and see a colleague simply "pour lui donner le bonjour" (to bid him good day) - the handshake needs no ulterior justification. What is more, because it requires the participants to invade each other's personal space and look each other in the eyes, it provides an ideal opportunity to pass on confidential messages, and to pick up early-warning signals. One PDG from the sample looked upon it as a fairly accurate psychological barometer. He recalled an occasion when he had gone to introduce himself to the staff of a newly acquired company: on shaking hands with the personnel he had consciously noted two individuals who did not look him straight in the eye. He later learned that they had been the most vociferous opponents of the take-over.

Used wisely, the handshake can prove an invaluable tool for pro-active management. The production manager is perhaps its foremost beneficiary in that he is able to glean information early, thereby allowing him to pre-empt future problems; and the benefits are not entirely one-way in that the manager is also making himself accessible to workers and can anticipate their needs before these lead to problems.

Yet the handshake is also a channel for less 'salutary' messages. For instance, it reflects and perpetuates that distinctive feature of French management, the hierarchy. Touch is traditionally related to dominance, whether between sexes, generations or classes. Paradoxically, whilst handshaking reduces the physical distance between individuals, it reinforces the organisational distance between them. The distinct set of rules which govern the salutation display, leave those involved in no doubt as to who is boss. It is a power gesture insofar as it is instigated by the superior and,
if carried to extremes, can be a faithful guide to the rank of the interlocutors.

This physiological manifestation of inequality is compounded linguistically by the "tu/vous" distinction. The combination of these power signals leave the participants under no misapprehension as to which of them is the senior. Thus, French managers neatly sidestep the problem of asserting their authority. They are provided with the means of doing so without having to invest their personality - simply by displaying the trappings of authority.

**Form of address**

For all its egalitarian claims, even the French revolution had no lasting impact on formalism. The "vous" form of address was briefly abolished (along with Monsieur and Madame which were collectively replaced by the androgenous "Citoyen") but soon reinstated. This was inevitable - "vous" and "tu" are power pronouns that situate class status and reflect a society which accepts social inequality as natural; a structured society by general Euro-American standards in which each individual has his appointed station and says "vous" to his superior.

Of the countries which retain the formal/informal distinction, France is perhaps the most 'miserly' with its "tu" - in contrast say with Sweden where the polite form is virtually obsolete. Certainly in France, the "vous" form of address is "de rigueur" in business circles. Like the handshake it is subject to a number of rules - the basic one being that it is up to the superior to determine which form of address to use, since this defines the relationship. As with the handshake, the researcher has actually witnessed an instance of an 'irreverent' subordinate (who foolishly tried to instigate a more familiar relationship) receive a firm put-down with an emphatic "vous" in the superior's response, to accentuate the social and hierarchical distance between them.

A more subtle, but equally effective snub is attributed to François Mitterrand (reported in l'Express; 1/03/85; 33). On emerging from a particularly successful party congress, a fellow Socialist ventured, "On se tutoie?" (shall we drop the formalities?), to which the President replied
distantly, "Si vous voulez" (if we must) - or, to put it another way, "No!". Mitterrand is in fact renowned for his aloofness and one of the claims to fame of François Dalle (the PDG of L'Oreal) is that he is one of the very few people to use the familiar form of address with the President.

Fortunately, most subordinates know their place and would no more dream "de tutoyer le chef" (of being familiar with the boss) than refuse to shake his extended hand. Many of the 'cadres' spoken to, confessed "J'ai du mal à tutoyer" (familiarity does not come easily to me), notably with regard to older or more senior colleagues. The resilience of this norm can be gauged from the reaction of one secretary to the researcher's hypothetical suggestion that she employ the familiar form with her boss. She was adamant that even with his blessing, she could not "bring herself" to do so (as though mortified at the very thought). Her boss in fact corroborated this by admitting that he would not address her as "tu" for fear of undermining his power. He felt that familiar relationship would leave him vulnerable because 'people' (impersonal) were prone to take advantage of it - and use it as a lever for favours. The French believe that friendship obliges, exposes the "friend" to manipulation, and makes him dependent - a fundamentally intolerable situation, if we are to accept Crozier's theories on the subject (see the chapter "Those who set the tone").

Basically, there is a profound apprehension that a relationship will degenerate if one reveals too much of oneself, so distance is artificially maintained using the polite form. Many 'cadres' made it a rule never to use the "tu" form. This was particularly so among the older 'cadres' for whom 'tutoiement' was tantamount to "sleeping together" - the allusion is not so far-fetched when one considers the revelation of one of the bosses interviewed, a 58 year old, who admitted that he had never once addressed his parents as 'tu'. He added that 'vous' could, quite easily, be reconciled with friendship but that familiarity made reprimand difficult. The use of the 'vous' form was primarily motivated by the future need to sanction or, worse still, make a subordinate redundant. Censure is regarded as far more "sanglant" (scathing) in the 'vous' form.

Thus, to use the "tu" form one had to be fairly confident of not needing subsequent recourse to the 'vous' form since back-peddling is out of the question. It is a one-way move, though there were rare exceptions: for instance, two cadres on familiar terms reverted back to the 'vous' form when
one of them was promoted to be the other's boss—though in private they remained on "tu" terms. This use of "vous" as a face-saving device was also witnessed with a cadre during one of the interviews. We were interrupted by another 'cadre' who addressed his colleague as "vous". It later transpired that the two were on familiar terms but that the 'intruder' had refrained from showing this out of respect for his colleague in front of an unknown party.

As a rule, people of the same generation or organisational/educational status are likely to use 'tu' more readily with one another. One cadre listed those colleagues with whom he was on familiar terms and mentioned one "que tout le monde tutoie" (that everyone calls by his first name). This at once implied a certain lack of authority (you do not say 'tu' to someone you respect) and a congenial disposition (or to someone you dislike). From his own experience, the 'cadre' recalled that the turning point had often been an event (long car journey, shared hotel room...) whose relative intimacy rendered the 'vous' form absurd—this would prompt an anxious (for fear of rejection), "C'est bête quand même..." (it's a bit silly after all) and a transition to the familiar form. It is striking that the watershed for relaxing these formalities was frequently when those concerned were away from the rigid setting of the workplace.

The widespread use of 'vous' means that any derogation of the practice is all the more significant. In other words, the 'tu' form of address derives its political power precisely from the fact that 'vous' is the norm in business*. Thus, the accelerated, or in some cases obligatory, use of 'tu' is a powerful weapon in forming a clique and warding off unwelcome intruders. Mutual "tutoiement" effectively seals a clique in a highly 'visible' way—and numerous old boys associations, as well as less formal networks employ this device to their advantage.

France's top grandes écoles (l'ENA, Polytechnique, HEC, Arts & Métiers...) are particularly fond of the ruling that their alumni should address their cohorts as 'tu'. This, according to one cynic, in spite of the fact that they did not know one another at school and would probably have despised one

* - To invert the old adage "It is the rule which reinforces the exception"—were it not for the widespread use of "vous", the familiar form would not have so much impact.

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another heartily if they had*. "Le fait d'avoir posé ses fesses sur les mêmes bancs" (the mere fact that they sat on the same seats) is regarded as reason enough for familiarity.

It is said that ex-Polytechnique students must "tutoie" anyone who was up to seven years above or below them - a ruling presumably designed to spare the sensibilities of senior members. In other schools the exigency is less restrictive but equally binding, even at official functions. For instance, at one international conference attended by the researcher, the guest speaker, Yvon Gattaz, acknowledged the chairman's introduction with "Je te remercie..." (thanks a lot). Many of the foreign guests were visibly taken aback at this sudden injection of informality - little did they know that the two protagonists were both graduates of l'Ecole Centrale.

Directories lend weight to this peculiar form of exclusion rite by listing alumni according to occupation, company and position. Every self-respecting association publishes a directory, thereby reinforcing the popular image of old boy networks as "les mafias". The directory of the Ecole des Arts et Metiers actually includes a book marker-cum-advertisement which addresses members informally: "As-tu payé ta cotisation?" (have you paid-up your subscription fees?). The clubbishness of this approach is replicated in a recruitment poster for the communist-based union, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT). The poster urges workers to renew their membership: "Prends ta carte CGT" (see Exhibit 7).

All this reflects the exploitation of the familiar form of address as a utilitarian device rather than to denote friendship - but its 'misuse' is not confined to institutionalised solidarity. There are informal examples in most organisations of politically motivated cliques.

These coalitions constitute privileged arenas in which people already possessing social capital (connections) congregate in an attempt to make that capital fructify - by making useful contacts. On these occasions, the 'tu/vous' distinction acts as a powerful barrier to entry.

* - This comment has a ring of truth about it insofar as French education in general, and the elite "grandes écoles" in particular, are notorious for promoting individual effort (symbolised by the dreaded final year rankings) over joint effort - an approach not particularly conducive to developing friendship ties.
A typical example of "tutol ement politique" (political familiarity) was experienced by a PDG in the observation sample who was invited to a product launch by a company manufacturing a complementary product. He accepted the invitation as a useful opportunity to make a few new contacts but was disappointed to find that everyone knew (or pretended to know) everyone else. He was made to feel awkward, an outcast, simply because "ça se tutoyait à tours de bras" (they were all 'in' with each other). The conspirators had rendered the clique 'impregnable' simply by using the 'tu' form. Their familiarity with one another, whether genuine or (as he suspected) cosmetic, barred his entry. The familiar approach acts as an expression of group membership - and as such constitutes one of the pillars of French tribalism (this propensity for forming clans and "cloisonnement" is discussed in the previous chapter on work relations).

Having seen what it is like to be on the outside looking in, it may be interesting to quote a boss who happened to be plugged in with the people that mattered. He took great pride in explaining to the researcher:

"Je suis personnellement ami à tu et à toi avec tous les présidents de ligue. Aucun de nos concurrents n'a ça. Aucun. Ils viennent là en spectateur."

(I am on familiar terms with every single president in the confederation. There's not one of our competitors who can make that claim. Not one. They all attend as spectators).

An interesting twist on the protective use of 'tu' was provided by the senior management at a car plant from the sample. The personnel manager, who was part of a so-called "organigramme en rateau" (i.e. where all heads of department are on the same level), was de facto the boss' right hand man. Now this was probably fully justified in so far as his detachment from operational problems made him a valuable advisor. However, it was reinforced by a psychological barrier which set him apart from his 'peers' - he shrewdly insisted on remaining on formal terms (like the boss) with his colleagues (who all addressed one another as 'tu'), thereby asserting his 'authority' over them and keeping potential usurpers at bay.

Another amusing variation on the political use of 'vous' was revealed to the researcher by a young cadre who envisaged rapid promotion and took the precaution of addressing everyone as "vous". This was a conscious decision
based on the reasoning that subsequent promotion might prove embarrassing for people with whom he had previously been on familiar terms. The anticipated promotion materialised and the transition was smooth, thus confirming this useful tip for potential high flyers. As already mentioned, a rather less elegant solution to the same problem resulted from the promotion of one cadre as boss of his previous colleague. In order to avoid embarrassment to the senior cadre, they conspired to revert to the formal "vous" - in public at least.

Further nuances in relationships are revealed by the way in which people are addressed - such as the title used. The French seem very keen on formality: the referee is "Monsieur l'Arbitre", just as the policeman is "Monsieur l'Agent" and any ex-chairman expects to be addressed till his death as "Monsieur le Président". Even graduate engineers will be referred to in jest as "Monsieur l'Ingénieur". Older people especially like being called by their titles both in letters and speech. This may be a sign (as suggested by a cadre with twenty years experience in America) that, "on se prend trop au sérieux" (we take ourselves too seriously). Others regard this deference, not so much as a sign of acceptance of the hierarchy, as a mark of respect for individual dignity. Whatever the motivation behind it, formality seems to result in a bolstering of the traditional hierarchy.

French managers certainly appear socially reserved by Anglo-Saxon standards - especially in comparison to their American counterparts who value informality and at least the appearance of equality in human relations and are quick to seize upon Christian names. This difference in approach was quite striking when companies visited received incoming telephone calls from abroad. The direct manner of Americans in particular, often jars in France. On a number of occasions the caller provoked a stir at the reception by asking for "Philippe" or "Pascal".* Some French cadres have taken this as a cue to modify their own communications with other countries - by making the awesome concession of including their first names when signing letters.

* - This may be a learning point for foreign callers who, in their myopic attempt to play down status distinctions such as titles by eliminating "unnecessary" formalities, succeed only in making themselves comfortable, whilst their French colleagues become uneasy or even annoyed.
In France, close relations between cadres are indicated by use of the surname - without "Monsieur". The secondary importance of the forename can be seen on envelopes where addresses bear the surname followed by the initial (or name), rather than vice versa - a habit which is ingrained at school and perpetuated by the administration. The relative redundancy of the first name was emphasised by the difficulties faced by secretaries when attempting to fill out forms requiring the forename. On more than one occasion colleagues of the cadre in question were unable to help the secretary. This French preference was made explicit by one cadre who was unable to respond to an American request for full names (to fill out hotel reservations) and could only offer a sheepish, "In France people do not call themselves by their first name"*1.

As with the predominance of the 'vous' mode, the almost exclusive use of surnames loads the use of forenames with significance - they can even become prized rewards if used sparingly. According to one cadre, his PDG called only five or six people by their first names*2 - they did not reciprocate, but it was nonetheless considered "une marque d'estime extraordinaire" (a real honour). One of the privileged few was Pierre who was more important in the company when the current PDG had started out 22 years ago; in this case it was a mark of affection for a senior employee.

A fascinating reversal of this trait is practised by workers who prefix the PDG's first name with "Monsieur". This is particularly the case in traditional family firms which harbour several family members bearing the same surname, such as Michelin where the current patron is endearingly known as "Monsieur François". Whilst this signifies a certain closeness, it also smacks of paternalism.

The qualifying prefix "Monsieur" is reserved for superiors or visitors and is generally abandoned with colleagues and subordinates. However, it will

*1 - The fact that formality is the rule may be inferred from the surprised reaction of an experienced cadre on entering a new company: "I was kind of surprised, because in business you don't see people clapping each other on the back very often and calling each other by their first names, at least not for long" (Boltanski; 1982; 301 English trans.).

*2 - This does not imply he also used the 'tu' form with them - vous and the first name are perfectly compatible - they denote affinity whilst preserving distance. The permutations are numerous.
be used if the superior seeks to emphasise a point (usually negative). For instance, "J'ai quelque chose à vous dire, Monsieur Dupont" (which is reminiscent of the way a mother might signal disapproval by calling out her child's full name). It can also be used to indicate rôle reversal as demonstrated by a PDG who had to reprimand a junior cadre. On their next encounter the PDG made a point of showing there were 'no hard feelings' by mimicking subservience, "Très bien Monsieur, je m'en occupe" (very good Sir, I'll take care of it). The essence of this joke-cum-reconciliation lay in the inversion of the formality expected in hierarchical relations.

Another nuance in the art of interpersonal one-upmanship is provided by the use of the whole name and the omission of Monsieur. Strictly speaking, this is a breach of business protocol but it can provide a significant psychological edge. For instance, a request to speak to Jean Dupont has a touch of Anglo-Saxon irreverence about it - implying that the person asked for does not impress the inquirer.

The French organisational context provides its players with the means to assert their authority without having to reveal their personalities. They have at their disposal numerous physiological and linguistic signals which provide a ready-made delineation of authority. Their British counterparts are bereft of such messages and have to project authority in their tone of voice or attitude - both of which are more open to misinterpretation.

This finding also seems to fit in with Theodore Weinshall's theory (1977; 248) that French managers see authority vested in the role as opposed to British managers who see it vested in the person. In France then, authority requires a lesser investment of the 'self' - the handshake, the title and the form of address are stage props which help maintain authority whilst simultaneously protecting the real individual. In short, business etiquette equips the cadre with the weaponry to assert his authority, whether or not he has the personal attributes to back it up. This perhaps corroborates Crozier's belief that the French are uncomfortable in face-to-face relationships since they have organised rituals to cover the anxiety.

It would seem that the French have concocted a system of authority relations which minimises the personality element - and makes it possible for those without experience to exercise authority. To distort the motto of Winchester school (coined nearly six centuries ago), in France, "manners makyth the manager".
On presenting an English secretary with a draft copy of a letter to be typed up in French, she gave it a cursory glance and immediately remarked on the apparent absence of a closing salutation. I had to point out to her that the whole of the last paragraph, beseeching the receiver to accept the assurance of my most distinguished sentiments, was the French equivalent of "Yours faithfully".

Furthermore, there are infinite possibilities for signing out depending on the impression one seeks to make on the receiver. For instance, a senior civil servant will send a lowly colleague, "l'expression de ma considération distinguée"; an equal his, "haute considération" and a high ranking superior his, "très haute considération". In the business world, the formalities are not quite so strictly defined, but similar rules operate. The sender can bestow anything ranging from the basic "vive considération" to the more lavish "sentiments respectueux" or even "entier dévouement", depending upon the perceived relationship with the receiver. The permutations are full of nuance and secretaries generally need an etiquette guide at hand to avoid a regrettable "faux pas" - in other words, to ensure that the signing out phrase conveys sufficient deference given the relative status of sender and recipient. What is more, the courtesy and status-consciousness bear up even under the utmost pressure of deteriorating relations. This can lead to a signing out phrase which is in striking contrast to the tone of the letter (see Exhibit 8).

Another feature of French business correspondence is its impersonal nature. Letters open rather stiffly with "Monsieur" (even if the recipient is known to be a woman) or "Monsieur le ... (plus a title)", and end with the stylised formality mentioned above - there is no presumption of acquaintanceship. By convention, even the content is disconcertingly cold from an Anglo-Saxon standpoint. The aim seems to be to preserve anonymity. There is no sign of the familiar approach which characterises Anglo-Saxon correspondence. Even if the individuals parted on the warmest of personal terms, the follow-up correspondence is unlikely to make reference to that cordial meeting. In fact, the only discernible evidence of individuality is the written style of the letter. The letter is an opportunity to parade one's education and impress both secretary and recipient(s), by one's "tournure" (expression).
The French clearly indulge in what, by Anglo-Saxon standards, is excessive formality. French business correspondence seems to prize inordinately complex set phrases such as those quoted by Zeldin (1980; 352), "J'ai l'honneur de vous prier de bien vouloir" (=please) or "Il ne saurait être question d'apporter à cette demande une suite favorable" (=no). These "formules" do not add to the core message and if anything, actually serve to conceal it. Thus, for example, on one occasion in my own correspondence with a French firm I was led to expect a favourable response until, upon reaching the twelfth line of the letter (see Exhibit 9), it was finally stated that I would not be allowed to visit that company.

It would seem that the French sometimes indulge in voluntary long-windedness. One cadre admitted as much by saying "on prend plaisir à tourner autour du pot" (we relish beating about the bush). Certainly, they do not always seem anxious to get to the heart of the matter. This would seem to bear out the traditional portrayal of the French as a people overly concerned with style; sometimes attaching more importance to means than ends, to form than content. It would appear that the American managerial values of practical utility, efficiency and performance have not been fully integrated into the French managerial model.

Yet this lack of directness is also an indication of French humanitarianism. Their elegant meanderings display respect for the individual and a desire to avoid inflicting unnecessary loss of face. The coded nature of French business correspondence gives it a sense of abstraction - which renders the most virulent attack, impersonal. Similarly, a request which is turned down is made far more palatable if the sender takes the trouble to compose a courteous and personalised refusal - the brusqueness of the negative message is attenuated by a veneer of grace and humility which provides both sender and recipient with a certain psychological refuge.

This preoccupation with form has additional implications. Most importantly, it serves to uphold the distinction between those who know the rules and those who do not. Since the former are generally the products of higher education it helps to reinforce educational elitism in business. Admittedly, awareness of written protocol is only one barrier among others; but it supports the claim of the educated to hold high positions in organisations. Simultaneously, self-taught individuals are discouraged in
their bids to infiltrate this graduate preserve simply because they are not "au fait" with the written niceties of business etiquette. Emphasis on the need for correct written expression in business communication mirrors and lends weight to the French conviction that educational credentials are the proper means for determining managerial eligibility.

The power of written expression as a means of weeding out 'undesirables' was suggested by the decision of an "autodidacte" (self-taught) PDG to install telex machines throughout the group - on the basis that such a system would help to cut through the verbosity which impeded intra-group communications. A different interpretation of this decision was provided by a less than charitable graduate cadre. He confidentially suggested to the researcher that it was in fact motivated by the PDG's desire to conceal his inability to compose a good business letter.

Further evidence of the importance of educational qualifications for business legitimacy can be found in the business card. These bear the name of the "grande école" attended (notoriety permitting) and are therefore vital in establishing the status relationships, since there is widespread consensus on the implicit pecking order of schools. Thus, the ritual exchange of business cards enables each party to know which rôle to play and leaves them in no doubt as to who has the upper hand.

Feeding rituals

Meals

According to the Financial Times (21/5/86; 20), in Finland, the focal point of informal business discussion is the sauna. Its French equivalent is the restaurant. The two have a great deal in common. Both are ambivalent public/private places. Both serve to diminish hostility whilst fostering intimacy by increased physical proximity. Moreover, inhibitions are lowered; in the one case by absence of clothes and in the other by the consumption of alcohol.

The importance of business lunches as an arena for extended business discussion was emphasised by a free guide (resembling a travel brochure) received unsolicited by a commercial director in the observational sample.
This brochure listed all the hotels and restaurants available for seminars and "repas d'affaires" both in France and in France's more exotic overseas territories. Confirmation of the French expectations regarding hospitality can be seen in the way British managers shudder at the costs of entertaining in France.

Eating is a convivial affair; the French enjoy talking about food in much the same way as the British find diversion in the weather — these are topics which unify a nation. People with nothing else in common can quite happily rhapsodise about what has been eaten, what is being eaten and what will be eaten. And this preoccupation with food has infiltrated the organisational setting, so that business expressions are replete with gastronomic references.

Every business language borrows food imagery to some extent; most have some sort of equivalent of 'bringing home the bacon' (gagner son pain/defendre son bifteck). But what is distinctive about French managers is the degree to which they plunder the gastronomic world for imagery. They do not confine themselves to set phrases but invent their own variations and frequently have spontaneous recourse to food vocabulary in their expressions. Take for instance, the PDG who contemplates introducing merit-based salaries with the justification, "Il y aurait davantage de biscuits pour ceux qui les méritent" (there'll be more cookies for those who deserve them) — this is by no means a set expression, but he uses "biscuits"* as a variation on the recognised association between confectionery ("le gâteau, le nougat, la tarte, le miel") and rewards ("just deserts").

Some of the better known expressions include:

- The top brass are "les grosses légumes" (big vegetables) or "le gratin" (cheese topping) and a sinecure is "un bon fromage" (a mature cheese).

- A contract which clears a healthy profit "fait des choux gras" (yields large cabbages) and one which sustains losses "bouffe de l'argent" (gobbles up money).

* — The euphemistic allusion to biscuits is indicative of the lingering reticence to talk of money per se.
- Likewise, a cadre involved in negotiations rounded off his sales pitch with the aside, "J'ai vendu ma soupe" (I've sold my soup) - it only remained to see if they were interested, "si la mayonnaise prend" (if the mayonnaise was setting).

- On the other hand a favourable situation which deteriorates is said to "tourner au vinaigre" (turning sour) or "se gâter" (going off). Or, if negotiations appear to be leading nowhere (paying 'homage' to German cuisine), "Ça patine dans la choucroute" (we're pedalling in sauerkraut) - possibly a sign that a compromise is needed and that the time has come to "mettre de l'eau dans son vin" (dilute one's wine).

- Finally, an interesting example of linguistic imagery 'materialising' was provided by a group of cadres celebrating the early retirement of a colleague. Among the departure gifts they included a squeezed out lemon mounted on a stand - a visual joke evoking the popular reference to a 'washed out' cadre as "un citron pressé" (a squeezed lemon).

This 'appetite' for gastronomic expressions is a mark of the central role of food in business negotiations - so synonymous are they, that it becomes almost inconceivable to talk business outside the meal times. As one sales director explained to the researcher:

"Il arrive qu'un rendez-vous soit remis de plusieurs semaines faute d'avoir pu trouver un déjeuner de libre avant."

(It is not unknown for a meeting to be postponed for several weeks simply because of a failure to find a free lunch hour).

In France, "la table" is regarded as the best means of promoting healthy relations since it has a number of obvious advantages over the more formal organisational setting. For a start, business can be conducted graciously, at a leisurely pace, and diluted with social conversation to ensure both parties are at ease - and by getting away from operational pressures one be more attentive. After all, it is not easy to conduct a discussion in an office where one's attention can be distracted by the sight of some unanswered telex; or else one can be interrupted by a secretary needing an urgent signature; and however much one insists on no disturbances, some
calls or individuals invariably find their way through. Even without these unforeseen interruptions, the background bustle of organisational life can prove unconducive to negotiation. So the prime advantage of eating out is peace and tranquility it affords.

By distancing themselves from the immediate pressures of work the protagonists are able to think more clearly. Managers who may have some inhibitions about negotiating in front of their peers (even behind sound-proof glass), will find it easier to adopt a bolder persona outside the confines of the organisation. Self-presentation is easier and anxiety is lowered by eating. The atmosphere which reigns in a restaurant is more propitious to reflection and creativity.

What is more, moving away from the organisational setting means leaving behind all the files relating to the case - without his 'heavy artillery' to fall back on, the manager requires a perfect understanding of the case. This means that preparation will have to be better resulting in better informed and more coherent argumentation.

As mentioned earlier, the physical proximity in the restaurant facilitates psychological proximity. In a restaurant the two parties shift from a desk-width apart to within touching distance - in other words, from a work relationship to a social relationship. This facilitates communication, both psychologically and physically. The actors can see and hear each other perfectly and non-verbal communication is less 'showy' and stylised.

The restaurant can also be used to achieve an early psychological edge. The host cadre can give an inflated impression of his organisational standing by choosing a restaurant noted for its fine cuisine (rather than its décor, in France). This impression of status can be reinforced by a cordial greeting from the proprietor and by the means of payment (the more discreet, the better - the epitome being to leave casually immediately on finishing thus indicating an open table). All these signals suggest that the cadre is a 'regular' and enhance his social and organisational kudos.

Since business lunches are so important, "le savoir manger" (knowing how and what to eat) is deemed an indispensable string to the manager's bow. This implies an awareness of etiquette; a French meal should be composed of well-delineated parts and ingested with well defined liquids at specific points. The host is expected to determine the structure and contents of the meal -
and this influence over meal format can be used in such a way as to spring surprises on his unsuspecting guest. The host is able to induce drowsiness and sap the adversary's intellectual faculties, leaving him open to attack. The mere reaction to the "plate arrival" gives some measure of the level of vulnerability. The attention becomes rivetted on the dish; even if emerged in deep conversation everything becomes secondary as the dish is sighted (reminiscent of a cat sighting a mouse). To avoid dropping one's guard at this point requires considerable willpower.

Of course "me savoir manger" also demands a capacity to cope with alcohol and to stave off its debilitating effects. This was supported by a commercial director; he confessed to occasionally resorting to consuming a tin of sardines prior to important negotiations in order to delay the absorption of alcohol. French managers are not averse to using their international reputation as "bons vivants" as a means of 'softening up' their adversaries – particularly when dealing with foreign visitors.

Interestingly, it is not only the after-effects of the meal which facilitate acquiescence – the very prospect of a meal can provoke a similar reaction. One store manager from the sample used hunger as a device to curtail protracted meetings. Being rather partial to "les petits déjeuners à l'anglaise" (English as opposed to continental-style breakfasts), he would timetable awkward meetings for late morning and would programme particularly contentious issues at the end of the agenda. By the time it came to discussing them, the interested parties could rarely muster much support from peckish colleagues. Having thus gained the upper hand, the polemic issue of working on a Bank holiday was passed relatively unhindered. He was inadvertently putting into practice Maslow's hierarchy of needs whereby satisfaction of low order (physiological) needs takes priority over more ethereal needs.

A lavish "repas d'affaires" (business meal) will last anything up to two or three hours and although lunch hours are supposedly shortening, getting in touch with French managers between 12h00 and 14h30 is still problematic. In fact, the French are conditioned into taking a long lunch hour from school days when a two hour break means that they stay relatively late in the afternoon to compensate. (A trend which carries over into adulthood and will be examined in the following section).
Business lunches are loaded with social and political significance. For instance, lunching with the boss is regarded as a real privilege. It was regularly used as a bone to toss to meritorious subordinates for whom alternative forms of recompense (namely financial or promotional) were inappropriate or unavailable. This reward drew its value from the prestige of being seen with the boss. One cadre went as far as to suggest that the length of the meal was critical since competing cadres would compare the time accorded to one another. Although such claims may be exaggerated, they do suggest a sycophantic mentality.

The superior whose attention is so sought after must be cautious in distributing his favours. Accessability must be limited in such a way as to give subordinates the impression of being priviledged to be in attendance. Used sparingly, private lunches can be a powerful means of inclusion in, and exclusion from social groups. Food in fact plays an essential role in constituting unofficial networks since people are particularly touchy about who sits near them outside the functional requirements of the office environment. Of course, the issue of access would not be considered so critical if it were more available - but in France the right of access to people or information is not a basic democratic principle. Having access is equated with power.

Political guests may also be invited to meals; perhaps in order to placate a disgruntled subordinate; or in order to "butter up" external parties like clients, suppliers, works' inspectors, or representatives from the employment agency and the town hall. They will be flattered by the time accorded to them and the charade of listening to their preoccupations. Dining with someone is also a mark of respect for that person. As one cadre explained to the researcher:

"C'est une façon de reconnaître l'importance sociale de votre interlocuteur. Un moyen de partager quelque chose qui soit au-delà de la conversation et de la cigarette."

(It's a means of acknowledging someone's social standing, of sharing something more than a talk and a cigarette).

In this respect, it can help to cement an association. Just as a handshake facilitates informal comments "entre quatre yeux", so the table reduces the physical distance between participants and enhances persuasive power.
Perhaps the most significant social implication of this obsession with food is the way it discriminates against women. They are placed at a relative disadvantage on two counts: firstly, long drawn out meals at lunchtime are fine provided one is free to compensate for the loss of time in the evening; secondly, in the organisational context (as outside), it is far less acceptable for a woman to be overweight than for a man. It is harder for a woman to set the pace at lunch time - a female executive is expected to be slim and elegant. Likewise, her diminished capacity to drink will put her at a disadvantage if she attempts to keep up with the traditional sequence of apéritif, two wines and digestif.

Such discrimination helps to explain the paucity of women in senior management positions - and is all the more dangerous for being unintentional. Whilst it does not in itself explain their relative absence from the higher reaches of French management, it draws attention to the way in which the work pattern is designed to fit in with a man's lifestyle - and a unilateral change in habits (ie. working through lunch and leaving early) is useless unless colleagues do likewise.

Coffee and drinks

Contracted versions of the food sharing ritual are discernible in the French penchant for coffee and alcohol. Drinks are, after all, only liquid foods.

Coffee provides a welcome psychosomatic boost to help managers start the day or ward off the soporific effects of a heavy meal - "un petit jus pour me mettre en route". It acts as a gentle prelude to the rigours of work - a sort of ice-breaker whereby everyone gathers round the "cafetière" (percolator) for the "pause café" (coffee break) which serves to prolong the morning handshake and ease people back into work. The informal congregation about the coffee machine in fact facilitates the obligatory "tour de mains" (round of handshakes) since everyone is within close proximity. It also provides an opportunity for a little informal chat which goes beyond the initial contact - and which may or may not be deemed productive.
One company visited regarded coffee breaks as so unproductive that they had removed all coffee percolators save a drinks distributor in the basement—though there was a real percolator "pour les hôtes/invités de marque". This effectively proved dissuasive but the time wasted in descending up to seven storeys made the solution less than satisfactory. In addition, people were made to feel guilty if they spent too long in the basement. One cadre surmised that the "prohibition order" was indicative of French narrow-mindedness regarding management work. To "them", working and offices were synonymous—it was inconceivable that one might actually gain something from the informal contacts made around individual coffee machines installed on each floor: "En France on ne travaille que quand on a le cul sur une chaise" (in France you can only be working if you are sitting down). So much for Tom Peters' Management By Walking About (MBWA—a phrase coined in "A passion for excellence").

The early morning/early afternoon consumption of caffeine as a stimulant has its antithesis in the end of morning/end of day apéritif to wind down. The consumption of alcohol in French companies was not excessive but it was certainly regular. It was not uncommon for directors to have their own drinks' cabinets and to use them as bait with which to tempt colleagues to "prendre un verre/boire l'apéro" (share a glass) and engage in an impromptu chat; just before lunch or prior to leaving in the evening. It provided an opportunity to relax and talk at greater length about the 'strategic' issues for which there is little time in the tumult of operational pressures.

Perhaps this need for informal contact at the end of the day also indicates French aversion to MBWA. Observation suggests that the tendency of cadres to keep themselves to themselves throughout the day (with the exception of an American subsidiary, no open plan offices were encountered in the companies visited), may explain a need for informal contact at the end of the day in order to transmit information. It may be that Americans, with their more interactive management styles do not require a specific time set aside "after hours" for more diverse discussion (see following section about Americans leaving work "on time").

The formal version of the apéritif is the "pot" which consecrates the most insignificant piece of good news. One sales rep organised a "pot" simply because he had spent a whole year in the job. More commonly they are held in celebration of a personal event such as a marriage or birth. The announcement of these glad tidings is invariably greeted with the ritual
call of "Ça s'arrose" (it's your shout) and the subsequent breaking out of various cocktails and savoury snacks.

Since this is a social occasion, absences are particularly unforgivable - the boss will generally be invited out of courtesy but his failure to take up the invitation will not go unnoticed and is likely to vex the person in whose honour the "pot" is held. The act of presence, because it is voluntary and non-work related is particularly important, and a brief speech on the part of the "patron" (boss) will prove an important mark of esteem. The boss can gain a modicum of goodwill vis-à-vis his personnel on these occasions but risks a far greater loss by failing to attend.

**Business hours**

The ritual of long working days is partly a knock-on effect of the preceding ritual concerning copious meals. Because meals are both time-consuming (they 'eat' into the afternoon) and sleep-inducing, afternoons tend to be more sedate than mornings, with a compensatory effort in the evening. The managers involved in work shadowing regularly put in 11 hour days - typically starting around 8.30 a.m. and leaving after 7.30 p.m. Again this is a work pattern to which French cadres are accustomed from childhood since the school day generally lasts from 08h30 until 16h30, with a two hour midday break.

For prima facie evidence of this tendency to work late we need look no further than the television. In most European countries the evening news is screened at 18h00 or 19h00 whilst the French "journal télévisé" traditionally has a 20h00 slot. This is probably a sign that the bulk of the news-watching audience is not home before that time.

The ethos of working late is a curious one. Leaving on time is "mal vu" (bad show) and to do so is to risk accusations of having "un esprit de fonctionnaire" (a civil service mentality) - though the criticism can be warded off by being seen to take work home. This is based on the principle that a cadre, unlike a civil servant or a worker, is paid to do a job not to complete a set number of hours - a notion supported by the fact that cadres are not entitled to overtime pay.
Cadres supérieurs are supposed to spend more time at the office. Leaving on time "ne se fait pas" (is not done) even if some allowance is often made on their morning arrival. "Le patron" would not take kindly to his commercial or financial director not responding to his call at 7.00 p.m. And the virus spreads downwards from PDG to cadres dirigeants, to cadres supérieurs, to cadres moyens. Not surprisingly, this has generated a certain amount of folklore. One cadre recalled a colleague who gave a show of conscientiousness by having two overcoats - one to wear and one on permanent display on the coatstand, thereby signalling his presence when the boss walked past his office early in the morning and late at night. Another spoke of a colleague who would take his car to work and go home on the bus.

The compulsion to leave late was seen by several cadres to have degenerated - so that they would stay behind, often to no great avail, simply "pour la forme" (for show). Staying late irrespective of the real need for it has an element of play acting about it. There is a certain amount of self pity, of playing up to the image of the cadre as an overworked, overburdened individual without a moment to himself - "le malaise des cadres" (the unhappy lot of the cadre) is a frequently cited syndrome. There is something comforting about being hard done by in a culture where success should not be flaunted*.

Quite apart from this self-pitying aspect, there is also an addictive side to staying late - cadres are conditioned into it. The upshot of all this is that they find themselves unable to "kick the habit". Several cadres confessed that they were reluctant to go home early because they were irritable and unable to relax - so they preferred to stay at work where the pace had slackened than to go home and risk annoying their wives and children.

* - The stereotypical joke about the cyclist and the Rolls Royce owner is indicative of the French attitude to success. The American cyclist wishes he too owned a Rolls whilst the French cyclist wishes the car owner had to ride a bike - it does not do to stand out in France.
Of course, this had a double edge to it since wives were fed up of taking second place to work. This problem was a particularly acute in the exacting hypermarket retail trade which boasted a high proportion of actual or prospective divorcees. One of the latter explained that his wife would almost rather he were adulterous than "la tromper avec le boulot" (play second fiddle to work).

One Public Relations officer was particularly sceptical about the value of staying late at all costs. He felt that it promoted inefficiency — work would be dragged out to fill out the available time. And although one benefited from the absence of distractions ('phone calls or subordinates), the cadre was by the same token, bereft of secretarial help, making some work impossible. Another cadre confirmed, "On ne travaille pas toujours à fond le soir" (we don't overexert ourselves in the evening). It is seen rather as an opportunity to wind down and reflect on the day's events.

If, as certain (mainly American) specialists maintain, working outside normal hours is an indication of poor organization, of the individual or the company, then French managers or companies are models of disorganisation. Some speculated on the possibility of changing the "obligation" to work late and adopting a quasi-American approach of working more consistently hard but finishing on time. However, this was little more than wishful thinking since a unilateral change in working practices would not solve anything. It would only serve to put them, as a company, out of synchronisation with their associates. In actual fact, they confessed, they had locked themselves into a recurrent cycle of inefficiency from which they could not break out (shades of Carlson's "administrative pathology").

Whilst ostensibly French cadres long for regular hours they realise that the intensity of work which would necessarily accompany the change would not

* - The term "administrative pathology" was coined by Sune Carlson in "Executive behaviour" (1951). It refers to the inability of managers to devote more time to strategic matters because of their involvement in operational problems — which might have been pre-empted had they engaged in more reflection.
suit them. They are conditioned into supplying a long intermittent effort rather than a shorter more sustained effort. One female executive neatly summed up the difference in approach by saying:

"En France il y a du temps mort et on sort à 20h00 - en Amérique on sort à 17h00 mais mort."

(In France there is quite a bit of dead time and we leave at 8.00 p.m. - in America you leave at 5.00 p.m. but dead beat).

She went on to enumerate some of the ways in which time was wasted - specifically on the 'phone and in meetings which seemed to drag out because "on se perd en paroles" (we get lost in words). She tentatively ascribed this disregard for time to the Latin mentality (a scapegoat for everything from money taboo to a lack of pragmatism) and their tendency to "vivre dans le désordre" (live chaotically).

Working long hours clearly implies a certain lack of respect for time. The Anglo-Saxons have ingeniously wedded time and money in the adage "Time is money"*. But this philosophy seems anathema to the French who do not share the American obsession with time as a measure of efficiency or as a serious constraint - "On finira quand on finira" (we will finish when we finish). They show a patience for, and appreciation of, the historical flow of events, a belief that problems can be put off and left to resolve themselves. For instance, Gérard Vincent quotes Henri Queuille (three times President of France in the space of only two years, 1948-50) who had this to say about decision making:

"Il n'est aucun problème, si complexe soit-il, qu'une absence de décision ne puisse résoudre." (Santoni; 1982; 127)

(Any problem, however complex, can be solved by failing to take a decision).

* - In English, time (like money) is a commodity which is "spent" as opposed to the French "passer" - this reveals a more relaxed attitude to the passage of time.
This view of time 'the great solver' is reiterated in an old proverb (borrowed from the Chinese and naturalised) which goes:

"Au dessus de l'art, déjà estimable, de faire faire les choses par les autres se situe l'art, bien plus remarquable de laisser les choses se faire toutes seules."

(Beyond the fine art of getting others to do things, is the even worthier art of allowing things to do themselves).

The sentiment was even echoed spontaneously by a cadre who was convinced:

"Mieux vaut ne rien faire que de décevoir" (better to do nothing than disappoint).

The need to stay late has a number of significant implications which are worth exploring in more detail. Firstly, it is worth reiterating the way in which it militates against the advancement of women. Their careers are subtly (if inadvertantly) undermined by the expectation that cadres should not leave "on time". The solution is either to put up with irregular hours and all the concomitant family problems (including self-reproach) or else to leave on time and miss out on what is potentially the most crucial part of the day. One female cadre complained to the researcher that this was when the real decisions were taken - so family commitments effectively barred her from playing her rightful role in the decision making process. Whilst long hours are not solely responsible for the low incidence of women in the higher reaches of management they are indicative of a work pattern which seems more "hostile" to the integration of women than that of most Western cultures (noticeable for instance, in the relative absence of flexitime).

What is worse, as far as women are concerned, is that the requirement to stay late is not uniform - it increases with rank ('noblesse oblige'). Thus, the hours spent are more or less proportional to organisational standing. Each cadre is supposed to see his subordinate arrive and more importantly see him leave. There is a plausible explanation behind this if we take account of the French tradition of French centralisation and unwillingness to delegate. Let us take as our starting point the assumption that the more senior a person the more onerous their responsibilities will be and, without delegation to alleviate them, the larger their work load. Thus, centralisation of authority and decision making automatically result
in a cumulative progression of the work load through the echelons. If this is the case then working late is not necessarily a sign of disorganisation but a form of organisation based on unequal allocation of tasks.

**Holidays**

Oddly enough, since it occurs only once a year, the main holiday is also something of a ritual. For a start, it invariably lasts four or five weeks. The French refer to their "mois de congé" (month off) as if holidays in smaller units were inconceivable. This 'compulsory' duration is to some extent imposed by works' shut downs - for instance, when the large car manufacturers shut down for one month (in August) there is little point in staying open for many companies. Thus a whole host of suppliers, subcontractors and intermediaries must follow suit. There is a knock-on effect which provokes what one PDG referred to as "la mise en sommeil totale" (the hibernation) of the French economic machine.

With the business world partly closing down from mid-July to early September, relations with French companies are difficult. French subsidiaries abroad will find it hard to get hold of people at head office and foreign customers will be unable to place orders with French firms. The holiday period can also prove disruptive for small French firms which are caught flat-footed and embarrassed by a sudden upswing in orders after the holidays. Yet, the ritual persists in spite of its penalising effect on French industry.

A measure of the concentration of the holiday period can be seen in the fact that there is an identifiable period known as "la rentrée" (the re-opening) which applies to politics, education and industry. As one cadre put it "France starts back to work next week". The degree of consensus surrounding the subject is also visible in the way cadres will naturally assume their peers have had a break. Throughout the month of September cadres ringing each other will open the conversation with "how did the holidays go?", followed by mutual commiseration at having to be back at work, "c'est dur la reprise" (the re-start is difficult). Even circulas to the personnel may make allusion to the holiday. A note on security at l'Air Liquide concluded with a P.S. wishing those about to leave 'a pleasant holiday' and those returning 'bon courage'.

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The major preoccupation in offices from the month of April onwards, is scrutinising the calendar in order to extend one's holiday using bank holidays and "jours d'ancienneté" (seniority holidays) judiciously. A successful holiday is one which is complete contrast to work - it is the reward for the eleven months of effort, constraint and frustration which preceed it. But, it is precisely this contrast which provokes greater post-holiday depression. In a month one has ample time to change one's lifestyle and the shock to the system is so much greater on returning. Add to that the fact that everyone's holiday coincides and the result is a case of mass depression.

For most cadres the summer holiday is not a chance to go somewhere exotic but a "retour aux sources"* (back to the land - in a literal and spiritual sense) - usually to a "résidence secondaire" (weekend house) of which the French are particularly fond and which prompted Zeldin's quip "a Frenchman's second home is his castle" (1980; 205). The cadre longs for the freedom denied him throughout the year - yet he does not seek the freedom to do anything, but the freedom to do nothing. As Jean Gandois, the head of Pechiney, explains:

"Je ne vais surtout pas à l'autre bout du monde. Cela, je le fais toute l'année. En été, je vais à la montagne et dans mon Limousin natal." (Le Point; 17/08/87; 50).

(I don't go to the other side of the world. I do that all year round. In summer, I go to the mountains and to my home region).

The whole idea behind holidays is to "recharger ses batteries" (revitalise oneself) and to "faire le point" (think about things) or as Claude-Noel Martin (executive vice-president of the CNPF) puts it, "j'ai besoin de me retrouver moi-même" (Le Point; 17/08/87; 50). The French cadre generally uses the holiday period to reappraise his career situation. Indeed, he is

* One is tempted to speculate that the importance of regional roots is to some extent responsible for the notorious lack of mobility both within France and more acutely, away from France. This theme is developed in more detail in the chapter on "Work ethos", but the core hypothesis is that France is so heterogeneous (a geographic and climatic patchwork of regions) that individuals grow strongly attached to their particular region (or "pays") and are particularly averse to changing regions.
capable of genuine self-criticism (in an abstract sense) but he does not show the same enthusiasm when it comes to acting upon those perceived strengths and weaknesses. Of those willing to discuss their shortcomings, a particular favourite seemed to be, "je parle trop et je n’écoute pas assez" (I talk too much and listen too little).

**Future trends**

As in most other countries, French business rituals are losing their identity under the influence of international business. In terms of formality, younger cadres are adopting more easy-going styles. They have shown impatience with the old formal approach and are setting less store by titles and decorum. For instance, the use of first names, though still much less widespread in than Britain or the US, has become far more usual among the under forties, especially in the newer professions such as advertising. Similarly, the 'tu' form of address is steadily gaining ground at the expense of its more formal equivalent. This is particularly the case among students and teenagers and to a lesser extent among younger cadres. Similarly, letter writing is giving way to the more mechanical telex or fax as well as the ubiquitous "Minitel".

Another change is the 'Americanisation' of meals. Many French executives for reasons of health and time are today putting less accent on the long heavy business lunch as a matter of routine, and will reserve it for special occasions. At other times, they will opt for a brasserie or even a snack bar. The American-style working breakfast, often in a hotel dining-room, has also now come into vogue.

According to surveys, the French are now going on holiday nearer to home and for less time but more often. Long week-ends and short holidays are apparently sweeping the nation. This is partly the result of a push by companies to get into 'sync' with the rest of the Europe. Notwithstanding this trend, "les grandes vacances" (the summer holidays) have maintained their grip over the French nation - and anyone who disagrees should try their hand at setting up meetings in the August/September period.

* - The Minitel is a sort of telephone on a screen. It was in fact, the British Post Office which dreamt up videotex but it is the French who have created a massive network with the state providing free terminals.
Paradoxically, the foregoing rituals have as their unifying feature, the fact that by their mundane nature, they go unperceived by those who perpetrate them. Nor are they acknowledged by management writers when they are an essential dimension of business life. Their existence seems glaring to the novice, who is well placed to point out the absence of the Emperor's clothes. It also transpires that what may pass for petty concerns subliminally convey deeper messages reflecting and reinforcing essential characteristics of French management.

One is particularly struck by the formality, restraint and awareness of status differences which would not be out of place in Japan. It has in fact been said that French executives "d'un certain âge" are the Westerners who fit most easily into Japanese business life. Their behaviour has even earned them the label, "les asiatiques de l'ouest".

The theatrical aspects of French management are probably more developed than in Anglo-Saxon countries which value a more direct approach. The French seem particularly adept at the art of organisational mime which conveys feelings or reinforces relationships without putting either into words. In extending a hand to shake, in their greeting or in electing to meet over lunch they pre-determine the relationship.

The French still tend to be rather hierarchical and ceremonial, even if a new social informality is now emerging among younger people. The fact remains that the French continue to put value on doing things in elegant style, and on the formal courtesies and forms of address.
Selected bibliography


*L'Express*, "Les dix blocages de la société française", 1/03/85, pp. 21-33.

Financial Times, "Business with birch twigs" - Survey on Finland, 21/05/86, p.20.

Le Point, "Comment les patrons prennent conges", 17/08/87, pp. 50-51.


Use of the familiar form of address to denote membership.

As-Tu Payé ta cotisation ?

Cotisation 1986
- de soutien 580 F
- membre actif 470 F
- retraité suivant possibilité à 580 F
- promotion (82, 83, 84) 120 F au minimum.

Cheque Bancaire :
Association des ingénieurs ICAM.

Virement Postal :
Compte 90-11 P LILLE

Pense aussi à la caisse de Secours.

The CGT urging workers to pay their dues (below) and the book marker reminding alumni of l'Ecole des Arts et Métiers to pay their subscriptions make strange bedfellows.
Contrast between tone and content of a business letter.

Paris, le 02 Septembre 1987

Monsieur,

J'accuse réception de votre courrier en date du 29 Juillet, qui ne me surprend, ni ne m'attriste, mais m'irrite au plus haut point.

Je ne peux en effet pas accepter le ton que vous vous croyez autorisé d'utiliser.

Il me semble que je suis celui qui est en droit de demander des explications, et que vous tentez bien maladroITEMENT de renverser cette situation.

D'autre part, et que pour les choses soient claires, sachez que j'entends m'entretenir avec Monsieur tant que lui et moi y trouverons convenance et que je n'envisage pas d'utiliser les services de quelconques intermédiaires pour ce faire.

Enfin, puisque Monsieur a été informé de notre différend tant par vos soins que par les miens, je pense qu'il serait heureux qu'il accepte d'assister au prochain Conseil d'Administration du CILBO. Je compte en effet sur cette occasion pour aborder aussi précisément que vous le souffrirez la situation pesante que je vous soupçonne, ainsi que ce Monsieur, de créer volontairement.

Je terminerai en vous précisant :

- Que c'est au titre de la SARL T.A.T. que j'ai été réélu, et non PAT-MULTIPREST.
- Que dirigeant une SARL, j'en suis le gérant et non le PDG.
- Que m'écrivant en qualité de Président du CILBO le Conseil peut et doit être informé de notre litige, la mention "Personnelle et Confidentielle" me paraissant déplacée.

Vous souhaitant bonne réception de la présente,

et dans l'attente d'une convocation pour le courant Septembre,

Je vous prie d'agréer, Monsieur, l'expression de mes salutations très distinguées.

Jean-Pierre
LE GERANT
Monsieur le Professeur,

Vous voudrez bien ne pas me tenir rigueur du retard avec lequel je réponds au courrier que vous m'avez adressé en décembre dernier avec la recommandation de M. CARRON de LA CARRIERE, Ministre Conseiller chargé des affaires économiques et commerciales à l'Ambassade de France en Grande-Bretagne.

Ce délai me permet cependant de vous répondre en meilleure connaissance de cause car mes collaborateurs ont pu ainsi étudier votre proposition avec une attention réellement bienveillante, ainsi que je les y avais invités.

En réalité, nos structures d'accueil pour les étudiants doivent faire face à de nombreuses demandes et nous tentons de satisfaire le plus grand nombre d'entre eux. Malheureusement aujourd'hui, nous ne voyons pas la possibilité d'accueillir votre élève le temps suffisant pour entreprendre valablement une étude en profondeur sur les méthodes de gestion pratiquées dans notre entreprise.

Croyez que je regrette de ne pouvoir vous apporter l'aide que vous sollicitez et je vous prie d'agréer, Monsieur le Professeur, l'assurance de mes sentiments très distingués.

Monsieur Peter LAWRENCE.

cc : Monsieur G. CARRON de LA CARRIERE.
9. THE FRENCH MANAGERIAL ETHOS

"Il est peu de pays qui se sentent aussi rattachés à leur histoire que la France; ou le passé explique autant le présent."
(Peyrefitte; 1976; 373)

(There can be few countries which feel so tied to their history as France; where the past has such a hold over the present).

The glory of some nations lies in what they are; for instance the United States. For other nations, notably the Soviet Union and China, it stems from what they are building. Others still, find meaning in chaotic growth (Brazil), recent independence (the young African or Asian nations) or the need to purge themselves of their past (Japan and West Germany). At least one nation, Israel, in its endeavour to fulfill an ideal, is speeding towards a sort of anti-destiny. What characterises France is its respect for the past.

French management bears subliminal traces of many of the forces which have shaped French civilisation including Catholicism, agriculture, together with a strong literary and logico-intellectualist tradition. It is the aim of this chapter to look at these and other influences, many of which pre-date industrialisation, to see how they have affected the French managerial ethos. Having considered these intrinsic influences, we shall assess the influence of one important external force namely, the American view of management.

Intellectual tradition

There is a longstanding logical-rational tradition in France of which the some of the obvious flowerings are the work of Descartes in the 17th century and the age of Enlightenment in the 18th century. Their emphasis on rationalism and abstract thought, has left a lasting impression on French culture. At a very obvious level this is symbolised by the "jardin à la
française" - a tribute to mathematical rigour, clear conception and hostile to the whims of nature. A variation on the theme can be seen in the French style of comprehensive planning ("plannification indicative") with its emphasis on intellectual development but relatively lax implementation or control:

"Dans aucun autre pays occidental il n'existe l'équivalent du Plan, cette projection ambitieuse qui, votée solennellement tous les cinq ans, prétend mettre le futur en fiches" (L'Express; 1/3/85; 32).

(No other western country has anything like the Plan - an ambitious forecast which attempts to frame up the future and is subjected to a formal vote every five years).

Lionel Stoleru explains how the French have stubbornly persisted with the national plan in spite of its manifest inapplicability in a dynamic environment. He points out how the plausibility of the plan steadily declined from the mid-seventies onwards:

"As from the 7th Plan, we began to sink into the unreal. In the middle of the crisis, the planners considered two scenarios, 5.5 per cent growth, and 4 per cent, both being entirely unrealistic. At this point we passed from the unrealistic to the surrealistic. Everyone saw that the 4 per cent scenario implied 1m unemployed; inadmissible. So everyone agreed to reject it and adopt, in general cheerfulness, the 5.5 per cent scenario. This vainglorious ("cocorico") wishful thinking ended lamentably, with 2.5 per cent growth and 1.5m unemployed." (Financial Times; 5/11/87; 26).

The above examples would seem to corroborate the longstanding view of the French temperament as pervaded by a disembodied intellectualism. A 19th century Swiss writer, Henri Frederic Amiel described the French in these terms:

"L'esprit français met toujours l'école, la formule, le conventionnel, l'a-priori, l'abstraction, le factice au-dessus du réel et préfère la clarté à la vérité, les mots aux choses, et la rhétorique à la science" (L'Express; 1/3/85; 32).
(The French always place a school of thought, a formula, convention, a priori arguments, abstraction, and artificiality above reality; they prefer clarity to truth, words to things and rhetoric to knowledge).

Whether these notions are really founded or not, they have been touted for so long that the French in general, and their managers in particular, end up believing them and living out the stereotype. For instance, in the eyes of the cadre, it is the ability to think logically and analyse systematically which sets him apart from the rest of the personnel. Indeed, there is no greater compliment for a French manager than to be described as "cartésien" since it implies a thorough and analytical mind and labels him as typically French.

Even serious French sociologists perpetuate the view of their countrymen as people striving for intellectual satisfaction rather than for the truth about the real world:

"Confrontés à un problème, les Anglo-Saxons, peuple empirique, cherchent avant tout à lui trouver une solution; les Français, à le traiter conformément aux règles de la cohérence logique, quitte à le rendre insoluble." (Weber; 1987; 259).

(Faced with a problem, Anglo-Saxons with their empirical leaning will place a priority on finding a solution; as opposed to the French who will apply the rules of logic to the extent of making it insoluble).

This rather dogmatic approach to problem solving favoured by French managers was noted by Theodore Weinshall who contrasted it to American pragmaticism. Weinshall characterises the French approach as "the most systematic and quantitative assault possible on every problem, while taking into consideration all factors which may influence it" (1979; 266). The French appear to relish the intellectual exercise of taking the problem to pieces and contemplating it from all angles - something which Americans might consider time-consuming and ineffective since it diverts attention from the crux of the matter.
On the other hand, this fascination with intellectual challenges is perhaps indicative of a higher tolerance for complexity and ambiguity. French managers are apt to deride what they consider US superficiality, whilst acknowledging the characteristic drive and optimism of Americans. Evidence of French disdain for US superficiality can perhaps be seen in the way the book, "One minute manager" flopped in France because of its perceived hollowness (see later section on "American influence"). French views of the book were typified by the criticism, "ça sonne faux" (it does not have an authentic ring to it).

Further confirmation of this mental agility was noted by Wylie with regard to French interaction. He maintains that the French are capable of juggling with conversations - following a general conversation and a private conversation simultaneously without embarrassment or misunderstanding (Reynaud; 1981; 324).

As has been stressed in previous chapters (notably in "The making of French managers"), intellect is regarded as the prime criterion for leadership in any field. This is why politicians will often point to their literary accomplishments when they seek election. The presidents of France since de Gaulle have all been intellectuals. Admittedly, de Gaulle was that unusual and stiff-necked thing, a military intellectual, but his whole process of thought was both radical and highly rationalised. The successive Presidents, Pompidou, Giscard d'Estaing and Mitterrand, have all been natural intellectuals, men for whom the qualities of the mind were the prime qualities. This is in contrast with the US and Britain which have witnessed a decline of intellectuals in politics - possibly because of the basic fear that those who can think can not act. Clearly, the French do not adhere to the Anglo-Saxon view that qualities of thought and action are mutually exclusive.

Another facet of the intellectual-cum-literary tradition, can be seen in the respect paid to powers of oration. This is perhaps epitomised by the 'grand oral' at l'ENA, in which a student must speak, with stopwatch on the table, for precisely ten minutes - an exercise of stunning oral virtuosity. But the fascination for "le verbe" can in fact be found at all levels of society. This concern with form was neatly expressed by one PDG from the observation sample, who explained that style served a practical purpose in smoothing the
"La forme aidant, la rugosité du message passe bien."

(A nice prose style helps people to accept an unpalatable message).

As one cadre put it to the researcher, "le pouvoir se conquiert par la parole" (oration is the key to power). A leader distinguishes himself by his language and will make the most of meetings or other such occasions to press home this superiority - occasionally going as far as to pick up subordinates on grammatical correctness (essentially missed subjunctives). For the same reason, a union representative will be sent to a school for "cadres syndicaux" - not, as might be expected, to gain some insight into corporate economics, but in order to acquire "un certain maniement du verbe, et du langage qu'il n'a pas" (the oratory skills he lacks - Santoni; 1981; 156) - in other words, so as to avoid feeling linguistically inadequate in high level discussions.

A similar impression seems to permeate the following banner headline which appeared during one of the fieldwork periods:

"Chirac relance l'industrie aeronautique et spatiale" (Les Echoes; 16/2/87; 1).

(Chirac revives the aeronautics and space industry).

The implication from the headline is that Chirac has done something to boost the industry. It transpires however, that he has simply outlined his policy for revitalising the industry in two speeches. Cynics might suggest that as far as many Frenchmen are concerned, words speak louder than actions - something which can perhaps be inferred from the abundance of sayings along the lines, "dire n'est pas faire" (saying is not doing) or "il faut joindre les actes aux mots" (words must be allied to actions). As the French themselves concede:

"En France le discours est plus qu'un penchant, plus qu'un talent, c'est une fin en soi. Au point de servir de substitut à l'action" (L'Express; 1/3/85; 32).
(In France, oration is more than an inclination or a talent. It is an end in itself - to such an extent that it becomes a substitute for action).

The importance of speech was substantiated by the actions of one PDG from the observation sample. He repeatedly reproached trainee cadres in a meeting for using the conditional clause in describing intended improvements. For instance, a cadre would suggest "on va essayer de ..." (we will try to ...) and the PDG would correct the statement to "on va faire ..." (we will do ...). And he rounded off the meeting by reiterating his point:

"Le changement passe par le langage" (language is the key to change).

To burlesque the situation, having done a comprehensive job of analysing the problem and having discussed every possible angle, in France the implementation becomes a formality, since everything has been foreseen. There is less of the 'make it up as you go along' side of Anglo-Saxon management. As Graves suggests, "the Frenchman likes to be able to see the end of the tunnel before he enters it" (1973; 303).

The same sort of attitude underpins the regular publication of books criticising the French. The latest one off the production line is "La France Paresseuse" (lazy France) which follows in the footsteps of best-sellers such as "Le mal français" and "Toujours plus". The authors are adept at highlighting the ills of French society but seem less inclined to propose courses of action. The classic example of this comes from the many grandes écoles alumni who launch vitriolic attacks on the schools which 'made them'. These leave the impression of an "exercise de style" of an impertinent aristocrat who can afford to spit on his privileges - and what is more, perversely enhance the appeal of those grandes écoles.

Rural background

Another feature of French society has been its considerable agricultural success. Of all the European countries, it is in France that the contribution of the agricultural sector has had the largest economic, demographic and cultural impact. At the turn of the century, the agricultural population constituted 60% of the nation's manpower - and even
as late as 1968, 15 per cent of the population were still involved in agriculture as opposed to 2 per cent in Britain, and 3 per cent in Belgium, Holland and the US (Peyrefitte; 1976; 373).

This tardy transition from agricultural to industrial nation may explain several tendencies in French business. To start with, it provides a clue concerning the longevity of Taylorism, which is still mentioned with surprising frequency, usually with reference to suppliers, competitors or the company's recent past. There is an apparent paradox here in that although the agriculture-industry transition came late, when it came it was fast, and involved the rapid conversion of an agricultural population into an industrial workforce and the consequent "exode rurale" (rural migration). Since this population had to be initiated into industrial tasks, Taylorism (the breaking down and specialisation of operations) was the simplest way of proceeding - and the model lingered on.

A further concomitant of belated industrialisation is that the French do not possess the same sort of industrial substratum of professional training as, say, the Germans (Maurice; 1977). In France there are many poorly educated, unskilled workers, as well as many hierarchical levels: in the automobile industry for instance, seven hierarchical levels (in contrast to four or five in Germany) are not uncommon between production worker and plant manager - "les ouvriers, les réglleurs, les chefs d'équipe, les contremaîtres, les chefs d'atelier, les chefs de département, le directeur d'usine". This probably stems from a lack of basic technical culture - if technical training were more widespread, there would be less need for so many hierarchical levels. Because the workers are less technically proficient there is a greater need for co-ordination which is facilitated by narrower spans of control, hence the multiplication of hierarchical levels.

Another manifestation of the rural influence is the attachment to place which, at an organisational level, shows in the low personal mobility of the cadre*. This was confirmed by a senior manager from the interview sample who explained to the researcher that one of the most expeditious ways "de dégraisser un siège social" (of reducing an overweight head office), is to relocate. The French have always been reluctant to uproot

* - According to L'Express (1/3/85; 25), France is among the countries with the lowest professional mobility - with an average of 17 years in the same company.
themselves; in recent times there has been none of the pioneering tradition that in America took migrants perpetually across the continent in search of more satisfactory employment and living conditions. Superficial confirmation of this can be seen in the way that those who move away will return to their native region with increasing frequency during holidays and often retire there. As one cadre explained, tongue-in-cheek:

"Ce n'est pas comme en Amerique. Nous avons une histoire ici - on est attaché aux morts du cimetière."

(It's not like the US - there are historical factors here which tie us to the those who lie in the cemetery).

There is perhaps a logical explanation behind this attachment to place - and a brief geographical parenthesis may serve to highlight it. France is situated almost equidistant between the equator and the North pole. This means that France's North/South divide is not simply a social phenomenon. The country is in the unusual position of sharing in both the subtropical world of the Mediterranean and the temperate climate of northwest Europe. To add to this, France is firmly tied to the European peninsula and open to the Atlantic Ocean. Consequently, it is also in a state of climatic tension between continental and maritime influences. In terms of relief too, France shows a wide variety of terrains from high mountain ranges to expansive plateaus. Finally, France shares its borders with no less than eight countries - all this amounts to a fundamentally heterogeneous country.

France is a mosaic of regions and "pays", and its inhabitants have interacted differently with their surroundings depending on environmental conditions and neighbouring influences (Germanic, Hispanic, Anglo-Saxon). This can easily be seen in the form of the habitat (low pitched roofs or not), culinary habits (olive oil or butter) and drinking preferences (wine, cider or beer) - not to mention the surviving patois in Alsace, Brittany, and the Basque country. These contextual differences have generated characteristic types of behaviour. Thus, the Basque is represented as loquacious and sociable, the Alsatian as jovial but critical, the Lorrainer as cold and patriotic, the Parisian as aloof, the Normand as indecisive. These are more than platitudes - in the companies visited, personal faults would be attributed to regional origins (I should have known not to expect a straight answer from a Normand); and people were genuinely offended if they were associated with the wrong region.
With such awareness of regional identity, a lack of mobility is perhaps easier to understand. Notwithstanding these regional differences, Americans still tend to view immobility as a negative trait, both from a personal standpoint and even more so from a professional perspective. The French, on the other hand, look at it more positively. From a personal standpoint, it is associated with humane values such as love of the place where one was born and unease in the face of increasing de-humanisation.

From a professional perspective, Americans would maintain that movement was even more essential as proof of drive/ambition/mastery over one's destiny, to shake up corporate thinking and because mobility is synonymous with adaptability. The French are sceptical about this relationship - as one cadre pointed out, "l'instabilité n'a jamais été un indice d'adaptabilité" (there's no automatic tie between instability and adaptability). Instead, the French stress the positive aspects of stability as a means of establishing relations of mutual trust, particularly between customers and suppliers and as a means of building team solidarity, complementarity and anticipation of each others actions - (dare I say it, of synergy). Furthermore, the French appear sceptical about the rationale behind mobility: firstly, because it is based on the idea that people are interchangeable, which offends the Frenchman's self-perception as an individual - "nous ne sommes pas des pions" (we are not pawns), interchangeable elements, to be shunted around into new positions; and secondly, because as one cadre explained to the researcher:

"On peut remuer sans bouger."

(You can stimulate ideas without moving).

The implication here is that the benefits of mobility can be achieved without physically moving around. This notion that it is all in the mind, is perhaps to be expected from an essentially cerebral people.

Finally, the rural influence may help to explain French attitude to change. After all, the existence of agricultural workers has always been marked by precariousness. It is hardly surprising that they should value stability and predictability in an environment where they were constantly exposed to the vagaries of the weather. Perhaps this accounts for a certain risk aversion.
which still marks the French mentality. As the head of training commented in one of the companies visited:

"On s'accroche au passé comme à une bouée de sauvetage."

(We cling to the past as we would to a a lifebuoy).

**Catholicism**

Catholicism is regularly invoked to explain the stigma which surrounds money and its possession in French society. It is regarded by some as the last remaining taboo, having outlived even sex as an unsuitable topic for conversation at the dinner table. One cadre from the interview sample expressly drew that parallel, asserting that, "l'argent est le sexe de l'économie" (money is the economic equivalent of sex) - in other words, something about which people talk very little or in roundabout terms (but enjoy having).

The Catholic church has constantly cautioned its followers against the seductive lure of money. According to Catholic logic, economic activity should be geared towards the common good, not individual enrichment. In short, the Catholic ethic is largely opposed to the 'spirit of capitalism', and especially to money made from exchange, more or less assimilated to "enrichment without cause". Such teachings have left their mark on the French population, including non-believers. As one personnel manager explained to the researcher, a Catholic's aim is to make a success of his spiritual, not his earthly life. This, of course, is in stark contrast to the prevailing ethos in Protestant countries where social success has been seen as a sign of divine predestination.

The repercussions can be seen in the French business context where the profit motive is thought to be fairly weak. From the researcher's own experience, there is certainly a tendency to talk in terms of turnover rather than profit margins. Some writers have even gone so far as to suggest that the profit motive is virtually absent from much entrepreneurial activity. In Landes' classic description of French business and businessmen,
he quotes the head of a small company:

"Do you mean to tell me that you can respect a man who has become wealthy through the ruin of a dozen or more competitors? Such a man is a menace to society." (Landes; 1951; 348).

In 1970, Yvon Chotard, then president of the Centre Français du Patronat Chrétien, suggested that in employers' speeches, they might substitute the word profit with "rentabilité", in order to avoid negative connotations, "car profit évoque profiteur" (since profit suggests profiteer). Antoine Riboud, the head of Boussois-Souchon-Neuvesel (BSN, the food and drinks group), responded that this would not resolve the problem, since "rentabilité" is linked to "rente" (annuity) and "rentier" (person of private means).

More recently there has been something of a turnaround in values. The money taboo has relaxed somewhat - helped along by such initiatives as the regular publication of pay leagues in business journals (L'Express, L'Expansion, Le Point). Over the last 15 years or so, the French have grown accustomed to 'looking at' each others' pay slips, albeit in an impersonal and voyeuristic way.

The changing attitude to money was given further impetus by the socialists' rehabilitation of profit as a positive value. It is no longer taboo for a company to make money and set that as its primary target. Indeed, the French public has come to accept that firms must make money in order to survive and prosper. One PDG interviewed paid a backhanded tribute to the socialist government when he explained:

"Ça me fait mal au coeur de le dire, mais les socialistes ont donné à l'argent une valeur sociale nettement positive."

(I hate to admit it, but the socialists have turned money into an acceptable social value).

Notwithstanding the theoretical progress made, the reality of individual behaviour remains cautious, as corroborated by a few examples from the interview sample.
To start with a general point, the interviewees were invariably guarded in their reactions to the subject of remuneration, even though the answers could be graded in terms of candidness. Those who offered a straight answer were generally self-employed or poorly paid and therefore derived a certain pride or self-righteousness from divulging their salary - their 'poverty' was an implicit testimony to their honesty (good Catholics).

Secondly, there were those who revealed their salary after some prompting and a guarantee of confidentiality. A typical example was the interviewee who explained to the researcher:

"Je n'ai pas honte de vous dire combien je gagne par mois: 40 000 francs. Mais je ne sais pas comment les autres vont recevoir cette information."

(I'm not ashamed to tell you my monthly salary - 40 000 Ffr. I just don't know how others will react to the figure).

Next in line, and this was perhaps the most common response, were those who offered the researcher a general idea of their earnings. These ranged from the sign-posted lie, "Disons que je gagne 350 000 francs par ans" (let's say I earn 350 000 francs a year), to the indeterminate revelation of an ex-civil servant:

"Auparavant je gagnais 15 000 francs par mois, mon salaire a été multiplié dans une proportion appréciable d'au moins trois ou quatre fois."

(Previously I earned 15 000 francs a month - my salary has increased at least three or four-fold).

Finally, and there were a number of these, there were those who refused outright, some of them taking offence at the researcher's indiscretion. This group included several of the youngest and most successful interviewees - some of whom had recently graduated from a grande école, boasted a relaxed outlook on management and were supposedly infused with American candour. Their rapid career progress would have rendered their salaries obsolete in a matter of months, so there appeared little to lose from disclosure. Yet, their attitude is consistent with what one finds in accounts of French
success stories. The meteoric rise of dynamic young entrepreneurs is described in detail, but the reports somehow overlook their earnings. As Americans would perceive it, how can one possibly talk of success without putting a figure on it?

The clash between the traditional and the revitalised view of money were strikingly enacted in an interview the researcher had the good fortune to attend as part of a non-participant observation study of the work of a general manager. The occasion was a job interview for a post as a salesman in a service company. The interviewer simply asked the candidate what he thought of money. The interviewee was visibly taken aback by the question and his response was disjointed and self-consciously pro-money:

"I'll be frank - I like money - it is an essential tool, not an end in itself - it's not a taboo subject as far as I'm concerned."

The awkwardness of the delivery, the divergence between words and tone and the unsure aggressive/defensive stance, all revealed a lingering ambivalence towards the subject. Here was the crystallisation of French uncertainty regarding the 'correct' attitude to money.

More emphatic confirmation of the persistence of money phobia came from the experience of one young entrepreneur from the observation sample, who had found out about it the hard way. He had attempted to replicate a tried and tested Anglo-Saxon formula in France by creating a discount card which entitled the holder to benefit from fixed reductions in affiliated stores. Unfortunately, the market was not really mature enough and the business collapsed. According to the young entrepreneur, who had since set up a successful service in a different field, the card idea would have worked if customers could somehow have preserved anonymity, as they would at a cashpoint service. As it was, asking for a reduction made people uneasy. They were not sure how asking for a discount might be perceived by others - they were worried that it might be construed as a sign of privileged treatment or insufficient means. In short, they felt uncomfortable about drawing attention to themselves for any reason related to money. In effect, the card had floundered for cultural rather than business reasons.
As said, the eighties have clearly witnessed a mellowing of French attitudes towards money and profit which are starting to come into line with Anglo-Saxon norms. This can be seen in the regular salary surveys, alluded to above, on the subject. As recently as 1984, one opinion poll (SOFRES; 1987; 76) revealed that the French public was mistrustful (47%) rather than approving (34%) of anyone who had made their fortune in a matter of years. By 1987, the respective figures in the same poll were 42% and 43%.

In spite of this telling reversal of trends, one still gets the impression that the change in attitudes is on an abstract rather than a personal level. People now accept that money is the lifeblood of the French economy but are still loathe to specify how much they earn and accord honour to those who make 'too much'. And this individual reticence even extends to collective secrecy in the case of the civil service. France is the only democracy where the government does not know the exact salaries of the civil servants in central administration who receive jealously guarded bonuses. This is in contrast with the UK for instance, where civil servants' salaries can be looked up in Whittaker's Almanac.

Class structure

Differentiation seems inevitable in societies. Today, we tend to focus on divisions of gender, race or region, but in France, as in Britain, class distinctions remain significant.

French society is characterised by a rather rigid class structure. This social ossification was a feature observed by Kindleberger who considered that, "it took at least two or more generations to rise from the lowest to the upper middle class in France, as contrasted with half a lifetime in the US and a generation in Britain" (1964; 106).

More recently, several sociologists (Bourdieu, Birnbaum, Thélot and others) have shown that social background remains a strong determinant of occupations. Indeed, French senior management is often held up as the most bourgeois in Europe. It is posited that French organisations have replicated French social hierarchy thanks to a socially discriminating educational system (see chapter on "Those who set the tone").
Another aspect of class consciousness which has marked French business attitudes is the way commerce and production were denigrated by the aristocracy which refused to integrate economic values into its ethos. Social prestige was associated with more intellectual pursuits, and even within the business world there was a hierarchy of prestige (also discussed in the chapter on "Destiny"). The noblest activities were those where one did not have to deal directly with, for instance, lower-class consumers. These nobler activities contrasted with the low status areas such as retailing where one had to submit to the consumer's judgment. This may explain why the best talents have been drawn away not only from business pursuits in general but also, within business, away from its most central functions, sales and production, and towards administration and research.

David Landes (1951) elaborates on this idea, suggesting that the aristocratic influence has also shaped the prestige hierarchy of French industries - and may shed light on the current performance of French economy. To have the King, his court, nobility and the state for clients is more prestigious than having common folk. The industries with the highest standing are those which are in the service of the king (or its latter-day equivalent, the state): high finance, energy, communications, defence, transport. Beneath these one finds the production of industrial goods for other companies, followed by production for the general consumer, and at the very bottom, retailing - the lowest of the low since the entrepreneur is in a position of solicitor, and exposes himself to the judgment of the public. This may in fact, provide a cultural explanation for French 'dirigisme' - it is more honourable to work for the state as client than for the public at large.

At an individual level, this fascination with the state (and the 'altruistic' spirit of state service) can be seen in the attitude of the French public. Even French entrepreneurs with their liberal, anti-state discourse dream of sending their sons to l'ENA, seeing them graduate in the top five, opting for the "Inspection des finances", marrying "une héritière" and rounding off their career with a pair of golden slippers, at the head of a bank. All this suggests that the aristocratic view of achievement, which has traditionally failed to stimulate the entrepreneurial fibre of the nation, still taints French business values.
Though lacking physical and ethnic unity, France has been subjected to an unparalleled political and administrative centralisation. This was perhaps the price paid to unify a territory with such regional diversity (see earlier section on "Rural background").

Paris has traditionally monopolised France - psychologically, socially, economically and, above all, culturally. For confirmation of Parisian influence one need only take a cursory glance at a map of France. Whether it is a matter of roadways, canals or railroads, the same pattern emerges, that of a spider's web, the center of which is Paris.

All the laws and regulations emanate from Paris, drawn up in great detail and often riding rough shod over regional particularities. For individuals dealing with provincial administrations there is a stock phrase to explain delays, "le dossier est remonté à Paris" (your file has gone up to Paris).

Paris is also the corporate centre of France - businesses are only credible if they have a Paris head office. Quantitatively about 65 per cent of corporate headquarters are situated in Paris but if one considers France's most prestigious firms (with the notable exception of Michelin), the quasi-totality are based in Paris. In this matter there is a contrast with, say, West Germany where company head offices are to be found variously distributed in Hamburg, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt, Stuttgart and Munich. Similarly, in the US there is not only a tradition of rivalry between the capital and the main town (Washington and New York City), but also a tradition of head office location in such regional centres as Atlanta and Minneapolis.

The centralisation which manifests itself at a national level, is also held to be the case at a corporate level, where bosses are seen as 'one-man shows' (see chapter on "Those who set the tone"). Desmond Graves goes as far as to suggest that this inclination can even be seen at an individual level:

"The French manager, by cultural preference, centralises. The reason for this - not always well understood - is that by centralisation, he can maintain structural strength, integration and dependence, whatever the human resources happen to be." (1973; 295).
Indirect confirmation of the tendency to centralise can perhaps be drawn from the fact that virtually every manager interviewed described his role as that of "animateur". This is a peculiarly French term meaning activator, in the sense of stimulating people into action. Perhaps, as suggested by Graves, the inertia generated by centralisation means that the chief problem of the French manager is to generate dynamism without destroying the structure upon which authority depends. In other words, French managers place a premium on their ability to activate people who are devitalised by excessive centralisation.

Further evidence of centralisation can also be seen in the importance of the "système D" (practical resourcefulness) as a long-standing and cardinal feature of French life. As with the "cult of the animateur", this is a case of inferring the existence of centralisation from its perceived effects on personnel rather than positive identification. The idea is that the "système D" exists to counteract bureaucratic rigidities. As Ardagh explained:

"Le système D brings human proportion into inhuman official procedures" (1982; 646).

The non-participant observation threw up a particularly interesting example of this desire to escape or circumvent the absurdities of centralisation. The managerial team at a provincial car plant considered that the new manufacturing philosophy needed to be communicated clearly to the workforce. Having settled on an appropriate text, they decided that the best way of conveying the message was in the form of a cartoon slide show. Unfortunately, central control over funds was such that getting funds released at short notice was nigh on impossible. Consequently, the plant manager gave the person in charge of training the go ahead to undertake the project with minimum disruption to the other departments. The head of training approached two draftsmen, one an amateur cartoonist, the other an amateur photographer, to help him on the project. Within a couple of months, working on a part-time basis (including many unpaid week-ends at home), they completed the slide show. It was very well received by the personnel at the plant and has since been borrowed by two other plants to use with their staff. According to the plant manager, it even compared favourably with the full-length cartoon film commissioned from a professional cartoonist by head office.
With few resources and a lot of initiative the team had produced a very credible product. Yet, the plant manager's hands were largely tied with regard to rewarding the two hard-working draftsmen. Once again, the only way of rewarding them was by appealing to head office, and the unofficial nature of the exercise made the case for a bonus rather delicate. He opted instead for a celebratory meal in the exclusive executive dining room, dubbed "The Club". This served a dual purpose - first to placate the boss of the two draftsmen, whose department had been disrupted by their occasional unavailability; and secondly, as a mark of esteem for the men themselves for whom this was the first visit to "The Club". They were also presented with a symbolic gift and the plant manager talked of "further rewards" - his intention being to divert some of the money saved by using a few of the company's 'unoccupied' workers to redecorate the conference room instead of calling in outside decorators as budgeted.

Military

The military experience and example has had some effect on the character of formal organisations in a number of countries but in France its impact has been greater and more sustained. To start with, not every nation can boast a Napoleon. His influence on French businesses can still be felt directly with the Napoleonic code continuing to govern many areas of work practice. But more importantly, Napoleon's obsession with administrative efficiency provided the blueprint for French business organisations - France's neat pyramidal structures live on as a tribute to him.

Of course, Napoleon did not only provide a model for the future shape of French organisations, he also helped determine the sort of people who should lead those organisations. The grandes écoles are generally viewed as the characteristic institutions of the Napoleonic education system. The grandes écoles corresponded to Napoleon's concern for the efficiency of the state machine. He found in them instruments well suited to the pursuit of his design for endowing France with trained cadres. The students were selected by the most exacting intellectual criteria and subjected to a strict discipline, often based on the military pattern.
Foremost among these, was l'École Polytechnique, established in 1794, which stands as the archetypal grande école. By origin it is a military college, founded to train engineers for the armed forces. Today it is still run as a sort of residential officer cadet school, with a serving general at its head and crossed cannons for its emblem (hence the nickname 'X'). Its pupils, "Iles X", go on parade four times a year in full-dress uniform complete with "bicornes" (curly hat). But this military spirit has been greatly diluted in recent years, especially since the school's transfer from the enclosed atmosphere of central Paris to the wide open space of suburban Palaiseau. Formerly, "Iles X" were confined to barracks most of the week; now movement is more or less unrestricted, though in school they must still wear khaki boy-scout uniforms. Very few today opt for a military career. Most, as has been indicated, enter public service or private industry.

The link between industry and military was therefore established at an early stage in France with military engineers moving into top managerial posts. The military influence was further felt in the 1930s with the adoption of the cadre category from the armed forces (see chapter on "The French manager"). Boltanski describes how, from the outset, the cadre was perceived as "an officer in the army of labour" (1986; Eng. trans.; 80). The style of leadership echoed military practice. The cadre was urged "to gain the sympathy of his men by his manner", "to look his men directly in the eye" and "know how to punish" (Boltanski; 1986; Eng. trans.; 81). The virile qualities which were seen as desirable for an officer were also deemed suitable for a cadre. As Daniel Jouve, who at twenty nine years of age was Director General of the Groupe Expansion, summed it up:

"The best training for a manager is first military service, the responsibility for men the fact of being an officer. Commanding a section of 60 to 80 men at the age of twenty is an extraordinary education! In relation to what one can learn as a student which is theoretical you are given power and learn practical matters ... Commanding men young is fundamental." (Whitley; 1981; 67)

Even at lower levels the military influence has had an impact. After all, for many young Frenchmen, the first experience of organisational life comes with national service. This inevitably colours their views of authority and of how to relate to others in the organisational context. The army provides strong rôle models for leadership and parallels between military and business spheres are often drawn. This may account for the widely held
perception of the foreman as akin to the long-serving NCO ("une mentalité d'adjudant").

Finally, in linguistic terms, the French use many military analogies. Needless to say, this is not exclusive to French business life. The methods and vocabulary of the armed forces have exercised considerable influence in many countries. What differs, is the context in which they are used. In general, in the Anglo-Saxon countries it is the field of marketing that the military analogy has had its greatest impact. Typically writers draw the parallel between business and military tactics and strategy.

In France, on the other hand, the transfer from military to business setting has been different. It is discussions of structure and authority relations which are likely to be overlaid with military values, rather than discussion of managerial methods or strategic matters. Thus, in France, it is common to hear of "l'état-major" (top management), "les cadres" (middle managers), "les troupes" (rank and file), "la pyramide" (pyramid), "la voie hiérarchique" (formal chain of command), "la médaille du travail" (medal for long service) and "le bâton de maréchal" (uppermost level of competence). To add to these, the verbs employed by managers often have a military resonance to them: "commander" (to order), "diriger" (to direct), "convoquer" (to summon), "rendre compte" (to report back) ...

American influence

Notwithstanding the strong influences mentioned previously, the overriding determinant of any nation's managerial ethos is probably its receptiveness to American influence.

The French attitude to America is ambivalent. On the one hand, there is a latent anti-Americanism. This is perhaps based on resentment that France's old civilisation should stoop to borrow from America which is a mere 200 years old. For instance, the recent plans to build a Disneyland east of Paris were denounced as "the encroachment of an alien civilisation next to the city of enlightenment" (Sunday Times; 16/3/86).

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, stability is prized in France and looked upon as a positive force. Longevity is deemed to bestow legitimacy upon practices and habits. This seems at odds with the American notion that
new is synonymous with progress. Whilst the French do not share this determination to bring about change, they do show genuine respect for American drive and economic success.

The American managerial lead was first acknowledged at an official level in 1929. The Paris Chamber of Commerce (CCIP) sent a small group of people to the universities of Harvard, New York, Chicago, Columbia and North Western. They returned with a welter of observations which were at the base of the foundation of the Centre de Perfectionnement aux Affaires (CPA) in 1930 by the CCIP. This was the first senior management training centre in Europe and by its immediate adoption of the case study method demonstrated France's early receptiveness to US techniques.

The post-war economic reconstruction saw a quantum leap in French adoption of US managerial methods. The French Chambers of Commerce were particularly active in promoting exchanges by businessmen, senior civil servants and teachers to the US to study business organisation & management methods. Story & Parrott (International Herald Tribune; 5/5/77) refer to "streams of French businessmen" who headed for the US to prostrate themselves before sales guru, José Trujillo.

Further corroboration of the perceived US advance lay in the pilgrimage West throughout the fifties (this time for personal motives rather than state-inspired) by the cream of the commercial and engineering schools, in order to round off their education with an MBA. France seemed quite infatuated with American management and was in fact the European nation which dispatched the largest contingents to American business schools. The demand was such that a US style MBA was created in France (awarded by the French business school, INSEAD) to satisfy it. INSEAD, founded in 1958 on the Harvard model, had the explicit intent of closing the transatlantic management gap. It drew on American expertise in developing both curriculum and training suitable teachers.

At around the same time the commercial grandes écoles led by HEC, set about changing their curricula and teaching methods. In terms of content, the focus shifted from a staple diet of law and accountancy towards the new disciplines such as marketing. As for the teaching style, there was a move away from lecture theatre pedagogy towards a more interactive approach as typified by the adoption of the case study method. All this signalled a transition from commercial schools to management schools, specifically
inspired by the American model.

Further diffusion of American managerial values was ensured by emergence of a French management press. The launch of L'Express, and later L'Expansion, both inspired by the American journal, Fortune, marked the transition of the economic press from one providing financial information for investors to one aimed at encouraging a new business-literate generation of managers. Once again they confirmed the pervasive influence of America on the evolution of the French managerial ethos.

As Dyas and Thanheiser explain:

"American consulting companies, management theories, and US-style management education, all flourished quite independent of French foreign policy" (1976; 267).

The obsession with managerial trends from across the Atlantic perhaps waned to a certain extent in the seventies, when it became clear that American methods and ideas were not automatically applicable to Europe. The point was driven home by translated case studies borrowed from the US with its less complex social structure and a more liberal economic system; tackling issues such as hiring and firing "à l'américaine", was unthinkable in the French context.

The eighties have brought with them renewed interest in American concepts. In particular, the cult of managerialism has sparked off the same sort of enthusiasm elicited by American management ideas in the fifties and sixties. Tom Peters' books have sold better in France than anywhere else in Europe and home-grown replicas of the books abound. However, the French have shown themselves more discriminating than in the past when American managerial notions were transplanted without serious consideration of applicability to French culture.

They have spurned certain American authors whose prescriptions are clearly at odds with French culture. For instance, Lee Iacocca's tale of dirty dealings in Detroit has flopped in France, perhaps because of France's more structured managerial environment. A similar fate has befallen Kenneth Blanchard's "One Minute Manager", with its apparently simplistic message - which seemed to offend French executives' intellectual view of themselves.
Several of the managers spoken to cast aspersions on its foundations: "ça sonne creux" (it sounds hollow), "ce n'est pas vécu" (it lacks authenticity), "c'est du préfabriqué" (it is contrived) were typical reactions. In addition to this perceived lack of depth or substance, Blanchard's book also proposed culturally inappropriate behaviour. As explained in the chapter on "The nature of work relations", the spontaneous violation of personal space (of the 'pat on the back' variety) is not always welcomed in France.

In spite of a certain scepticism, educating managers through reading has become big business and this has been reinforced by a resurgence of business journals which are helping to disseminate the managerial ethos. These have contributed to the belated emergence of an enterprise culture, in a society which has traditionally been hostile to business and profit. There is a greater willingness to treat business as socially acceptable, and essential to the life of the country.

Whilst the French may have a low opinion of American culture, they have a long tradition of openness to American managerial concepts - at least in principle. Perhaps by virtue of their intellectual powers they have latched on to American methods and techniques with apparent ease. As one American consultant explained:

"The average French manager is not only smart, he is also startlingly well educated. He is clearly not just the intellectual equal, but perhaps even the intellectual superior of his foreign counterparts. It's hardly surprising that he learns fast. French management has acted like a power vacuum cleaner in its acquisition of US systems, techniques and concepts over the last few years." (Dyas and Thanheiser; 1976; 267).

There are, however, indications that French intellectual commitment to these concepts does not carry through into practice. This is something touched upon earlier in this chapter in the section on "Intellectual tradition" and in the chapter on "French malaise". The French seem adept at identifying their shortcomings but less prepared to act on them. A similar pattern seems to characterise France's adoption of American managerial methods. Again, there is recognition of American superiority and intellectual commitment to American practices, but a failure to carry the ideas through.
The most frequently cited example is Management By Objectives (MBO) - there is even an unpublished doctoral thesis by George X. Trepo, devoted to the question, "The Introduction of MBO in France; Reality or Ritual?" One PDG interviewed confirmed the view that French managers generally understand the new techniques or methods, but often only pay lip service to them:

"Dans maintes cas, le nouveau jargon dissimule à peine la persistance d'anciens usages."

(In many cases the new jargon is only a thin cover for the continuation of traditional French practices).

From the researcher's own experience a similar pattern seems to be emerging in the case of quality circles, many of which are barely distinguishable from worker representatives' meetings. This may account for the failure of quality circles to produce the anticipated results (see chapter on "Industrial relations").

Restatement

According to an expression popular in both languages, France is both 'the eldest daughter of the Church' and the begetter of the Enlightenment and the Revolution - such a heritage must have an impact upon French management. Given the great change in national mood and attitude caused by German occupation and to a lesser extent by the coming to power of the socialists (1981-86), one can justifiably question the continued impact of pre-twentieth century history on individual psyches. There seems, however, to be evidence that French heritage still plays a vital role in determining the French managerial ethos.
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10. THOSE WHO SET THE TONE

"Peut-être appréciés personnellement, les patrons sont critiqués collectivement." Conversation with John du Monceau, Directeur Général des Titres de Services, Accor.

(People generally like their bosses on an individual basis, but dislike them as a group).

In much the same way as 'cadre' does not mean manager, so 'patron', the subject of the present discussion, has broader connotations than its translation as 'boss' or 'employer'. According to Priouret (1968: 14), the term 'patron' gradually superseded that of 'maître' (master) under the Second Empire (1852-70). It has its roots in the Latin, 'pater' (father), which suggests patriarchal overtones - and, in spite of the advent of less loaded terms like 'chef d'entreprise', 'industriel', 'employeur' or 'PDG' (CEO), it remains the most widely used designation of the company head. The term is a catchall which includes the chiefs of owner-managed and professionally managed companies, in the public and private sectors. It is also used to designate intermediary bosses (somewhat on the lines of the English "governor") since, as one maintenance manager explained, "Pour l'ouvrier spécialisé, c'est le contremaître son patron" (as far as an unskilled worker is concerned, the foreman is his 'boss').

Reputation

Employers in France have traditionally suffered from a poor public image. They have been criticised for making money by exploiting others ("sur le dos des autres"). Zola's "Germinal", published in 1885, provides a useful indication of the prevailing attitude towards 'le patron'. In this novel, one of the characters (Deneulin) weighs up the various ways of making money and concludes, "l'argent que vous gagnent les autres est celui dont on engraisse le plus sûrement" (Zola; 102 - making money through others is the surest way of making fat profits). The phrase endorses the popular view of profit as synonymous with profiteering. And, as Erhmann points out Zola's
portrayal is by no means exceptional:

"For a country where literary incarnations still command wide popular appeal, it is significant that in the French novel there seems to be not a single example of an outstanding entrepreneurial pioneer; where they appear at all, they are slightly ridiculed rather than pictured as heroes." (1957; 210).

In popular circles, for those brought up on a staple diet of Marxism and Catholicism the standard view of the 'patron' was of a parasite, "un buveur de sang". If this 'blood sucker' happened to be successful he was labelled "un aigrefin" (swindler); if he had the misfortune to fail, he would be dubbed "un incapable" (Weber; 1983; 42).

As if this initial prejudice were not enough, the image of employers was further tarnished by accusations of open collaboration with the enemy in World War II. Some of the disgraced employers were punished with expropriation. For instance, Louis Renault who, immediately after the June 1940 armistice, ran headlong into economic collaboration with the Germans, found his company confiscated (the same fate befell Berliet, the lorry manufacturing company) in the wave of nationalisations*1 which followed the War. As Erhmann puts it:

"The government no less than the man in the street was convinced that the employers' record during the most difficult hours of the country had been at best undistinguished, in many cases despicable." (1957; 103).

Even de Gaulle joined in the 'boss-baiting' with a sort of catch phrase "Ô étiez-vous, messieurs?"*2 (Harris; 54) with which he regularly taunted representatives of the embryonic employers' union, the Conseil National du Patronat Français (CNPF). But whatever the extent of employer collaboration, there is a strong argument for suggesting that they had actually failed their country prior to World War II when conservative and uncompetitive

*1 - Also included were Air France, the coal-mines, electricity and gas, and the larger insurance companies and clearing banks. Much of this was done in an anti-capitalist spirit with de Gaulle's backing.

*2 - Analogous to, on the German side, the evocative title of Heinrich Boll's novel, "Wo warst Du, Adam?"
practices contributed to the weak economic base of France - one factor in the country's collapse in the face of German might.

From this all-time low at the end of the War, French employers have achieved an impressive turnaround in societal esteem - to the point that children will now announce with pride that their father is a PDG, when the fact was concealed for fear of retribution only a decade ago. The reversal of image is rooted in France's entry into the EEC in 1958. This prompted an important change in corporate behaviour since it opened up the French market to foreign competition, at least formally, and signalled the end of a long history of economic protectionism dating back to the fifteenth century.

Ardagh drew a parallel with the effect of the Occupation - suggesting that the German menace (economic rather than military) had once again catalysed the French into action, "this time before defeat and without bloodshed!" (1982; 37)

Further progress was made as a result of the 1968 uprisings which emphasised the need for a change of style in corporate leadership - a point driven home by the fact that the strike had been the bitterest in the autocratic, old-style firms like Citroen. Ardagh points out that:

"May '68 brought in a new questioning of the old assumptions about authority, and it sounded the death-knell of a certain rigidly autocratic French style of command, both in factories and offices" (1982; 96).

The rehabilitation of top management has been enhanced in the 1980s by the so-called cult of managerialism and the tardy emergence of an enterprise culture in France. The process was given additional impetus from an unexpected quarter, namely the Socialist government (1981-86). It is ironic that the revaluation of the 'patron' should have been engineered by those who were initially thought to 'have it in for him', as seen in the article entitled "Faut-il brûler les patrons?" ("Should we do away with bosses?" - Le Nouvel Observateur; 12/12/81).

In fact, the Socialist decision to varnish not tarnish was based on economic rather than ideological grounds. The entrepreneur had to be encouraged as a potential job creator and locomotive for the economy, ideas which though commonplace elsewhere were accepted only belatedly in France. This socialist repositioning in fact reflects a general shift to the right by all manner of
political parties, indicating a greater public acceptance of market
economics. Even countries as far away as China have experienced something of
this revolution as indicated by Schell's book, "To get rich is
glorious: China in the eighties" (1984). Politics is a useful barometer of
the changing attitude to entrepreneurs and business.

The net result of these convergent forces is that corporate heroes have
actually come to the fore. As Dean Berry put it in the Financial Times:

"With business exposed, managers need heroes - they haven't had
any." (2/07/86; 18)

Ways to the top

This section will deal with the various routes to top management in France
and comment on their relative merits. Three distinct avenues to corporate
leadership have been identified in the research literature: inheritance,
competence and intelligence. It goes without saying that these qualities are
not mutually exclusive, but the terms have been selected to characterise a
particular means of access to the top. In each category, an individual has
been selected from the primary research as a representative for that group.
He will be introduced with a brief personal file and his career will be used
to illustrate various points.

Inheritance

Example: François Delachaux: PDG of a 'micro-multinational' (850 personnel
and 12 foreign subsidiaries), founded in 1912 (grandson of founder). Aged
47, with an MBA from the University of Indiana.

The proportion of family-run firms in France is high both quantitatively and
qualitatively. In other words, a high number of fairly large concerns are
family run* - for instance, the Dassault family which supplies military
aircraft to the state or the Rothschild family in banking (see chapter on
"Corporate culture" for further examples). The French seem particularly

* - Morin (1977) suggests that in the mid 70s, 44.3% of France's largest
companies still had important minority, if not majority family ownership
interests.

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attached to the tradition. Power is relinquished to outsiders only as a last resort. Ferdinand Beghin, the last in the line of a sugar and paper emporium (Beghin-Say) epitomised the view, when he stated:

"Je n'ai jamais trouvé dans ma famille de gens capables de m'aider! J'aurais été enchanté d'avoir des gendres à qui j'aurais pu donner des places importantes." (Harris; 22).

(I have never found anyone in my family capable of helping me! I would have loved to have had sons-in-law to whom I might have entrusted important positions).

The bourgeois saw success in life in terms of augmenting the capital and reputation of their families. Love meant enabling one's child to be richer than oneself and sacrificing individual whims in order to achieve this. This spirit of 'financial affection' is not dead and continues to perpetuate values like thrift and sacrifice - the supreme duty is still seen by some as the transmission of property to their children.

One of the Peugeot chiefs (a company notorious for harbouring family members) was also quite candid about the raison d'être of a business:

"Contrôler le capital, ça sert à placer les enfants." (L'Expansion; Sept. 1978; 139).

(Controling the capital guarantees jobs for one's children).

Today, there is a rather more discriminating approach to nepotism with anyone likely to jeopardise the family business sidelined early. "Le patron de droit divin" (a phrase coined for Eugène Schneider, the one time flamboyant lord of Le Creusot) is a figure of the past. Those who are deemed a liability to the survival of the business will find their families less indulgent than was once the case. As Ardagh explains:

"Nepotism, hitherto rife, has now waned: many patrons used to regard the family firm as a way of giving sinecures to doltish cousins or nephews, but today realize that this spells disaster." (1982; 42)
With successive generations, inheritors multiply and the company can become a repository for family members. In the common vernacular, "la famille vit sur la bête", "elle lui fait rendre son jus" (the family milks the cow dry) - a case of the company working for the family rather than vice versa. Aware of the dangers of such a policy, the Delachaux brothers (designated at the start of this section as representatives of the family-run business) decreed:

"Aucun Delachaux dans l'entreprise Delachaux. Si la maison doit servir à nourrir la famille, elle est vouée à sa perte." (Weber; 1983; 26)

(No Delachaux in the Delachaux company. If the role of the firm is to feed the family, we are bound to lose out).

So, François Delachaux's rise to power illustrates the more realistic attitude to nepotism. In order to preclude the extinction of the business, the 21 second generation Delachauxs got together in a family council to eliminate all but the single most competent family member from the company - in much the same way as the Michelin family have done. That is how François Delachaux was elected. The other family members pulled out of the company and went elsewhere to exercise their industrial talents.

Enlightened nepotism as demonstrated here, can yield substantial benefits without incurring the traditional drawbacks. To start with, the heir apparent is inculcated early into the ways of the company. The old adage, "Je possède, donc je sais" (I own, therefore I know), has more than a grain of truth in it. Bertrand Lepoutre the head of a family business explained:

"Les gosses étaient élevés dans l'idée que telle était la vocation de la famille." (Harris; 68)

(The kids were raised on the belief that this was the family's vocation).

Anticipatory socialisation enables the heir to prepare himself to take on the mantle of head. The training period can be intense with no holds barred. Almost certainly, criticism will be meted out more readily and accepted more easily since both master and apprentice have the family's best interests at
heart. As Patrick Ricard, the PDG of Pernod-Ricard and son of the founder explained:

"Tout ce qu'a fait mon père, c'était avec l'objectif de me faire rentrer chez Ricard." (L'Expansion; 4/06/81; 108).

(My father's every action was channeled towards my joining Ricard).

What is more, the argument of lack of motivation is perhaps overstated since the chosen successor must prove himself in relation to rival sibblings, is in daily contact with shareholders and is subjected to the critical gaze of fellow executives who may consider themselves more able. As a comparable American heir once said, "I had to be holier than the Pope and work harder and more conscientiously than anyone else." (Fortune; 17/03/86; 25). Clearly, some chiefs will try to establish their right to the 'throne' by an epic display of industry and commitment.

As an alternative to this, the future incumbent may have recourse to educational qualifications or experience in other companies as a means of justifying the heritage. Ideally, the heir should aim for an unimpeachable qualification - on that score, Serge Dassault's stay at Polytechnique makes him an easy irreproachable choice for taking over his father's aeronautical company. However, not everyone is gifted enough to avail themselves of such a qualification. Marceau notes that INSEAD is often used as an instrumental qualification to shake off the 'boss's son' label. This amounts to converting economic capital into more acceptable educational capital.

This was the case for our example François Delachaux whose MBA was achieved without a bone fide first degree, thanks to America's more flexible educational system and the help of one of his father's old friends. The quest for educational legitimation is so important in France that some parents will gladly pay out to procure a diploma for their offspring. As the son of one PDG freely admitted:

"Autant le dire tout de suite, je ne suis pas arrivé à la force du poignet. J'ai fait quelques études, notamment l'école Violet. L'Ecole des fils qui n'ont pas les moyens de faire des études, mais dont les parents eux, ont les moyens." (Miler; 1975; 145).
(You might as well know, I didn't get where I am through hard graft. I studied a bit, especially at the Violet Business School. That's the school for offspring who don't have the means to study, but whose parents do have the means).

Legitimation through experience is perhaps easier to achieve than legitimation through qualifications, but it does not carry the same weight. It is an easier option since the family will generally have contacts which it can approach "pour placer quelqu'un de la famille" (to take on members of the family). Friendly suppliers, customers or banks should manage to put up with the offspring for a while in the knowledge that the favour might be reciprocated for one of their own. Again use is made of economic and social capital to provide the offspring with an artificial track record to mask heredity. He will be overpaid and overpromoted until he is ready to return to the family fold. This was the tactic employed by the Cointreau heir who benefited from an HEC label, followed by three years with Arthur Young and a brief spell with Elizabeth Arden:

"C'était pour moi un sine qua non d'aller faire mes classes ailleurs... avant d'entrer dans le groupe familial. " (l'Expansion, 4/06/81, 113).

(It was essential for me to get a good grounding elsewhere... before joining the family group).

Competence

Example: Philippe Loridan (58): Armed with only a baccalauréat, he found work in a forwarding agency in Morocco. He returned to France in 1955 to start up the French subsidiary of Treifus PLC, which he has since turned into a resounding success employing 800 people.

Basically, there are two ways in which competence can lead to corporate leadership - either by working one's way up a single or a succession of companies over a number of years; or else by setting up a business which provides immediate access.

Trying to reach the top of an organisation from a lowly starting position, is a fairly remote prospect in France, unless one works for a foreign
subsidiary. Inès reputedly offer the quickest upward mobility for those without prestigious diplomas or family ties - but these companies also make demands on the individual (relentless pressure, set hours, geographical mobility and inflexible objectives) which are anathema to most French managers. As one woman cadre explained:

"Pour un Français les conditions de travail chez Rank-Xerox sont épouvantables."

(A French person will find the work conditions at Rank-Xerox unbearable).

Taking the example of Amstrad-France, the company has a young chief (35) who does not boast a grande école education or family connections - and is a woman to boot. There is no way that Marion Vannier would have made it in a traditional French firm, where diplomas, seniority and masculinity are the keys to success.

This triumverate of qualities prevails in big business throughout France. According to Michel Bauer, a researcher from the CNRS, instances of company men making it to the presidential chair are rare. The case of François Dalle and Charles Zviak (see chapter on "Corporate culture) who spent their entire careers at l'Oréal before being named PDG is exceptional among indigenous companies. In contrast to this, IBM, Kodak, Nestle, Shell, Philips or Unilever all seek continuity of leadership by appointing individuals whose careers have been with the company. Michel Bauer is campaigning for what he terms the "dérégulation" (opening up) of corporate leadership.

There are various ways of reaching the summit in a system which favours introduction from above ("parachutage") over access from below. Travelling around as a counter to qualifications was the option taken by Philippe Loridan. Realising that he would not get anywhere in "ce pays à diplômes" (this qualification-conscious country), he spent three years in Morocco and gained responsibilities which would have taken ten years to accumulate in France. Having made a name for himself, he returned to France and was able to find immediate employment thanks to his experience. Self-imposed exile proved a means of acquiring the experience which would have been denied him in France. This is in stark contrast with countries like US where geographical mobility is part and parcel of the promotion game - in France it is simply the price paid for lack of qualifications.
Another means of rapid promotion is of course to set up one's own business. It is ironical that the nation which spawned the word "entrepreneur" (Jean-Baptiste Say in 1800) should traditionally be so weak in that domain. A much-quoted work by David Landes (1951), the author blames unenterprising businessmen for holding back French growth in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to him, the bourgeois family values hampered economic growth by emphasising social success over individual profit or industrial expansion. Innovation and success in business were held in low esteem and risk-taking was shunned for fear of bankruptcy, which amounted to absolute dishonour in the social system which prevailed.

As a result of the bourgeois influence, business creation was still frowned upon until a few years ago. Even today surveys show that relatively few grande école graduates seriously entertain the idea of 'going it alone'. A recent poll of nearly 1000 graduate engineers by L'Usine Nouvelle (19/03/87) revealed that only 34% were even contemplating self-employment at any time in their careers and their answers suggested that for most this was only an outside possibility. Apparently, that particular road to business success is deemed too risky for all but the most adventurous. There seems little point in trading in the security of a well-paid job for the struggle of self-employment and the derisive label of "parvenu" or "nouveau riche" should one succeed. The plea for recognition was made explicitly by the head of one small firm:

"Que la bataille soit dure, les adversaires coriaces et l'arbitre impitoyable, d'accord, mais qu'en cas de succès on ait le droit au tour d'honneur et non-pas au guet-apens." (de Closets; 1982; 137)

(That the battle be tough, the adversary tenacious and the referee pitiless, fair enough, but if we win we could at least expect congratulations not hostility).

In view of the traditional reception of business success it is hardly surprising that the only people likely to opt for this are those who are "in a rush" to succeed and find enterprise creation the best short cut — or else those whose qualifications, class, sex or race preclude career success by more conventional means. A more detailed discussion of the new attitude to business creation follows in the section "The new breed of managers".
Intelligence

Example: Jacques Calvet: 57 years old and a product of Sciences-Po and l'Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA). Successively, senior civil servant, Chairman of the Banque Nationale de Paris and since 1984 head of the private Peugeot-Citroën car group. He has managed to check the plunge of a group on the verge of bankruptcy.

L'Expansion (20/11/80) included a feature on the CEO of an advertising agency which was entitled, "L'itinéraire modèle d'Yves Cannac" (Yves Cannac's perfect career). The reason his was considered an ideal career was that he was a graduate of l'Ecole Normale (very prestigious), the "major" (laureate) of l'ENA (even better) and had spent 10 years in state service to boot. What more appropriate pedigree for the head of France's No.1 advertising agency, l'Agence Havas.

Yves Cannac's career pattern is exceptional in content, but is by no means unusual in format. Jacques Calvet (Peugeot) boasts a similar curriculum vitae - after graduating from l'ENA, he took up various positions in the French administration, notably as the Directeur de Cabinet of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing when the former President was Finance Minister (1970-74). He made his transition to the business world via the public sector where he was appointed Deputy Managing Director of the Banque Nationale de Paris (BNP) in 1974. By the time he joined the Peugeot group in 1982, he had risen to Chairman of BNP.

A cursory glance at the backgrounds of most heads of large industrial concerns reveals a similar story. This is in stark contrast to Britain where, of the twenty biggest companies, sixteen have bosses who have spent virtually all their careers with the company (Economist; 5/03/88; 69). In France, it would seem that the state has taken over the responsibility for training individuals to assume leadership positions. As Michel Bauer, a researcher at the CNRS put it:

"Il semble normal, en France, d'accéder au sommet en étant non seulement étranger à une entreprise, mais également étranger au monde de l'entreprise." (L'Express; 1/1/88; 33)
It seems perfectly natural in France to be named head of a company without prior knowledge of that business or indeed of the business world in general.

France's largest public and private groups alike are headed by products of "la haute administration" (the higher reaches of the civil service). In the nationalised and semi-nationalised companies, the appointments are politically motivated. Thus it was that the French Socialist electoral victory in May-June 1981 was accompanied by the biggest reshuffle of corporate leaders ever carried out in a Western capitalist country (Stokman; 1986; 184).

The appointment of former state officials as heads in the nationalised sector is perhaps understandable. What is less obvious is their occupancy of similar posts in private companies such as Peugeot or Moet-Hennessy, as well as companies like Pechiney, Rhône-Poulenc and Saint-Gobain whose management by senior state officials pre-dates their nationalisation in 1982. The ubiquitous presence of senior state officials in the private and state sectors makes the conventional distinction between public and private industry less relevant in France since both types of company will be run in similar ways. Inevitably, this raises the question of competence - what do private companies see in these individuals?

It would seem that the attraction is primarily instrumental. The civil servant is courted for his contacts rather than his talents per se. In the French context, where relations with the state are more important to a company's well-being, it is desirable to be on good terms with the authorities. As Alain de Cointet put it:

"Dans une économie aussi largement administrée, recruter des fonctionnaires issus de l'X ou de l'ENA permet d'entrer en dialogue beaucoup plus facilement avec ceux qui administrent." (L'Expansion; 20/1/80; 215).

(In such an interventionist economy, recruiting top flight civil servants who have graduated from Polytechnique or ENA facilitates discussions with the government).
As ex-civil servants they are accustomed to being on the receiving end of discreet pressure and are initiated in the ways of politics. They are responsible for building and maintaining the bridges between the company and the state. This does not mean they are bound to win out, but their case will not go by default of not being heard.

Besides this capacity to open doors with the state, and bearing in mind that they are inevitably products of l'ENA or l'Ecole Polytechnique, what else can these ex-state officials offer a company? Not much, if we are to believe Roger Martin, the ex-PDG of Saint-Gobain:

"En sortant de Polytechnique, je savais tout mais rien d'autre."

(When I left Polytechnique, I knew everything but nothing else).

There is a grain of truth in this statement in that these elite graduates lack specific expertise. However, the quip fails to do justice to the reasoning power, the depth and rigour of the study process, addiction to hard work, and the tradition of honesty inculcated into those heading for state service. These individuals are sought after because their intellectual probity is second to none. The compliment "une belle mécanique intellectuelle" (a fine intellectual apparatus) is often employed to describe them.

Finally, if the alleged resistance to change (referred to by Michel Crozier in "La société bloquée") is real, this provides another good reason for systematically appointing outsiders in preference to insiders. When a company wants to make sweeping changes, the task is best handled by an outsider. Insiders tend to be hamstrung by obligations towards individuals who have helped them on the way up. Perhaps, in France's 'stalemate society', this has proved the most effective way of implementing change.

The new breed of managers

The previous section outlining the various means of access to top management deliberately played down the setting up of one's own business - justifiably so since, until recently, there was little incentive or consideration for those who did so.
All that has changed under the combined influences of managerialism and Socialist exaltation of entrepreneurs. The acceptance of managerialism is largely attributable to "In search of excellence" by Peters and Waterman. Its French version achieved quite spectacular success with sales of 100,000 copies in just three years - that, in a country where a business book was deemed a hit if it sold 5,000 copies in a year.

In parallel with France's love affair with American business gurus, the Socialist régime (1981-86) endeavoured to promote the entrepreneur as the new saviour of the economy. In many respects, this turnaround could only be achieved by a Socialist government whose a priori hostility to employers lent authenticity to its message - if they say employers are alright, they must be. Had the same notion been put forward by a right-wing government it would certainly have been viewed with suspicion.

In the space of a few years, the self-made individual has become a folk hero, replacing philosophers and writers as France's new gurus. As Gerard Mermet puts it:

"Après les maîtres à penser, les maîtres à agir." (1986; 254)

(After the men of thought, the men of action).

As one PDG saw it there has been a subtle change of emphasis in business philosophy:

"Il s'agit maintenant de lutter pour et non pas contre quelque chose."

(We now fight to achieve something rather than to resist change).

The socialist rehabilitation of profit and entrepreneurial values were helped substantially by the success of one particular individual, Bernard Tapie. He more than anyone can be credited with the restitution of the entrepreneur. His case is worth investigating since it is inherently interesting and highly revealing of the French need to personalise the new movement in order to exorcise anti-capitalist prejudices. It is difficult to find an article on the new French managerial values which does not acknowledge Tapie's influence.
Described as the "superasta" of French business, Bernard Tapie is in his mid-forties, the son of a fitter, a graduate of "une petite grande école" and an unsuccessful crooner in the 1960s - pure Hollywood melodrama. He heads a conglomerate of companies which include La Vie Claire, the leading French health food chain, Wonder Batteries (a joint venture with Francis Bouygues), Look Ski Appliances, the Marseilles Olympique football club (à la Robert Maxwell), as well as the fashion house Grès and Kicker shoes.

His business empire, built up from scratch in nine years employs 10,000 people and has a turnover of Ffr5 billion (about 500 million pounds). He has specialised in buying up bankrupt companies for a symbolic Ffr1 and turning them into profitable concerns - without even trying to capitalise on the much vaunted synergy. Instead he exploits the French legislation which allows the receiver to issue a 12-24 month freeze on the company's debts from the moment of filing the winding-up petition. While his managers streamline the staff and start working on new products, Tapie buys back most of the debts from hard-pressed creditors.

His knack for turning all manner of lame ducks into golden geese is such that there is actually a waiting list of companies in distress hoping to be acquired by his conglomerate. His selection criterion is simple: it must be the company's management, not its products which are at fault.

"Il détecte les sociétés dont les déboires sont imputables à la mauvaise gestion. Ce qui permettra de rétablir leur rentabilité en resserrant les boulons." (Baumier; 1984; 109)

(He seeks out those companies whose setbacks are the result of mismanagement - which will allow them to return to profit by tightening up a few nuts and bolts).

So powerful is his effect, that simply being associated with him is often enough to redress the falling share price. As Vincent Beaufils of L'Expansion points out:

"La présence même de Tapie, par son action médiatique, est à elle seule un facteur de bénéfice" (L'Expansion; 23/10/86; 62).

(The mere presence of Tapie is, in itself, worth several percentage points).
He is anti-establishment and pokes fun at the archaic approach of most French employers. His blunt style and taste for hype have not made him a favourite in traditional French business circles. His style is perhaps best captured by a commercial for one of his products.

It shows an energetic business man striding purposefully through his office pursued by journalists, politicians, secretaries, Japanese factory managers, Arab oilmen, American salesmen, union leaders and assorted business figures while he relentlessly flings orders to a harried assistant.

As one pursuer after another falls to the floor exhausted, the voice-over asks: "But what makes him run?" Whereupon the businessman reveals a cavity in his back, containing a pack of 'Wonder' brand alkaline batteries.

As his assistant pulls them out, he also collapses with a wink at the camera.

The star of that advertisement is Bernard Tapie himself (à la Victor Kiam), plugging one of his own products. The whole presentation is typical of his cocky, go-getting style with "un sens extraordinaire de la mise en scène" (an uncommon appreciation for theatrical effects). He is a master of self-promotion, combining the high profile of Richard Branson (Virgin Records' irrepressible chairman) with the business style of Chrysler's popular CEO Lee Iacocca. Christine Mital of l'Expansion described him as:

"Le patron à grand spectacle qui réconcilie les Français avec l'entreprise, la fortune, la réussite et l'esbroufe."
(l'Expansion; 11/09/86; 45)

(The epic boss who is reconciling the French with industry, wealth, success and showing off).

He has become a symbol for the new business-minded, money oriented France of the late 1980s: the self-made entrepreneur who creates jobs, does not beg for state subsidies, and is proud of his wealth, success and hard-edged business approach. He has managed to make a hero out of the "nouveau riche", a traditional figure of fun in French theatre.
He is endlessly selected in opinion polls as the individual young people would most like to meet or emulate. A poll in 1985 actually found him to be the ideal holiday companion of 48% of French women, ahead of the film stars Yves Montand and Alain Delon; whilst 36% of French voters would like him as Prime Minister. He is generally regarded as the best known French personality outside the political world.

Tapie’s cue has been taken by many who have tried to follow in his footsteps. The management press is hunting out all the brightest, most personable young entrepreneurs and turning them into folk heroes - Vincent Bolloré, a 35 year old, with "le look du gendre idéal" (the appearance of the perfect son-in-law) and a meteoric rise behind him makes ideal fodder for the voracious cover features. His opinion is regularly canvassed - "Les recettes de Vincent Bolloré" (Challenges - March 87); "Saint Bolloré - gagner pour nous" (l'Expansion; 22/10/87). Such individuals are merely the tip of the iceberg.

The management journals regularly present new sets of entrepreneurs who have succeeded "à la Tapie": l'Expansion (11/09/86) introduces us to, "Quinze stars" (fifteen stars); Le Point (14/4/86) reveals, "Comment faire fortune en 1986" (how to make a packet in 1986); Le Nouvel Observateur (4/2/83) lets us in on "Le secret des Gagneurs" (the winning formulae of the successful); Tertiel (sept. 1987) details, "Le who's who des clubs d'entrepreneurs"; and l'Expansion (10/09/87) presents "Le club des gagneurs" (the winners' club). When the journals are not highlighting a cross-section of successful entrepreneurs, they will focus upon individual bosses (preferably under-40) and question them on their recipes for success.

The journals are bolstered by a quantum leap in the number of business books with a similar thrust: "Les héros de l'économie" (superstars of the economy), "Ces patrons qui gagnent" (bosses who win)...etc. Their aim is to draw up a photofit picture of what it takes to succeed in order to provide budding entrepreneurs with rôle models and inspiration (if little else). The portrayals conveniently play down money, qualifications and contacts but emphasise youth, imagination, courage, effort and perseverance. Their central tenet is that "n'importe qui peut faire fortune" (anyone can get rich quick). The new buzz words quoted by Le Point (No.723, 28/7/86, 66) are all success-oriented: "Les 'décideurs', 'battants' or 's'investir',
'assurer' (deciders, battlers, commitment, self-confidence) - words which have traditionally been in poor taste in 'aristocratic' France.

In short, public opinion is now favourably inclined towards business and businessmen. However, the backbone of this new ethos has not been tested and there are real doubts over its survival in the event of a major crisis. Because Bernard Tapie has been so instrumental in forging the new enterprise culture, their fortunes are permanently linked. Consequently, his personal failure might have devastating repercussions on the fate of French capitalism as a whole.

In his bid for success, Tapie has not endeared himself to everyone and even his peers ("mes patrons") include many detractors who resent his 'stardom'. There have been several unkind rumour campaigns to the effect that his business empire is built on debt. Tapie himself admits to debts of Ffr1 billion, but his group turns in a profit and benefits from an A-credit rating from the Crédit Lyonnais. Notwithstanding Tapie's reassurance, his critics have a point. His entire 'system' is based on confidence and growth - a stumble might quickly reveal an inability to refund his group's debts. The embodiment of new, French style capitalism in one man is at once a strength and an achilles heel. Christine Mital expressed her fears that the bubble could burst:

"On tremble à l'idée qu'il lui arrive quelque chose: l'image du capitalisme en prendrait un coup dont il ne se relèverait sans doute pas!" (L'Expansion; 11/09/86; 45)

(Perish the thought that anything should happen to him: it would deal a hefty blow to our perception of capitalism and it is doubtful that it would recover!)

It would seem then, that "le phénomène Tapie" is a precarious one. And, beneath the vociferous support, French capitalism is in fact highly susceptible to a reversal of values. Oddly enough, much of the danger comes from the "patrons" themselves - outwardly, they join in the chorus of openness or mouth the latest buzz-words, but privately they resent the invasion of American-style values. Paul Evans professor of organisational behaviour at INSEAD, the European business school based just outside Paris.
strikes a cautionary note:

"Things have only changed on the surface. There is lots of talk, and a mood of change, but deep-set social and political changes have not yet occurred." (Financial Times; 2/07/86; 18)

Perhaps because of the very rigorous intellectual training which French chief executives typically receive, they have difficulty in subscribing to the view of management a fairly straightforward activity — in the Tom Peters KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid) tradition. There seems to be resistance to the notion that managerial work includes some routine, fire-fighting, juggling, walking about, 'man-handling' of recalcitrant circumstance (and people), speedy arational decision-making, and inspired acts of adaptive implementation; individuals chosen for their brains are not necessarily best suited to carry this out. Maybe the French overcomplicate management but this seems consistent with a more complex view of human behaviour than that adhered to by Americans.

So behind all the media hype, fronted by American-style managers, there is an undercurrent of scepticism, which top managers generally refrain from expressing in public, since to do so would be tantamount to subverting progress. As one PDG put it:

"Ça serait considéré une tare pour un patron de ne pas adhérer à ce movement."

(Not to endorse managerialism would be viewed as a real defect in a boss).

The current obsession with American gurus and the 'go-getting' spirit is so powerful that it would be foolhardy to criticise it out loud. Yet in private conversations, a number of managers speculated that the cult of managerialism and the public interest in management were a flash in the pan (un phénomène de mode) and fully expected values to go round full circle. They were simply waiting for the whole thing to blow over and for 'normal service' to be resumed.

One is reminded of the way the French embraced management by objectives or quality circles in theory, but have failed to implement them successfully. Perhaps these are simply manifestations of what Ardagh regards as a national
"The French have a tendency to fall in love intellectually with new ideas and then not to bother too much with their application; in some firms, new American jargon and gadgetry barely conceal the persistence of old French habits of rigid hierarchy and routine." (1982; 42)

**Homogeneity?**

In the light of the preceding discussion it may seem odd to discuss the homogeneity of French bosses. Allusions have already been made to their divergent career patterns - in particular the distinction between owners (sometimes called "le patronat réel") and salaried heads ("le patronat de gestion"). Notwithstanding this fundamental duality, a number of common traits are worth highlighting.

**United we stand**

To start with, bosses are united under the banner of a single union (in contrast with five separate worker unions), the Conseil National du Patronat Français (CNPF). The organisation was conceived after the Liberation as a means of facilitating contact between employers and government - and in the hope that it might help retrieve some of the employers power and self-esteem, damaged by the Occupation. The head of the confederation is usually referred to as "le patron des patrons" by newspapers.

But the notion of collective body goes beyond a single union. The "patrons" are clearly perceived by the media, as an entity sharing common political, economic and social views:

- "Edmond Maire réhabilite les patrons" (Edmond Maire legitimises bosses) - Le Nouvel Observateur - 13/03/86 - p.19.

- "Les dix patrons les plus durs" (The ten toughest bosses) - L'Expansion - 19/09/85 - p.90.

- "Pour gagner, changez vos patrons" (If you want to win, change your leaders) - L'Express - 1/01/88 - p.33.
"Comment les patrons prennent congés" (How bosses take their holidays) - Le Point - 17/08/87 - p.50.


The idea is reinforced by books with titles such as, "Les patrons face à la Gauche" (The impact of the Socialists on bosses), "Paroles de patrons" (The bosses speak out), "Les patrons" (bosses), "Comment devient-on un grand patron" (how to become a big boss), "Ces patrons qui gagnent" (bosses who win), "La fin des patrons" (the end of the bosses) and so forth. As with the cadres, the media tend to treat them as a discrete group in spite of their self-professed heterogeneity.

But, whilst bosses are themselves reluctant to acknowledge a common bond which transcends questions of ownership or background, there are indications that it does exist. According to Harris, François Ceyrac the former head of the CNPF, was particularly adept at hitting this unifying chord, each time he addressed the bosses:

"Cette disposition bien française, un peu mauroisienne, qu'accompagnent en général le goût du beau langage, pour ne pas dire des belles-lettres et une certaine méfiance vis-à-vis des modes et de la modernité, François Ceyrac en use et en joue à chaque occasion." (Harris; 46)

(François Ceyrac forever plays upon the peculiarly French penchant, rather in the manner of Charles Maurras, for stylish not to say sophisticated language and a certain suspicion of fashion and novelty).

This view was corroborated by a PDG who, as an "habitué" of CNPF meetings, had seen many a skilled orator unite the various factions of employers with a few well-chosen words. According to him, all you had to do was evoke a few of their "bêtes noires" (pet hates) - union leaders, civil servants, politicians, intellectuals - to elicit Pavlovian indignation from all quarters.

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So, in spite of the emergence of the new entrepreneurial culture, the legacy of vilification against bosses has left its mark - and for many of them the solidarity born of adversity remains a source of considerable unity. This reaction is the product of several decades of perceived persecution and misunderstanding - and the struggle to gain public approval. Bosses seem particularly preoccupied by the no-win situation in which they have found themselves in the past. Harris quoted a number of bosses on the matter:

"Si nous réussissons, nous sommes des exploiters; si nous échouons, des salauds doublés d'incapables." (1977; 8)

(If we succeed, we're exploiters; if we fail, we're bastards - useless one's at that).

"Aujourd'hui, être patron, c'est peut-être aussi accepter de se sentir 'mal aimé'..." (1977; 23)

(Being a boss today is also about being disliked).

"Les dirigeants? depuis le temps qu'on leur colle mauvaise conscience!" (Harris; 36)

(Bosses? how much longer must they be made to feel guilty?)

"S'ils font des bénéfices, ce sont des salauds; s'ils ratent, se sont des imbéciles et il faut s'en débarrasser." (1977; 36)

(If they make money, they're bastards; if not, they're idiots and we should be rid of them).

The consensus view on the part of bosses was that they were despised by the general public, or at very best regarded as a necessary evil - we need bosses, "comme il 'faut' des gendarmes ou des putains!" (Harris; 74 - in the same way as we need policemen or whores). Even if their image has changed in the last few years, the disdain is still fresh in their collective memory and there is no telling how long the present euphoria will last. The bosses remain bonded by the solidarity borne of adversity - and in their own mistrust of the fickle public.

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Another thing which unites the corporate rulers, whether owners or salaried heads, is their possession of one or other form of capital: economic (money), educational (qualifications) or social (connections). The theme of social inequality in France is very well documented - the hobby horse of a number of French sociologists. Alain Girard was one of the earlier contributors to the debate:

"Tout se passe comme s'il existait une véritable transmission professionnelle de génération en génération" (Girard; 1965).

(If's as if professional status could be handed down from generation to generation).

A similar argument was put forward by Pierre Bourdieu who argued in "Les héritiers" (1966) that the French bourgeoisie had hit upon a system of 'social reproduction' whereby the various forms of capital could be passed on from one generation to the next - thanks largely to the nature of the education system.

Around the same time, a statistical study by researchers at INSEAD revealed that of the heads of France's 500 largest firms in 1966-67: 42% had fathers who were themselves company heads and 25% could boast at least two generations of chief executives. According to Marceau this tendency to social closure was reinforced by endogamy, that is, marriage within similar social circles (1976; 134).

These findings are confirmed by the more recent work of Pierre Birnbaum - and also by Claude Thélot whose book on the subject bears the appropriate title, "Tel père, tel fils" (like father, like son). In fact, the social reproduction argument is further enhanced by the fact that individuals with different political convictions take a similar stance.

The three forms of capital identified earlier are by no means mutually exclusive - more often than not they are cumulative. For instance, the PDG whose offspring is not bright enough to reach one of the grandes écoles may well deploy social and economic capital in order to send his children to foreign universities - rather than opt for a French university with its
'second rate' image in relation to the elitist grandes écoles. The value of a foreign higher degree (preferably from an American university) will go some way to offsetting the lack of a highly prestigious French diploma.

Such a conversion strategy is fairly typical since educational capital is by far the most precious form of currency - presumably because of its cleansing effect on the less meritorious social or economic capital. Inherited power is concealed beneath a veil of merited power thanks to highly competitive and overtly objective (based on maths) public secondary and higher education system. Bourdieu and Passeron argue that the grandes écoles transform inherited privilege into 'merited' privilege (their thesis as to how the sifting process operates is covered in our earlier chapter "The making of French managers").

As Birnbaum explains this system is not guaranteed to work for a particular individual (that is where the element of merit comes in) but on a class-wide basis it does ensure the reproduction of the ruling class. That does not mean that the individuals at the top are incompetent, but simply that their accession was in part based on considerations other than strictly rational and objective ones - and in some cases, carried more weight.

Another example of the way one form of capital will help procure other forms of capital is that of those already in possession of educational capital. The graduate who comes from a well-to-do family stands a better chance of rapid accession to top management than his working class counterpart. As Vincent puts it:

"Si on a un père bien placé, on obtient des avantages qui sont évidents, soit par la position même du père, soit par la position des amis du père." (Santoni; 143)

(Having a father in a position of authority is a source of obvious advantages, either directly through his actual position, or indirectly through that of his friends).

The various forms of capital will be inherited, invested, accumulated, multiplied (through marriage) and converted so that, in Jane Marceau's words, "to him that hath, more shall be given." (Howorth; 1981; 118). Or, as Bourdieu put it "capital attracts capital".

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Whatever one's mode of access to the "patronat" (top management), the notion of predestination is strong. Yvon Gattaz, the former head of the CNPF went as far as to say that the desire to be a boss was "congenital", (Zeldin; 1983; 193). This view of bosses as a hereditary class is corroborated by Gail lard's book "Tu seras président, mon fils" (a chairman you will be, my son). It is rare in France to succeed from nothing, without any of these trump cards. Characters like Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby" are nowhere to be seen in French folklore. It would seem that Detoeuf's (progressive boss of the 1930s) quip still holds true:

"En France, pour réussir, un seul secret: avoir déjà réussi."
(Santoni; 174)
(The secret of success in France is to have succeeded already).

One is reminded of a saying attributed to Bob Hope about banks only lending money to those who can prove they don't need it.

Activities

The notion that top managers all round the world partake in the same sort of activities is true to a certain extent - but there are differences of emphasis which unite bosses from a particular nation and may distinguish them from their counterparts in other countries. In the case of French bosses, the distinguishing features seem to derive from the nature of the relationship with the authorities, and from a certain taste for ritual.

In terms of activities, there is common ground between all manner of bosses. For instance, parallels can be drawn in terms of their dealings with the authorities. Whether these are at national level or at local level, French bosses find themselves involved with the state to a far greater extent than their Anglo-Saxon counterparts.

In France, when there is lobbying to be done, the onus generally falls upon the individuals at the top. Partly this is by virtue of their educational background, which will stand them in good stead with like-minded civil servants. But status also enters into it, since the state officials will find the attentions of a PDG more flattering than those of one of his 'lackeys'. However, when the qualifications of the PDG are somehow inappropriate, a more suitable corporate representative may be sought out.
For instance, confronted with a rather thorny issue, the head of a provincial production plant, an engineering graduate, elected to send his second-in-command, the "directeur administratif", to meet the local "préfet" - this in the knowledge that the préfet would be an "énarque" and in all probability, a graduate of "Sciences-po" (the favoured preparation for l'ENA). In the administrative director's own words, "the conversation 'somehow' got round to 'Sciences-po' and the period we were there - and the dialogue was much easier after that."

At a local level, the head of a production plant or small business will be considered "une personalité locale" and his presence is often requested at official functions. Relations with the mayor and the town council will be attended to, so that favours do not fall on deaf ears later. For instance, a hypermarket manager in our observation sample wanted to use the municipal stadium for the corporate football team's home games. With the town council making an unnecessary fuss over the matter, the head discreetly reminded them that the local handball team was sponsored by the company. Needless to say, access to the facilities was granted.

Another example from our observational case studies involving reciprocity was demonstrated in a communist-dominated municipality. Late one afternoon, at about 5 p.m., the Communist mayor with whom relations were strained to say the least, telephoned the head of the business. He explained that he was in a fix since he had invited a number of guests from England (neo-Marxists according to the PDG), and the factory they had intended to visit, had gone on strike - so, finding a substitute factory was a matter of some urgency. The PDG gave his approval and the visit went off without a hitch. Later that year, the poor results of the company's divisions meant that 50 people had to be laid off, so the PDG contacted the mayor. He outlined the situation and explained that the last thing they needed was a stirring up of public disapproval. The mayor "qui avait la haute main sur la CGT" (who had control over the communist-based union, the CGT) reassured the PDG that he need not worry and stood true to his word.

At a national level, the same sort of preoccupations were evident on a larger scale. For instance, the national management of the same hypermarket which had negotiated access to the municipal stadium, were trying to persuade those concerned to reframe the legislation on pharmaceutical products - and lift the chemists' monopoly on their sale.
Another company, selling luncheon vouchers, was involved in lobbying the authorities for greater tax relief on their service where the profit margins were melting away. Of course, when secured, these concessions would benefit the entire 'industry', not just the company in question. But there was rather convenient division of labour since the company's main rival happened to be a co-operative. So, if a left wing government was in power, the head of the co-operative would "go and see his socialist friends" - if the right were in power, it was the turn of the company's PDG "d'aller au charbon" (to go to work). In the face of this "force majeure" the two competitors collaborated to achieve the best possible deal for the industry.

In a similar vein, the head of a leading pet food company was exerting pressure on the treasury minister to place their product in a lower VAT bracket*1, on the basis that pet food was a necessity not a luxury. Irrespective of the success of this request, the pleading was designed to raise parliamentary awareness of the company's performance and shatter the illusion that "c'est une activité facile qui rapporte gros" (it's an easy way of making money). The real aim was to legitimise their business so as to pre-empt "some half-wit parlementarian from demanding that we be included in the uppermost VAT bracket."

Another feature of French corporate management is the need to comply with certain duties, either by law or by custom. It may be worth highlighting a few of these which distinguish the French employer from his Anglo-Saxon counterparts at least in degree. The company head will generally attend the works' council meeting ("comité d'entreprise"). His presence will also be expected at internal ceremonies such as handing out of medals (which range from the basic "médaille du travail", through "meilleurs ouvriers de France", to the highly-prized "Légion d'honneur"*2). Other, internal appearances include best wishes for the New Year, and cocktails for special (and not-so-special) occasions such as departures. The PDG will also be...

*1 - France has three basic VAT rates (33%, 18% and 5%) together with a special category for cars (28%) so as to keep the French automobile manufacturers internationally competitive.  
*2 - Where the PDG is himself the recipient of the "Légion d'honneur" it may be pinned on him by the minister for industry. At Accor, those not privy to attend to the ceremony in person, were cordially invited to watch it live on closed-circuit tv.
called upon to attend a number of statutory assemblies with the unions or with employers' organisations. One gets the impression that the French chief has more official duties foisted upon him than his Anglo-Saxon counterparts - and what with "la réunionite" (meeting-itis) of which the French are so fond, the boss's day seems almost entirely preplanned.

Finally, in the list of distinguishing activities is one which is new to the French boss, namely the art of media communication. With the new public interest in business, bosses suddenly find themselves the subject of considerable media attention. They are increasingly accountable to the general public and their views are eagerly canvassed by reporters. This is proving just as time-consuming for small bosses with the regional press, as it is for large employers with their national counterparts - since the former, though less solicited, do not have a specialist in public relations at their disposal to take some of the burden off them.

The new leader must be "un homme de la communication" (a communicator) - and the bosses are aware of this new imperative since many are taking courses on how to present themselves effectively on TV. One specialist consultant in this field, explained to the researcher that he had seen the number of heads seeking advice multiply ten-fold in the last decade. Indeed, his appraisal of the situation was endorsed by the fact that even large management consultancies (such as the CNOF) had been forced into providing media induction courses in order to satisfy demand and to maintain their blanket coverage of available management development courses. Of course, it may be held that this media exposure is not strikingly different from what goes on in the UK, but this facet of the boss's work should be seen in the French context where it is, on the whole, novel.

Photofit picture

Finally, the ranks of the "patronat" also bear a number of outward similarities. An annual check-up by l'Expansion of big business in France ("La galerie de portraits des grands patrons") is particularly revealing in this respect. Of the 100 bosses surveyed:

- 50 are grande école graduates - including 6 'énarques' and 29 'polytechniciens'.
- Only 15 have not undergone higher education, and of those only two (each with their own business) admit to being 'autodidactes'.

- In terms of age, 14% are in the 40-50 age group; 38% are between 50-60; and a surprising 32% are in the 60-70 bracket - the remainder are divided almost equally between over 70s and under-40s.

- Not a single woman appears in the sample population, "l'univers de la grande industrie" (the realms of big business).

Several conclusions can be drawn from these findings. Firstly, French bosses are highly qualified in international terms - and those who were not privy to higher education prefer to keep quiet about it. Little pride is derived from having succeeded against the odds or being a 'self-made man' - presumably because those who were bereft of qualifications had other resources to fall back on such as heritage. Secondly, as a group they are relatively elderly, certainly in comparison to the workforce they lead. This is a finding corroborated by Maurice (1986; 274) who points to a number of empirical studies which have shown that French company presidents are older, on average, than their German counterparts. Finally, they appear hostile (whether consciously or not) to the infiltration of women in their ranks. The fact that big business is an exclusively male domain is worth investigating in more detail.

Women bosses

The French business world and its uppermost stratum in particular, remains to a large extent, a male bastion. This is partly the result of the overt chauvinism of the grandes écoles which supply industry with its business élite. The foremost school, l'Ecole Polytechnique, did not open its doors to women until as late as 1972. What is more, the annual intake of women at l'ENA rarely exceeds 15% whilst at Polytechnique the 'barrier' is around 10% - this, in spite of the fact that the percentages of women candidates are approximately double those figures. The heads of the schools are baffled, but the indications are that the entrance exam somehow militates against female success - thus denying women access to these seed beds of top managerial talent.

Women are perhaps discouraged in first place because the top "grandes écoles" are founded on 'virile' values - decisiveness, networks,
hierarchies, comradery and dominance. There is little place for "feminine" qualities like nurturing, accessibility, intuition or openness. The curriculum too, bears the stereotypical masculine hallmark of logic, mathematics and Cartesianism. Boltanski explains:

"Les valeurs viriles inculquées dans les grandes écoles conduisant traditionnellement à des positions d'autorité dans l'industrie, comme l'Ecole des Arts et Métiers ou l'Ecole Centrale, sont fortement exaltées et recherchées." (1982; 325)

(Qualities of leadership and other manly virtues inculcated by schools such as the Ecole des arts et métiers and Ecole centrale, whose graduates have traditionally assumed positions of authority in industry, are highly praised and exalted).

The traditional hostility towards 'soft' values is also linked with France's attachment to classical management - after all, it is in classical management that our association between man and management is rooted. Was it not Henri Fayol who helped designate management 'a man's job' by equating it with rational and deductive aptitudes such as organising, commanding and controlling? But even before Fayol imposed his 'macho' view of management, top management in France was dominated by engineering graduates - something which is still true today.

The combined legacies of engineering and classical management have done little to facilitate female access to top management. In fact, the few women who did manage to infiltrate this preserve seem exceptionally gifted: women like Yvette Chassagne, who graduated from l'ENA and was the first woman to be appointed in a succession of prestigious civil service posts and recently retired as the head of l'Union des assurances de Paris; entrepreneurs such as Annette Roux, the PDG of Bénéteau pleasure crafts (and the only woman on the CNPF's executive council); or, Francine Gomez, who inherited and worked wonders with Waterman pens. Cynics maintain that the regular appearances of these women in the management press is an attempt to allay fears of underrepresentation. They are sometimes referred to as "femmes alibis" (token women).

It may be that French women have been socialised into adopting a more passive role than their cohorts in other countries. No doubt the bourgeois values (based on aristocratic aspirations) which are blamed for influencing
French businessmen have also marked their wives and daughters. The idea of the wife having to work was considered to reflect badly on the ability of the provider to fulfill his role. And the daughter was seen not in terms of a potential inheritor of the family business, but as bait to attract a "competent" son-in-law. Alternatively, Francine Gomez (the PDG of Waterman pens) suggests a more endemic explanation for French women's attitude to power:

"Les hommes ont un désir de puissance que n'ont pas les femmes, c'est physiologique." (Harris; 39).

(Men have a craving for power which women simply do not possess - it's physiological).

Optimists point to the belated emergence of an enterprise culture as a possible way round traditional barriers. Certainly, the starting up of small businesses by women has received a lot of publicity, notably in the women's magazines. And institutional backing was provided by the socialists in the form of a Ministry for women.

This, together with the new managerial emphasis on openness, accessibility and intuition may help to undermine the masculine stereotype of top management. To some extent, the traditional view of management as a logical, mechanistic process is being replaced by a more 'feminine' approach. The new manager is seen as "un animateur pas un gendarme" (a facilitator not a traffic cop); as someone who should be accessible and supportive not distant and directive. The foundations are perhaps being laid for more widespread female involvement. Certainly, courses in management studies are attracting more women - at least three of the well-rated ESCAE business schools (Le Havre-Caen, Pau and Toulouse) have equal percentages of male and female students (source: Annuaire national des ecoles de commerce; L'Etudiant). It can only be a matter of time before women start to filter through to top management.

In spite of these encouraging signs regarding wider female involvement in management, there is a nagging feeling that the very highest rung may continue to elude them - in much the same way as it continues to elude the under-forties. This is tied to the concept of corporate leadership in France which seems to demand more than mere management ability.
The role of the patron

The way the French view their national leaders may give an indication of what they expect of their corporate leaders.

The centralization of authority in the hands of an individual is a long-standing and popular trait in France. The authoritarian centralisers in the nation's history are all glorified and looked upon as heroes - stemming from monarchs like Philip the Fair at the start of the 14th Century, through Richelieu, Mazarin, Louis XIV, Colbert, Napoleon and most recently de Gaulle.

One could posit that the French reputation for individualism requires strong leadership to galvanise them into collective action - as de Gaulle did after World War II. The umbrella of his prestigious paternalism helped to provide a national focus in the period of turmoil and moral confusion after the Liberation. The French are prepared to entrust one man with absolute authority, provided he is remote and cannot act directly upon them. They have a taste for the personification of power and show deference towards it.

Today, General de Gaulle's absolutism is in many ways replicated by Francois Mitterrand's style of government. In fact, the history of the 5th republic (1958-) is replete with 'monarchic' leaders who apparently adhere to the philosophy 'L'état c'est moi'.

For instance, before reaching office François Mitterrand, pronounced the following indictment of Giscard d'Estaing:

"Déjà pourvu des grands pouvoirs que lui confère la Constitution de la Ve République et héritier d'usages et d'abus qui en ont élargi le champ, il s'est emparé de ceux qui lui manquaient...L'exécutif, c'est lui..., le législatif, c'est lui..., le judiciaire c'est lui." (Le Monde; 11/02/81)

(As if the tremendous powers invested in him by the constitution and amplified by custom and malpractice were not enough, he has seized those which he lacked...he is the executive..., the legislative..., the judiciary).
This from the president dubbed "Un roi socialiste" (a socialist monarch) by Konrad Müller (1983), his own biographer.

Another, manifestation of the elevation of selected individuals can be seen in the way that former political leaders tend to embody political philosophies. Sympathisers are referred to as "gaulliste", "pompidolien", "giscardien", "chiraquien", "barriste" (in the way reserved in Britain for monarchs or longstanding leaders: Victorian, Thatcherite, Churchillian).

The tradition of omnipotent political leaders is echoed in corporate circles. And company law replicates the French constitution by conferring absolute power upon a single person.

France has a singularity in terms of company law: the Président Directeur Général (PDG). Based on the "Führerprinzip" model imposed by the Vichy régime in 1940, French corporate management has the peculiarity of placing in the hands of an individual what, in most countries, is shared out: deciding on, executing and controlling a policy. The PDG is what Britains would regard as 'Chairman of the Board' and 'Managing Director' rolled into one. His role is in even sharper contrast to that of the primus-inter-pares German Vorstandsvorsitzender (a chairman of the executive committee). This point was brought home by the PDG (CEO) of a small firm visited, who claimed:

"Je peux tout faire sauf vendre la société".

(I can do what I please with the exception of selling off the company).

This concurs with Horovitz' view of French businesses as 'one-man shows' (1980; 64) which is nicely captured by Sempé's illustration (see Exhibit 10), and is further reinforced by an article in l'Express, stating:

"Le patron règne en maître absolu, quitte à être blackboulé sans préavis par le conseil d'administration qui le désigne".

(L'Express; 1/3/85; 33)

(The boss rules like a feudal overlord, unless there is a spontaneous vote of no confidence from the administrative council which elected him).
Tenure appears almost completely assured (barring political interference) irrespective of age, longevity and even to some extent performance. The status of the PDG is sharply differentiated from that of the rest of top management, which helps to explain why bosses are so revered in France.

"Il faut voir, en particulier dans les grosses entreprises nationales, l'apparat et le phénomène de cour qui entourent les précieux PDG, avec huissier personnel, ascenseur privé et collaborateurs directs qui servent du 'Monsieur le Président' gros comme le bras à celui que des Américains appellerait tout simplement 'Bob' ou 'Bill'" (L'Express; 1/3/85, 33).

(It is difficult to imagine the pomp and circumstance which surrounds the CEO, particularly in large national companies. What with his own 'orderly', private lift and a cortège of immediate subordinates who earnestly address him as "Sir" when Americans would simply call him 'Bob' or 'Bill').

These are clear manifestations of the difference between PDG and those around him - rather like a yucca tree, which grows strong while killing off everything around it. Other signs of the demarcation between the PDG and his staff, can be seen in the apparels of power. By Roger Alexandre's reckoning, a chief is identifiable "à l'épaisseur de la moquette, à la cylindrée de la voiture, au nombre de plantes vertes..." (by the depth of the carpet pile, by the horse power of the car, by the number of potted plants...). What is more the PDG's intellectual aloofness is reflected in his physical remoteness. France does not favour a 'hands on' approach to management and the PDG is invariably out of harm's way:

"Où met-on le chef, où situe-t-on le pouvoir? Au sommet, naturellement. Au plus haut, au presque inaccessible, là où l'humanité a toujours placé les dieux, les héros et les confitures." (L'Expansion; 19/05/85; 72)

(Where should we place the chief, where should we locate the power? Why at the top, of course. At the very highest, least accessible point, that spot which men have always reserved for gods, heroes and jams).
The coalescence between God and the boss is actually formalised in a number of set expressions, "plus on est prés du bon Dieu, mieux on se porte" (the closer you are to God, the better off you are). Similarly, "le patron de droit divin" (divine right boss) is a phrase which is in popular usage to describe those who accede to power by birth. On another occasion in our observational study, a perplexed cadre emerged from the boss's office muttering, "les voies du Seigneur sont impénétrables" (the Lord works in mysterious ways) - which again denotes the PDG's supremacy.

Since one individual is endowed with so much power, the status of PDG has tended to inflate proportionately. As Dyas and Thanheiser put it:

"Etre PDG" (to be a president) is referred to as belonging to a caste apart, regardless of the size of the operation being run. The respect is given almost more to the ability of a president to exercise absolute authority than to the actual power to influence. And "de PDG" (as in "voiture de PDG") has become an adjectival phrase to describe a high status item somewhat as the word 'executive' is used in the US." (1976; 246)

There is also a measure of self-fulfilling prophesy in this 'one-man show' image. The perceived status and authority associated with the title of PDG affect the behaviour of both title holder and those around him. Dyas and Thanheiser (1976; 246) quote a French cadre who speculates that simply being named PDG has an impact on behaviour, bringing out the autocratic tendencies - the sort of outlook typified by l'Expansion's "ten toughest bosses" (19/09/85). In its bid to identify the nation's top despots, l'Expansion took statements from those who worked alongside them. This is a typical selection:

- "L'autorité est du style quasi militaire. Quand il convoque, c'est pour dans deux minutes" (It's not unlike a military regime. When he calls you in to see him, you don't play hard to get).

- "Il est au courant de tout, y compris des problèmes personnels, il a des sous-marins partout" (He permanently knows what's going on, including personal problems - he has spies everywhere).
- "Ultracentralisateur. Les meilleurs cadres deviennent des exécutants. Il signe tous les chèques à la main." (The ultimate centraliser. The very best managers are reduced to puppets. He signs every cheque by hand).

- "Quand il s'est fait son opinion personnelle, il ne sait plus écouter" (Once he's made his mind up, you might as well talk to a post).

- "Il faut être disponible à tout moment. Les coups de téléphone à des heures impossibles, ça pleut" (You must be available at all times. Telephone calls come raining in at all hours).

The notion of the all-seeing, all-knowing boss is fairly widespread in France. This makes it difficult for the bosses themselves to ask the advice of their subordinates since, as one cadre explained, the "patron" is supposed to have a monopoly on ideas and solutions:

"Il est parfois mal vu pour un PDG de consulter ses collaborateurs au sujet d'un problème dont il est censé, par sa position, connaître la solution."

(It is generally bad show for a PDG to consult his staff about a problem to which, by his position, he should know the answer).

Nor are subordinates encouraged to offer up alternative solutions on matters where "le président considère détenir la vérité" (l'Expansion; 19/09/85; 92 - where the CEO's word is gospel). As one of Francis Bouygues' staff put it:

"Chacun avait le droit de prendre la parole, mais peu de téméraires oçaient le contredire."

(Everyone was free to express themselves, but few were reckless enough to disagree with him).

Bosses are perhaps encouraged in their despotism by the very fact that they have been traditionally disliked by the French public, which leads them to take a 'devil-may-care' attitude to the popularity of their management style. It may be that their authoritarianism stems from the fact that they are disliked (and consequently do not care) rather than vice versa. This
view was suggested by a number of comments:

"Je ne veux pas qu'on m'aime, je veux qu'on m'obéisse" (Harris; 84)

(I want people to obey me, not like me).

"De toute façon, il est détesté, le patron. Le problème n'est pas d'être aimé, mais d'être respecté et suivi." (Harris; 94)

(Anyhow bosses are hated. The aim is not to be liked, but to lead and to be respected).

But the signs are that this approach suits the French - that they actually admire them. Why else glorify them by searching for the nation's toughest boss?

The PDG is effectively at liberty to do as he pleases - something which manifested itself in the way that bosses behaved towards their subordinates. The conduct of one particular boss from the sample is worth highlighting since by Anglo-Saxon standards it would appear rather unusual.

The boss in question had an obsession with picking people up on minor faults - correcting their French on a number of occasions: not "prendre la porte" but "passer par la porte"; not "aller au coiffeur" but "allez chez le coiffeur" (rather like correcting someone on "different to" or "equally as" in English). He also castigated a woman for chewing gum and a cadre for talking with a cigarette in his mouth. He was no doubt caricatural in the extremity of his behaviour, but the trait was visible among other bosses in the sample. Another boss, insisted on correcting a cadre who used "ennuyant" rather than "ennuyeux", and invariably drew attention to missed subjunctives. These are not, in fact, signs of disrespect for the personnel since the same boss who was such a stickler for savoir faire claims he would never take the liberty of sitting at a subordinate's desk - he refuses to exploit his authority.

Perhaps the motive behind correcting subordinates is that the patron sees himself as responsible for the education (au sens large) of his workforce. On the upside for instance, the pedantic boss described above, made a point of complementing one cadre - after checking in the dictionary - for
employing an adjective never before heard by the boss. He congratulated another cadre "pour une lettre bien tournée" (for a stylishly written letter). Perhaps such behaviour is to be expected since it is conventionally the boss's education which sets him apart from his subordinates (see chapter on "the making of French managers"). Therefore to correct a grammatical mistake is a means of reaffirming one's intellectual superiority and, by the same token, one's right to lead.

Explanation?

The desire to entrust one person with absolute power is a trait identified by Crozier in his classic analysis, "Le phénomène bureaucratique". He starts with the basic premise that the French are individualistic. Consequently, they will not tolerate dependence relationships which impinge upon their freedom of action. Yet, the collective action requires some form of leadership. So, an omnipotent conception of authority has emerged whereby the locus of the power is sufficiently remote to preserve the independence of the individual. Crozier characterises the French model as:

"preferring to submit to impersonal rules and to appeal to a superior authority than to fight and compromise in its own right."

(1964; 251)

Individuals are quite prepared to accept the arbitrary decision of a distant leader since it provides direction but guarantees independence. Such a perception of decision-making might seem alien to the Anglo-Saxon mind which believes that decisions should be taken at the point of action. But the French approach compensates for loss of detail with enhanced objectivity.

On a national scale, this willingness to bow down to a greater design can be seen in the French system of "planification indicative" (five year plan) which was successful for several decades while long range planning was a meaningful exercise. The French approach is perhaps epitomised by the senior civil servant who explained:

"In the final analysis, the best decisions are the ones that are made when one is able to be at some distance from reality"

(Crozier; 1982; 222).
Restatement

The present chapter has attempted to hone in on the French corporate leaders in terms of how they reach the top, how they are perceived, how they perceive themselves and what is expected of them. Particular attention has been given to their changing image which coincided with the arrival of the socialists to power and the cult of managerialism imported from the US.

We noted that the PDG enjoys comparatively higher status than his Anglo-Saxon counterparts, the CEO or MD – that he was, in fact, more of a MD-cum-chairman of the board. Partly, this is a product of the legislation, but it is also a cultural and sociological preference. French preference for Napoleonic leaders appears to permeate all walks of life. There seems to be a need for a father figure to channel French individualism into collective action.

Because of this common role, it is possible to talk of French bosses as constituting an identifiable "milieu" which holds certain shared beliefs, in a way not found in Anglo-Saxon countries.
Selected bibliography:


*The Economist*, "How companies choose their bosses", 5/03/88, pp. 69-70.


Financial Times, "Europe warms to business punditry", Christopher Lorenz, 2/07/86, p.18.


Fortune, "Business dynasties face the raiders", 17/03/86, pp. 20-29.


*L'Usine Nouvelle*, "Ingénieurs: la nouvelle vague", 19/03/87, pp.56-70.


The perceived role of the patron.

Extract from Sempé's album "Vaguement compétitif" (Denoel, 1985).
"It's very difficult for me to explain what is distinctive about the company - the singularities are a part of my mental furniture." Conversation with M. Lafforgue, Directeur Général Technique, l'Oréal - 8/04/87.

Corporate culture is a difficult thing to grasp. Yet, it is an aspect of organisational life which an outsider is perhaps better placed to appraise than insiders, who grow oblivious to corporate idiosyncracies.

In this section, four companies have been picked out for closer scrutiny. The selection is based on spontaneously cited examples of what are considered typical French companies. Although each of the four companies is unique, it is hoped that a number of common threads may emerge - and that these elements may provide some clues as to the national identity of French companies.

Michelin

A recent book parodying the careerist tactics which offer the best chances of success in particular French firms included a fairly comprehensive selection of the top French firms (including two of the companies cited later). But, by the book authors' own admission, one conspicuous absentee was Michelin - the reason being:

"...que l'organisation cultive avec une redoutable efficacité le goût du secret." (Wickham; 1983; 206)

(...that the company has an extraordinary capacity for the art of secrecy).

This research has also been affected by the company's renowned secrecy. Affirmations about the firm are derived from interviews with high ranking personnel but have not been confirmed by informal contact with junior personnel or by periods of direct observation. Even with this limitation the standing of Michelin certainly justifies a discussion of its culture.
It is generally agreed that secrecy is a definite feature of this company. Outsiders are immediately confronted with it since interviews are conducted in a meeting room which acts as a no man's land between the company and the outside world. But this is no reflection on the status of the visitor since even de Gaulle was forced to leave his presedential cortège at the entrance when he came to visit the company in 1959.

It is a company which makes appearances in the specialist or trade press but is rarely sighted in the management press. The role of the journalist is seen as being fundamentally opposed to the interests of the company:

"Votre métier est de percer les secrets. Le nôtre est d'assurer l'avenir de la Maison."

(Your job is to penetrate secrets. Ours is to safeguard the future of the Company).

Anonymity has become a way of life, and the tone is firmly set by the discretion of François Michelin, the grandson of the founder. So contagious is the desire to avoid "le vedettariat" (stardom) that even the person in charge of public relations prides himself on only having been quoted on two occasions, and that was by mistake. Still more surprising, there was talk of the same head of public relations naming a porte parole of his own - but the idea was finally turned down on the grounds that it would degenerate into a sort of cascade effect.

Of course, efforts to stay out of the limelight tend to fuel speculation. And exaggerated rumours persist simply because the company refuses to be drawn into public denial. One example is the lingering myth that presence at mass was compulsory for the personnel. Whilst it is true that François Michelin is a devout Catholic, the rumour itself is totally unfounded. In a way the company is a victim of its own secrecy - and its head, François Michelin, all the more enigmatic for keeping a low profile. He is a man of few words, who holds by the Chinese proverb, "Tu es prisonnier de la parole que tu vas lâcher" (you are a prisoner of your next word).

He claims that his behaviour is the result of corporate socialisation: "Ce que je suis c'est la Maison qui l'a fait" (Michelin made me). François Michelin sees himself as no more than an inheritor of the tradition
The founder's influence is undeniable, but the present head does not do himself justice. By shunning publicity when others are clamouring for it, Francois Michelin has done far more than simply perpetuate a legacy. Media interest in business has reached such a pitch in the 80s, that staying out of the limelight has to be a conscious decision. The company regularly has to turn down offers of free publicity, including one from the American Institute of Management which sought to present the company in a book on management success stories.

François Michelin's attention is turned inwards rather than outwards. He sees his responsibility as being to ensure that people fulfill themselves: "Que chacun devienne ce qu'il est". He uses simple imagery to get this message across:

"Imaginez que vous ayez trois verres sur cette table. Un grand, un moyen, un petit. Le rôle d'un patron, c'est toujours de faire en sorte que chacun des verres puisse se remplir d'eau au point de déborder." (Freydet; 203).

(Imagine three glasses on a table - one small, one medium, large. The boss' role is to see to it that they are permanently topped up).

**Oriental affinities**

The simplicity of his language is just one aspect of a corporate culture which has oriental overtones and which has prompted the description, "la plus japonaise des entreprises françaises" (the most Japanese French company). It is worth exploring this comparison since the company exhibits several traits traditionally associated with Japanese companies.
Many of François Michelin's speeches include messages which would be considered trite or hollow in other companies, or from other heads but are not in his case. Take his conditions for success, expressed in the company's brochure:

"Au fond, ces conditions du progrès expriment l'essentiel: rester jeune et ouvert sur la réalité des hommes et des choses."

(Simply stated, progress is dependent upon our staying youthful and open to the reality of men and things).

Another example was François Michelin's speech when awarding the "médaille du travail" to a number of workers:

"Derrière le contrat qui vous lie à la Maison et qui lie la Maison à chacun de vous, il y a un contrat moral, un contrat de confiance qui nous lie les uns aux autres avec nos clients et qui est le vrai fondement de l'ouvrage." (L'Expansion; 1979; 104)

(Underpinning the contract which ties you to the company and which ties the company to every one of you, there is a moral contract which ties you to each other and to our customers. That is the real basis of our work).

Two further points emerge quite forcefully from the above speech: firstly, a concern for the customer and secondly a heavy dose of paternalism.

Whilst the company is not overly concerned with public opinion, it is clearly committed to its customers. As François Michelin himself explains: "La seule mission d'une entreprise, c'est de servir ses clients" (a company has only one mission - to satisfy its customers). Senior managers spoke convincingly about the fact that they were fundamentally answerable to the customers who are literally trusting them with their lives every time they purchased a Michelin tyre. What is more, it is the customer, not François Michelin who really pays their wages.

There is more than a hint of paternalism in the reference to a moral contract between the individual and the company in the short passage quoted from L'Expansion - an idea reinforced by the use of the noun "Maison" to
designate the company, which has the same overtones as House in English used in, for example, the fashion business or publishing. Another obvious manifestation is the workers' reference to "Monsieur François". This is typical of family concerns in which it has been necessary to distinguish between various members of the family.

Paternalism at Michelin has been a powerful and longlasting force. But it has still been steadily eroded as a result of state intervention. For instance, holiday camps, the Christmas tree, leisure spending have all been put in the hands of the Works' Committee. And control over corporate schools was relinquished to the state, albeit as late as 1967. This is regarded in Michelin as a "déresponsabilisation" of bosses who need no longer concern themselves with the welfare of the workforce. Nonetheless, at Clermont-Ferrand, (the heart of the company), there is still a Michelin hospital, a sports complex and a chain of stores which bear witness to the company's sense of pastoral responsibility.

Michelin also displays certain Japanese values in its personnel policies: recruitment, promotion, training and employment.

In terms of management recruitment, Michelin rarely seeks to fill a specific vacancy: "Nous cherchons des gens qui fassent carrière" (we are looking for people who want a life long career with us). A "Michelin Man" was described to me as, "self-motivated, self-respecting and self-sufficient". He should also be able to cope without an enveloping hierarchy or a "titre ronflant" (pompous title). The consensus was that Michelin Men are made not born, but that there is certainly an element of predisposition. The recruitment policy is biased towards young entrants who, as the head of personnel put it, "bnt une formation mais pas de déformations" (who are qualified but not corrupted).

More recently, there have been a few problems with experienced "cadres" who have joined the company. Until the 1960s the company relied on home grown talent notably from the region of l'Auvergne which is a rather dour region in central France. But expansion and internationalisation provoked a call for new blood with broader experience. Inevitably, the steadfast values of the company have provoked occasional culture shocks among individuals who were not "type Maison" (company men).
Recruited usually at an early age, immersed in the corporate culture, there is a sort of clubbishness about the company. Managers will talk fondly about the career progress of people who were on the induction course at the same time as them. An essential part of the induction program is to learn humility (very Japanese) which can prove a hard pill to swallow for the more extravert who are quickly brought back down to earth. One divisional head was quite adamant that it was one of the rare companies where "on peut gagner en s'appuyant sur les faits" (you will win if your argument is founded); and where one would ultimately fail by trying to "vendre du vent" (pull the wool over people's eyes).

In terms of career development, the company seeks to fit the job to the person rather than vice versa. Individuals are given a free rein as well as the concomitant "droit à l'erreur" (right to foul up), to accumulate what responsibilities they feel capable of taking on. As one cadre quaintly put it, people are like the Michelin Man of the well-known advertisement - they are allowed to inflate their jobs to their natural limits. A job definition is determined by the particular aptitudes of its incumbent. This notion was epitomised by the experience of the head of Public Relations. He started off promisingly in the prestigious R & D section of the firm but it became clear that his personal skills would make an ideal Communications person out of him. He took on the post in a small way and turned it into a significant force in the company: "le poste a grossi avec lui" (the post grew with him). This is empire building with a difference - it is not a negative force. Horizons are not blocked and "aucune rente n'est acquise" (no position is for keeps).

The familiar race for inflated titles is minimised at Michelin since there are none. Managers will introduce themselves modestly as Mr. X, Michelin*. Officially, even François Michelin has no more of a title than anyone. He is modestly known as the "gérant" (manager) in the corporate vernacular. Even corporate heroes such as the inspired worker who invented radial tyres are not glorified in the company folklore. On the other hand, workers' suggestions are considered seriously and rewarded appropriately - the implication being that anyone may make a useful contribution but everyone

* - The absence of formal titles with the exception of financial director and plant manager can prove quite disconcerting for outsiders who like to be able to situate their opposite numbers - and some concession to titles has therefore been made in order to accommodate outsiders.
is on an equal footing. François Michelin rejects the spurious distinction which opposes "patron" and "salariés" and points instead to a common goal:

"Tous ceux qui travaillent chez Michelin ont un même dessein: fabriquer le meilleur produit possible pour le client." (Freydet; 206)

(All those who work for Michelin have a common goal: to make the best possible product for the customer).

This smacks of the advice given by Peters and Waterman in "In search of excellence" (1982). The authors singled out a number of successful companies whose priority was customer satisfaction through product quality.

Another feature reminiscent of Japanese business, is the commitment to lifelong employment. We have already seen how recruitment and promotion policies are geared towards lifelong careers through careful selection and acculturation of entrants. The same applies to the organisational structure which was put forward as being a web, as opposed to the more familiar rake or pyramid. It is claimed that the company lives without an organisational chart. In a way, the company has a biological aspect with each cell fulfilling its natural function. Of course, there are grey areas where responsibilities are not clear. But it is this natural slack which helps to preserve lifelong employment - thanks to what the French call "voies de garage" (sidings for burnt out managers) or on a grander scale "fonctions de délèstage" (functions or departments which have been put out to grass).

Finally, in terms of Japanese similarities, the company exhibits caution, patience and meticulous planning in its approach to exporting and production abroad. They are willing to export for decades before committing themselves to manufacturing on the spot. Nor does the company suffer from the traditional French weakness of impatience when results are not forthcoming. Instead it shows a willingness to devote time and money to establishing links, preparing the ground and sealing a contract.

Other traits

The company philosophy is based on a certain pragmaticism which manifests itself in "le culte des faits" (quest for proof, or as Harold Geneen of ITT called it, the search for unshakeable facts!). There were several references
to the importance of truth and the need to support one's case with hard facts. One cadre explained that the company gives a priority to facts rather than financial, political or "custom and practice" considerations. The implication is that the truth will out.

What holds true at interpersonal, interdepartmental level, is equally true at corporate level. The company is not given to "discours intoxicants" (inflated opinions) or predictions about new products, profits or likely performance. Information is not released unless the company is capable of backing it up. Indeed they prefer to underestimate targets in order to avoid unnecessary speculation. François Michelin's language is devoid of the hyperbole normally associated with corporate figureheads. On the contrary, his is "un langage d'une banalité stupéfiante" (a language devoid of pretention). Yet, it is meaningful to those imbued by the Michelin spirit. Further proof of corporate integrity can be seen in the decision by the Algerian government not to nationalise the company. Michelin justifiably derives much pride from the fact that it was the only foreign multinational spared that fate - a real tribute to its moral rectitude.

This no-nonsense approach is perhaps a manifestation of the company's provincial roots, and more specifically its origins in Auvergne. It is one of the few companies which persistently shuns the bright lights of Paris. While the likes of Peugeot claim to retain their provincial identity with a nominal presence in Sochaux, Michelin's bosses are actually based in unglamourous Clermont-Ferrand. They have not renounced its provincial origins.

The region of Auvergne is believed to exercise a profound influence on corporate values. Certainly, the company mirrors the cautious, thrifty, sober and conservative attitudes which characterise that region. What is more, the French provincial disdain of Paris as depraved and superficial is reflected in the company's refusal to succumb to the lure of Paris. So in spite of the company's global expansion it remains staunchly based in Clermont and its officials still eschew the salons of Paris. As one cadre put it to me, "When they tell you it's raining in France, they mean it's raining in Paris." Perhaps it is thanks to the fact that it remains little known to the authorities that it escaped the nationalisations which befell half a dozen big industrial firms (including Elf-Aquitaine, Saint Gobain and Thomson) under the Socialist (Mitterrand) regime in February 1982.
obvious to accusations of parochialism, François Michelin steers well clear of the crowd of civil servants, bankers and industrialists who consort to run France. A divisional head explained how François Michelin shuns the fallacious trappings of power. He illustrated the point by saying that François Michelin would not have to ring twice to have an audience with a Minister. Yet he refuses to indulge in that sort of egotistical power mongering. So, while Michelin might resemble Dassault, the aeronautic pioneer, in many respects, he is totally different when it comes to relations with the state.

The company has a very strong production orientation. For instance, the Factory is designated with a capital letter like "la Maison, le Patron ou le Client". In fact, the Factory is used as the generic term which implies the company as a whole rather than the place of work.

Technically speaking, Michelin has no reason to hide its light under a bushel. It is one of the few companies in the world which has single-handedly transformed an industry by a revolutionary invention, namely the radial tyre (1946). Its reputation for innovation and quality products is second to none, as reported in a recent survey in l'Expansion (3/12/87).

There is no skimping on research. The company reputedly devotes 5% of its turnover to R & D. By doing this irrespective of financial wellbeing, it has managed to retain its technical advantage over competitors. Indeed, part of the reason for the recent opening out of Michelin was to let the public know that poor performance would not impinge on research programmes. The development of the public relations department was a 'proactive' move designed to attenuate possible fears that a downturn in performance would lead to R & D cut-backs.

Michelin frequently develops products related to wheels and the vehicle suspension system, but it sells the technologies to others (again, "a la japonaise"), preferring to concentrate on tyres. The company sees no need to diversify, any further than the guide and maps. These were shrewd developments since they guarantee a permanent association between the company's name and the idea of travel for pleasure. The decision not to emulate Goodyear and Firestone in wider diversification (to cushion the volatile automobile market) is based on François Michelin's philosophy that diversification is not the company's problem but that of the shareholders. François Michelin displays a shrewd awareness of what the
company is selling - the fundamental need to travel. And he realises that to-date, there is nothing better than a tube of rubber envelopping a mass of air under pressure to get about on land. That is the raison d'être of Michelin.

There is a very real affinity with and respect for the raw material. Rubber is venerated as an quasi mystical substance and one which lends itself to corporate analogies. François Michelin himself claims the company is like a tyre ("Nous sommes pneumatiques") - supple and resilient. The company is also compared to its emblem (the Michelin Man) in its resolute determination to swallow all obstacles placed in its path.

This association between company and emblem was carried to its logical conclusion in London's Fulham Road where Michelin House was built in 1911. The tyre showroom broke new architectural ground by using the facade to advertise the product. The Michelin building embodies the bravura and ebullience of Mr. Bibendum (the Michelin Man) himself. To employ the company engineer Mr François Espinasse, who may or may not have been an architect, to design the building was a brave stroke. The result was a building which was not only functional but also incorporated the selling of tyres and the promotion of an image.

Another Michelin trait is the importance of freedom. First and foremost, this means independence from state interference. But secondly, it means steering clear of "the Parisian virus" which, according to François Michelin, merely cuts people off from reality. And finally, for the head himself, it means voluntary exclusion from the French employers' organisation*.

The company values its independence, not to say isolation. Michelin's is a closed world whose workings are difficult to grasp. Indeed the more one delves into it the more one wonders how it works. And yet...Michelin is a testimony to the fact that a different management philosophy from the traditional US blueprint can work - not only in France but also in the US, where Michelin has five production plants as well as research and testing centres.

* - Feeling let down by the alleged irresponsibility of the Confédération Nationale du Patronat Français (the French Employers' Organisation) in 1968, François Michelin decided to opt out of the organisation.
Strangely enough the avant-garde technology goes hand in hand with practices that some might describe as archaic. The company was characterised by a senior manager as having one foot in the 19th century and one in the 21st century. This manager intimated that they were trying to eradicate the 19th century side, yet without it, the company would not be Michelin.

The company is run in a dedicated, unpretentious way which is deeply rooted in its provincial origins. There is a strong sense of what the company values - modesty, a respect for facts, personnel and customers. Clear ideas and consistent language, "Langage simple, idées fortes". Its members speak intelligently and convincingly about what makes this organisational anachronism tick.

Michelin is perhaps the ideal representative of French corporate culture - or at least it would be if it were not so exceptional. It embodies both extremes of what typifies French companies.

L'Air Liquide

L'Air Liquide is a family firm producing industrial gases. It is the world leader in its field and boasts large market shares in Europe, North America and Japan.

In its own way, L'Air Liquide is even more self-effacing than that paragon of discretion, Michelin. Of course, it has the advantage of manufacturing an industrial rather than a consumer product. But in addition to this, it does not shun publicity in quite the same obsessive way that Michelin does, and therefore avoids undue attention.

In its long history the company has always done its best to stay out of the limelight - to steer clear of litigation with either customers or personnel. As a matter of policy the company refuses to lay people off for economic reasons - the only proviso being that individuals accept transfers. Anyhow, in view of its impressive profit record, the company would probably be prevented from making anyone redundant by the "Inspection du travail" (equivalent of the Department of Employment in UK). So, although L'Air Liquide bears the battle scars of lost markets, failed initiatives and missed opportunities, it gives an impression of immunity from injury. The company has earned an unparalleled reputation for stability.
This has made the company a firm favourite with investors. Its shares are highly respected in the investment fraternity who look upon them as "une valeur de fond de portefeuille" or "une valeur de père de famille" (blue chip investments). These are the corporate equivalent of granny bonds - they will provide shareholders with a steady income year in year out.

Primarily for this reason, the company boasted by far the largest private share ownership until the recent spate of privatisations. It has over 300,000 faithful shareholders. Their influence has a considerable impact on the company's actions and in many respects determines the corporate culture.

The atomisation of the company's capital means that the group is theoretically vulnerable to the sanction of the market. The shareholders can decide to vote with their feet if they are not happy with the management. So the company is particularly attentive to its shareholders. This is rather unusual for French companies, which are generally unsympathetic to gains not earned through effort. But the PDG, Edouard de Royère, is quite adamant that the shareholder takes priority:

"Chez nous, les actionnaires passent avant le banquier. S'il y a une bonne affaire à réaliser, c'est l'actionnaire qui doit en profiter." (L'Expansion; 16/04/87; p.64)

(Here the banker takes second place to the shareholder. If there's a good deal in prospect, the shareholder must be the first to benefit).

On the other hand, provided the company retains the goodwill of its shareholders, it is in a stronger position than companies with a more concentrated ownership. Some consider that the company can partly thank its shareholders for avoiding nationalisation in 1982. Had it not looked after its small shareholders properly, l'Air Liquide might have suffered the same fate as the nationalised companies whose disillusioned small shareholders offered little resistance - succumbing easily to the state pay-off instead of putting up any resistance. Another feature of the share ownership which promotes solidarity is the absence of differentiation. The company has avoided several categories of share, which might prove divisive and frustrating. It has opted instead for a system which entitles shareholders to financial benefits but limits their decision-making participation.
**Stability incarnate**

Many of the corporate characteristics emanate directly (perhaps subconsciously) from the image of stability which the company seeks to project.

Visually speaking, this stability is apparent in the sartorial temperance at Head Office. The aim is not to stand out (contrast with l'Oréal), but to maintain a low profile. The same reasoning lay behind the company's recent decision to sell the company jet which gave an unnecessarily flashy impression to customers and personnel alike. The trappings of corporate success must be toned down in an era where money is one of the few remaining taboos. Again this shows considerable sensitivity to the image projected and is somehow reminiscent of the frayed curtains, threadbare carpets and ink stained desks in the solicitors' office - comforting signs which give the impression of low fees and inspire the confidence of their thrifty clientele.

The company does not value the showy approach of some of its counterparts: for instance, the head of Saint-Gobain (Polytechnique graduate but modest origins) was regarded by one senior cadre as excitable and lacking in 'savoir faire' in comparison to the sober Édouard de Royère (PDG of l'Air Liquide and a member of the French provincial aristocracy). The austerity is also visible in the attitude of the PDG who, according to one senior manager, is barely happier when the shares go up unexpectedly than when they go down. What he wants to see is measured progress based on performance, not speculation - it is precisely to quell volatility that, according to one shareholder, "la société fait tout pour lisser ses résultats" (the company does everything to smooth out its results). It is this sort of attitude which prompted l'Expansion (16/04/87) to describe the company as having, "Un management aussi discret que peu remuant" (a management whose discretion is matched only by its aplomb).

For the same reason, political activism is not appreciated when it interferes with professional life. The upper echelons are particularly sensitive to the development of a "hiérarchie parallèle" which might undermine "hiérarchie naturelle". For this reason when informal discussion groups ("droit d'expression des salariés") were introduced by the
Socialists, the company took the precaution to impose the "chef hiérarchique" as session leader rather than run the risk of having a political activist elected as group leader (the theme is discussed in the chapter on labour relations).

The family nature of the business also contributes to the stability. With only three bosses in over eighty years, one could hardly hope for greater continuity. Of course, the massive reigns of Edouard de Royère's two predecessors (Paul Delorme 1902-45; and his son Jean Delorme 1945-85) have left their imprint on the firm. So in spite of his long apprenticeship as the firm's second in command, Edouard de Royère has had some difficulty stamping his own personality on the company.

He is also faced with the problem of modernising the image of the company, "de rompre un long silence" (to break a long silence) without shocking public opinion or his predecessor who has been given an honorary post as "Président du comité général consultatif". As the head of public relations told me:

"15 years ago, the company was like a black box - no-one knew what was going on inside. But now there is pride in the company's achievements."

This contrast in exposure was underlined by the fact that l'Air Liquide now subcontracts the measurement of column inches and tv seconds allotted to the company to determine the value in terms of publicity. The Head of Public Relations pointed out that, until recently, this would have been a useless exercise owing to the company's secrecy and the absence of media exposure.

Jean Delorme, the present PDG's father-in-law would not hear of being talked about in the press or being photographed (à la Michelin). But de Royère would like to dispel the company's rather staid and comfortable image "d'une grosse entreprise tranquille, sans relief et bien nourrie." (of a large company which is aloof, characterless and slightly overweight).

* - Thus bearing out the old French chestnut - "Once a president, always a president" (of some committee or other).
Curiously, for a company which is so familiar to investors, the company is remains little known to the general public. The decision to set up a public relations department was not really intended to remedy the fact—it was more for the benefit of the shareholders. In the light of media interest in corporate affairs, l'Air Liquide could not afford to stay hidden, since this might be interpreted as a sign of inadaptability. If the company showed inability to move with the times on the communications front, shareholders might equate this lag with inadaptability, backwardness or worse still, skeletons in the cupboard. And with the company so susceptible to rumours something had to be done.

So, like Michelin, l'Air Liquide's concession to expose itself was a proactive move primarily destined to allay shareholder fears. Still, the Head of Public Relations was not entirely convinced that the media revolution was anything more than a passing fad. These sentiments were echoed by Edouard de Royère himself, who showed scepticism about the current 'love affair' between companies and the media:

"Je ne crois pas qu'il suffise d'un coup de pub pour obtenir la confiance des actionnaires."

(It takes more than a bit of advertising to gain shareholder confidence).

And he adds that it has taken l'Air Liquide several decades to gain the trust of their shareholders.

The caution displayed by the company—in exposing itself and its profits, in avoiding negative publicity—is a deep-rooted trait which finds physical form in the head office. When it was built, in 1932, the building was designed to double up as a hotel should the existing business turn sour. This may have been a wise precaution on the part of the founder, but it has left a legacy of mazy corridors and isolated offices.

The physical geography of the building does not lend itself to easy communication—either spoken or physical. What is more, the sumptuous, marbled décor (reminiscent of a museum or ministerial office), seems to militate against any sort of informal contact—the only coffee point for
instance, is in the basement. Whilst this is an extreme example, it does highlight French attachment to classical management and the rejection of spontaneous exchanges, or what has been dubbed "management by walking around", as a legitimate means of communication. The French attitude to work is based on the ideal of intellectual effort.

The coldness of the architecture seems to have repercussions on the personnel. Wickham (1982; 324) refers to the company thus:

"L'Air Liquide n'est pas réputé pour la cordialité des relations que l'on entretient avec ses collègues."

(L'Air Liquide is not renowned for promoting friendly relations between colleagues).

The climate is certainly rather reserved when it comes to interpersonal relations. A fact corroborated by the generalised use of the "vous" form of address*1 which plays a protective role for those in authority. Whilst I was there, a secretary was at a loss to communicate the forename of one of her immediate superiors in order to book a flight. Similarly, considerable importance was attached to being on first name terms with the PDG. Only five or six people were privy to it, and it was deemed, "une marque d'estime extraordinaire" (real recognition)*2.

The company appears strong on vertical differentiation - quite literally, since the importance of managers at head office could be determined by their position along the plumb line linking earth to the sky. The PDG was at the summit and the typing pool in the basement - which gave new meaning to the careerist's quip "pour être plus près du Bon Dieu" (to be closer to God).

*1 - The "tu/vous" distinction and the preference for first names or surnames proved useful "litmus tests" when attempting to determine the nature of interpersonal relations.

*2 - One is reminded of Pierre Daninos (1960): "A ma connaissance, il y a quatre personnages qui ont droit aux fleurs 'comme le patron'." (To the best of my knowledge, there are four people who are entitled to have the same sort of flowers as the boss).
Having reached the desired 'altitude' (same floor as the PDG), thoughts turn towards geographical proximity. It was ironic that the Public Relations manager, whose role as company impresario brought him into constant contact with the boss, would never be given an adjoining office for fear of upsetting the numbers two and three. The PR manager described himself as an 'offshore' cadre (i.e. outside the direct hierarchy) and therefore an unsuitable candidate for such a choice spot. Instead he was on the same floor - but "côté cuisine" alongside the secretaries. Even if the regularity of contact logically warranted a closer office, the proposition was inconceivable from a prestige point of view. Protocol dictates that the general must be surrounded "par son état major" (by the top brass) - even if the radio operator is his most valuable ally.

Whist the preceding description tends to burlesque the situation, these are latent but very real concerns. For all their egalitarian claims, the French seem to cherish pecking orders and the perks that go with them. To indicate the meteoric rise of a mutual acquaintance, one plant manager explained to another, "il a un parking au siège" (he has a parking space at head office). There was also a hint that political games were being played at Head Office where one progressive young manager had suddenly become more cautious "il n'y pas longtemps il fonçait, jusqu'à ce qu'on a commencé à lui glisser des peaux de banane" (he used to rush headlong, until they started slipping him a few banana skins).

As regards careers, the favoured route to the top is allegedly research. This is perhaps understandable in view of the research orientation of the company. Research and the ability to find concrete commercial applications for new products are deemed the groups main assets. Though a promising young 'Centralien' who had started in research claimed that research was a dead end - adding "pour avancer dans cette boîte il faut se frotter au client" (to make headway in this company you have to move into the commercial side). It is noticeable, though not necessarily significant, that he referred to "boîte" (meaning firm) which is colder than the more homely "maison", employed by Michelin personnel.

Another promising route was said to be expatriation. It is understandable that mobility within the group is valued since the majority of the company's activities and personnel are abroad. What is more, the management of its international implantations is regarded as an essential apprenticeship for taking on the group's more prestigious French operations.
And mobility is seen as an important means of diffusing the corporate culture, "véritable ciment de l'ensemble" (a real corporate stiffening agent) promoting group coherence.

It also helps if one is a graduate of l'Ecole Centrale, though all three top engineering schools (Polytechnique, Mines and Centrale) are well represented; as well as the top business school, HEC. Edouard de Royère (Valeurs Actuelles; 21/07/86; p.32) explicitly denied the popular rumours that there are "mafias" within the company by stating that the upper echelons were not recruited as a result of their qualifications:

"Les membres de la direction générale ne sont pas recrutés en fonction de leur diplômes au sein de chapelles particulières."

(Those on the board of directors are not selected on the basis of qualifications obtained from particular establishments).

Clearly, there is some confusion about the best recipe for success at l'Air Liquide. But the fact that the PDG feels compelled to comment on them tends to suggest there may be an element of truth in the rumours. Still, it is a company which is committed to life-long employment (with a qualification of mobility) and which encourages "promotion interne".

Independence is another key word for the company. Like Michelin, l'Air Liquide is determined to stay clear of the state in spite of obvious attractions:

"Bien sur, nous pourrions être tentés de céder à telle ou telle pression des pouvoirs publics, par exemple en matière d'investissements."

(Of course we could be tempted to succumb to pressures from the state, for example where investments are concerned).

This independence is of course based upon a solid financial base, which allows the company to snub the state. It has enjoyed spectacular post war growth - without state assistance. According to their Head of Public Relations, the company's policy is to be "une bonne citoyenne" - to put new legislation into practice quickly, and never to ask for subsidies or "passe-droit" (favours). In exchange for steering clear of the state, the company
does not expect the state to interfere in its running. As with Michelin, this is believed to have contributed to their avoidance of Nationalisation in 1982 — since the company was an unknown quantity. Indeed one plant manager jokingly wondered how much the company had paid the Socialists to stay off the Nationalisation lists.

On the matter of the future the question was raised about prospective successors to Edouard de Royère, "Do his sons work here?", I ventured. "Not yet", let slip a senior manager. He added that the logical successor would have been Jean Delorme's own son (rather than his son-in-law) but in spite of his intelligence he was politically imprudent, had played his cards badly and now found himself permanently "à l'écart" (sidelined) - in a Singapore diving equipment subsidiary.

L'Oreal

Like Air Liquide in industrial gases, L'Oreal is the world leader in cosmetics. Like Air Liquide it has an enviable financial and export record. Like Air Liquide it has known only three heads since it started in 1907. Like Air Liquide its penultimate head has been forced into retirement having reached the statutory age limit but retains an honoury position as advisor.

But, whilst the two companies share similar track records, they are very different in character. For instance, Air Liquide's low key approach is in stark contrast with L'Oreal's polished image. For the last two years L'Oreal has been voted top in the corporate image stakes by the readers of Expansion (3/12/87). Company reputations were judged on six criteria — and L'Oreal won two individual categories (quality of management and capacity to innovate) as well as the overall title — ousting the illustrious IBM from that position in the process.

The company bears the hallmark of the product it sells — appearances matter. On a superficial level this can be seen in the sophisticated and artistic decor at head office and in the sartorial elegance of its personnel. Yet, the characteristic percolates much deeper than this — Wickham (1983), a cynical observer of French careerist manoeuvres, goes as far as to suggest that it colours managerial behaviour. At a number of levels substance plays second fiddle to style.
For example, the production plants out in the provinces - establishments conventionally associated with purely functional goals - pay real attention to 'window dressing'. The offices are pleasantly decorated, the plant manager smartly dressed, and the corridors carpeted. Even the production line was marked by "le souci de l'esthétique" (a concern for aesthetic values). Production managers would enthuse about the visual merits of glass protection over metallic protection on the machines: "Ça donne à la ligne une allure géniale" (it makes the production line look wonderful).

There was a concern for making the workplace more pleasant for the benefit of visitors and personnel alike. The customisation of machinery was encouraged and bright colours were used to liven up normally dull workshops. There was what one production manager termed, "un côté cinéma" (showy aspect) to all this, but there were also sound practical reasons. The judicious use of glass protections on the machinery meant that workers could see what was happening on the production line. The pleasing appearance of the workshop made workers more inclined to keep it clean and tidy.

However, the point about image consciousness was brought home most forcefully at a meeting attended on the external re-decoration of the factory. The meeting was a presentation of the various types of wall covering available for the facade. For nearly an hour the discussion revolved around the visual impact of the various coverings as typified by phrases like: "on pourra faire des trucs marrants" (we'll be able to do some fun things), "un brin de fantaisie" (a touch of inspiration), "rendre la façade vivante avec la lumière" (make the facade lively with light). One form of covering was even deemed "plus fin, plus noble" (more refined and noble) - not the sort "qu'on retrouve partout" (you see everywhere). Not until the very end of the hour long meeting were practical considerations like resilience or cost brought up - again the preoccupation was with appearance rather than function.

L'Oréal's culture has been heavily influenced by two men - the founder, Eugène Schueller and his successor and penultimate PDG, François Dalle. Between them they 'ruled' for nearly 80 years (and Dalle now heads the "Comité stratégique" regarded by some as a sort of golden cupboard, "un placard doré"). They incarnated the two driving forces of the company namely, research and marketing.
Research was the great strength of the founder Eugène Schueller who invented the first artificial hair colourings. This tradition has been reinforced by the appointment of the current PDG, Charles Zviak, whose entire career at l’Oréal has been in fundamental and applied research. He spells out this commitment in slightly melodramatic terms in the company brochure:

"Il était une fois une entreprise qui avait choisi la qualité et les moyens d’obtenir cette qualité: elle avait choisi la recherche."

(Once upon a time, there was a company which had chosen quality and the means of achieving that quality; it had chosen research).

"L’essentiel, c’est de chercher, toujours chercher. Les idées viennent quand on a la volonté acharnée de promouvoir l’entreprise à la pointe de la qualité, à la pointe de l’innovation."

(The main thing is to seek, ceaselessly. Ideas will come if the company is wholeheartedly devoted to staying at the sharp end of quality and innovation).

L’Oréal is continually innovating and coming up with new products. So research is critical to the company's success - but to capitalise on that research requires marketing dexterity. The man responsible for giving l’Oréal this appetite for marketing was François Dalle, a particularly fervent admirer of "le marketing à l'américaine". When he took over from Eugene Schueller in 1957, he introduced marketing techniques borrowed from the likes of Procter and Gamble - and these had a considerable impact on the unsophisticated French consumer.

For instance, when l’Oréal launched its now famous tetrahedral shampoo container ("shampooing-berlingot") it revolutionised French social habits. Novel packaging, clever promotion and low price, turned the product into an instant success. It also transformed the French into the world's most devoted hair washers - this in spite of their otherwise poor reputation (among developed countries) for personal hygiene.

It was Dalle who coined the phrase, "Saisir ce qui commence" as a corporate rallying call. This dictum reflects the company's obsession with being at the centre of things. The company's main concern is not to miss
opportunities. Missing the boat on the trend in 'natural' products was a particular disappointment - despite the fact that the company has now made up for lost time. This was a severe blow to the corporate ego which prides itself as being a trendsetter not a follower.

Before handing over the reigns to Charles Zviak in 1984, knowing that the latter was due to retire in 1988, François Dalle nominated a successor. His name is Lindsay Owen-Jones and his background, like François Dalle's, is in marketing. Many look upon the current PDG, Charles Zviak, as an interim PDG who is 'minding the store' until François Dalle's "fils spirituel", Lindsay Owen-Jones, comes of age. (Dalle himself was nominated by his predecessor, Eugène Schueller). Lindsay Owen-Jones, or O.J., as he is known, is 40 and a graduate of Oxford University. So the company looks set for another lengthy reign, as well as a slight shift back towards marketing.

When questioned about the strengths of l'Oreal, Lindsay Owen-Jones paid tribute to the company's commitment to research and marketing, but went on to underline the quality and motivation of l'Oreal's management - something he attributes to being picked early:

"Nous avons la chance, pour la très grande majorité d'entre nous, de faire notre vie à l'Oreal. J'y suis entré pratiquement, comme tous mes camarades, directement à la sortie de l'Université et, à 40 ans, j'ai presque 20 ans de l'Oreal derrière moi." (LSA; No. 1057; 15).

(The vast majority of us are fortunate enough to build our careers at l'Oreal. I entered the company, like all my colleagues, straight from University, and now aged 40, I have had nearly 20 years as a company man).

The same is true of Charles Zviak and his "état-major" (council), most of whom have been with the company all their working lives. The company clearly places a high premium on loyalty. This was obvious from the slightly derisory way a plant manager referred to his young second in command - with a tally of four companies to his name:

"C'est un carriériste. Il n'a pas de maison - comme un escargot"

(He is career-minded. He has no house (firm) - just like a snail).
This commitment to life-long employment has several repercussions—notably, on recruitment and promotion policies, management training and on the handling of 'burnt out' cadres.

Sources of recruitment

As one might expect of a company which places a premium on ideas and initiative, L'Oreal cannot afford to recruit from a single source. It must cast its net wide so as to avoid the problem of too many like-minded individuals stifling creativity. So, as one personnel manager put it, "par volonté de pluralisme", the company recruits indifferently from both tiers of higher education—universities and "grandes écoles" (see chapter on "Destiny" for clarification of the distinction).

This is rare for a large group, particularly a successful one which could recruit exclusively from the cream of the grandes écoles if it wished. L'Oreal sees itself as a sort of "equal opportunity employer" as far as university students are concerned. This fact was corroborated by the presence of university people in a number of key posts, not least Director of Management Development. However, the insistence with which the claim "nous n'avons pas peur des universitaires" (we're not scared of university people) was reiterated, tended to draw attention to their second class status in France—the point would not have to be made if there were parity between the two sides of higher education.

Lindsay Owen-Jones sees motivation, rather than qualification, as the main recruitment criterion:

"Il faut faire un choix entre ceux qui recherchent l'appartenance à l'Oreal parce qu'ils y voient une façon de s'exprimer dans une organisation déjà dynamique, et ceux qui cherchent avant tout une sécurité, qui ont envie d'être portés par la vague. Nous avons besoin de porteurs, et pas de gens à porter." (LSA; no 1057; p. 15).

(We must distinguish between those who see L'Oreal as a means of expressing themselves in an active company, and those who seek security first and foremost, and want to be carried by the wave. We need locomotives, not wagons).
L'Oréal appears less than sympathetic to the old school tie allegiances ("les mandarins") which often dominate French companies. Perhaps this reflects the university backgrounds of its leaders. The company has nothing against grandes écoles graduates, but it expects them to set aside their schooling when they join the company. As François Dalle put it:

"Nous souhaitons seulement qu'étant chez nous, ils gardent le moins possible l'esprit de l'école d'où ils viennent. Nous souhaitons qu'ils perdent cette forme d'orgueil que donnent les grandes écoles. Nous voulons des hommes disponibles, et non pas a priori supérieurs." (Priouret; 115)

(We simply hope that once admitted, they don't retain the spirit of the school to which they belonged. We hope they lose that sort of conceit typical of grandes écoles. We need people with adaptability, not a superiority complex).

Internal promotion

As with recruitment, individuals are judged on their merits and on their performance "on the job" rather than by their educational credentials—though François Dalle qualifies this, by saying:

"Sous cette réserve que nous attachons beaucoup d'importance à la culture et la formation que représente un diplôme." (Priouret; 111).

(Bearing in mind that we attach a great deal of importance to the culture and training which qualifications represent).

When a post comes up, there is always conscientious "tour de piste" (lap of the track) before the company looks outside for talent. They are proud of their internal promotion tradition. Even "autodidactes" have a chance of 'making it', provided they play their cards right. One cadre explained that you could make it through the tradesman's entrance ("la petite porte" as opposed to "la voie royale") but, you have to 'navigate'. This was meant both literally; that is, you have to be geographically mobile (such is the price for a paucity of qualifications); and metaphorically— in other words, you have to be politically adept and manoeuvre judiciously.
Whilst there were no clans based on educational allegiances, one cadre suggested that there were divisions by generations - "Il y a l'équipe de Dalle (60-65)", then a gap of twenty years to the 40-45 age range, and then a ten year gap including the 30-35 year olds.

Of course, internal promotion also necessitates some commitment to management training in order to prepare "cadres" for changes in responsibility. The company was instrumental in setting up a co-operative training establishment, the CEDEP (Centre européen d'éducation permanente), in 1971 on the INSEAD campus at Fontainebleau. This centre is staffed by INSEAD professors and provides the company's top and middle management personnel (along with cadres from a restricted number of companies) with high quality management development. The stated aim of this establishment was to provide member companies with a "critical mass" of managerial talent, speaking the same language and with the same objectives to enable the companies to act coherently and break through the "pesanteurs sociologiques" (all forms of sociological inertia).

Being sent to the CEDEP is invariably regarded as an important sign of career development - indeed it often confirms a forthcoming promotion. As a result, value it more for instrumental reasons (confirmation of prospects) than for its intrinsic worth (knowledge imparted). Those selected described it as:

"Un peu répétitif mais très valorisant" (a little repetitive but a great personal endorsement).

"C'est la super récompense" (it's the supreme reward).

"C'est un événement professionnel" (it's a professional watershed).

"Un sine qua non pour l'avancement" (a pre-requisite for promotion).

The course clearly acts as confirmation of the company's faith in a particular individual - it acts as implicit confirmation of one's career prospects. But because of the small quota allotted to each company in the association, the waiting list "de gens CEDEP-able" (of possible candidates)
is long. Strict rules govern eligibility and the appropriate mix of ages, functions and hierarchical levels allowed on to the prestigious course. There is a touch of hierarchical apartheid since learning is considered a potentially embarrassing situation - "on se dévoile" (you bare yourself) and seminars involve "relations intimitistes" (intimate relations). To mix levels would be to risk erecting psychological barriers to communication. L'Oréal is also careful not to award a diploma with the course - presumably to deter individuals from using it as a springboard to leave.

Burnt out cadres

A policy of life-long employment implies dealing with individuals whose relative contribution to the company is diminishing - what American managerial parlance has labelled the "Bobo" (burnt-out but operating) syndrome. The grounds for keeping on these individuals are often humanitarian: out of tolerance, respect or recognition for having helped the group through difficult times. Alternatively, more practical reasons may be invoked for their retention: to help nurture young talent, to preserve the collective memory of the company and pass on the corporate culture. Or as François Dalle put it:

"L'ancien peu rendre des services avec son expérience, dans un domaine différent de celui où il est resté jusque-là" (Priouret; 116)

(Senior managers can put their experience to use in an area which is new to them).

François Dalle goes on to explain why he considers the problem of dealing with ageing cadres as one of his foremost preoccupations:

"Je suis attaché à ceux qui ont fait leur vie dans l'entreprise, parce que cela correspond à mon tempérament. Il s'agit là d'une simple correction; on ne peut pas être ingrat avec ceux qui ont contribué à faire la maison. Mais être fidèle, c'est aussi notre intérêt; si l'on sacrifiait les anciens, les jeunes n'auraient pas confiance dans l'entreprise." (Priouret; 116)
(I am attached to those who have spent their working lives with the company, because I can identify with it. Being grateful to those who have helped build the company is simply a matter of fairness. But it is also in our interests to stand by them; if we sacrifice the older managers, the younger ones will have no faith in the company).

In other words, Dalle expresses the concern that if L'Oréal fails to "take care" of its ageing cadres, it risks deterring young cadres from even joining the company!

So the company is left with the problem of what, in practical terms, it should do with its loyal servants. L'Oréal is fortunate in that it is large and successful enough to accommodate a fair amount of excess weight in the so-called "voies de garage" already mentioned for Michelin.

This slack remains invisible because of "un certain flou" (a slight blur) in the organisational chart. This vagueness would seem to confirm Wickham's characterisation (p. 220) of the company as being "très intuitive, à l'organisation un peu anarchique" (very intuitive, and rather anarchic in its organisation). By his reckoning, territories and responsibilities are ill-defined, re-negotiated daily, with politics and careerism rife. L'Oréal's personnel is reputedly impulsive, "brouillon" (opaque) and perhaps a touch courtesan. As one plant manager explained, ideas must be sold to the right people and support canvassed in the right areas "avant d'aller presenter son projet au 10ème" (before taking a project to the top floor). Wickham (1983; 332) also notes that "certaines décisions seront prises alors qu'elles n'ont apparemment fait l'objet d'aucune délibération officielle" (certain decisions will be taken which have not apparently been the subject of official deliberation).

This analysis was born out at plant level where decisions from head office were often greeted with incomprehension. Explanations from the head office were typically lacking and production plants were presented with a 'fait accompli': "le comment mais pas le pourquoi des choses" (the 'how' not the 'why' of things). This proved demotivating for those on the receiving end and prompted criticism along the lines:

"Les économistes de la division manquent de méthode, de logique et d'objectifs."

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(The divisional economists are short on method, logic and objectives).

This criticism seems to point to a certain subjectivity in decision-making - the implication being that even the managerial ethos is coloured by the "paraître" (seeming) and "être" (being) ambivalence of the product. Cadres at all levels would pride themselves on their ability to assess a situation without empirical evidence - and there were numerous references to "le feeling" or what used to be called "le pif" (the nose). It would seem that at l'Oréal at least, intuition is deemed a legitimate basis for action.

The professed penchant for intuition, together with the "coloration féminine du produit et du métier" (the feminine nature of the product and the profession), make the actual paucity of women all the more shocking. One female cadre suggested that whilst the company boasts "une grande ouverture" (great openness) towards sex and race, the reality is that it is not "très en avance sur le restant de la France" (very far ahead of the rest of France). She went on to explain that research and marketing are fairly open to women since these involved limited responsibility in human terms; but production and sales are strictly out of bounds. Only recently have there been any female sales representatives - a real irony for a product essentially aimed at women.

The company operates a decentralised philosophy. "C'est une culture qui fait confiance aux hommes" says one plant manager who receives a budgetary enveloppe to allocate as he sees fit. The plant manager himself is referred to as his own boss, with a big B. "C'est lui qui fait la pluie et le beau temps de ses cadres" (he determines the lot of his cadres) since it is he who evaluates them and awards bonuses - though, as might be expected, the evaluation is oral, since writing is deemed to promote vindictiveness.

The company also boasts the hackneyed "droit à l'erreur", though one cadre suggested this was only possible because of the high profits. In other words, it is easy in their position to allow people to pursue far-fetched ideas. The result is a virtuous circle where, "il faudrait être idiot pour perdre de l'argent" (you'd have to be stupid to lose money).

As with the companies previously described in this chapter on corporate culture, l'Oréal is a company which boasts total independence from the
"Nous n'avons rien à leur demander." (Priouret; 1968; 120)

(We have nothing to ask of the state).

The fact remains that rumours suggest that there may have been one or two instances of state indulgence on legislation enabling l'Oréal to maintain competitiveness - and these rumours are lent credibility by François Dalle's longstanding friendship with François Mitterrand. Baumier (p.54) describes François Dalle as, "Un des rares, parmi ses proches, à tutoyer François Mitterrand" ("One of the few, in François Mitterrand's entourage, on familiar terms with him). And, as one rather cynical PDG suggested:

"So many industrialists say they want government off their backs when what they really mean is that they want government in their laps."

In terms of self image, the company sees itself as a beacon for French companies in general, and as an advert for "The French way of life". The company brochure refers to:

"A travers les liens multiples que tissent l'entreprise, ses produits, ses hommes, s'inscrit une certaine image de la France."

(Through the multiple ties made by the company, its products and its people, a certain image of France emerges).

However, behind its international success, l'Oréal faces unsuspected problems in finding French cadres to look after their international operations. As François Dalle put it:

"Nos cadres supérieurs et nos directeurs veulent bien, pour nous dépanner, aller un mois ou deux en Amérique du Nord ou du Sud, ou en Asie, ou en Afrique, mais pas au-delà." (Priouret; 114)

(Our senior managers and directors are perfectly willing to go out to North or South America, Asia or Africa for a couple of months to help us out - but no longer than that).
The corporate culture of the company's image is "soigné" (well-groomed). Each year the top 50 individuals in the company ("la première couronne") get together to reflect on the group's culture and the values to be encouraged. The trick seems to work since the personnel spontaneously refer to the distinctive culture of the company - "le monde de l'Oréal", "l'homme oréalien", or "une grande famille" - phrases which one might expect from an IBM-er. It clearly leaves its mark on those who enter it.

Carrefour

Carrefour is in the vanguard of successful post-war French companies alongside groups such as Accor, Club Méditerranée, Bouygues or BSN. Carrefour is different from the companies which precede it in this chapter in that it is a retailing not a manufacturing company and was launched in the early 60's rather than around the turn of the century.

Its founders, Marcel Fournier and the Defforey family have been responsible for introducing several innovative concepts to the French retail sector - most notably the hypermarket and "produits libres" (no-name products). Over the past quarter of a century, Carrefour has developed into one of the leading food retailers in Europe - a success which has been built on a number of tenets.

Decentralisation

The cornerstone of the firm's operating philosophy has been the decentralisation of management. Although financial control is highly centralised, and the performance of individual stores is closely monitored, in most aspects of operation the company is decentralised. Each store is operated as a profit centre and the store manager has complete responsibility for the performance and operation of the store which must meet sales objectives established annually by the company.

It is worth noting that this philosophy runs counter to received wisdom on responsibility. Clutterbuck and Goldsmith (1984; 29) maintain that whilst decentralisation is a hallmark of successful industrial groups, retailing operations rely on centralisation. In support of this thesis they cite Sainsbury's and Marks and Spencer which maintain central control over design, presentation, stock and pricing.
The decentralisation of authority is intended to provide scope for flexibility, allowing store managers to respond to local factors and environmental conditions*. The store managers are encouraged to think of the stores as their own businesses - a notion made quite explicit by the head of Carrefour-France, "Nos directeurs doivent être plus que jamais des chefs d'entreprise" (more than ever, we expect our store managers to behave like heads of their own companies). This was confirmed in the field where one store manager explained to me that the buck stopped with him, that this was the reason for his security consciousness - it was his money that he had to fork out - and he underlined the view further by referring to "mon magasin" (my store).

Ironically perhaps, the best testament to the level of discretion enjoyed by store managers is that independence is not a hard and fast rule. Store managers are at liberty to contravene the decentralisation philosophy and get together in small groups so as to improve their competitiveness. Further proof of this delegation of responsibility can be seen in the size of the head office staff which numbers only about 20, including secretaries, chauffeurs and caretakers. In terms of communication too, little more than 10% of the overall budget is devoted to the national campaign. The latter merely serves to set the tone and avoid "une cacophonie d'initiatives" which would leave the customer "dépayssé" (confused).

This commitment to decentralisation does not stop at store manager level. Within the store, the individuals in charge of particular sections are free to decide which goods they wish to carry and are responsible for negotiating additional discounts with suppliers. The aim is to personalise all that is on show to the customer.

Of course, the greater the level of decentralisation the harder it is to maintain a sense of corporate identity. Until recently, coherence was achieved via an oral tradition. Corporate values were passed on in an adhoc way through meetings and informal contacts. Standardisation was given further impetus by the systematic rotation of store managers. (Only three of the 71 store managers have been "en place" for more than three years). These methods are still used to communicate corporate beliefs but they have been supplemented with a formal expression of "corporate culture".

* - This would tend to confirm the regionalistic nature of France mentioned in the chapter on "Managerial Ethos".
In 1979, Carrefour introduced a small book entitled "Politiques" - a sort of corporate manifesto which set out objectives and policies as well as expounding the corporate philosophy:

"La pérennité, l'indépendance et la croissance régulière de CARREFOUR sont fondées sur les hommes. Tous, chaque jour, s'efforcent d'apporter une réponse plus harmonieuse aux attentes multiples des partenaires de l'entreprise."

(The future, the independence and the regular growth of CARREFOUR are based on people. Together, each day we must do our utmost to satisfy more fully the many expectations of the partners of the company).

These are regarded as the terms of reference for any initiative, or as the Head of Carrefour France put it, "C'est l'élément le plus fédérateur de la culture originale de notre groupe" (it is the most unifying element of the group's unique culture).

In theory, the existence of such a document takes the responsibility off the store managers for spreading the corporate gospel. They merely have to refer their personnel to the booklet when the need arises. For instance, when documents are drafted at a local level, store managers will urge the writers to use the existing terminology in order to promote written standardisation.

Yet, the oral tradition seems to persist. Store managers proved very adept at peddling the corporate message using concrete incidents as they occurred. For instance, one store manager would make a point of conscientiously stopping to pick up litter on the floor of the store. The implications of this action were twofold. On the one hand, this confirmed the idea that he thought of the store as his own ("Nous ne sommes pas des fonctionnaires" - meaning that they are not civil servants devoid of personal involvement); and on the other hand, he was effectively saying to colleagues that no-one is too big to bend down and pick up rubbish. In the same vein, on his way through the store to lunch (sacred) with a number of cadres, he made a point of stopping to answer customer queries (to reinforce the notion of service). Afterwards he pointed out to his colleagues that some of their personnel still walked off in the opposite direction when they saw a customer heading for them. He implores them to "faire passer le message" (pass on the message) to their teams.
His example was quickly picked up and applied down the line. In one instance, a section was getting a little carried away with its displays. This prompted the head of the sector to rehash a message passed on to him that very morning by the store manager, namely: "Il faut raisonner client, pas professionnel" (we have to reason like customers not retailers). This was in response to a self-consciously clever display which only served to confuse customers and impair their judgment. The sector manager then went on to remind his team that the company philosophy regarding customers states: "Le client doit garder le libre arbitre" (the customer must have freedom of choice).

This respect for the customer is reflected in another Carrefour peculiarity, the inverted organisational pyramid. This is a vivid, if somewhat gimmicky image whereby the customer is on top and the top brass at the bottom. Not everyone was convinced about the reality or desirability of this claim. Some sceptics criticised its feasibility: "Une pyramide à l'envers ça se casse la gueule" (an inverted pyramid is bound to topple). Others, at section level failed to carry the logic through and had their own (sector level) pyramids "the right way up". But irrespective of these drawbacks, it is a symbolic statement and provides a visual reminder of customer supremacy:

"C'est lui qui paie les salaires, lui qui permet d'investir, lui qui paie les dividendes aux actionnaires."

(It is they who pay our salaries, they who allow us to expand, they who keep our shareholders satisfied).

The inverted pyramid also helps to promote the check-out personnel as those in the front line. They are in constant contact with the customer and provide the first and critical link in the feedback process - prime communicators of customer needs. What is more, the inverted pyramid serves to reiterate the central tenet of decentralised responsibility by emphasising the way in which the success of the group depends upon its lower level personnel.

Of course contact with the customer is not the sole perogative of check out personnel. Even the store manager eats in the same canteen as the customers. This enables him to see things from the customers' perspective and to eavesdrop on their conversations. The very nature of the work brings the
managers into constant contact with the customer and there is an immediate response to new initiatives. Because of this immediacy, action was valued. There was little point doing two years research, when a makeshift improvement could be implemented straight away and fine tuned in function of customer reaction.

As mentioned earlier, there is tangible evidence of the commitment to the customer. Respect for the customer's freedom of choice translates into wide aisles to ease circulation around the store, objective information round the store and an absence of pressure to buy at the check out. Further evidence of customer orientation can be seen in the shift away from the original "move more merchandise" conception towards a more qualitative approach. The customer is no longer offered "rock bottom prices", but a wider choice of goods instead. This reflects Carrefour's move away from consumerism and towards what the company labels, "humanism". Customers are actively involved in the selection of products through in-store questionnaires and 'round tables' in which they offer constructive criticism.

The image of Carrefour as the leading innovator in French retailing is one of which the company is understandably proud, and the group has taken steps to preserve this reputation. As TV advertising by retailers is prohibited in France, Carrefour has had recourse to less traditional methods, notably the monthly "Carrefour Journal" produced individually for each of its stores (once again confirming commitment to decentralisation). This eight-page news sheet, which accounts for 20% of the group's advertising expenditure, is delivered free to nearly a million households.

But there are other means of getting round the advertising bar. One way is to get reported on in the media - rather in the same way that betting shops in the UK will take advantage of free editorial to get round advertising restrictions*. In this respect, the launch of the "produits libres" range of generic products in 1976, proved an important publicity and marketing coup for the company.

* - For example, William Hill betting shops gained worldwide media coverage (which they could not buy) by offering odds on who shot JR, on the name of the Royal Baby, or most recently on Chris Bonnington's chances of finding the Yeti.
But Carrefour is not averse to grabbing media attention in more notorious ways. In 1979, Carrefour first tangled with the thorny issue of the legality of comparative advertising, when the group launched an "economic indicator" to reinforce the discount element of the Carrefour operation. The comparative advertising campaign encroached upon a grey area of the law, and prompted a series of law suits from furious competitors. The campaign is thought to have cost the company four million francs in legal fees, but made a lasting impact on customers: "Ça a fait parler de nous" (it got people talking about us.").

At a local level the emulation can take many forms. One interesting initiative was that of a store manager who managed to gain prime time (national news) TV exposure and newspaper coverage (see Exhibit 11) by introducing condom dispensers into his store. This shrewd manoeuvre was justified on the grounds of responding to the AIDS scare. But the introduction of these vending machines, was calculated to cause a stir in Catholic France where the subject remains taboo: "on gesticule pendant 20 minutes" (people gesticulate for 20 minutes) before daring to buy the offending item. This initiative demonstrated the store manager's presence of mind and his eye for a coup; but also confirmed his independence since he did not have to seek Head Office clearance (even on potentially damaging publicity) before inviting the film crews to his store.

Other off-beat examples include a store manager who succeeded in getting the Carrefour logo displayed on all the street maps in the locality by offering to pay for their printing. Another store manager employed what can only be described as "preventive-advertising" in his fight against local rivals. Following a decision to try to attract more occasional customers, signposts were put up to syphon off traffic from the nearby motorway. However, the route signalled was neither the shortest nor the quickest - it was simply the least competitive!

The foregoing evidence suggests that there is little love lost among retailers. Partly, this is due to the transparency of any new initiative. Competitors have easy access (as customers) to the store and are free to steal any distinctive advantages since these can not be patented. As a result of this visibility, "espionnage" is difficult to counter which means that the best (only?) form of defense is attack.
This can take two forms: firstly, store managers will encourage their staff to display the same sort of curiosity as the Japanese when they visit competitors in order to cull ideas. And secondly, the company must constantly innovate—a real task of Sisyphus, given that nothing escapes copy. But Denis Defforey, the PDG (CEO), takes this philosophically and points out, "It is always good to be imitated, because when one of your competitors imitates you, he does not innovate." (LSA 666, 1978). So the company retains its competitive edge.

In spite of the company's reputation for innovation, retailing continues to suffer from longstanding French antipathy towards commerce ("ce sont des vendeurs de sardine"—they are sardine sellers, is the traditional graduate line). Nor is the notion of service especially well developed in France. As the Head of Carrefour France puts it, "L'idée de donner du service à d'autres n'est pas toujours très bien perçue" (the idea of serving others is not very highly thought of). Consequently, the company finds it difficult to attract the high fliers from the grandes écoles, including business school graduates whose training should find an ideal outlet in the retail sector.

Quite apart from these image problems, the company (like retailing as a whole) makes hefty demands of its personnel which tend to deter prospective candidates. The job has to be learnt out in the field doing menial tasks and in stressful contact with the customer. The initial status of "stagiaire" is off-putting for graduates who know they are passing up the chance to be named "cadre" immediately elsewhere. Managers are subjected to long hours ("corvéable et taillable à merci"—constantly on call) and geographical mobility is an essential requirement. Managers can turn down a posting once but not twice.

What is worse, young graduates will be accountable to "une hiérarchie autodidacte" (a hierarchy of self-taught managers) which may jealously guard its privileges and is liable to show hostility towards their qualifications. One Carrefour manager admitted that this was the case in certain groups and alluded to a competitor, Casino, which (in an official brochure) allegedly requested of its personnel, "Ne pas bloquer les gens plus intelligents que vous" (do not impede those more intelligent than yourself). However, the manager in question was adamant that no one was held back at Carrefour, "On ne met pas de bâtons dans les roues ici" (we don't trip people up here).
One thing students know is that their qualification will count for little once admitted. The company they are entering has a reputation for self-made individuals - in keeping with the background of its founders. Qualifications will not procure the same sort of steady progress which it might in more traditional firms - "chacun doit faire ses preuves" (individuals must prove their worth).

It is perhaps understandable that grandes écoles graduates who have exposed themselves to risk and won, are loath to do so again when they are guaranteed more comfortable posts elsewhere. Deprived of this source of talent, Carrefour tends to look towards the Instituts Universitaires de Technologie (IUT) as its favourite hunting ground. These IUT offer two year vocational courses and turn out students who are well equipped for careers in retailing, and who do not suffer from delusions of grandeur, (or as one store manager put it, "C'est nous les plus beaux, c'est nous les meilleurs" -we're the fairest, we're the best).

However, retailing seems to be gaining its "lettres de noblesse". Certainly Carrefour has started to attract talent from the more prestigious establishments. Partly, this is on account of a change in retailing. As one cadre put it, "Le métier s'enrichit" (the profession is developing) and hypermarkets are now firmly implanted in French society. But it is also a product of the change in student attitudes. Spurred on by the exploits of entrepreneurs like Francis Bouygues and Bernard Tapie, they are prepared to forego immediate responsibility for greater medium term responsibilities. They have come to realise that the possibilities are more varied, the rungs fewer and the chances of promotion enhanced - for anyone willing to make the effort.

In fact, it is an essential part of the career folklore at Carrefour that anyone can make it. Of course, the company has changed since the days of unbridled expansion in the early 70s:

"C'était l'époque des armées de Bonaparte: entre comme employé chez Carrefour, vous dirigez un magasin quelques années plus tard."

(At the time, it was like Napoleon's army: you came in at a junior level and you'd be in charge of a store a few years later).
Although these opportunities are less abundant, the company is still keen to highlight them (see Exhibit 12). The company newspaper for instance, focuses on a number of store managers in their mid-thirties who have nothing more than a "bac" to their name - people who might have reached their "bâton de maréchal" long ago in other companies*.

The company ethos remains imbued with that go-getting spirit. As one store manager put it:

"Chez Carrefour, l'ambition n'est pas une tare. Au contraire, si on fait ses preuves, tout est ouvert, sans aucune restriction."

(At Carrefour, ambition is nothing to be ashamed of. On the contrary, if you prove your worth, all doors are opened, without exception).

The implication is of course, that overt ambition is perhaps frowned upon in more traditional French companies.

Further evidence of this work ethos is the attachment to long hours. These are inherent to retailing but the trend is taken to extremes at Carrefour, where "un certain snobisme" is associated with working longer than colleagues. In terms of the physical stamina required, one store manager took a humorous dig at the underperforming textile department by suggesting the introduction of a perspiration indicator. He was convinced that no-one in textiles "aurait le dos mouillé" (would have a damp back) at the end of the day. And he threatened them with a short 'work-out' in one of the high turnover sections.

Given this commitment to work, it comes as no surprise that stress is an occupational hazard. Two senior managers complained of hyperactivity - one told me, "Je tourne en rond le dimanche - je suis insupportable" (I don't know what to do with myself on Sundays - I'm unbearable); whilst the other confessed that he daren't go home early for fear of irritating his family.

* - Though for all its meritocracy, the company has a mysogynous reputation with only two of the seventy-odd store managers being women.
It is a job which elicits involvement but which requires sustained mental and physical efforts. The stress factor means that no one has yet retired as a store manager - and few of them reach 50. Another manifestation of this ambition can be seen in the obsession with self-improvement. There is healthy rivalry within the group with each store trying to improve its displays and service in order to climb in relation to sister stores in the Carrefour turnover rankings. In contrast to this, store managers were perfectly willing to show round their counterparts from sister stores - and would conscientiously point out features of interest and allowing their counterparts to record them on a note pad or a miniature dictaphone.

This ambivalent rivalry/co-operation could also be seen at departmental level. Competition is instilled between the sections by the daily printouts of sales figures which pit the performance of each sector against that of corresponding sectors in other Carrefours; as well as keeping a running check on actual performance as against forecasts and previous year's performance - there is a rolling comparison daily with the corresponding day the previous year.

In spite of constant comparisons between the sections and jibes about poor performances, intrastore co-operation was high - one sector which was being refurbished suggested to the electrical appliances sector that it could usefully employ the unwanted chairs to sit customers down while the rather lengthy order was attended to. There was little evidence of back-biting or power feuding. Indeed, interpersonal relations were unusually forthright and informal. Cadres were on first name terms, they wore shirt sleeves and tie rather than suits, and used the familiar "tu" form of address. The standardisation of the furnishings too, were also signs of an egalitarian culture - and were in marked contrast to the considerable vertical differentiation evident in French industry as a whole.

By French standards Carrefour is classless - the ubiquitous qualification hierarchy which dominates French manufacturing industry, is diluted. Graduates rub shoulders with the autodidactes - though it is fair to say that grandes écoles graduates are thin on the ground. Social and educational backgrounds appear to have limited impact on promotion chances/expectations.
Carrefour's commitment to training and staff relations is another essential feature of corporate policy. The development of personnel, in support of the corporate ethic of the Carrefour group: "Carrefour's future, independence and steady growth are based upon people."

The personnel policies are in keeping with this respect for the personnel - 5 weeks holiday, bonuses for holidays, end of year, attendance, and a share in the profits.

In terms of pay policy, the company is at the forefront of the move to undermine sacro-sanct French salary structures. Carrefour salaries have three components related to inflation, company performance and individual performance, for the entire personnel - this is undermining more conventional seniority based increases, epitomised by the French Railways (Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer - SNCF). In 1987, a proposal that wages should partially depend on merit, so incensed French railway workers that a nationwide strike was called.

Considerable effort and resources have been channelled into personnel management, and Carrefour pride themselves upon their staff relations and training programme. The company invariably exceeds the legal requirement, since it regards training as a guarantee for the company's future. This year 4% of the wage bill was spent on training in comparison to the 1.1% legal requirement.

By pioneering French style hypermarkets, Carrefour has out-Americanised the Americans. The company has taken the retailing techniques championed by Bernard Trujillo in his 3M seminars 30 years ago, and extrapolated the logic. France is now in the unique position of being able to export to the Americans a formula it originally imported from them.

Of course, part of the reason that hypermarkets did not develop in the US was that the American environment was too competitive - hypermarkets would never have got off the ground over there. Carrefour itself has found it necessary to opt out of the more developed markets in Europe and focus its attention on less developed markets such as Spain and Latin America - which in fact resemble the state of French retailing at the time when Carrefour was launched.
Whilst the companies described earlier in this chapter are divergent in numerous respects, there are some resemblances. These common features will be used as a 'point de départ' — on the one hand to generalise about French companies as a collective entity, and on the other to contrast these four internationally successful companies with the vast majority of French firms — they will be the exception which proves the rule.

It is also worth pointing out the divergence between Michelin, l'Air Liquide and l'Oréal, on the one hand, and Carrefour on the other. It may be argued that Carrefour typifies the new generation of French companies which have a less traditionalist outlook. This distinction mirrors a similar split in the French industrial landscape. We can use the theme of secrecy to illustrate the point.

With the exception of Carrefour, the chosen companies were remarkably coy by British or even more, American standards. All were very selective in their approach to publicity and shunned Carrefour's "all publicity is good publicity" maxim. Even l'Oréal, whose outgoing image would suggest easy access, proved very difficult to penetrate. Indeed, at each of the companies visited there were expressions of surprise at my having made it. For instance, the senior manager who vetted my request at l'Oréal, speculated that I must have encountered some difficulty in gaining access to French companies "qui sont assez spéciales dans ce domaine" (which are quite peculiar in that department).

There is no reason to believe that the chosen companies were exceptional in this respect and the findings concur with Erhmann's view of France as "the country of 'counter-publicity'" (1957; 211)*. Incidental corroboration in the form of newspaper headlines also suggests that it is a common trait among French companies. A recent issue of Tertiel (no 28) whet readers' appetites with its cover feature, "Le PDG le plus secret de France" ("France's most secretive CEO"). And the Financial Times (13/01/88) did likewise with, "Paul Betts meets Gustave Leven, the publicity-shy chairman of Perrier." Horovitz also encountered and noted French secrecy (1980; 46).

* - Ehrmann quotes Detoeuf on the matter: "The Frenchman is not a chess player, but a card player; he chooses games where one hides." (1957; 209)
This secrecy prime attitude was described by the PDG of a small firm as: "Pour vivre heureux, vivons cachés" (to live happily, we must live hidden). In the French context, this approach makes sense for a number of reasons. Firstly, secrecy protects the company from competitors - this was a particular preoccupation of Michelin's which refrains from patenting for that very reason.

Secrecy has also been part and parcel of the fiscal game ("la contrainte fiscale") which companies play with the authorities. More recently, the threat of nationalisation has provided renewed cause for remaining an unknown quantity for the State.

However, the primary reason for maintaining 'radio silence' has been to do with the general public. Traditional antipathy towards profit-making may be the motive behind the secrecy of these high performance firms. One PDG explained that "personne n'aime une entreprise qui crache du fric" ("no-one likes a company that spits (sic) money"). So, "pour avoir la paix" (to be left in peace), successful companies have kept themselves to themselves. We can cite the PDG of the large industrial group, Saint-Gobain who, on the eve of the company's re-privatisation (November 1986), addressed his personnel thus:

"Chaque jour, de nombreux articles de presse ou émissions nous placent sous leur projecteur; et nos concitoyens redécouvrent qu'il existe, dans notre pays, un groupe industriel - le nôtre - qui est leader mondial ou européen dans la plupart de ses métiers..." Jean-Louis Beffa, PDG of Saint-Gobain (Publication for Saint-Gobain personnel - November 1986)

(Each day, we are the focus of attention for press articles or TV programmes; awakening the French public to the fact that it harbours, in its midts, an industrial group - ours - which is a World or European leader in most of its fields).

This speech perhaps symbolises the transition in French attitudes. All of a sudden, a company which, according to its PDG, "est souvent resté à l'écart des médias" (has generally stayed out of the limelight), moves into center stage. He found himself introducing the group to an eager French public who, until then, were blissfully unaware of its existence.
Only since the entrepreneur has been billed as the saviour of the economy in the 1980s, have companies really felt safe to emerge from their shells. The managerial movement has thrown up a host of individuals like Antoine Riboud, Gilbert Trigano, Francis Bouygues or Bernard Tapie whose business empires are in stark contrast to the closet MNCs which have dominated France. These men actually court publicity — Bernard Tapie popularised the enterprise culture with his prime-time television shows and Francis Bouygues has purchased the recently privatised TF1 (France's No.1 TV channel). Such extravagances do not endear them to everyone. They are criticised in some quarters as self-seeking publicists who use their companies as vehicles for their personal promotion.

"Le vedettariat" was particularly condemned in the more traditional companies. One cadre explained "Il s'passent pour des truands" (they are looked upon as outlaws), since there is something "louche" (fishy) about anyone who 'makes it' without the benefit of inheritance or qualifications. Whilst people like Tapie are admired by younger generations, their elders are sceptical about what Tapie is up to — rapid success in French terms leaves him open to all sorts of accusations of government collusion (in terms of facilitating necessary redundancies in newly-acquired companies as well as reciprocal favours with the former Socialist finance minister, Pierre Beregovoy). The view of the businessman as villain dies hard.

As mentioned earlier, another justification for the secrecy of the companies described, was that it helped avoid state interference in corporate affairs, and particularly Nationalisation in 1982. The fact that all four of the companies should actually boast about resisting state advances, is a measure of its persuasiveness — and indicative of a qualitatively different state-industry relationship from that found in the UK or the US.

Looking to the state for help does not carry the same negative connotations in France. One need only look at the way Renault's modernist headquarters on the banks of the Seine announces in huge letters that it is "Renault - Régie Nationale" — a nationalised industry. It is unthinkable that the Rover Group or any British state-owned industry would do the same. Nationalisation may be a preoccupation but it is not a stigma. To be nationalised in France is to have the full weight of the state behind you. This can prompt role reversal, with the company, not the state, making all the running. As one
"Au moindre pépin les chefs d'entreprise sont prêts à se précipiter dans les bras de l'Etat-papa" (L'Express; 1/03/85; 30).

(At the slightest sign of trouble chiefs are ready to run into the arms of Daddy-State).

A fairly accurate indicator of whether a company is under state tutelage, is the background of its chief executive. It is a feature of nationalised or semi-nationalised companies that their heads are appointed, usually from outside the group, by the government in office. Needless to say this tends to provoke a real game of musical chairs, whenever there is a shift in political power. Such instability is in marked contrast to the unruffled continuity of the four companies examined earlier in this chapter.

Three of the four companies were family-owned or managed. There is a strong tradition in France of relatively large groups being dominated by an individual or family - even Carrefour, with its tradition of open competition, includes Bernard Fournier (eldest son of the co-founder Marcel Fournier) on its board. Apart from the companies investigated, there are the Dassaults in the aeronautical industry; the Triganos with their 'Club Méditerranée'; the Leclercs, the Montlaurs or the Guichard-Perrachons in retailing; the Ricards, the Cointreaus and the Dubreuils in alcohol manufacture; the Peugeot family in the automobile industry; or the Leroy family in the aptly named Groupe Maison Familiale (small house construction)*. Even the model entrepreneur, and building magnate, Francis Bouygues has succumbed to temptation of employing his own offspring.

French companies have traditionally shown a penchant for "management by chromosome". But more recently, this has been tempered by judicious business sense. The case of l'Air Liquide is a perfect example - one of the PDG's sons worked for the company but he was passed over in favour of the son-in-law as the successor to the throne. The automatic handing on of the top job like a family heirloom is a thing of the past. Family companies will do their utmost to keep the business from "mains étrangères" (foreign hands) by exercising greater discrimination in their choice of successor.

* - For a more detailed discussion of French corporate leadership see the chapter, "Those who set the tone".
The current approach might be termed enlightened nepotism, whereby family companies exploit its positive aspects whilst limiting its drawbacks. The most important benefit is continuity. The heir to the throne is prepared for the top job from an early age. Even before entering the company, the future PDG is impregnated with the corporate values which are often an extension of family values. Consequently, the baton changes hands smoothly.

A smooth transition of power is important to those who have dealings with the company (customers and suppliers) who will not wish to have to change longstanding arrangements. It is also of particular interest to the personnel, who will wish to avoid an upsetting change of regime. The case of a somewhat smaller (800 people), provincial, paper-making company provides an interesting illustration of this point. The company was a struggling family concern which decided to appoint an external PDG 20 years ago. He has managed to turn the business into a minor success story - and now, with retirement looming he has been unexpectedly approached by his management team. They had had dealings with his son who worked in a local company, and proceeded to recommended to the PDG that he take on his own son with a view to succession (the company had gone full circle).

Such is the desire for continuity that non-family businesses may try to manufacture 'surrogate offspring' who can be entrusted with the running of the company. Generally, these individuals will be picked at an tender age and prepared for the role of leadership. At l'Oréal for instance, the next PDG is known long in advance. He is variously described as, "fils spirituel" (spiritual son), "bras droit" (right hand), "héritier présomptif" (heir apparent) or "dauphin" (crown prince). Such expressions leave the future occupier "du fauteuil du PDG" (of the CEO's chair) in no doubt as to what is expected of him.

Whether in a family business or not, those chosen must dispel the 'divine right' label by proving themselves more worthy than their peers. The argument that this will demotivate senior cadres who have 'no shot at the top' is probably overstated since those with such ambitions will steer clear of companies where predestination operates. On the contrary perhaps, it acts as a political dampener, since the pole position is out of bounds.

Another feature of the leadership in the chosen firms was its longevity: Michelin and Defforey (Carrefour) had been in place since 1959, whilst l'Air Liquide and l'Oréal had recently changed leaders after 'reigns' of over 35
years apiece* - though each of the recently deposed leaders continued to exert influence through their presidency of a strategic committee. In such cases, the firms inevitably become synonymous with their heads - thus provoking a certain personality cult. In fact, if Peters and Waterman are to be believed, these corporately historical figures may account for the success of the companies examined:

"Associated with every excellent company was a strong leader...who seemed to have a lot to do with making the company strong in the first place" (1982; 26).

Evidence for the existence of such a personality cult lies in the widespread devotion to work. Working long hours seemed less a feature of the rules or expectations than a part of the culture in which charismatic bosses reign. People would ring each other at 19h00 fully anticipating an answer. Such anti-social hours tend to militate against the presence of women in the higher reaches of French management - this, even in retailing and cosmetics where one might have expected a moderate feminine presence.

The exceptional longevity of the PDG in the companies investigated was mirrored by the personnel which, except at Carrefour, tend to benefit from lifelong employment. This also requires corporate commitment to internal promotion, expenditure on training and a bit of slack in the organisational chart.

The lack of definition in the organisational chart means that responsibilities are 'up for grabs'. This makes internal promotion easier to handle - unfettered by organisational constraints, able individuals will naturally rise to the top. This vagueness is in stark contrast to American organisational charts which pin-point exactly who does what and who is answerable to whom. Part of the lack of precision also stems from the absence of job descriptions in France. In addition to helping internal promotion, the organisational "flou" (vagueness) enables the company to maintain loyal servants in ill-defined posts.

* - Again, this is stark contrast to the companies under state influence, where 10 years is considered a good innings. Michel Bauer, a CNRS researcher, makes the surprising claim that of the 200 largest French firms, only 29% of bosses actually entered the firm before the age of 30 - as opposed to 50% in the US and 74% in Japan (l'Expansion; 22/10/87; 130).

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Another feature of the four companies examined was their very definite product identity. Efforts were directed towards one goal — undiluted by diversification. Even Carrefour which might have been tempted to emulate its American counterparts with vertical integration has passed up the chance. As Denis Defforey put it:

"C'est déjà assez difficile de connaître son métier — nous devons avant tout éviter de devenir un conglomérat. Nous nous refusons à investir dans l'agro-alimentaire: nous savons très bien que faire de nos magasins des clients captifs de nos usines et y vendre nos propres conserves de légumes serait forcément au détriment de la qualité et de la productivité."(Le Nouvel Economiste; No.333; p.79)

(It's difficult enough getting to grips with our business — we must at all costs avoid becoming a conglomerate. We have deliberately resisted investing in agro-nutrition: we are fully aware that making our stores into captive customers for our factories and selling our own tinned vegetables through them would inevitably impinge on quality and productivity).

L'Oreal too, has avoided emulating its large American competitors and diversifying widely. As for Michelin and l'Air Liquide, they remain strongly attached to innovation in their own fields and to new applications of existing products, but do not venture outside what they know. These are firms which, in Peters and Waterman parlance, have resolutely, 'stuck to their knitting' (1982; chapter 10). Perhaps, the roots of this commitment to a particular product area lie in the influence of strong 'family' management. While not precluding diversification, traditions which stretch back several generations are unlikely to stimulate it. And as Dyas and Thanheiser explain:

"Personal commitment to a particular product area can be particularly strong if the industry involved is located within a particular region in which the founding family has associations and responsibilities" (1976; 203).
All four companies have had considerable success abroad—less common in France than elsewhere because of its tradition of economic protectionism lasting up to 1958. By virtue of their own records, these companies could afford to denounce French faint-heartedness abroad. Two quotes typify this widespread feeling:

"Le Français répugne profondément à s'expatrier, c'est-à-dire à aller vivre longtemps à l'étranger. Il s'habitue aussi mal à la langue qu’aux usages et aux manières de vivres locales." (François Dalle in Priouret; 113)

(Frenchmen hate to expatriate themselves, that is, to go and live abroad for a long spell. They can't get used to the language any more than they can to the local customs and habits).

"Il faut bien connaître ses clients, les voir et les revoir jusqu'au jour où ils vous invitent chez eux. Rien à voir avec les Français qui font trois petits tours et ils s'en vont." (Edouard de Royère; l'Expansion; p.65).

(You have to know your (foreign) customers, see them over and over again until the day they invite you home. A far cry from the French who look around a while and then go home).

At Michelin and Carrefour too, they were scathing about French impatience when faced with a new market, in contrast to the more methodical approach of the Japanese or even the West Germans. As a returning French expatriate put it:

"Les Français ont conservé l'esprit 'colon': ils ne partent à l'étranger que bardés d'assurances, celle surtout de faire du fric".

(The French still have a 'colonial' mentality: they only go abroad when loaded with insurance cover, and not unless they are guaranteed a killing).
Management recruitment is not generalised. Each company tended to favour particular sources—specific engineering grandes écoles in the case of Michelin and l'Air Liquide, and Instituts Universitaires de Technologie for Carrefour. Only l'Oréal was more or less indifferent to provenance. The graduate market is highly segmented and companies buy talent which matches their standing and their educational tradition—often mirroring the head's own background. One can tell a great deal about a company's relative standing from where it does its fishing. Starting salaries are less of an indication of prestige since career-minded graduates will seek first and foremost, a company where they can "faire leurs armes" (gain their wings) and obtain a useful "carte de visite" (track record) for future employers.

Another unifying feature was the so-called "droit à l'erreur" (right to foul up). It may be that this was a product rather than a factor of success. However, if the claim is founded, then it is unusual in a country where, according to one cadre, "un échec vous poursuit" (a failure follows you) and "on en tient longtemps compte" (it is held against you for ages). It is also worth pointing out that Peters and Waterman refer to the tolerance for failure (p.223) as a central tenet in their recipe for corporate success.

Finally, the companies examined bear the hallmark of Parisian centralisation. With the exception of Michelin which remains staunchly provincial, each company had its headquarters in Paris and its production plants in provinces. This may be a legacy from Napoleon who, for reasons of stability, tried to turn Paris into an administrative rather than an industrial city (distancing the workers to take the revolutionary sting out of Paris). This has produced two distinct populations whose preoccupations, ambitions and lifestyles are totally different. In a way, the provinces have become the corporate equivalent of non-league football, where young hopefuls on their way up to first division Paris, cross 'has-beens' on their way out.

It is interesting to note that a number of the features highlighted by Peters and Waterman as critical to organisational success actually manifest themselves in the four French companies scrutinised. However, it would be simplistic to assume that the success of these companies stems from their adherence to the Peters and Waterman blueprint. The companies examined also possessed several distinctive traits which were far removed from the informal processes and intuitive aspects preached by those gurus—it is equally plausible to speculate that it was these which were responsible for their international success.
Restatement

It would be wrong to suggest that the preceding examples are representative of French corporate cultures in general. However, they do display a number of distinctive characteristics which have survived in spite of the increasing internationalisation of these particular firms. In theory, what goes for these large, successful companies, which have been exposed to the sterilising influence of international competition, should apply to even greater degree among smaller French companies.

It seems reasonable therefore, to posit that these common features as part of a broader national corporate culture which taints all French companies to some extent.
Selected bibliography:


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LSA, "Carrefour plus que jamais valeur de croissance!", 21/04/78, no 666, pp. 17-21.

LSA, "L'Oreal pret pour une nouvelle montee en gamme", 13/02/87, no 1057, pp. 11-15.


Valeurs Actuelles, "L'Air Liquide, capitalisme exemplaire", 21/07/86, pp. 29-32.

Publicity surrounding introduction of condom vending machines at Carrefour.

Préservatifs dans les hypers: Carrefour tire le premier

Il fallait s'y attendre. La venue des préservatifs dans les grandes surfaces va commencer. C'est le magasin Carrefour d'Ivry, en banlieue parisienne, qui annonce le premier ses intentions dans la matière. Déjà samedi prochain, il mettra à la disposition de sa clientèle un distributeur automatique de préservatifs installé dans le rayon parfumerie-hygiène. La boîte de 6 sera vendue 10 francs. Un petit prix aux grandes conséquences.

Préervatifs en libre service


Le magasin Carrefour d'Ivry-sur-Seine est plus "hard" : depuis vendredi, un distributeur automatique permet à ses clients de mettre une boîte de préservatifs dans leur caddy. En toute discrétion. Une simple pièce de 10 francs et la boîte (de six) est à vous. Pratique, rapide et discret : il n'y a pas à présenter l'article à la caisse.

Dès le mois prochain, deux cents autres machines devraient être installées. Delicate attention : sur le distributeur automatique, on peut lire : "L'hygiène et la protection sont une preuve d'amour."

Les préservatifs ne se cachent plus

OBJECTIF : FAIRE « CAPOTER » LE SIDA

Une première en région parisienne. Depuis hier, le magasin Carrefour d'Ivry (94) met à la disposition de ses clients des distributeurs de préservatifs.

Cela ressemble à un distributeur de confisseries... Mais rien à voir ! Deux distributeurs de préservatifs ont été installés, hier après-midi, dans le magasin Carrefour d'Ivry. Le premier a été installé dans les toilettes publiques et le second — c'est plus original — en plein milieu du rayon mode et santé ou cohabitent savons, shampooings et produits de beauté.

Ce nouveau produit répond au nom de "PrepBarm". Il vous suffit de glisser une pièce de dix francs dans la machine pour faire l'acquisition d'une boîte de six préservatifs. Ce produit, déjà proposé chez nous en libre-service, explose un des responsables du magasin, ne l'était pas encore en distributeur. Ces machines offrent des garanties d'anonymat aux consommateurs et respectent leur pudor.

Les clients, certes un peu surpris par l'intrusion de ces distributeurs, n'ont pas manifesté de façon intempestive.

En revanche, une bande dessinée, diffusée dans l'Ile-et-Vilaine, le Val-d'Oise et le Bas-Rhin, dans le cadre d'une campagne d'information sur les maladies sexuellement transmissibles, a provoqué la colère des parents et des associations. Intitulée "le Dernier des tabous", cette brochure, éditée à trente mille exemplaires, a été jugée tour à tour "trop crue", "choquante", "antireligieuse".

Face à cette levée de boucliers, la Direction générale de la santé a demandé aux préfets de suspendre la distribution de cette BD, litigieuse qui n'avait pas reçu l'aval du ministère de la Santé.

Remy MIVROZ
Pen portraits of Carrefour career successes.

From the company publication "Notre Entreprise - Carrefour" (Bilan economique et social 85) - p.9:

**L'avenir**

Chez Carrefour, on peut progresser.
Bon nombre de directeurs régionaux et de directeurs de magasins sont entrés dans la société dix ou quinze ans plus tôt comme employés ou stagiaires.

Trois exemples le prouvent:

- **Philippe Jarry**, 36 ans.
  - 1972 : entré en qualité de stagiaire aux Comptoirs Modernes, y passe huit ans pendant lesquels il sera adjoint au directeur, puis directeur de trois magasins successifs.
  - 1980 : débute chez Carrefour, à Nantes, comme chef de secteur épicerie.
- **Marc Devaux**, 37 ans.
  - 1974 : devient chef de rayon ménage, maison et vaisselle, puis chef des secteurs bazar et textile, à Villiers toujours.
  - 1975 : muté, sur sa demande à Dijon, où il est chef de secteur non alimentaires.
  - 1979 : directeur du magasin de Pau.
  - 1982 : inaugure le centre commercial de Labège (Toulouse).
- **Noël Almegiacchi**, 36 ans.
  - 1973 : retrouve le magasin de Sainte-Geneviève où il devient gestionnaire de stock.
  - 1974 : nommé responsable de rayon.
Labour relations have an inevitable impact on managerial attitudes and behaviour. Therefore, for sake of completeness, the subject warrants a chapter in this characterisation of French management. The aim, however, is not to provide an exhaustive account of French industrial relations, which is worthy of a thesis in itself, but to shed some light on the way they are viewed by management practitioners. The testimonies of three company chiefs from the observation sample have been selected to convey the main preoccupations in this area. Not only does this make better use of the first hand research; it also provides a more realistic picture, albeit partial and idiosyncratic, of French labour relations.

Scene setting

This brief descriptive section sets out to fill in the salient characteristics for readers unfamiliar with the French system of industrial relations. The French unions are divided along political, ideological and religious lines. The biggest union is the Communist dominated Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT). Its main rival is the Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT) which has socialist sympathies and formerly had Catholic affiliations. Third comes Force Ouvrière whose more moderate stance seems to be paying dividends and winning new members in the, for France, novel entrepreneurial culture of the 1980s. Of the smaller bodies, the most important is probably the white-collar Confédération Générale des Cadres which officially launched the term "cadre" (see chapter on "The French manager").
Social progress in French industry has been a fairly painstaking process, with real breakthroughs achieved only after historic conflicts (1936, 1945, 1968). One notable example is the belated acknowledgement of the right of shop stewards to do union work in the firm's time, to have their own offices inside factories and to do canvassing or other such work on the premises. These activities had long been commonplace in Britain for instance, but were only accorded in France after the uprising of May 1968. Part of the reason for the weak status of shop stewards is that there are other channels of appeal and these will be examined at the end of this chapter.

Company 1: family firm, based in a communist municipality in Paris

A first clue as to the thrust of the chief's industrial relations preoccupations came from a cursory glance at the bookshelf behind his desk. Two books stood out from the conventional managerial fodder of 'guru' literature. They were "Les finances du PCF" (the funding of the French Communist Party) and "Les secrets de la banque soviétique en France" (the secrets of the soviet bank in France - both written by Jean Montaldo). The PDG in question considered these essential reading for the rather convoluted reason that the Soviets funded the French Communist Party, which controlled France's main worker union, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) which in turn dictated the actions of local CGT leaders. As the chief puts it, "Les représentants de la CGT utilisent un langage et suivent des ordres qui n'ont rien à voir avec les intérêts de la maison" (the local CGT's rhetoric and the instructions it obeys are far removed from the interests of the company).

A few examples may give some idea of the way in which this perception of the unions affected his behaviour in practice:

- He saw conflicts as falling into two categories: political ones, as when the workers rise up out of solidarity for "leurs copains du Chili" (their mates from Chile); and real conflicts, but even the latter are motivated by factors other than the financial ones put forward.

- The soundproofing of his office door and the anti-tapping device on his telephone were both attributed to the red threat - "pour ne pas faciliter la tâche aux cocos" (so as not to make things any easier for the communists).
- He subscribed to l'Humanité, the Communist daily newspaper, to know what might be afoot. He explained that anyone in a "point chaud" (i.e. Communist stronghold), must keep abreast of the national policies which sooner or later will manifest themselves at grass-roots level, since the CGT leaves little scope for local initiatives - again because local initiatives are dictated by national policy. He makes the ironic point that if "l'Huma" were to lose its employer readership, the paper would go bankrupt. He also reckons, tongue-in-cheek, that it is a sign of "bonne conduite" (irreproachable behaviour) to be criticised by "l'Huma".

- The chief was on the committees of several employers' bodies and saw himself as something of a local spokesman against the union stranglehold over companies. His charisma and readiness to be opinionated ("de cracher dans les micros" - to talk to the media) made him a favourite with local journalists. Indeed, he regularly contributed a column to a journal generally condemning the antics of the CGT - and making the most of the opportunity to 'have a go' at some of his favourite targets:

"Demandez aux journalistes de l'Humanité par exemple, s'il n'y a pas de patrons à 'l'Huma'!!! (surtout à ceux qui viennent d'être licenciés pour raisons économiques!!!)."

(Just go and ask the journalists at l'Humanité if they don't have any bosses!!! - especially the victims of the economic lay-offs!!!).

- In a 'phone conversation with one of his management colleagues, a head of division, the chief remembers that he has heard that a neighbour's son is looking for a job, and the 'candidate' has the sort of professional skills they happen to be looking for - and what is more, "il a des idées proches des nôtres" (his ideas are akin to ours). The chief then spells it out, "C'est un Polack qui ne peut pas sentir les Cosacks - il pourra nous être utile" (he's from Polish stock and he can't stand Ruskies - he may be able to help us).

- He actively 'encouraged' cadres to join the Confédération Générale des Cadres (management union) to ensure cadre representation among the Works Stewards ("délégués du personnel") and on the works' council (described at the end of this chapter). If there were no cadre candidate on these
compulsory commissions, the way would be open for the CGT to name one of its own members instead. As the chief explains "j'ai horreur du vide" (I hate to see a void).

The chief was clearly hypersensitive to Communist 'plotting'. His Macartyite reactions were to some extent justified inssofar as the municipality in which the plant is located was a Communist stronghold which meant he could expect few favours from the local mayor. There was a feeling, however, that he devoted a little too much importance to the communist threat, to the detriment of his other activities. As one cadre put it:

"Certains patrons voient rouge partout et accordent trop d'ampleur aux syndicats."

(Some bosses see red everywhere and give the unions more attention than they deserve).

The personnel manager from this same firm confirmed the fact that the CGT had once been a force to be reckoned with, but since around 1979 it had lost its way (both within the firm and at national level). Its membership no longer consisted of professional French workers, who were to some extent disillusioned by the rhetoric - "l'analyse simpliste ne leur parle plus vraiment" (the simplistic analysis has lost its appeal) - partly because of the changing attitude towards capitalism and because of a greater understanding of economic interdependencies. This was posited as an explanation for the shift within the firm towards the reformist union Force Ouvrière, which like the Confédération Générale des Cadres, showed awareness of the fact that the company had to be in a healthy position in order to get anything out of it.

With its traditional core melting, the CGT had been reduced to recruiting among the immigrant labour - the company's CGT representatives were a Portuguese and a Tunisian. This has had a profound influence on the 'culture' of the CGT since its immigrant followers are less influenced by the communist ideology - they vote for the CGT but tend not to pay their dues. The head of personnel explained to the researcher that the immigrants were more demanding in their material expectations, and would simply switch allegiances if they were poorly represented on that front.
The changing demands of the grass roots supporters with their lesser commitment to communist ideology, has led to occasional divergences between national policy and local practice. According to the personnel manager, at national level the CGT had not signed an industry-wide agreement for five years. Yet at company level the local CGT had been forced to put their signature to wage settlements because their new followers would not have tolerated a refusal - which would be construed as misrepresentation rather than sticking to principles. Thus, using the pretext of "solidarity" with the other unions, or some other face-saving "clause de style" vis-à-vis the outside, the CGT would "collaborate with capitalism".

**Company 2 - large provincial plant (mass production, consumer goods)**

The problem of paying too much attention to the unions was a contributory factor in the concerns of the plant manager in this company too. He had recently taken over from a man who had been in the job 19 years and considered himself something of a "union specialist" - who liked acting tough and revelled in show-downs. This predecessor had helped to fuel a problem which was actually dying. He had exaggerated the disruptive potential of the unions and had set himself up vis-à-vis head office as the only person capable of dealing with them - on the principle of the "pompiers pyromane" (pyromaniac fireman). As the new boss explained:

"Les syndicats ont l'importance qu'on leur accorde."

(The unions are as important as you allow them to be).

The new plant manager had been brought in to stop the rot - and his main problem now was how to revalorise the foremen who had been spectators in the industrial relations process for 19 years. His predecessor had systematically dealt directly with the union delegates - which meant that the foremen "avaient le cul entre deux chaises" (fell between two stools) - they had lost all semblance of authority and often had to ask the union representatives what was going on. This had provoked a loss of morale...
malaise de la maîtrise*) and a certain indifference among the foremen. As
the boss explained, "ils ne voulaient plus se mouiller" (they'd washed their
hands of responsibility). From their point of view, why should they take
awkward decisions when these could be reversed if the personnel
representative went to see the head of personnel.

The new boss decided that this situation was unacceptable. And in his own
tidied up version of events he proceeded to explain how they had reinforced
the 'natural' (organisational) hierarchy, at the expense of the 'parallel'
(union) hierarchy.

The first stage was to give the foremen the desire to manage and to take on
responsibility since "ils avaient baissé les bras" (they had given up). To
do this, he sent everyone (from himself down to the supervisors) on a three
day training course destined to reinforce the "natural hierarchy". Over the
three days, they explored their hierarchic relations and expectations. They
compared for instance, the qualities they looked for in their immediate
superior, with those they felt their subordinates expected.

Next, he tried to "responsabiliser la maîtrise" (make the foremen more
responsible) by letting them award bonuses, organise and manage their teams,
so that a worker with a problem would get used to approaching his hierarchic
boss rather than the union representative. As he saw it, he was turning them
into "mini-PDGs". Indeed, he thought he could detect the change of attitude
in their language - saying he had actually heard them explaining to the
workers about sticking to budgets.

In some cases, these attempts to empower the foreman had backfired. For
instance, there had been indiscretions on the part of some foremen regarding
the granting of attendance bonuses and the authorisation of time off. "Il y
a eu du laisser-aller" (there was abuse of the system) which had prompted
the chief to clamp down on certain aspects of the system and put them in the
hands of the personnel department.

*) - The foreman's malaise, as illustrated in this small case study, seems
to be a fairly constant feature of French industry. It is probably more
justified than the malaise of the cadre (see chapter on "The French
manager") because the foreman does not benefit from the social consideration
allotted to the cadre.
This merely confirmed the boss' belief that a large proportion of the existing "maîtrise" (foremen) were indelibly marked by the régime they had known previously and might never be able to assume responsibility properly. Another aspect of his conversion strategy was therefore to try to raise the status of the foremen by recruiting from outside - and not just among workers "issus du tas" (from the rank-and-file) as had previously been the case. Increasingly they were looking to take on people with a technical baccalaureat or even two years post-baccalauréat education.

However, raising the recruiting standards was not proving easy since foremen continue to suffer from low status in France. The well-qualified technicians they were looking for preferred office jobs "comme dépanneur d'ordinateur avec voiture de fonction" (in computer maintenance with a company car) rather than work in dirty, noisy conditions. The plant manager conceded that the shop floor would never have the same prestige as an office job, but he also remarked that a post of foreman now had real responsibility attached to it. As he put it:

"Ce n'est plus le marteau et l'enclume."

(It's not the hammer and anvil anymore).

A final means of diverting power towards the normal chain of command and away from the unions was through enforcing the participative management legislation. For instance, the discussion groups (groupes d'expression) introduced by the Socialist government which came to power in 1981 and since revoked, had been maintained within the plant. The boss saw in them an excellent means of keeping people informed and of allowing them to vent their grievances in an informal setting - thereby outflanking the unions by depriving them of ammunition.

**Company 3 - large provincial plant (FMCG)**

Another manifestation of the move towards participative management has been the introduction of quality circles. The plant manager of the cosmetics plant explained how the company had gone along with the trend on the grounds that quality circles made economic and social sense. Unfortunately, the first attempt had floundered, but they were trying to get the circles off the ground again.
The plant manager had decided to hold a seminar together with the entire management group to discuss what had gone wrong the first time and to try to draw lessons for the second generation of circles. He had already listed a number of the lessons from the first abortive attempt and ran through them with the researcher.

First of all, the launch of the quality circles took place in very different conditions from its subsequent expansion. The launch had identified a favourable group (a small, stable, autonomous unit), with a good team spirit and an enthusiastic "facilitator". All the conditions had been united to ensure success - in the hope that this would provide the necessary publicity to encourage subsequent circles. Subsequent attempts had to contend with individuals who were neither convinced of the need for circles nor capable of organising them.

The pilot group had also benefited from the psychological boost of being under general scrutiny. They were aware that they had been identified as the most likely candidates for success and derived pride from that fact*. The boss had regularly referred to them as pioneers - they felt invested with a mission. Under these circumstances, it was hardly surprising that the pilot group made a promising start, but as the plant manager himself conceded, it was insufficient evidence on which to launch extend the experiment.

It was only when the number of circles increased that the real resistance manifested itself. There were secret objections, for instance, to the fact that the circles upset the traditional flows of information and required managers to surrender information which they considered to be part of their power. And, this resistance was not confined to the managers - even one group of highly skilled workers had refused to operate the circles. They were involved in the finishing of costly components and were at the summit of the shopfloor hierarchy. Their opposition to the quality circles was on the grounds that it would force them to divulge tricks of the trade to lesser skilled workers and formalise their methods. A similar phenomenon was noted by Michel Crozier (1963), among maintenance men who declined to give explanations to workers and hid the repair manuals.

* - There is a close parallel with the First Relay Assembly Test Room in the famous Hawthorne experiments where the flattering attention received by the pilot group was posited as one of the main reasons for its high performance (see Roethlisberger and Dickson; 1939).
Clearly then, the idea of group discussions in the French context was not universally welcomed, and appeared to clash with the prevailing pattern of work relations which tended to be hierarchic and distant. This was particularly the case in the staff functions where open meetings were not the norm - and the personnel seemed inhibited by the informality expected of them. What was more, there was a certain reluctance to adopt methods associated with production - and quality tended to be perceived in terms of product quality, not in a larger sense.

As for the production-related areas, the meetings had proved difficult to hold during work hours and seemed at odds with production imperatives. The plant manager explained how, on the one hand, the production managers are asked to stick to deadlines and cut costs, and on the other, to hold meetings which cost both time and money. What was more, shutting down the production line for two hours for no reason was anathema to the production manager's thinking - as the plant manager explained to the researcher, "if production kick up a fuss about stopping the line for preventive maintenance, you can bet they don't take kindly to stopping it to hold a discussion".

There was a general view that the circles ran parallel to the normal management processes. This attitude was no doubt encouraged by the fact that efforts by individuals in relation to quality circles were not officially recognised within the appraisal framework. Indeed, this was perhaps the prime reason for the eventual demise of the pilot group. Those involved in the first circle had put in a great deal of personal effort and when it was not rewarded, their enthusiasm understandably flagged.

Once this circle had lost its impetus the whole infrastructure collapsed very quickly. Yet, the idea of quality circles retained a great deal of intellectual appeal - hence the determination to re-launch the experiment.

**Tying up the threads**

The preceding snapshots give a fairly accurate representation of the salient concerns on the French industrial relations scene - certainly through the eyes of a general manager. The ordering of the accounts is no accident - it is intended to reflect the evolution in top management attitudes towards labour relations.
French management was long regarded as the most authoritarian in Europe. But the trauma of May '68 (euphemistically referred to as "les événements") sounded the death knell of the authoritarian attitude to labour relations. The number of old-style, confrontational bosses is dwindling. In the larger firms, at least, most managers today are intelligent enough to swim with the tide, for a variety of motives. Some may feel a genuine concern for their staff's well-being. Others have a main eye for profit, and believe that increased worker participation serves to raise productivity and reduce grievances, thus undercutting union influence. Several birds are expeditiously killed with one stone. As the plant manager of company 3 explained with regard to quality circles:

"J'y vois un moyen essentiel pour améliorer non seulement l'ambiance mais aussi les résultats économiques."

(I consider them a vital means of improving the work climate and the financial results).

With these initiatives coming from the employers themselves there seems little incentive for the government to add to the existing consultation structures - which remain fairly rudimentary.

The foundations for worker participation in France were laid just after the war when de Gaulle set up obligatory "comités d'entreprise" (works councils) for companies with a staff of over fifty. This has encouraged many companies to curb their expansion so as not to cross that fateful threshold - the so-called 'forty-niners'.

The council is chosen by the staff from candidates generally put forward by the unions, and has monthly meetings with management. By law, the members of the works council should be the first people informed of company changes - although they no longer have a right of veto (suppressed by the Socialist government, 1981-86). In theory, their advice may be sought, but in practice this rarely happens. In terms of actual activities, the council's main function is to supervise welfare and social matters. At a works council meeting attended in company 1, the committee accounted for the previous year's budget. Three main activities emerged; these were the organisation of presents for Mothers' Day, and for all the children at Christmas, and a subsidised holiday in Austria. And this would seem fairly typical if we are
to believe Ardagn:

"All the comités do is arrange the Christmas parties,' is a jibe one often hears." (1982; 95)

All firms with over ten staff also have what are called "délégués du personnel" (works' stewards). This was a post established in 1936 to channel employee grievances about working conditions (safety, hygiene, wage rates, social security etc.) to the management. In the 60s, de Gaulle made it clear that these two minor institutions (works' councils and works' stewards) were merely precursors to larger scale 'participation' - and in 1967, as a step towards it, a law was introduced obliging all firms with a staff of over fifty to distribute to them a small proportion of their profits in the form of shares.

However, de Gaulle's grander plan of participation does not seem to have materialised - little has in fact been added to his framework. The only real socialist concession to increased participation have been the Auroux laws voted through in 1982. These introduced "groupes d'expression" (discussion groups) into many companies and extended shop steward power, making this a full time job. The idea backfired somewhat though with the union representatives tending to alienate themselves from the workforce, and the "groupes d'expression" serving as a useful forum for apolitical discussion. Indeed, although the "groupes d'expression" are no longer obligatory, many companies have kept them running. Therefore, measures intended to reinforce union power have ended up undermining it.

As regards the unions then, their support has steadily declined since about 1978. A number of causes lie behind this erosion of union power. Firstly, there is the greater sensitivity of top management to personnel matters, and the multiplication of opportunities for giving vent to those concerns. Secondly, there is a greater awareness of economic imperatives. The recently-acquired business culture has filtered through to the general public - workers are better informed on the economic matters and have a better grasp of the interdependencies.

What is more, worker demands are now tempered by the sobering thought of unemployment. France is a nation that traditionally sets a high moral value on work and French workers are now thinking twice about the implications of striking.

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The unions, however, have not really adapted to the new mood. They are staunchly divided along ideological rather than trade lines as in Britain; and the largest union, the communist based CGT, remains doctrinally opposed to "collaboration with capitalism" on the German model. This tends to make effective joint action between the unions virtually impossible - and the rivalries between the unions are often exploited by management. On the other hand, it does mean that French industry is relatively free of the sort of demarcation disputes and workers' closed shops which plague British industry for instance - the result of the power and intransigence of the rival craft unions.

Restatement

French labour relations have traditionally been fairly conflictual. More recently however, they seem to have emerged from their former rigidity and mellowed. This seems to have been both a product of enlightened self-interest from top management and a more realistic approach by workers. The losers in the story have been the unions which have seen their power limited and their appeal reduced.
Selected bibliography


"Animals studied by Americans rush about frantically, with an incredible display of hustle and pep, and at last achieve the desired result by chance. Animals observed by Germans sit still and think, and at last evolve the solution out of their inner consciousness." (Bertrand Russell, Philosophy, 1927).

The aim of this chapter is to draw up some sort of evaluative summary of the distinctive features of French management. This may seem like a meaningless exercise since the balance sheet is more likely to reflect the researcher's inherent bias than the intrinsic merits of the entity assessed. However, bearing this objection in mind, the researcher will approximately retrace the layout of the thesis, and also look for hints as to what Britain can profitably learn from French management.

**Distinctive features**

Chinese philosophy maintains that in nature there are two complementary principles, yin (feminine) and yang (masculine), which eternally interact. Applying this view to French management, the researcher will try to avoid simplistic dichotomies, along the lines of the grandes écoles being either good or bad. The aim instead is to evaluate particular characteristics in context. Thus, one might posit, as Ardagh does, that France's technocratic elite was the guiding force behind the country's economic miracle, "les trente glorieuses" (1945-75), but now appears to be "a waning asset" (1982; 82) - what was appropriate in the fifties and sixties is less suited to the upheaval of the seventies and eighties.

French managers have an obvious advantage over their Anglo-Saxon counterparts in that they wear a legally recognised badge, that of cadre. Managerial status in France is not something that is handed out indiscriminately - there are no unflattering associations with say, bar managers or floor managers, as in Britain. In France, cadre status is generally acquired with some difficulty and it bestows social as well as a professional consideration on its incumbent.
The social standing of cadres probably helps to account for the quality of candidates which firms are able to attract - and a virtuous circle is established with the calibre of these recruits further enhancing the prestige of managerial careers. The only way to gain immediate cadre status is to graduate from one of the country's leading grandes écoles. This endorses the strong belief in the value of education and the use of qualifications for entry and promotion.

Firms generally deny that qualifications hold any water after initial entry; the reality is that the senior positions in French management are heavily dominated by graduates of the grandes écoles - even though the grandes écoles only account for about 5% of the population in higher education.

The grandes écoles are believed to have contributed a great deal to the growth of the French economy in the postwar period. They have ensured that people of the highest quality enter the civil service, business and government. Equally important, the products of the grandes écoles are highly mobile between these three sectors. This creates a powerful élite and old boy network which some find objectionable. Yet every society has such groupings; at least this one has the advantage that business, government, and civil service share the same values and knowledge of each other's problems - something which facilitates cross-sector mobility and dialogue, at least among the higher echelons.

This is in marked contrast to the situation in the UK where isolation continues in training, experience and career paths. What is more, the type of education imparted in the grandes écoles (with emphasis on applied science, mathematics, engineering or commercial subjects) is broadly relevant to the subsequent careers of the French élites - unlike British educational high fliers who tend to be trained in the classics and other humanities subjects and therefore have a weaker grasp of the underlying needs of an industrial society. It is hardly surprising that once selected for top civil service posts, British civil servants rarely move into industry.

Of course, the reliance on grandes écoles as nurseries for would-be leaders raises questions about the rather premature and irreversible nature of managerial selection and the disillusionment it produces among those cast aside. But the system has concomitant advantages - not least, the fact that
it pumps a high proportion of the best brains from each generation into the most productive areas of the French economy. There is a close and longstanding relationship between education and business in France. When national deficiencies have been identified it has generally been left to the education system to provide a remedy. The tradition of specialist schools are a perfect example - Polytechnique was set up in the 1790s to train engineers for the armed forces; l'ENA was founded in 1945 to turn out high level administrators and most recently l'Ecole Nationale de l'Exportation was created by the Socialist government (1981-86) in response to a balance of trade deficit. There was even talk, at the time of the "American challenge" (J. J. Servan-Schreiber) and France's alleged managerial lag, of setting up a business version of l'ENA. However, the idea was shelved and a co-ordinating body, the Fondation Nationale pour l'Enseignement de la Gestion des Entreprises (FNEGE) set up instead.

Another virtue of the system is that it allows youngish men with modern ideas to reach positions of influence without dissipating a lot of useless energy in political gamesmanship. The grande école graduate is virtually guaranteed an illustrious career and can therefore concentrate on actually doing a good job without having to devote inordinate time to self-publicity. Grandes écoles graduates form a very distinct élite and are very conscious of the fact, self-confident and intellectual in outlook.

If we turn to the nature of French work relations we note that they tend to be fairly structured and formalistic. French employees seem to shy away from the sort of workplace familiarity in which Anglo-Saxons indulge. The French do not appear to share the belief that openness in professional relations makes sound business sense.

From a British standpoint, the deliberate restraint and rigmarole of French office life would make it quite unbearable. However, in the French mind this lesser investment of the 'self' is considered a means of preserving personal choice and independence - which are perceived as higher order needs than the desire for enriched social contact.

The French believe that friendship obliges, provides a lever for favours, exposes the 'friend' to manipulation, and makes him or her dependent. In other words, they regard informality in the workplace as something of a Trojan horse - outwardly appealing but inherently dangerous.
It is noticeable in France, that those companies which do try to impose a more informal style of work relations are often unpopular. There is a widespread belief that cordial relations merely serve as a means of extracting commitment from employees and of encouraging a certain freedom of expression which facilitates decision making - in other words, as a manipulative device which gives an illusion of freedom whilst actually reducing it.

In order to get round this perceived dependence and manipulation, the French have therefore concocted a system of authority relations, based on ritual, which minimizes the personality input, the need for personal interaction.

Rituals include such things as the form of address, use of first names and so forth. The rituals are a means of situating the participants and defining their respective roles, thereby leaving them in no doubt as to which one has the upper hand. These rituals serve to diffuse potential tension since they clearly identify the authority of each party - thereby reducing the need for political manoeuvring or personal involvement. As a result of the preliminary ritualistic power play (exchange of correspondence, business cards and greeting), the participants know exactly where they stand. In other words, the authority of each party stems from their position (as projected by assorted rituals) rather than from their personalities. Authority in France is vested in the rôle - it does not emanate from the individual.

Clearly, these rituals are more than the trivial concerns for which they are often mistaken. Beneath their apparent banality, they reflect and reinforce essential traits of French management - notably the hierarchic and elitist traditions.

In terms of managerial values, the French seem torn between their respect for traditional values and an infatuation with the more modern American values. On the one hand, the social and cultural norms of the pre-industrialised order seem to have had a pronounced effect on the development of business attitudes - and colour French views of money, authority, mobility and so on. On the other hand, the American managerial ethos based on openness, pragmaticism and results is also having an impact on French attitudes.
This state of tension between past and future is perhaps best illustrated by the contrasting attitudes of French corporate leaders. At one extreme there is the older style of family management, usually authoritarian, wary of expansion and innovation; and at the other there is the 'new wave' of dynamic young entrepreneurs, such as Bernard Tapie, more or less self-made men who, without any elite training, have built up small firms to achieve spectacular results.

When it comes to big business though, the majority of heads are products of the grandes écoles and are parachuted into firms. French companies rely to a large extent on individuals who are alien to the firm, and sometimes even to the private sector. This goes against traditions in the UK, US and especially Japan which all tend to favour established insiders. There are signs however, that France may be something of a trendsetter in this area. Richard Vancil, a professor at the Harvard Business School recently published a book about succession at the top called "Passing the baton" in which he says that in the late 1960s fewer than 10% of American chief executives were outsiders. By the early 1980s the figure was 25%.

One good reason for preferring an outsider to an insider is that when a company needs to make big changes, outsiders are freer to deliver the necessary shocks. Insiders are too often lumbered with favours owed to others who have helped them on the way up.

It is customary in Britain to oppose public and private companies. What is noticeable in the French set-up is that this traditional distinction between public and private sector is less clear-cut. Partly, this is the result of the common backgrounds of the heads. In France, a large number of private companies are run by former senior civil servants, two notable examples being the Peugeot-Citroën Group and Moet-Hennessy. This blurring of categories probably helps to account for the ease with which the likes of Pechiney, Rhone-Poulenc and Saint-Gobain have made the transition from the private to nationalised sector and back again.

It might be said that French companies have confided the task of identifying and training its future leaders to the state. This demonstrates a qualitatively different relationship between state and industry from that found in Britain or the US. Another manifestation of the positive (though perhaps overbearing) influence of the state on business is the legal obligation to spend one per cent of the payroll on training.
The distinctive features alluded to above might, taken in isolation, appear contrary to received (mostly American) wisdom regarding sound management practice. For instance, we might consider that French management is too stratified, that qualifications are accorded too much importance, that interpersonal relations are too remote, that corporate mentalities are archaic... All these remarks are partly justified. However, we should not forget to look at the whole picture.

To take an obvious example, it would be easy to criticise the education system for its rigidity and rather narrow focus. However, the education system produces what it is asked to produce. It is geared to suit the exigencies of the companies, which seek help in the pre-selection of an elite of potential top executives. This allows careers to be mapped out at the recruitment stage, based on qualifications. What is expected of the education system is not that it impart particular skills, but simply that it classify students via entry and finalist examinations. Certificates guarantee a career and the most prestigious guarantee the best careers. If the companies decided to recruit and promote, not on qualifications, but on efficiency in the field, creativity and teamwork, the education system would try to develop these qualities. As it is, those qualities are more or less assumed to be the natural corollaries of high intellect.

What is true for the French education system, also applies to the economic system, to career and salary structures, to organisational relations and to the corporate cultures of French companies. They are all attuned to one another. The jigsaw pieces may have weird configurations but they still interlock neatly and are generally consistent with the industrial needs of the nation.

So, whatever the perceived merits or shortcomings of French management it can not be isolated from the society which spawned it - compatibility is probably more important than adherence to an ideal in determining economic success. The acid test is whether or not it works and the evidence - not least France's economic performance since the war - suggests that it does. At the same time French society has more recently found the self-confidence to articulate particular criticisms of management and especially of competitiveness where this is the case.
Universal versus culture-bound: some thoughts

By way of a conclusion, it is worth returning to the universalist versus particularist views of management. The idea that management tends to submerge cultural differences is one which is particularly dear to the Americans with their enthusiasm to convert people and organisations to an ideal model. However, there are signs that the French do not cherish conformity in the way the Americans do. Lawrence Wylie makes a very acute observation on this matter:

"When I was looking for an average French village to study, I had to use the expression "un village témoin". Everyone would react with hostility to being called "average". Whereas, in America, one sees towns that advertise themselves as being "All-American"." (Santoni; 61).

A variation on this theme was observed earlier in the thesis (chapter on managerial ethos). It was noted that French cadres are relatively immobile - partly because they do not like to think of themselves as interchangeable in the way American managers do, since it evokes facelessness, a lack of individuality.

Such fundamental differences in attitude raise serious doubts about the transferability of American management practices. This is not to say that those concepts are irrelevant, but nor are they automatically applicable to other cultures. The image which emerges is of several parallel tracks, rather than a single track with certain obligatory stops. To take an obvious example, the legitimisation of wealth creation and the pro-business cult seems to be a widespread phenomenon in Western cultures in the 1980s, just as consumerism was in the 1960s. But that does not mean that each culture has reacted to it in the same way. In France for instance, the rehabilitation of profit seems to have taken place at an abstract level, but remains taboo at a personal level (see chapter on management ethos). And it is doubtful that French culture will ever replicate American candour in the matter.

The universalistic theory derives its strength from the assumption that people will react to the same kinds of challenge in the same way. Yet the
foregoing chapters show that this is not the case. For instance, although the French adopted American-style management education in the late 1950s, they did not replicate American business schools. The American model did not generate clones, but grafted itself upon the existing infrastructure of grandes écoles, thus preserving the essential characteristics of French higher education. In other words, the expected democratizing influence of management education was countered by the elitist tradition of the grandes écoles - although the curricula (substance) changed the character of French management education (form) did not.

This is inevitably the case. American management practices are not filling a void - they are competing against longstanding practices. Management is certainly a source of change, but it is injected into an existing model whose broad outlines remain unchanged.

We have inherited a view of management as having a kind of pure logic which will eventually erode all the negative (cultural) forces which stand in its way. As Sorge points out, (1987;10) this idea of international convergence makes sense only as long as one is prepared to accept that industrialism is a homogeneous base, and that it is different in this from hunting, gathering, agriculture, herding or trading and transport. These activities also possess the magic ingredient of inherent logic - for instance, speed and safety in the case of transport or yields and consistency for agriculture. That has not prevented them from evolving in different ways, even in ostensibly similar environments. Marc Maurice (257) makes a similar analogy with regard to systems of production, claiming that there is no one best way to organise the construction of an automobile or a typewriter.

The most sensible stance on the debate between universal and culture-bound theories is of course an intermediary one - and Arndt Sorge provides a neat summary of the researcher's own position:

"The conclusion is that system organisation is never culture-free. If it were, it would be a natural phenomenon, which it is not. On the other hand, it would be wrong to propose a totally constructivist model of action, in which man can do more or less anything, and any organisational arrangement is possible" (Sorge; 1986; 19).
Any audit of another nation's management is inevitably loaded with the researcher's own cultural preconceptions. But awareness of this bias is half of the battle in overcoming it.

While certain parts of the French managerial model may seem archaic or idiosyncratic, the overall effect is one of coherence - the contradictions are complementary. This is reminiscent of the way we dismiss species in nature as parasitic or even repulsive while they serve to maintain the ecological equilibrium. Again, this view is the result of looking at elements out of context and according to myopic perceptions of what is useful, aesthetic and so forth. The aspects of French management can not be divorced from the society in which they thrive.

Criticism of French management has largely been based on the American presumption of universality. One is tempted to respond using the French saying "ne prends pas ton cas pour une généralité" (don't project your views onto others).

On the other hand, we should not fall into the residual trap whereby any unexplainable differences observed are attributed to cultural factors. That too, is rather facile.
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14. A FRENCH MALAISE?

"On passe notre temps à croire qu'on est malade, à gratter nos plaies" - conversation with François Delachaux (PDG Delachaux S.A.).

(We spend our time thinking we're ill and scratching our sores).

The aim of this chapter is to round off the thesis by setting French management in a wider context - to try to give some idea of the change of mood in French society.

The French have a long tradition of introspection and self-criticism. As Zeldin put it:

"No nation has tried harder to find and express its identity, none has looked in the mirror so hard and argued so much about what it sees in it" (1983; 6).

This theme has fascinated writers from Voltaire and de Tocqueville through Ernest Renan, Michel Crozier, Alain Peyrefitte and François de Closets. Hardly a year passes by without some indictment of the shortcomings of French society - the favourite targets being the constitution of the nation's élites or the psychological blocages within the society. And the French public seems to have a high tolerance for self-criticism since these books are almost guaranteed best-sellers.

French people have a habit of putting themselves above the masses and criticising the nation. The criticism can be quite incisive and scathing but somehow remains impersonal with commentators cleverly detaching themselves from the population they are criticising. The architypal example is the regular publication of polemic books with titles such as "La mafia polytechnicienne", "L'Enarchie" or "L'Enaklatura" - usually written by ex-alumni, stricken with conscience at their own presence in this privileged upper-crust world (see section on intellectualism in chapter on work ethos). The critics give the impression they are somehow not part of it - rather in the way de Gaulle used to criticise the French as being ungovernable, when he himself was hardly the most accommodating politician in history. Inside every Frenchman is a miniature General who loves France, but hates the French.
Against this backdrop of criticism, France has recovered from decades of underachievement, defeat, occupation, war in Algeria and student riots - and has emerged as a rich and successful country. Given this essential contradiction, are the French "malades imaginaires" (hypocondriacs)?

France is reluctant to concede that it is no longer a 'superpower' - it harbours dreams of returning to the forefront of world affairs through prestigious science and technology projects and economic prosperity. The French tend to see their country as a great power "en petit", on a somewhat smaller scale.

Perhaps because of the lack of self-belief described above and the loss of say in world affairs, the French have looked to Europe for support. This may explain the enthusiasm with which France, and its business community in particular, has embraced the concept of a unified European market. The vision of removing all barriers, visible and invisible, physical and technical, and all obstacles to the internal circulation of people, goods, services and capital has really captured the French imagination.

1992 and all that

It is no accident that the idea of 1992 as an annus mirabilis coincides with a rather dour and introspective domestic debate about national decline, as witnessed by articles along the lines: "La France est-elle encore une grande puissance?" (Is France still a superpower? - L'Express; 2/2/84; 24). To a France worried about its faltering economic performance and lack of clear national direction, the challenge of 1992 offers both a fresh goal (to fire up enthusiasm) and a vital lever for implementing internal structural change.

As explained in Le Point:

"Dans une France encore morose, les thèmes mobilisateurs se font rares" (15/06/88; 56).

(In a down-hearted France, rallying calls are hard to come by).
Confirmation that a united Europe is "une idée porteuse" (an inspirational theme) can be seen in the way the presidential candidates have seized upon the concept in the build-up to the recent elections (May 1988). As early as January 1987, François Mitterrand made a speech to the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, in which he repeatedly stated, "La France est ma patrie mais l'Europe est mon avenir" (France is my country, but Europe is my future). Not to be outdone, Jacques Chirac decided to incorporate the idea of Europe into his electoral slogan: "Gagner en 1988 pour réussir en 1992" (Winning in 1988 to succeed in 1992). Indeed, 1992 cropped up so frequently in speeches by the two front-runners that each seemed to be vying to make the issue his own.

France's vision of a united Europe is a long-standing one. Whilst Britain has wavered and dragged its feet, France has remained staunchly committed to the idea of Europe. It has also led the way in terms of providing a common vision as to the direction and distance in which the European member states should travel together. When he was Prime Minister, Georges Pompidou (1969-74) once said that France had to play the role of Europe, given the absence of a common European will. There is more than a grain of truth in this statement. One could not imagine, say, Britain emulating France and staging a conference with the purely academic aim of defining a common European identity (Financial Times; 26/1/88; 19).

Recently, French faith in the idea of a united Europe has been reinforced by two particular concerns: firstly, the loss of national impact on world affairs; and secondly, the need to revitalise certain sectors of French industry.

There is a strong nationalistic element in French life. French people buy French cars, eat French food, go on holiday in France. France shows determination to 'remain herself', to preserve distinctiveness, and to pursue a national ambition. But, there is a clear discrepancy between these goals and the resources at her disposal. The French have realised that, in order to be heard, they must use the European amplifier - unlike Britain which benefits from privileged relations with the US. Thus, from a French viewpoint, Europe is a means of achieving national goals and conserving a central role on the world stage. France has tried, not without success, to pursue a mix of independent, distinctive and autonomous actions wherever possible and of co-operative policies with its European neighbours - in short, to reap the benefits with a minimum of burdens.
Perhaps more importantly, in the context of this thesis, is the perspective of the single European market as a catalyst to activate French businesses. Some areas of French business are still backward and cloistered, and it is hoped that 1992 will help shock them into modernising - in much the same way that the prospect of increased competition accelerated French modernisation in 1957. The exaltation of 1992 may, therefore, amount to little more than a device to spur French industry to do faster what it needs to do anyway - become more self-reliant, internationally-minded and responsive to market forces.

In France, with its history of protected and highly regulated markets, the deadline is adding psychological impetus to efforts to shake-up corporate thinking and the need to reach a 'critical size' to compete on a European scale - hence, the recent spate of take-overs.

In fact, there seems to be little danger of the French underestimating the implications for companies of 1992, since everyone from the President down has been beating the drum. In his address to industrial leaders (Palais des Congres, 18/6/87), President Mitterrand evoked the negative scenario of France becoming a mere sub-contractor for other nations - instead of seeing French companies flourish on a global scale. Similarly, Edouard Balladur, the Treasury Minister has tried to instill a sense of urgency among the bosses by telling them:

"Cinq ans est un délai extraordinairement court, compte tenu du redressement à accomplir pour un pays affaibli depuis de nombreuses années." (Dirigeant; numéro spécial; July 1987).

(Five years is a very short lead time to redress a country which has grown weaker over several years).

Not all political leaders are using these scare tactics. Some, like Jacques Delors are emphasising the potential gains for French industry, suggesting that the unified market can pave the way for "a second French economic miracle" (L'Usine nouvelle; 19/3/87; 10). His optimism was echoed by Philippe Willaume, President of the Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants (CJD), who believed that 1992 represented "une chance historique" for French companies.
It would seem that the message has not fallen upon deaf ears. Perhaps stirred by memories of the inspirational years of post-war reconstruction, the whole concept has struck a particularly loud chord in French business circles.

At every level one can see initiatives to raise national consciousness regarding 1992. These efforts have ranged from high profile extravaganzas like the invitation of 2800 political and industrial leaders (including François Mitterrand and Jacques Delors) to attend a colloquium entitled, "Europe-entreprise: objectif 1992", to the setting up of hundreds of working groups and task forces across industry destined to prepare for the challenge of a Europe without frontiers. Since the start of 1987, virtually every trade association, chamber of commerce (see Exhibit 13) or professional body has turned its attention to the theme of a united Europe. Even the small companies have jumped on the bandwagon. In June 1987, they held a national 1992 awareness day. Further support has come from the business journals all of which have focused heavily on 'European' articles knowing that there is a guaranteed readership eager to be informed.

As a result of this frenetic activity, corporate awareness is high. Assuring shareholders that the company is ready for 1992 has become an almost obligatory feature of the PDG's statement. Of course, the way in which companies view the single market is dependent upon their existing commitment to Europe. There are those companies for which international competition is no novelty, and others which have never yet been exposed to it.

Among the former, one finds all the major corporations in industrial and service sectors which have a European perspective at the heart of their strategy. Within these companies there is a faintly pleasurable sense of expectation which is highly revealing. Only a few years ago, the prospect of a freer European market would have been viewed in France as the prelude to an invasion by West German industry. Today it is talked of as an invigorating challenge and an opportunity for expansion. One tell-tale sign regarding French optimism, is the way French companies are looking at the Channel Tunnel. They clearly have their eyes set on the British market. Tangible proof of this lies in a brochure from a small company in Northern France. The brochure has a map showing the distance not only from Paris but also from London.
More surprisingly, practical preparations for 1992 have kept in step with the official rhetoric (something commented upon in the chapter on management ethos). French companies are preparing rapidly and in detail, incorporating the expected changes into their plans. All the companies visited had a plan already drawn up or in the offing. Even more striking evidence of preparation was visible in recent take-over wave which saw virtually every merger or acquisition being cloaked in the colours of Europe.

Whilst they are more apprehensive, small firms are not burying their heads in the sand. They too, are giving considerable thought to the changes which the lifting of barriers will foist upon them. The small manufacturing companies visited were particularly preoccupied by the likely shift in engineering norms from the French system towards the more exacting West German standards. Notwithstanding this sense of foreboding, the companies knew the likely direction of the changes because they were genned up on the nature of the voting process whereby each country was allotted a coefficient from 1 to 3. It would seem that the effectiveness of the propaganda has been such that the small firms are as well informed as their large counterparts.

The researcher's informal findings were corroborated by survey results recently published in the Times (2/3/88; 26). These showed that French companies were well-informed across the board in contrast to the UK (and Germany) where awareness among smaller firms is significantly lower. The survey also revealed that the proportion of British firms with a strategy to take advantage of the internal market is less than half that in France. In France, 60% of the companies had already drawn up a strategic plan either to protect existing markets or to exploit new opportunities, compared to 30% in the UK. The idea that French companies are already in the starting blocks was further supported by a recent survey of members of the Paris Chamber of Commerce (Director; Feb. 1988; 58) which showed that a full quarter of respondents felt they already had enough information and were equipped for the advent of the internal market.

However, the most striking feature of the French reaction to 1992 is the grass roots interest it has elicited. For instance, in the companies visited, interviewees would spontaneously refer to the target date. The event has clearly gripped the public imagination, with middle managers enthusing about the prospect of a united Europe and conscious of the urgency
of the situation. As one production manager explained to the researcher:

"1992, c'est pas demain, c'est ce soir".

(1992 is not tomorrow but tonight).

What is more, the information does not stop at management level; primed by corporate chiefs and professional bodies, the middle managers are organising their own seminars and making sure that the rest of the workforce knows what is afoot. In the course of the fieldwork, the researcher attended one in-house seminar on the theme of Europe, came across several invitations to 1992 forums, and witnessed the passing on of numerous tit-bits concerning the unified market in everyday meetings.

The volubility of the 1992 debate in France, is all the more surprising in view of the comparative silence of France's neighbours. Some of the senior managers who regularly travelled abroad, commented on the relative indifference of their European counterparts from business contacts with them. This leads one to wonder if French paranoia in this matter is a reflection of backwardness - perhaps the lack of fuss elsewhere is a sign that preparations for 1992 started a long time ago, by dropping protectionist measures and by internationalising operations.

That is probably true. In some respects, the challenge of 1992 seems to have appeared at a singularly opportune moment, for France at least. The date has become synonymous with the challenge of restructuring industry and improving its efficiency in the face of international competition. However, something more fundamental seems to lie behind the enthusiasm over 1992. It is difficult to substantiate, but the French appear to respond very positively to grand designs - as seen in post-war rebuilding and on a smaller scale in projects like Concorde and the nuclear energy programme. Apparently, the idea of a single European market has locked into a basic French desire to be involved in an epic production.

At the moment then, France has become the yardstick against which other member states gauge their efforts. Taking a frozen snapshot of progress may seem pointless since the differences in preparation will no doubt be effaced as the countdown progresses. However, there are good grounds for doing so. Firstly, because the difference in initial response reflects a qualitatively different attitude to Europe - the French are effectively broadcasting their
commitment to Europe. Secondly, and more importantly, the differences in response which manifest themselves clearly at this stage may serve as explanatory factors when it comes to assessing which member states have most benefited from the levelling of the barriers.

Restatement

Five or ten years ago, it perhaps made sense to talk of a French disease, of local failure to adapt quickly enough to a new world economic climate, and of antipathy towards business. Today, both right and left have roughly similar aims. Socialists call it democracy, the right calls it liberalism. The country is stable and prosperous, and the business community has been revitalised by the idea of a single European market - which is being invoked as a reason to strip away archaic thinking. The French seem to have come to terms with the loss of French grandeur - and are looking to Europe to replenish it.
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**L'Express**, "La France est-elle encore une grande puissance?", Olivier Noc, 2/2/84, pp. 24-35.


Cher Monsieur,

Lors de l'Assemblée générale des délégués consulaires du 15 juin dernier et des différentes réunions préparatoires, j'avais informé l'ensemble des participants qu'une réunion de travail se tiendrait, le vendredi 18 septembre 1987 à la Chambre de commerce et d'industrie de l'Aisne en présence de M. Georges CHAVANES, Ministre du commerce, de l'artisanat et des services.

Monsieur le Ministre vient de me faire savoir que pour des raisons impératives, il se trouve dans l'impossibilité de se déplacer le 18 septembre.

Compte tenu de l'intérêt qu'il porte à nos travaux, il m'a proposé d'être parmi nous :

le jeudi 17 septembre 1987

Cette importante réunion sera placée sous le thème : "les entreprises de l'Aisne face au Marché unique de 1992". L'ordre du jour vous parviendra ultérieurement par un prochain courrier.

Je souhaiterais très vivement que vous puissiez être présent à cette réunion qui se tiendra :

au siège de la Chambre de commerce et d'industrie de l'Aisne  
83 boulevard Jean Bouin à Saint-Quentin  
à 14 heures 30.

Je vous prie de bien vouloir agréer, Cher Monsieur, l'expression de mes sentiments distingués.

Signature


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