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The paradoxical dynamics of personal and professional identities.

Pierre Tap¹
Samuel Antunes²

Summary.

What is personal identity and what is professional identity? How is professional identity constructed and how does it relate to the personal identity of each subject? The authors present the different authors who have dealt with these questions, from a psychosociological and sociological perspective, based on research in developmental psychology (Zazzo, Malrieu, Wallon, Cloutier) insofar as personal identity is constructed from childhood and adolescence. But identity, far from becoming entrenched during adult life, is subject to crises, mutations and transitions, whether voluntary or forced. The authors rely on specialists in Economics (Amartya Sen, John Rawls) and Social Philosophy (Paul Ricoeur, Jean-Marc Ferry, Alan Montefiore, David Rasmussen, Axel Honneth), insofar as work and professional identity, in their dynamics and crises, cannot be understood outside of professional and existential ethics, outside of the way in which social actors, both individuals and groups, give meaning to their lives, in and out of work. Finally, the authors develop the great paradoxes that run through the dynamics of elaboration and evolution of these identities, in a society disrupted by unemployment, by stress and by the uncertainties of the future.

Introduction. From conduct to professional identity.

In order to understand the importance of professional identities and their link with personal dynamics, it is necessary to place them in the context of *individual and collective behaviors*. By "*conduct*" we mean the complex intrapersonal articulation of mental activities and behaviors linked to a given field of human practices characterized by the interaction between the person, a human entourage and a physical, social and cultural environment. But it is advisable to specify this notion, important in our eyes.

Behaviors are often considered synonymous with behaviors. However, it is necessary to differentiate between them. Pierre Janet called certain actions, certain *particular forms of* human behavior (expectation, triumph or failure behaviors, etc.) *conducts*. Behavior is

¹ Professor emeritus at the University of Toulouse Le Mirail; Professor at the Institut Supérieur de Psychologie Appliquée. Lisbon

² Psychotherapist and Coach. Executive Director of Dave Morgan Consulting Company, Lisbon

supposed to be "objective", observable, whereas conduct introduces the non-visible dynamics of the same behaviors, the mental activities and feelings before their expression.

In 1929³, Janet wrote: "The psychological fact is the conduct of the living being". Behavior (outwardly perceptible movements, actions, words) is certainly part of the psychological fact, but it also includes motivational dynamics, intention, awareness and deliberation, which have an important internal dimension. One could say that *conduct is the organized set of behavioral and mental activities oriented by desires, motivations, values to defend and defenses to activate*. Thus, convictions and beliefs, fantasies and daydreams, inner language, feelings of love or aggression, mental evaluations in professional activities are all psychological operations that make it possible to articulate representations and acts, the body and social communications. *The notion of conduct refers to the hypothesis of the organized, structured, unified character of the person*⁴. Conduct cannot be reduced to its physical or social aspects. "By *behaviors* we must understand those that are externalized in action, but also those that are internalized in the mode of fantasies or in the form of intrasubjective relationships between the various tendencies of the psychic apparatus" (Widlöcher, 1973). Authors like Meyerson (1948) and Malrieu (2003) showed the importance of the emotions, feelings and systems of values in the emergence and the functioning of the socio-personal representations in the dynamics of the conducts. Pirandello wrote in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921): "Facts are like bags, if they are empty they do not stand up. In order for a fact to stand up, and to have a meaning, it is first necessary to include the motives and feelings that provoked it. *Conduct includes everything that allows a person to give meaning* to his or her situation, to *legitimize his or her own behaviors* according to the *values* he or she defends and the *projects* he or she develops.

³ The quotation from Pierre Janet has already been used by Doron and Parot (1990), taken from *L'évolution psychologique de la personnalité* (1929). Paris, Éditions Chahine, 1929. Re-edition of the text: Paris: La Société Pierre Janet with the support of the CNRS, 1984, 327 p. (downloadable).

⁴ Lagache defines conduct as "the set of material and symbolic operations by which an organism in a situation tends to realize its possibilities and to reduce the tensions that threaten its unity and motivate it. The expression "set of operations" does not exclude any reaction or response of the organism, and implies moreover that these reactions or responses form a structured totality" (1951, p.310).



It is therefore important here to link the question of identities to the conduct of the professional field.

To speak of "professional conduct" implies that we introduce the relationship between doing (behaviors) and being (conscious, competent, emotional, etc.). The notion of "*identity*", which is generally associated with the fact of "being"⁵, and which is evoked in relation to all fields of human activity, will play a significant role in professional conduct, in relation to various other fields, or areas of activity, life environments, external or internal spaces:

- Body field: to be "beautiful" or to be "ugly"; to be "big" or to be "small";
- Food field: being "obese" or being "anorexic";
- Gendered or sexual field: being a "man" or a "woman"; being "straight" or "gay";

These first three fields mobilize body identity, gender identity and sexual identity. It will be noted that each type of activity involving categorization presupposes the construction and evolution of a more or less complex identity system, including the person in his or her diversity and links with multiple fields. These definitions can take the form of stereotyping and stigmatizing: this is often the case when binary thinking is established, opposing two

⁵ One immediately perceives that *being* can only be abstractly dissociated from *doing*, *knowing*, *power* or *becoming*. We know the classical (1968) trilogy of the relations between *knowledge*, *know-how* and *being*. But this trilogy has the disadvantage of being too focused on knowledge. It can be validly articulated with this other trilogy, post-modern, of *power*, of the *gift of meaning and value*, and of *becoming*. For example, what good is a *know-how* (a skill) that would be cut off from any realization (not being *able to do*) or that would be perceived as unacceptable in terms of ethics (meaning and value of doing)?

groups or peoples, two categories, two characteristics. This is indeed what we see in certain categorizations, according to various social fields or areas of life:

- The Family Field: being a "fusional" parent (letting go) or a "castrating" parent (autocrat);
- The academic or professional field: being a "gifted" or a "dunce", being a "technician" or a "salesman", being a worker or an operator (two identities that are officially confused but that can cause differences in self-representation or the representation of others).
- The leisure field: which introduces many identities linked to specific practices: being a fisherman, a reader, a spectator, a sportsman.
- The cultural, religious, political fields, etc.

And we could multiply the qualifiers associated with different activities or different environments: social, cultural, sports, etc. All these identities can be hierarchical, merged or opposed to each other, in order to constitute the personal identity or orient the professional⁶ identity. To a first approximation, we can say that identity necessarily intervenes to "qualify" a person, a group or an institution, in relation to various *types of activities or functions...*

Identity is thus a process of qualifying attribution, made up of representations and feelings allowing both the person to describe and evaluate himself, but also allowing others to

describe or evaluate him. It should be noted that this *evaluative description* can be positive, negative or neutral, depending on its author or its target. The identity of the unemployed, the housewife (or man), the retired person, etc., is generally more or less devalued in relation to professional identities. But the latter are themselves more or less hierarchical according to a scale of valuation of the corresponding professions or according to the social or cultural affiliation of the actors concerned. It should be noted, however, that the identity defined in this way is part of the dynamics of wider behaviours that it guides, at the same time as it finds meaning and a reason to exist through decisions and "personal acts", as Malrieu (2003) puts it. As Marcia (1991) proposed, there are three facets of personal identity:

- *A subjective facet*: with a multiplicity of feelings, in particular the real or supposed feelings of unity and continuity of the self, entering in relation with the representations, the images and the emotions on the one hand, and with the external opportunities or pressures (physical, social, cultural);
- *A behavioral facet*: made up of all habits of all kinds, attitudes and motivations, reactions that are both observable and predictable;
- *A structural facet*: including the subject's ability to control, organize, maintain or change his or her global personal functioning, in relation to the different current contexts, but also in relation to personal history and time regulation.

Personal identity must constantly take into account the multiple social, professional and cultural identities that describe and constitute it. Moreover, these multiple identities, even when coordinated by the personal identity, constitute only a part of the personality. They intervene in relation to the different behaviors of the person, in the articulation between

⁶ For example, it is better to be tall to be a basketball player, to be short and light to be a jockey, ... etc., not to mention the professional stereotypes about more masculine or feminine jobs, ... etc.

systems of representations, beliefs, projects and systems of actions⁷. Of course, close and complex links exist between personal identity and collective identities. For example, personal identity is associated with *implicit theories of personality*⁸, collectively constructed. Conversely, collective identities are the object of individual internalization and appropriation, based on multiple learnings. However, experience and life history lead the individual to go through crises, transitions and identity reshuffling. This is the case for professional identities in relation to idealized representations (based on the imaginary or on non-actualized reference values) or pragmatic representations (lived through concrete experiences) and desired or prescribed⁹ behaviors. The identity dynamic is made up of processes that are at once intrapersonal (reflections and activities of the individual alone), interpersonal (discussions and activities with other people) and organizational (taking into account the objectives, the competencies expected by the professional organization, the duties and rights displayed or implied, the prohibitions, the requirements and the advice given).

I. Identity: definitions and characteristics.

To advance in a preliminary definition of the identity, it is advisable, according to us, to make the distinction between "identity" and "concept of oneself". According to R. L'Ecuyer¹⁰, the notions of "personal identity" and "self-concept" evoke and measure the same processes and the same contents. For other authors, on the contrary, it is advisable to differentiate them. For example, Honess and Yardley (1987) consider that the concept of "identity" gives priority to structural or social processes, to account for the action of the individual, whereas the model of "self-concept" considers the individual as the agent of the action. It is however necessary to take into account both structural and social determinations and personal determinations. According to us, contrary to the "concept of self", the notion of "*identity*" and that of its opposite, "*otherness*", imply *processes of comparison*. "Identity", a term derived from logic, implies "*sameness*" (absolute resemblance) between two objects or between two moments of the same object: my identity is what allows me to "*remain the same over time*" (comparison with oneself). The identity between two identical twins means that they are totally *identical* (comparison with others). But this first definition (by *idem*) is opposed to the one that defines

⁷ On this point, we can refer to the *theory of activity systems* proposed by Curie et alii. (CURIE, 2000)

⁸ The notion of *Implicit Theories of Personality* (IPP), borrowed from Bruner and Tagiuri (1954), then evoked in Europe by LEYENS (1983) and by BEAUVOIS (1984), has now entered the common psycho-social language. TIPs, developed by common sense, are mental representations of others (or of oneself) involving a pre-established organization of personality traits on doing (if someone does this, they also do that) or on being (if someone is this, they are also that). TIPs have been considered as a "naive characterology" (Doron and Parot, 1991, p.684); BELLIER (2004) shows the importance of TIPs in the individual and collective functioning of companies, both in their relationship with know-how and with the self-management and identity of the people and groups concerned.

⁹ Prescriptions can be explicit (by reference to laws and regulations) or implicit (representations, positive or negative stereotypes, etc.).

¹⁰ René L'ECUYER is the French author who has best studied the evolution of the self-concept throughout life, starting with the question "Who am I? Who are you? Cf. L'ECUYER, 1978; 1980; 1981; 1994.

identity as the assertion of the proper characteristics of a target object (definition by *ipsity*¹¹) : it is no longer a question of being the same, but of *being oneself*.

The identity can then be defined as the system of representations, feelings, knowledge and projects from which the person perceives himself, recognizes himself, but also is perceived and recognized by the others. It allows the individual to structure himself " in the confrontation with the objects, with the situations and with others, in valued unit, distinct from the others, individual engaged in his environments of life and able, while evolving, to recognize himself identical to himself in time " (MASSONNAT, PERRON, 1990, p. 10). Personal identity is "associated with awareness, knowledge, evaluation and integration of the self... It is in constant relation with *cultural systems of beliefs and values, with systems of conduct and lifestyles*, and thus with the multiple collective identities and the various group memberships that are linked to these systems and styles" (TAP, 2005a, p. 278).

According to Henri LEHALLE (1995), the establishment of identity introduces three distinct processes: the *descriptive* (self-description), the *evaluative* (self-esteem) and the *integrative* (internal cohesion). According to the same author, the identity has a double integrative function: to maintain the coherence and the continuity, but also, simultaneously, to actualize the capacity to build new forms (morphogenesis). Hanna Malewska-Peyre and Pierre Tap (1991) consider that the genesis of the identity is also bound to two integrative processes: the social integration (interpersonal and socio-cultural) and the psychic integration (¹²intrapersonal). The articulation of these two integration processes allows the child to socialize and personalize¹³ himself. Paul Ricoeur showed the importance of *the narrative identity* which allows the man, by telling himself, to build and reinforce the identity, personal or professional. We understand the importance of life stories, of the possibility to tell oneself, to be the hero, happy or unhappy, of one's own story. *The narrative identity* (articulating the *memeté* - to be the same and the *ipséité* - to be oneself), according to Paul Ricoeur, allows "the setting in narrative of the experiences. The narrative confers to the personal identity an *anchoring* and a historical thickness, directing the ethics towards a *substantial ideal of good life*".

But as Philippe MALRIEU (2003) rightly points out, "Autobiographical accounts are not simple "life stories" in which the subject exposes the course of his life. It is a question of formulating *reflexive questions*, in which he wonders about what he could have done, and, starting from an assessment of his experiences and the situation of strength or weakness in which he finds himself, about what he could do. We witness the more or less coherent *elaboration of a plan for the future*" (*op. cit.*, p. 159).

¹¹ Paul RICOEUR compared these two aspects (*idem/ipse*) of identity and their complex interactions in his book *Soi-même comme un autre* (1990). For their use in social psychology, see TAP (*Identité et exclusion*, 2004).

¹² The notion of *psychic integration* was evoked by Bruno BETTELHEIM (1943, reproduced in 1979) in relation to survival in Nazi concentration camps (in which he himself was interned for nearly two years). This psychic integration was, according to him, the determining characteristic of the prisoners who best resisted the atrocious conditions of life in the camps. This integration was linked to the strength of internal beliefs and convictions, values that were anchored and significant for the person.

¹³ See also Pierre TAP, 1991.

But the lived conflicts lead the actor to "a rational justification of the claims" and thus to construct an *argumentative and reconstructive identity*. "The argumentation engages the *responsibility* of the subjects of law, inflecting the ethics towards a *procedural idea* of the *just society*". This conception obliges to move away from the "substantial ideal" and to evoke crisis, mutation and possible reconstruction.¹⁴

Jean-Paul CODOL (1980) defines identity from three dimensions: 1. the self as a unique object (uniqueness, the feeling of difference); 2. the coherence, stability and relative constancy of the self (the feeling of unity and identity to oneself); 3. the valuation of the self (feeling of power, autonomy, self-esteem). According to him, identity is "the structured set of significant pieces of information, received or constructed by the individual about himself. It is ultimately an organization of traits, qualities, characteristics [...] that the individual attributes to himself." (*Op.cit.* p. 156). These characteristics are the result of the cognitive integration of external information, according to the person's social affiliations.

Paul MUSSEN (1980) presents identity as a "composite mental structure, having both cognitive and affective characteristics, which includes the individual's perception of himself as a distinct, self-consistent being, separate from others, whose behavior, needs, motivations, and interests have a reasonable degree of consistency" (*Op. cit.* , p. 13).

Erik ERIKSON (1968) makes the distinction between "*personal identity*" and "*ego identity*". The "*personal identity*" integrates the perception of similarity with oneself (*self sameness*), the dynamics of existential continuity and the perception that the others recognize this similarity and this continuity. The "*ego identity*" is rather linked to the existential quality of a given self (*the ego quality of this existence*). But the articulation between these two identities defines the *style of individuality of the person* who, through his or her own characteristics, would come to establish authentic and meaningful relationships with other people. "The search for identity implies giving meaning to life, to relationships with others, to history and to personal or collective aspirations" (TAP, 2005a, p. 305).

II. Identity as a system of qualification.

"Personal identity is part of the articulation of collective identities, associated with groups of belonging, categories of references or activities and social status" (TAP, 1996). Personal identity thus emerges as a structuring system that integrates multiple dimensions.

Seven dimensions participate in the structuring of personal¹⁵ identity:

¹⁴ Ferry, J.M. *L'éthique reconstructive*. Paris, Cerf, 1996. p.7

¹⁵ See TAP, 1980; 1988; 1991; 1996. The evolution of the definitions of identities, the changes noted in the nature and place of the dimensions and characteristics of identity (traits, systems, strategies, etc.) are significant of the progress made. Most authors are abandoning "substantialist" conceptions of identity (permanence, sameness, unity, continuity, etc.) in favor of dynamic conceptions. This is the reason why the notions of identities and paradoxical dynamics of identity seem important to us. As Piaget said, there are no processes without structures and structures without processes. In other words, we cannot replace the definitions of structure with conceptions based on change, without analyzing how the structures themselves

1. *The temporal dimension of self-knowledge.* The feeling of identity refers to the temporal dimension of the knowledge of oneself. From the feeling of "continuity" or "quasi-permanence", the subject situates himself in time and space, which allows him to build and organize projects. We know how important time is in the emergence and stabilization of professional identity. The candidate for any position must demonstrate his or her skills through years of *experience*. But the sense of identity is now being challenged by the need to adapt to new conditions. One has to be flexible, capable of change, creative, i.e. able to question one's own habitual ways of being and doing.
2. *The feeling of unity or coherence.* The feeling of identity is associated with feelings of unity or coherence of the self. These feelings refer to the idea of a representation, more or less stable, more or less structured, that the individual has of himself. This perspective of unity and integration is built in a controlled time and in a historical perspective, the personal history of the individual. When the individual is confronted with changes in his or her professional itinerary (unemployment, changes of functions or fields of activity), the person may experience these changes as a personal sign of instability, as proof of a loss of identity, especially if the feeling of efficiency is called into question, along with the loss of internal coherence, the feeling of self-destruction, of betrayal of values perceived as the *foundations of oneself*.
3. *The system of multiple identities* that constitutes the personal identity, draws its richness from the organization of this very diversity. Diversity evokes the multiplicity of roles that make up a single, total person, but also several *characters* ¹⁶integrated into a single person. The appropriation of these roles, the affiliative commitment and the participation in collective projects, enriches the perception of the internal self (its value and its capacities) and the perception of the external self(s) ("What is my value? How do I evaluate myself in comparison with others?"). The risk of this diversity is, however, to reduce "being" to what it has (to its cumulative, quantifiable "properties"). In professional terms, as in cultural terms, diversity appears as the need to accept others in their differences (others as people, as well as other activities, professions or trades, which we perceive as so many *otherness*). But often, for the same social actor, there is the need to simultaneously manage several functions or activities, possibly contradictory and conflicting. The most significant

are transformed. A person can say that he or she has lost his or her identity, that he or she no longer knows who he or she is, and yet, by saying this, he or she manifests his or her effort to find a coherence, a meaning to his or her losses and a way to assume them or to attempt a *restructuring*.

¹⁶ The notion of the "character" phase was evoked by Pierre Janet (1929). "The human personality, before becoming the individual self, passes through the character phase. In relation to others or to ourselves, we are characters (that is to say) individuals capable of special powers, capable of playing a particular role. There are almost in each of us two characters: the character of outside and the character of inside (at home)" (*Op. cit.* pp.178 and sq.).

example concerns the necessary articulations between professional identities and family¹⁷ identities. These articulations of course involve the regulation of behaviors and temporal phases between the two environments.

4. *The affirmation through the desire for autonomy, the need for separation and recognition.* The quest for autonomy can go through the need for affirmation and recognition. The individual seeks autonomy, self-affirmation, through cognitive differentiation and affective opposition: it is a way of saying that they are different, unique and independent. Of course, the needs for self-affirmation, autonomy and recognition play an important role in the appropriation and management of professional identities. But they can conflict with the functional needs of collective work: efficiency, sharing or competition, identification with the objectives of the group or the company.
5. *The singularization by the feeling of originality.* The individual accentuates his difference and seeks his originality (which can go as far as deviance, going beyond the limits), and, through it, manifests his quest for singularity. Singularity and originality can be an important engine of creativity. However, the collective definition of a professional identity is most often formulated in a normative way: "*what one must be or do when one is ...*". It rarely takes into account the importance of motivation and the space for freedom, which the professional needs to create something new. But not all *singularity - originality* - is necessarily creative. It can cause marginalization or even professional exclusion.
6. *Identity is rooted in action and the production of works.* Identity is affirmed and consolidated through action, commitment, taking responsibility and social coaction. The individual seeks to feel responsible and to be recognized as responsible by others. This relationship between identity, action and professional responsibility is obviously major. As Carmel CAMILLERI (1990) has shown, it is necessary to differentiate between *ontological identity* (general definition of oneself, outside of situations) and *pragmatic identity* (what I really am in action, in specific situations).
7. *Identity is established as a value and through values.* Even in difficult situations, the individual needs to be loved, recognized, admired and accepted by others. He seeks to value himself, to find his value in the eyes of others and, by "counterpart", in his own eyes. This aspect is linked to the need to be successful, to succeed in the projects that he assumes as a leader. The *feeling of success* is closely related to the feeling of self-worth and the need to be recognized as having value and a "future". But these feelings of success will be confronted with standards, with definitions of

¹⁷ Too often, family identity or professional identity is referred to in the singular. However, in the professional field as in family life, identities are multiple. There are therefore intra-professional regulations and intra-familial regulations (of the person with him/herself and with others), to which are added regulations between professional identities (and activities) and family identities (activities).

competence. They are therefore linked to the *qualification* (or *disqualification*) processes developed by sociologists, in particular by Serge PAUGAM (2002).

III. Identity as a system of categorization.

Theories on the formation of individual identity emphasize the importance given to the collective insertion of individuals, particularly their identification with the group to which they belong (LORENZI-CIOLDI, 1988). Giving an ¹⁸identity is a collective process of cognitive and linguistic attribution consisting in placing the person in a category. Categorizing is the mechanism common to the intra-individual, interpersonal and integrative processes of identity construction. It is through the use of *typification* schemes (BERGER, LUCKMAN, 1986), more or less stereotyped, more or less stigmatized, and what Erikson calls a "coherent combination of fragmentary identifications" (ERIKSON, 1968, p. 53), that the individual constructs his own identity. "These particular categories used to identify others and to identify oneself are variable both according to the social spaces in which interactions take place and according to the biographical and historical temporalities in which trajectories take place (DUBAR, 2002, p. 114).

It is true that these categorizations influence the process of identity construction, but they do not determine it mechanically, nor do they fix it definitively (LAING, 1961; DESROSIERES THEVENOT, 1988; DUBAR, 2002). In developmental terms, we can note that "categorical identification is contemporary with the establishment of social identities. It is based on the process by which the child tends to identify with categories or groups (of belonging or reference) and to adhere to the values, standards and rules of these categories or groups. These identifications are established in a complex network of "similarization" (accentuating similarities) and differentiation (gendered, ethnic, cultural, generational, national, professional, associative, sporting identities, etc.) (TAP, 2005a, p. 313). According to Claude Dubar, the space of recognition of social identity depends very closely on the recognition or non-recognition of knowledge, skills and self-images, the hard core of identities constructed on the basis of institutional requirements. The transaction between, on the one hand, the individuals carrying the desires of identification and recognition and, on the other hand, the institutions offering statuses, categories, devices and various forms of recognition, can be conflictual.

IV. Identity in an integrative systemic dynamic (strategies and styles of personation/socialization).

Some authors (for example MALEWSKA-PEYRE, TAP, 1991; TAP, 2005a) consider that the genesis of identity depends on two complementary processes: social integration (interpersonal and sociocultural) and psychic integration (intra-personal). The articulation of these two integration processes allows the person, from childhood, to *socialize* and

¹⁸ Note that one can give or receive, take or ask, conquer or lose an identity, as if it were a "having". I have a body, yet "I am this body"; I have a disease (I have cancer), but it is more difficult for me to be my disease (I am cancerous). This identity can be strong or weak, vulnerable or resilient, personal or collective. Identity can be qualifying (such as adjectives) or categorical (such as common or proper nouns).

personalize himself. **Personation** (a term preferable to that of personalization, which has long been proposed by the Toulouse team¹⁹) integrates all the strategies put in place by the subject to socialize, develop and construct his or her own itinerary. It articulates a set of psychological processes that support the actions through which the subject builds himself as a person.

The personation process we present below articulates four types of strategies:

1. *Identity strategies* refer to the past to be defended, to being anchored in a personal history, in an experiential experience (being situated in space and time, remaining oneself, having a value). Edmond Mark Lipiansky presents an operational definition of identity strategies as "procedures implemented (consciously or unconsciously) by an actor (individual or collective) to achieve one or more goals (defined explicitly or at the unconscious level), procedures developed according to the interaction situation, that is to say, according to the different determinations (socio-historical, cultural, psychological) of this situation" (LIPIANSKY, TABOADA-LEONETTI, VASQUEZ1990, p. 24).
2. *Strategies of social positioning and commitment* refer to the relationship between the individual and the social group (having a place, being loved, recognized). The will to join collective actions and the search for social recognition and roles to play in society that give him a place, value him in the eyes of others, allow him to situate himself, to position himself in relation to others in his group(s) of belonging and reference. The notion of belonging can be associated with that of affiliation (or disaffiliation) developed in a particular way by Robert CASTEL (1991).
3. *Project strategies* refer to the future to be managed and built. The objectives to be reached are concretized by the means to be implemented. The individual relaunches a self-project, in order to free himself from difficult situations in the present.
4. *Coping strategies* (adaptation/coping) are used by the individual to manage and untangle the present in which the individual is entangled (emotional focus, centering on the problem, seeking social support). Coping" therefore allows for adaptation to difficult situations in the present time. These modes of adaptation-defense constitute, along with evaluative processes, one of the essential processes for determining the degree of stress in person-environment interaction (SORDES, et alii, 1994; TAP, et alii, 1995; SORDES-ADER et alii, 1995; ESPARBES-PISTRE, et alii, 1996).

¹⁹ Cf. Tap, Roudès and Antunes (forthcoming, 2010) in which we discuss the evolution of the meaning of "personalization" which is now a marketing term. We personalize multiple devices: "personalize the Vista desktop" means the freedom of choice of the consumer for the organization of the desktop of his computer: colors, fonts, sounds and images,. He can "customize the presentation"! Of course, personalizing the support of people in difficulty retains its meaning of "development of the person, focusing on them, not on the devices. It is therefore preferable to speak of the process of *personalization*, even if the question of the appropriate verb arises.

V. Identity styles.

Identity styles or strategies are frequently mentioned in the literature (see CAMILLERI et alii, 1990; LIPIANSKY, 1992, 1998; TAP, 1979, 1988, 1991; TAP, VINAY, 2000). E. Erikson already proposed this notion. He likened identity strategies to "styles of individuation of the person" (1968/1972). However, it is important to differentiate between styles and strategies. According to TAP (2005b), the concept of "style" is linked to the processes of individualization and diversification coordinated with behaviors. He describes multiple categories of styles:

- *Cognitive styles*, often opposed to *affective styles* (KOGAN, 1976; WITKIN, GOODENOUGH, 1981; HUTEAU, 1981, 1985, 1987) ;
- *Coping styles* (COHEN, LAZARUS, 1973) which characterize the predictability of behaviors of a stressed person in a difficult situation. The notion of "*coping strategies*", which is increasingly used (TAP et alii, 1995, 1998; ESPARBES, SORDES-ADER, TAP, 1996; SORDES et alii, 1994), makes it possible to go beyond the contribution of stylistic conceptions to introduce a new *strategic model*, which takes into account the dynamics of intrapersonal processes (cognitive organization of strategies, weight of motivations and emotional mechanisms in decisions) in their relations with people, contexts, situations and events;
- *Lifestyles* (ERIKSON, 1968; VANDENPLAS-HOLPER, 1998) indicate the options and choices related to a particular way of organizing and orienting one's life;
- The notion of "*motivational styles*" was introduced by Apter (2001), in the context of his *reversal* theory. This theory is opposed to the traditional theories of continuity, equilibrium, and homeostatic regulation and proposes a dialogical dynamic, in which two contradictory processes intervene in a way that is both contradictory and complementary...
- The *flow* theory proposed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1988, 1991) is close to the theory of motivational styles. It emphasizes the presence and importance of the *autotelic* focusing process (self-organization) at privileged moments of creation, experienced as *optimal experiences* of self-focus. This theory is based on the hypothesis of the active presence of internal or intrinsic motivations (VANDENPLAS-HOLPER, 1998). But there are simultaneously external pressures or incentives that can accentuate, block or direct the external dimensions.

VI. Identity: from system to process.

As we have just seen, personal identity must be differentiated from personality. Identity is not the whole of the person, whatever the proposed definition. It is a subsystem of the personality of the individual concerned; a subsystem constituted in dynamic relation with the cognitive and emotional dimensions of the person. The personality is on the other hand constituted by the complex coordination of the whole of the bio-psycho-social systems, from which the person acts, reacts, reflects, etc. As a system of representations, identity can be structured in various ways according to the theories in presence. From this point of view, two levels of analysis are taken into account and often opposed, but in close interaction:

- **Internal characteristics of identity:**

A phenomenological approach (ROGERS, 1951; ANTUNES, 2000) of the intra-individual (Me-Self) and inter-individual (Me-Other) relationship values the processes of internal construction of identity and self-representation and introduces the importance of elaboration processes, especially the role of personal experience, certainly in constant and integrative relation with the social and cultural context and with the material and symbolic conditions included in this context. DUBAR (2002) presents the biographical process as an intra-personal process of identity construction and P. Mussen (1980) emphasizes the importance of the construction of the coherent representation of oneself by oneself.

- **The interrelational characteristics of identity.**

Erik Erikson (1950) was the first researcher to develop the analysis of the inter-relational dimension in the construction of personal and social identity. According to Monique PINOL-DOURIEZ (1984) and Serge LÉBOVICI (1985), the construction of the identity also concerns a process of cognitive and emotional transformations, process developed during the early interactions of the baby and the child. Dubar (2002) refuses the distinction between individual identity and collective identity and proposes the concept of social identity, which would imply the articulation between two transitions: one internal, built from the interactions of the individual with himself, and another external, built from the interactions of the individual with the institutions with which he interacts. Dubar's proposal is open to discussion, insofar as the author tends to confuse individual/collective aspects with psychological and social²⁰ contents. In fact, any identity, whether individual or collective, implies sociocultural dimensions (values, functions, effects of meaning, etc.), as well as psychological processes of appropriation (behavioral translations, imaginary, etc.). This multi-dimensionality can be applied to all categories of identity (personal, professional, gender, religious, national and continental, etc.).

We adhere, on the other hand, to the hypothesis of Dubar, when he affirms that "the identity is not what remains necessarily "identical", but the result of a contingent "*identification*". It is the result of a double linguistic operation: "differentiation and generalization"; the first aims at defining the difference, what makes the singularity of something or someone, in relation to someone or something else; in this sense, identity is the difference; the second operation is the one that seeks to define the common point to a class of elements, all different, of the same other; in this approach, identity is the common belonging. These two operations are at the origin of the paradox of identity: what is unique is what is shared. This paradox cannot be removed as long as we do not take into account the element common to both operations: the identification of and by the other. In this perspective, there is no identity without otherness. Identities, like alterities, vary historically and depend on their context of definition" (DUBAR, 2000, p. 3).

²⁰ This distinction leads us to assume the existence of social data integrated into individual functioning (or *individual appropriation of social data*) or, conversely, the existence of psychological data integrated into collective functioning (or *collective appropriation of psychological data*).

Carmel CAMILLERI and *alii* (1990b) evoke the constituents of the core of the identity structure. They define the identity as a polymorphic, dynamic structure, whose constituent elements are the psychological and social aspects in relation to the relational situation at a given moment, of a social agent (individual or group) as a social actor. It is thus in the interactions with the entourage and in a double movement of differentiation and assimilation that the identity is built. In this process, it is necessary to highlight at the same time the identification with the others and the distinction which is carried out compared to them.²¹

VII. Identity paradoxes.

Identity is paradoxical in nature, i.e. it includes contradictory and yet complementary and inseparable orientations. Social psychology has highlighted many examples of dilemmas (the "prisoner's dilemma"; Kohlberg's moral dilemmas, 1987... etc.) and paradoxical injunctions ("It is forbidden to forbid") or *double constraints* and *pragmatic paradoxes* (Palo Alto; Watzlawick, Bateson, ...).

We can identify six paradoxes involved in the identity²² dynamic:

- **The first paradox of identity concerns the complementary and conflicting presence of *similarities* and *differences*, between objects (persons) with a common identity.** Identity "is constructed in the confrontation of the identical and the otherness, of the similarity and the difference" (TAP, 1980b). Socio-cognitive processes (categorization, signification, legitimation), facilitate both cognitive development and socialization, which also make it possible to articulate the differentiation of objects with the differentiation-assimilation of the self and others²³. These processes are possible if the individual lives in a relatively stable physical and social environment.
- **The second paradox stems from the problematic link between *self-centeredness (on ourselves)* and *decentering towards others*.** It is linked to the fact that, in order to build his own identity, the individual will have to learn to decentralize himself, to get out of his egocentrism (according to the Piagetian expression), in order to establish reciprocal relations with others.
The child succeeds in acquiring his or her own identity only by giving up this ego-centricity and building reciprocal relationships with others. This is also the beginning of a "change in the systems of relationships between individuals and in cultural

²¹ A discussion is constantly engaged to know if the personal identity as a system of representations and feelings, includes a "core" which, put in question, denied by the others would cause the identity crisis, the reactions of violence by defense of the personal dignity. One could in fact represent the identity as an onion (metaphorical!), made up of multiple peels, more or less deep. If the onion has no core, it has on the other hand a "germ", to transmit and reproduce... and to cut it makes one cry! The hypothesis that the core of the identity is the identity of values (opposed to the identity of fact) evoked by Camilleri (1990a, p.86) remains subject to discussion.

²² In the article "Identity and Exclusion", Tap proposed four paradoxes. Subsequent discussions with various audiences or researchers lead us to add two more paradoxes here (see TAP, 2005c, n° 83, pp. 53-78).

²³ J. P. CODOL, 1979, 1980, 1984; H. WALLON, 1963, 1976; R. ZAZZO, 1980; P. MALRIEU, 1967, 1980, 1996.

values" (TAP, 2005a, p. 279). For example, the construction of professional identities requires a restructuring of the modalities of interaction between Me (personal identity), Us (who have the same professional identity) and Them (all those who are different from us). This restructuring can go in the direction of an accentuation of the *belonging to a professional us* and a closure on this us. It then forces to decrease the oppositions between *me* and *us* and to accentuate the differences between *us* and *them*. In the case of an effort at openness, there is a tendency to choose a broader "we", likely to cover identities that were previously differentiated, and to include professionals who were different from us. Political example: the differentiation (with possible opposition) between French and Germans is reduced by their identification with the European identity. Professional example: the differentiation (with possible opposition) between executives and non-executives or between salespeople and technicians is minimized by identification with the corporate identity.

- **The third identity paradox concerns the conflicting modalities between the process of constancy and the management of change.** Personal identity (*I am I*) as well as collective identity (*we are we*) also imply the idea of timeless permanence and without reference to change in life time. However, if the subject (*I* or *we*) changes, it keeps however the feeling that it remains the same and itself in the time (feeling of temporal and structural identity). Such is the third paradox. The term of identization was proposed to mean this paradoxical construction of the identity between permanence and change, between idealization and pragmatic revaluation of the self-image, according to the situations and the interlocutors (TAP, 1979).

In professional terms, identization occurs more strongly when the person is forced to change:

- The person must find a first job: he or she must look for a position corresponding to the skills acquired; build a professional identity through adaptation to the company, to real work; beyond the mere application of what has been learned, adapt to working conditions, to work relations; and become aware of the position and value of oneself and one's profession, in the interactive chain of jobs and functions;
- The person must change function or job: by promotion or demotion, with valorization or devaluation, linked to the acceptance of challenges or to the restructuring of competences, by the search for new trainings;
- The person is unemployed; he or she has lost his or her job and is looking for another one: questioning of acquired skills and doubts about the previous professional orientation; difficulty in managing the drop in self-esteem linked to not working; effort to organize a new realistic professional project, possibly involving new acquisitions;
- The person retires and experiences this change in a positive or negative way. This retirement can be organized in rupture with the previous professional life

or in relative continuity, with reorganization dictated by the maintenance of the valorizing and the abandonment of the devaluing.

- **The fourth paradox concerns the opposition, proposed by Carmel Camilleri (1990), between ontological identity and pragmatic²⁴ identity.** There is a constant distance between what we think we are (ontological conception) and our actual way of being in our daily practices (pragmatic variation of our self-consciousness and feelings about ourselves when deciding and acting). We find here, at least partially, the importance and the complexity of the interaction between the real self and the ideal self, in the dynamic theory of the self-concept presented by Carl Rogers (1951). The link between personal identity and professional identity is mediated by an idealized conception of success (in life or only in work), conveyed by concrete people with whom one can identify, but from whom the subject borrows "states of purpose" (according to the expression of Kelman, 1958), projects, styles of behaviour or life, ways of thinking or acting. Three processes interact here:

1. *Identification with a third party*: "I need to *identify with someone* who allows me to progress";
2. *Active identification*: "I need an external *model of action*, which I can identify with or take for myself" (Do I have skills? If I don't have them, can I acquire them?)
3. *The idealizing identification*: "I need an *ideal* to constitute myself as a total person (global self-realization, associated to the life project, to the congruence, to the fact of giving meaning to life)".

These three processes intervene in a complex way in the dynamics, both cognitive and social, of the articulation between, on the one hand, practices, actions, and, on the other hand, systems of values, systems of anticipation, meaning and legitimation, which constitute the dynamics of personation.

- **The fifth paradox concerns the identity which can be successively monodimensional and multidimensional.** According to the contexts, according to the moments or the experiential phases, the person can live with a strong feeling of psychic unity or diversity. This unity or diversity can be experienced as positive or negative. Unity can be associated with serenity or with the suffering of the losses that unification causes. Diversity can be the positive result of openings and encounters based on the understanding of what is enriching otherness. But it can also provoke a "crumbling" or a "liquefaction" of the self, a loss of coherence, even to the point of feeling non-existent.
- **Finally, the sixth paradox concerns the complex articulation between identization (temporal and structural variation of the self-image) and identifications (to persons, to groups, to values, etc.).** The identity is built from

²⁴ This opposition is taken up by TAP (2005b), in terms of the processes of ontological idealization and pragmatic identification.

multiple identifications, but, at the same time, the subject knows who he is and who the other is, even in a situation of identity crisis. "The identification would be thus the process that makes possible the experience of a "plurality of psychic persons" and it is through [their intermediary] also that are constituted, from an affective community, the reciprocal links between the individuals and the crowd" (LIPIANSKY, TABOADA-LEONETTI, VASQUEZ, 1990, p.9)

VIII. The dynamics of identity in the professional world today.

Renaud SAINSAULIEU notes the importance of the universe of work relations as a place of "differential constitution of individual identities" (1977, p. 335). According to him, the experience of the collective as a field of confrontation and struggle, but also as a field of encounters, of victories and failures, of risks and discoveries in the access to autonomy, to a personal power, implying recognition and assertion of oneself, is indispensable for the differentiation and the representation of oneself as a person, different and unique. In other words, characteristics, both personal and professional, will amalgamate and articulate themselves in work relationships, as well as in non-work relationships. According to SAINSAULIEU, "it is not enough to note that work relationships can affect deep mechanisms of the personality such as identification or the ability to differentiate. It is still necessary to try to identify the processes that explain these relationships between social work relations and the quality of the person" (*Op. cit.*, p. 311). According to him, social powerlessness leads to the loss of identity (not only professional) and the re-emergence of identity depends on the possibility of facing, in one way or another, relational or organizational conflicts (in the work or outside the work).

It is often observed that "work" behaviour is confused with "professional" activity. However, the child and the adolescent learn to differentiate between work and "non-work" behaviors, and this differentiation will persist throughout life (leisure, passions, hobbies, etc.). We can say then that the professional identity and activity will find support on the experience and the implicit theories related to the work behaviour. It is true that personal identity is constructed in the early years and through the processes of primary socialization (BERGER, LUCKMAN, 1966 or tr.fr. 1986), but this construction implies the appropriation of skills and successes in work behaviors. Subsequently, work, first at school, then at work, will play a determining role in the structuring of the identity of the student, then the professional. This structuring will imply multiple changes, according to the experiences and the professional itineraries. It will be characterized as "an evolutionary process [...] shaped by professional trajectories" (BOUQUET, 2006).

Without neglecting the importance of Sainsaulieu's contribution, we propose a new reading of the current socio-professional reality and its importance for the construction of professional identity. It should be recalled here that the current economic and social context remains dominated by a severe economic crisis that constantly provokes important transformations at the level of management in organizations, in the management of jobs and the labor market (BOUTINET, 1999; ANTOINE, 1996; DUBAR, 2000; ALMEIDA *et alii*, 2004; ANTUNES, 2006):

The dominant paradigm is characterized by innovation, by permanent change and by unpredictability (with all the uncertainty that is inevitably managed);

The current corporate operating system is dominated by: 1. The globalization of the economy; 2. The extension of information flows; 3. The constant development of information and communication technologies; 4. The flexibilization of the means of production and job management.

From the point of view of ideas, we can recall this era of "the era of neoliberal triumph", where the contemporary dynamics of organizations are related to: 1. the demands of flexibility and competitiveness; 2. relocations; 3. mergers of companies; 4. Restructuring and downsizing; 5. Job insecurity; 6. Job instability/precariousness; 7. the need to manage uncertainty.

In this new economic order, there is a dangerous increase in unemployment in national economies. Unemployment is often associated with mergers between large multinational companies, plant closures, relocation of factories and jobs to countries where labor is cheaper (Eastern and Asian countries), and downsizing (e.g. Airbus, Alcatel, Pfizer, Bayer AG, Astra Zeneca, Daimler-Chrysler, Ford, Volkswagen, Hewlett-Packard, among others²⁵). We are currently experiencing the most severe economic crisis in modern history. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), unemployment currently affects millions of people worldwide, equivalent to one third of the entire global workforce. According to M. CHOSSUDOVSKY (2003), this global crisis is more devastating than the great depression of the 1930s. "The crisis of employment is also the subjective crisis of employment, which leads a growing number of individuals to refuse to hold any job, to fit in under any conditions. The crisis of employment is above all the crisis of its content, in the massive mutation of trades towards professions, of the latter towards occupations with contours that are today difficult to identify" (BOUTINET, 1990, p. 116). If the struggle of the 1960s was determined by social injustice, today it is oriented by the struggle against unemployment, against the precariousness of employment and against instability in professional careers. The current conflict is above all linked to uncertainty, to the appearance of multiple threats concerning jobs and even the survival of companies, threats that are poorly defined and unknown in their contours as in their causes. Every week, in fact, a multinational company announces the global reduction of its workforce or the relocation of a factory from one country to another. Instead of a "relatively fixed and immobile universe", a bureaucratic and stratified universe (evoked thirty years ago by R. Sainsaulieu, 1977), we are today confronted with a universe that is not very stratified, unpredictable and in constant mutation, in which workers are led to compete among themselves for existing jobs.

A new representation of work and of oneself in work is thus emerging in this context, associated with the challenge of managing oneself: "More and more, the active population and the majority of Knowledge Workers will thus have to manage themselves... And they need to learn to develop themselves" (DRUCKER, 1999). A new career perspective is thus being constructed;

²⁵ See *Visão*, No. 731 of March 8, 2007, p. 78 and following.

- Employees are confronted with a framework based on uncertainty, on profound and unreassuring changes. But at the same time, companies want to invest in human capital;
- This context organizes a new career perspective and a new representation of work and professional life (mobility between companies, mobility in the type of work);
- The transition from a framework where the company truly managed the careers of its most valuable professionals, to one where the same professionals themselves take charge of managing their own employability.

It is true that today, the group of "executives", which is very heterogeneous, remains relatively privileged, even if it is crossed by several types of phenomena, advantageous or disadvantageous for them:

- Their multiplication, thanks to the democratization of education, but at the same time their relative devaluation;
- Their training remained very general (mathematics, physics, technology) and their assignment to major functions, more than to specific jobs;
- Their mobility between the major functions, in particular to prepare them for the functions of super leaders;
- The creation, in spite of everything, of new fields: human resources management, marketing, finance ;
- The lengthening of the chain of command, which transforms engineers into super technicians, subject to the orders of the upper echelon;
- The shortening of the duration of the career, by releasing the more than sixty years;
- The multiplication of technicians, who impoverish the function of the executives and who, themselves, are considered to have a profession. Their very large job market, thanks to their diplomas, their skills, their networks, their ability to create their own jobs (especially in consulting), thanks to good salaries, which allow a capitalization likely to be invested in their own job. This does not prevent their unemployment, however. Finally, even if executives lose certain advantages (monthly pay, paid vacations), their "professional identity" is nevertheless less threatened than that of other employees.

The challenge that employees, managers, technicians and workers, face today is linked to the need to cope with uncertainty and change. Faced with this reality, they need to mobilize their personal resources while at the same time multiplying the means of reestablishing the socio-professional link that is breaking down and showing solidarity and creativity, particularly under the pressure of a management style that is solely focused on productive results.

In the 1960s, professional identity had a very strong collective dimension, but today the trend is deeply individualistic.²⁶ In this context of unpredictability, the concept of competence becomes central to the appropriation of success and to professional evolution. To be competent is to be qualified and capable of meeting the requirements of professional constraints. It is then the responsibility of managers to manage their own careers and ensure their own employability. What in the past was provided by companies should now be taken care of by individual managers. This is undoubtedly what companies are saying today. But the economic and financial crisis and the massive increase in unemployment among executives prevent them from achieving this "self-management". For other employees, we know the difficulties of recognition of qualifications, whatever the level. The ability to manage one's own employability is therefore undermined.

IX. The system of professional identities and the processes that organize it.

Professional identity, as a system, develops through multiple processes:

- **Affiliation**, which implies a voluntary act of registration, translates a process of access to a socio-professional group through social ties and facilitates the emergence and maintenance of a feeling of belonging and social recognition. The construction of identity, as a process of identification, is a process of belonging and relationship (DUBAR, 2002). For the professional, [for](#) example, developing his or her professional identity means affiliating with and reinforcing membership in a reference group, which influences his or her "intuitive knowledge" (SAPIR, 1967), which leads him or her to "begin to think with others" (HALBWACHS, 1950), and which favors the sharing of a "common symbolic code that forms the basis of the relationship between its members" (PERCHERON, 1974, p. 32).
- **The reorganization of** behaviors is therefore constantly necessary, associated with the process of transformation of the representation of oneself as a professional. The construction of the professional identity of executives is associated with the development of a representation of the "professional world" and with the acquisition of "the values of the different groups with which he/she enters into relationship" (PERCHERON, 1974, p. 26). This representation and this integration of values are translated into professional behaviors and choices, associated with a "socio-professional category".
- **Qualification** (giving a qualification and recognizing a competence) combines the process of receiving the training that allows one to be qualified (acquisition of competences), and also the judgment on the value of one's own competences and the self-worth that these imply. "Typical identity configurations, in the field of work,

²⁶ If P&MS have "negotiated" their status collectively, it is true that they have always been very individualistic, refusing the "tools" of workforce management (for example the Hay system). On the other hand, they are the ones who wanted and applied individualizing policies to other employees. However, individualism as an ideology should not be confused with the process of individuation that concerns all social actors, in relation of course to events, situations, and the pressures of efficiency in production.

could abstractly be associated with privileged "moments" of an ideal professional biography: moment of identity *construction* traditionally corresponding to initial vocational training [...], moment of identity *consolidation* linked to insertion and the progressive acquisition of qualification in trade channels [...], moment of *recognition* of identity mastered by access to responsibilities in company channels [...], moment of identity *aging* and the progressive passage to retirement" (DUBAR, 2002, p. 238). *The qualifying identity* is also associated with knowledge that structures the professional identity, because the basis of the qualification is based on knowledge, knowledge acquired through training and experience. *Learned knowledge* is linked to theoretical knowledge, to technical information, to theoretical knowledge essential to the training of the professional. *Constructed knowledge* results from the practical application of knowledge learned and tested in practice. *Integrated knowledge*, involving the synthesis between theory, practice and the personal elaboration of experience, results in the development of personal skills, i.e. components of self-knowledge that are actualized in various practices which, from then on, become creative and not only repetitive.

Competencies constitute a subsystem that can be described as transversal, always present and in relation with the other subsystems. It is a differentiating and valorizing element of the professional identity, but closely related to the professional challenges and critical situations that the subject is confronted with and must face. "It is through competences that professional activity is now analyzed, which makes it the instrument for measuring the effectiveness of men at work, and in what way they also influence the representations that individuals make of their own action. [...]. Competence is also the vector of a profound change in the relationship to work. It is in this respect that we can speak of the 'logic of competences', which we see at work, when it combines the evaluation of results, the individualization of mobility criteria and increased responsibility, and which claims, in so doing, to take over from the 'logic of qualification', centred on the recognition of a process of acquired knowledge (training, diploma, experience) and organizing the criteria for classifications" (NALLET, EVEQUOZ, 2000, p. 78).

- **Transition**, as a process of change and evolution, is linked to the acquisition of the skills of the socioprofessional group of reference, but with the need to manage phases of change, to control the situations, the stress and the attitudes associated during these phases of change. It is a process that is structured from the encounter between the professional (with his personal history, his training path and the representation he has of himself) and the reality of a socio-professional context where he is called to interact with people, groups, in institutions, to promote projects, to face challenges, etc.
- **Valorization** reflects the perceived sense of competence and the personal recognition of one's own value (self-esteem). Valorization is a process including two vectors that develop simultaneously. On the one hand, the training and development of qualifications (competences), with the recognition (*for oneself* and *by others*) of the value of oneself and one's knowledge, in relation to belonging and the feeling of

being integrated in a professional field (affiliation). On the other hand, the structuring of self-esteem and the internal representation of one's own value as a professional, which translates into the ability to face the challenges placed in the professional itinerary (*coping* strategy), the ability to take risks and to respond with quality and rigor to daily professional situations. Of course, the reference to "challenges" can have an ideological connotation when it is used to justify unpredictable incidents or risky decisions in the company. However, it also has to do with the strategy of surpassing oneself and valuing oneself in the face of risk, which is developed in children and young people, whatever the social status of the family, or in sportsmen and women at all ages. On this point, we can observe the existence of three strategies present in varying degrees, depending on the circumstances and situations, in each of us: the *heroic strategy of surpassing oneself* (Nothing is impossible with a valiant heart!), the *dramatic strategy* of external determinisms: social and cultural (depending on my origin, certain doors will always be closed to me) and Amartya Sen²⁷'s *strategy of capabilities*, in which our freedom (both positive and negative²⁸) is articulated with our behaviors. The "capability" evoked by Sen is associated with the freedom that the actor has to live as he or she wishes. The important thing is not the goods he has at his disposal, but the way in which these goods allow him to *accomplish himself, to carry out the life project he has chosen*. Sen draws on the *theory of positive and negative freedom* proposed by Isaiah Berlin (1969) and reworked by Ronald Dworkin (1995). *Positive freedom* represents what a person, all things considered, is capable of achieving, can achieve, independently of the constraints imposed by others, in particular institutions. What interests Sen in positive freedom are rights and the capacity to convert them into real resources. *Negative freedom* corresponds only, but this is also important (!), to the absence of constraints from the state, institutions, groups or other people. One could associate this (negative) freedom with that obtained by a struggle to get out of inhuman working conditions or alienating living conditions (individual or collective).

X. Dimensions of professional identity.

Professional identity, like any identity system, involves three dimensions:

- **Qualifying identity**, which integrates qualification and recognition. Qualification is linked to the acquisition of skills, but also to the recognition of being able²⁹. Recognition is linked to the perception of competence by others and by oneself (self-evaluation). Identity is also linked to the personal development of

²⁷ Sen, A. *Rethinking Inequality*. Paris, Seuil, 1992. Sen, A. *Identity and Violence*, Paris, O. Jacob, 2006. Given the way in which Sen defines the term "capability", it cannot be translated either as capacity or as competence. Like Paul Ricoeur and other translators, we therefore translate it as "capabilities".

²⁹ Ricoeur has taken up Amartya Sen's theory of capability in P. *Les parcours de reconnaissance*, Paris, Stock, He 2004. uses this expression of "recognition of being able" (linked to "capability").

competencies, to the training and recognition of competencies, and to a whole career progression, which reflects this recognition by the organization.

Employees in general, and younger employees in particular, are seriously investing in this dimension of their professional identity. A young executive interviewed said: "In this phase, at the beginning of my career, what is important to me is what I can learn, in terms of new knowledge, new experiences and the challenges associated with them. Between the hypothesis of earning 1500€ per month doing a job that is not very interesting and not very stimulating from the point of view of new knowledge and the hypothesis of earning 1000€ per month doing an interesting job, in which I can learn a lot and develop new knowledge and responsibilities, I prefer the second hypothesis." The development of new skills, associated with new integrated knowledge, is perceived as an investment in itself, which enhances and increases the qualifications and knowledge capital of the professional.

- **The categorical identity** integrates the feeling of belonging, of having behaviors, attitudes or representations in conformity with those expected in the company or by the professional group. It is associated with the feeling of being recognized as belonging to more general categories (executives, etc.). Professional identity is also associated with the idea of a category of belonging (DUBAR, 2000) and frequently with the socio-professional category constructed by INSEE. The category aggregates a whole set of typical aspects of the life of a certain number of individuals who have something in common, what Emile Durkheim called "ways of doing, feeling and judging".
- **Integrative identity** is both a cognitive and emotional construct that brings together affiliation (the process by which the individual enrolls and participates in the activities of his or her socio-professional group) and integration (the mechanisms of integrative construction and engagement in a socio-professional or community group).

These dimensions are closely associated with socio-professional success, which in turn is linked to intra- and interpersonal evaluation (self-esteem) and to defensive (defense mechanisms) and adaptive (*coping*) mechanisms.

XI. Identity and models of personal and professional success.

Every human being aspires to achieve what is important to him. But not all aspirations are automatically realized. The process by which a person becomes competent is linked to self-evaluation³⁰ and external evaluation. From *feedback*, the individual reacts to the way others judge him/her and revises his/her own evaluations; he/she then identifies his/her weaknesses and strengths. Weaknesses become strengths, thanks to an effort of personal development, learning, trial and error, and self-correction. But success³¹ is not only linked to the feeling of

³⁰ Some populations, with little training, have difficulty taking a step back from themselves and are therefore unable to use their self-evaluation skills effectively.

³¹ Success is obviously a function of the economic and social context and also of the competence of those who set the objectives, often based on arbitrary criteria.

competence; it results from the synthesis between perceived value (self-esteem), perceived challenge (complexity) associated with responsibility (nature and complexity of tasks), skills (knowledge, know-how, interpersonal skills), *coping* and resilience. To this synthesis is added the appreciation and the practical modalities of managing one's own career. But these processes are not independent of the context and working conditions, which can deteriorate to the point of causing major health problems, sometimes even leading to suicide.

Dubar (2000) considers that the individual, including in his professional activities, identifies with idealized persons or characters (heroes, wise men, etc.). In the current context, the question arises as to "which heroes, which reference models do the various professionals identify with? The representation of success and professional achievement is an individual mental construction with collective impacts and interactions. In this construction, the individual takes into account his needs, his personal projects, his educational references, his qualifications and the culture in which he has developed as a person. This mental construction has characteristics closely linked to the representation of oneself as a professional in a particular context, a specific social reality (company, economy, globalization, competitiveness requirements, instability or precariousness of employment). The need to manage uncertainty and demands (function, responsibilities) is directly related to the skills that the subject has already acquired or that he/she will have to develop rapidly.

Proposing a model of personal and professional success may appear questionable and risky. It can be criticized for being part of idealization and normative legitimization, likely to distance the social actor from the real necessities of action. But we can show precisely that this process of idealization is at work, to varying degrees, in every social actor, relying on diverse systems of values and beliefs (religious, political, philosophical, etc.). Moreover, this process interacts with the inverse dynamics of pragmatic realizations. In the daily life, a constant back and forth takes place between *the idealization of the practices* and the practice of the ideals, by the projects, the dreams, the tension of realization. Moreover, the social actor will use *adaptive behaviors (bio-psycho-social)* which can lead him to change his behaviors, his values of reference and the representation that he makes of himself, in situation. But these behaviors, which enable him to assume the prescribed and socially expected identities, will come up against the equally determining need for internal and external valorization and *recognition*. These four processes (*idealization, realization, adaptation and recognition*) play a major role in the construction and maintenance of professional identities, as well as personal identity.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, an AFP dispatch informs us that "the Social Security Court (TASS) of Nanterre has just condemned Renault for "inexcusable fault" in the suicide of Antonio B, a 39-year-old computer engineer, who threw himself from the 5th floor of the main building of the Renault Technocentre in Guyancourt (Yvelines), on 20 October 2006. His family considered that Renault had not respected its safety obligations and that the professional stress to which the employee was subjected had directly contributed to his gesture.

Mrs. B., widow of Antonio B. declared "It is an immense relief, it is a great satisfaction after more than three years of battle. They finally give justice to my husband. They recognize what he suffered, endured because of Renault. I hope that this will be a strong signal to all the companies that sacrifice everything on the altar of profitability, and for the employees to know that justice is on their side. There are not only cases in the media, there are people everywhere who break down. This is a strong message to tell them: "lift your head".

For her part, Rachel S., the family's lawyer, said. "What I hope is that we finally accept that we put the man at the heart of all decisions. This means that we must stop invoking the vulnerability of people to explain their actions.

"According to whether you are powerful or miserable, court judgments will make you white or black" wrote La Fontaine in "Les animaux malades de la peste". Fortunately, this is not systematically true. The decision of the TASS honors justice, but it also confirms the necessity to refuse injustice wherever it comes from. Max GALLO already said, in his novel *L'oiseau des origines* (Paris, Laffont, 1974): "It is always refusal that gives birth to us. I wanted to go further in the refusal since I discovered that it is conquest of oneself and of the other even" (1974). Alain TOURAINE also affirmed the importance of opposition, in and through social movements: "It is the gesture of refusal, of resistance, which creates the subject" (1993). The fact that identity can be asserted through opposition is interesting, at least insofar as the actor has the means to control his emotions and anxieties, where he can live his conflicts without self-destructing, where he can give meaning to his *claims*, without losing himself in violence, which is not always easy in situations of extreme constraint.

We find here the way George H. MEAD (1934, tr.fr. 2006), father of symbolic constructivism, evokes the opposition between the "I" (spontaneous) and the "selves" (conventional forms close to social identities): "In certain domains the individual can assert himself. Certain rights are recognized within (certain) limits. But when the tension becomes too great, these limits are no longer observed and the individual asserts himself in a violent way" (*Op.cit.* p. 269). We could add here that *violence* can be directed against others but also against oneself. Of course it can be the result of a revolt against injustice, contempt, the denial of one's dignity by others, etc. But it can also be associated with the feeling of being a victim of violence. But it can also be associated with the feeling of superiority of oneself, legitimized by the fact that one belongs to a supposedly superior group (racism, sexism, etc.). But when this feeling of superiority, this desire of affirmation, inside the group, "finds a functional expression, it becomes completely legitimate. This power makes us effective. To be able to assert oneself in all its originality, that is what is desirable " (*Op.cit.* p. 267). Axel HONNETH joins MEAD in his turn, when he evokes the fact that "the potential of individuality manages to be liberated by means of an increase in legally guaranteed spaces of freedom" (*The Struggle for Recognition*, 2008, 102). Let us note in passing the difference with the title of Paul RICOEUR's last book: *Parcours de la reconnaissance* (2004). It is that Honneth relies on *Hegel's theory of the struggle for recognition* (*La phénoménologie de l'esprit*, 1807, recent French translation, 2006) whereas Ricoeur unfolds the multiple meanings of recognition.

SAINSAULIEU³² also relies on the Hegelian dialectic of Master and Slave to understand and explain the identity dynamics of the workers. According to Hegel, it is the desire for an object that founds the beginning of the dialectic leading to the recognition of oneself. During this movement of desire towards the thing, the subject meets the competing desire of another subject. A "struggle to the death" between two absolute desires is then established. In order to be recognized, it is necessary that one forgets his own desire for recognition in order to accept to recognize that of the other. Sainsaulieu uses this model to show that the constitution of individual identity is deeply inscribed in social relations (including professional ones). It is by emerging victorious from this struggle that the subject can be recognized (and recognize himself), through the acquisition of means of power that allow him to escape from alienating positions. "A whole sociology of the power to be oneself could thus be developed to better understand the social circumstances of the shaping of identities" (1977, p.327).

Conversely, for Paul Ricoeur, this need to face the conflict in order to overcome it is minimized, in favor of the relationship between action, rational capacity and multiple recognitions. According to him, the recognition of my identity by myself or by others can be studied in terms of a path (linguistic, philosophical or psychological). He proposes the sequence of the various meanings of recognition: from *recognition as identification* (I recognize something or someone, their identity) to *recognition as gratitude* (being grateful for the way I am welcomed, giving or receiving value, etc.), passing through *self-recognition* (construction or reconstruction of identity, appropriation of capabilities³³) and reciprocal *intersubjective recognition* (love, right and social esteem)³⁴

This being said, the major issue is the confusion between individuation³⁵ and individualism recuperated by liberal capitalism and which engenders the "fatigue of being oneself" according to Alain EHRENBURG's expression (1998), with depression setting in as a result of institutional or relational constraints, as an effect of a general pressure to self-realization (which has become ideology). This link between health at work and the limits of the ideology of success can be seen, for example, in the analysis of Axel Honneth's³⁶ "Capitalism and Self-Realization: The Paradoxes of Individuation". Following Simmel (1983), he evokes the fact that the concept of individuation applies to four different phenomena: 1. the individualization of personal paths; 2. the increasing isolation of actors (in a society of contempt or indifference); 3. the increased capacity for reflection; 4. The affirmation of greater authenticity (2006, p.308).

We can thus see that individuation, normally associated with subjectivation, with the singularization of the individual, with the construction of his personal identity, is constantly nourished by contradictory identifications, at first assumed in the sense of the optimization of

³² In Sainsaulieu (1977) see the whole of chapter 8 (collective identities and self-recognition in the workplace, pp. 302 - 343), but more particularly his "rereading of the Hegelian scheme of self-recognition" p. 319 ff,

³³ Ricoeur indeed relies on the work of Amartya Sen, as we do ourselves here, by taking into account the theory of "capabilities".

³⁴ Ricoeur explicitly borrows this trilogy from Honneth (2004, p. 295).

³⁶ Honneth, 2006, pp. 305 - 323.

experiences, but which the subject will then have to abandon in order to continue to feel himself, or to relaunch a project obliging him to transform himself in order to become other. In the current crisis situation, which is likely to be prolonged, we cannot "be satisfied with a Manichean discourse in which the 'bad guys' would do everything possible to monopolize wealth and the 'good guys' would be systematically deprived; or in which the 'lazy, debauched villains' would only have what they deserve and the 'brave workers' would be rewarded for their efforts" (Vincent de GAULEJAC and Isabel TABOADA-LEONETTI, 1994, p.112). It is therefore important to take some distance from the affirmation of stigmatizing opinions. We have seen how identity processes are constantly invaded by paradoxical but necessary contradictions that orient our way of life.³⁷

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³⁷ According to Honneth, relying on Anthony GIDDENS (1987), a contradiction is paradoxical when, through the intended concretization of an intention, the probability of seeing this intention concretized is actually reduced (2006, pp. 286 - 287).

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