

Coping with an agile transformation: an exploration through a Lacanian psychodynamic identity work perspective

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Résumé :

Agile methodologies appear in the 1990s in the software development industry as a response to accommodate rapidly evolving technologies and customer needs in IT systems. These methods have since spread out in an increasing number of organizational contexts and diverse industries. In this paper, which is part of a larger research program about Agility and its effect on actor's subjectivity, we examine the identity work of actors in an aerospace company that undergoes an Agile Transformation. We first describe how the change unfolds and identify four distinct identity work patterns, some successful and other not, that actors engage in. To understand the identity work we use a theoretical bricolage between the narrative identity and the psychodynamic theory, essentially based on a Lacanian perspective. We then try to understand why some actors survive this transformation and others not.

Mots-clés : Agile, Identity work, Narrative theory, Psychodynamic theory, Lacan

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INTRODUCTION

“Agile is the ability to create and respond to change. It is a way of dealing with, and ultimately succeeding in, an uncertain and turbulent environment”(« Agile Alliance », 2015). To be able to do that, according to the agile alliance, there is no other way than to apply the values and principles described in the Agile Manifesto (« Agile Alliance », 2015). The manifesto advocates that self-organized teams are the best possible way of organizing to produce quality software and that teams should work in a sustainable work environment. Most agile methodologies therefore promote an organization based on self-organized multi-disciplinary teams, each of which is in charge of developing a product while collaborating with end-users. Roles, understood as the set of activity an actor will durably endorse in such teams are not always explicitly defined and sometimes volatile (Hoda et al., 2013) whereas in other types of organizations such as waterfall (Royce, 1970), activities are rationalized and split into categories and roles defined accordingly. In agile, identities are therefore shaken. Indeed, Coupland and Spedale (2020), alert on the risks of putting individuals in vulnerable positions when, confronted to managerial ideologies promoting freedom, movement and adaptability, they engage in the construction of “agile identities”.

Research on effects of agile adoptions on individuals is emerging, although adoption of agile methodologies can certainly affect the way people relate to their occupations. To name a few there are research on perceived well-being of actors (Fortmann, 2018; Rietze & Zacher, 2022), on perceived recognition at work (Mukamba & Dupont, 2022), on how actors transform their roles (Hoda et al., 2013; Shastri et al., 2021). However, agile methods adoption has not yet been envisioned through the lens of individual identity and identity work. Identity relates to the meanings that actors reflexively associate to themselves while trying to find responses to questions about who they are and who they want to become (Brown, 2020). Identity work has been defined as the range of activities in which individuals engage in, in order to create, present or preserve personal identities that support the idea they have about themselves (Snow &

Anderson, 1987) and as such identity work is to be envisioned as a dynamic process. In fact, in times of transitions, when roles change, identity work is required to sustain a feeling of authenticity despite the changes the person is experiencing (Ibarra, 2004). It can be viewed as a narrative practice that individuals engage in to create, sustain and transform versions of the selves and can often be a struggle. Identity work perspective based on narrative theory (Bruner, 1991; Ibarra, 2004; Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010) offers therefore a potentially rich source of information on the process individuals subjectively undergo while exposed to the adoption of agile methodologies in an organization. However individual narratives are not always consistent, and are sometimes contradictory, the individual's discourse about themselves are often scattered with breaches and slips (Arnaud and Vanheule, 2007). The psychodynamic theory, especially the Lacanian theory (Arnaud & Vanheule, 2007; Driver, 2009, 2015, 2017) provides an adapted theoretical apparatus to make sense of these contradictions.

We have conducted exploratory research in the engineering department of a large aerospace company who decided around 2015 to move from a waterfall-based management (Royce, 1970) to one based on agile methodologies. This research is mostly based on interviews of actors, and the account they make of their experience of the organizational change. The data we collected helped us understand from multiple perspective both how the change unfolded in the department and how actors were individually and subjectively affected by it. In a first section of the paper, we review how subjectivity aspects are treated by literature on agility and how it advocates for such a research perspective. We then explain the identity work perspective, focusing on both the narrative theory and the psychodynamic theory that are at the basis of our methodology. After explaining our methodology, we outline our results which first consist of an organizational level perspective that will allow to understand the context in which the individual identity work takes place (Caza et al., 2018). We then provide an analysis of individual trajectories that will help understand the different ways in which individuals can be affected by the change. We will then discuss the contributions, limits and perspectives, our work brings to the understanding of agile transformation and its effect on individuals.

1. AGILITY AND SUBJECTIVITY

The concept of agility appears in the 1980s and becomes popular in the early nineties thanks to the work done by the Iaccoca Institute of Lehigh University inventing the concept of agile manufacturing that was supposed to help industries to cope with an always changing competitive environment (Dove, 1993). In a prospective and sometimes prescriptive approach, researchers in organization studies start theorizing organizational agility (Walter, 2021). At the

same time, the term “agile” appears in the IT industry, where practitioners theorize their approaches to software development. Defining themselves as “organizational anarchist” (Rigby et al., 2016), they compose a Manifesto for Software Development that summarizes 4 values and 12 organizational principles that are common to the methodologies they have respectively theorized (Fowler & Highsmith, 2001). Looking for the best adjective to qualify their manifesto, they will retain the term *Agile* in reference to a popular book written by the scholars of the Iaccoca Institute (Goldman et al., 1995). Agile methodologies then claim a clear filiation with the concepts of organizational agility and promote organizational characteristics such as a flat hierarchy, an organization structure based on autonomous, empowered and multi-disciplinary self-organized teams. These teams work in a close collaboration with customers and end users, adjusting the development to the very needs of the end users and in short development cycles with frequent deliveries so as to be able to react quickly should the customers need change (Gerster et al., 2020). Presented like this, Agile methodologies look like a range of organizational prescriptions and justify therefore research in organization and management studies. In the Agile Manifesto, “Individuals and their interactions” are at the forefront of organizational performance, and literature claims the human and social dimension to be a key success factor of agile transformations (Dikert et al., 2016).

However, research on these aspects is just emerging, and is split in two main perspectives. In a first one, scholars attempt to determine the human related conditions for implementing a high performing agile organization (Diegmann & Rosenkranz, 2020 ; Mordi, 2021), insisting for example on the necessity for actors to adopt an “agile mindset” (Mordi, 2021), especially when it comes to agile transformation, understood as the adoption of agile methods in an organization. Indeed, Scholars advocate also that the adoption of an “Agile Mindset” by the actors and by the organization as a whole is an essential condition for success in agile adoption thanks to training and coaching (Paasivaara et al., 2018).

In a second perspective, literature aims at understanding how people live the adoption, taking for example the angle of the well-being or suffering of actors practicing agile or perceived recognition while working in Agile (Mukamba & Dupont, 2022; Omar & Abdullah, 2015). Others will try to understand how people adapt describing how agile team members or managers change roles (Hoda et al., 2013, Shastri et al., 2017). In fact an agile transformation often leads to the creation and implementation of new roles and literature indicates as a major difficulty for actors to transition from old to new roles, without necessarily explaining those difficulties (Gerster & Dremel, 2020). Roles change as well for managers from organizing the work to

supporting the team in its self-organization process and transitioning to this new role can become a struggle (Pries-Heje et al., 2017). These difficulties are not explained nor fully described. Recent research has though examined qualitatively how endorsing the role of product owner subjectively affects individuals (Simha, 2021) distinguishing organizational factors from subjective ones, or how individuals subjectively perceive recognition at work after going through an agile transformation (Mukamba et Dupont, 2022). However literature remains scarce on understanding what individuals intimately undergo while facing such a change which has though an effect on them if, as scholars mention, it leads them to feel better or worse in their activities (Omar and Abdullah, 2015). This advocates for more qualitative research on identities and identity work understood as a subjective intrapsychic process. Indeed, Coupland and Spedale (2020), alert on the risks of putting individuals in vulnerable positions when, confronted to managerial ideologies promoting freedom, movement and adaptability, they engage in the construction of “agile identities”. This research seeks to contribute with empirical evidence on the way individuals are affected by such transformations and their demands. We intend therefore to contribute filling in this gap, by describing and explaining both how the organizational and individual mechanisms interact when such a change takes place. This leads us to formulate the following research question:

What process do individuals subjectively undergo in the way they relate to their selves at work and in the organization while living a change in ways of working from a traditional to an agile way of organizing?

To answer this question we will draw on the concept of identity work in organizations (Brown, 2015, 2020, 2022; Caza et al., 2018), which offers a potentially rich perspective to be able to answer this question.

2. A PSYCHODYNAMIC, LACANIAN PERSPECTIVE OF IDENTITY WORK

The notion of identity has, for the last 20 years been one of the fastest growing topics of interest in the organization and management studies. According to Brown (2020) more than 600 articles have been published mobilizing the concept of identity. Identity relates to the meanings that actors reflexively associate to themselves while trying to find responses to questions about who they are and who they want to become. Identity is therefore a way for actors to make sense of the place they hold in the social worlds they belong to, among which organizations (Petriglieri et al., 2018). What interests us in this paper is therefore the kind of activities people will engage in to try and make sense of what happens to them while undergoing an agile transformation, in other words, what identity work will they carry out? Identity work was first defined by Snow

& Anderson (1987) as the range of activities in which individuals engage in to create, present and preserve personal identities consistent with, and supporting the idea they have of themselves. Identity work perspective (Brown 2022) has been widely reviewed and scholars have taken a wide range of angles to describe it. According to Caza et al. (2018) individuals work on three different types of identity: collective identity, role identity and personal identity.. Scholars mobilize mainly 4 identity theories to describe how, when and why, individuals engage in identity work. Social Identity theory deals with collective identities. What motivates identity work is a sense of belonging or search of distinctiveness. Critical theory also deals with collective identities in relation to dominant discourses attempting to control the individuals. Identity work is motivated by maintaining continuity and individuality. Identity theory deals with role identities. It is here driven by self-verification. Finally Narrative theory deals with personal identities. It consists of creating and updating stories that draw on personal histories and available discourse. It is a continuous process that becomes more intense during transition and change. The motive of identity work is here coherence and plausibility (Caza et al., 2018). Brown (2022) adds a 5th one, the psychodynamic identity theory. The psychodynamic theory relies essentially on the work of Freud and Lacan (Arnaud et al., 2018) and considers identity as an illusion or a fiction that helps us maintain our self-esteem, but which can though be analyzed as such to reveal unconscious mechanisms (Petriglieri, 2020, cited by Brown, 2022). How do people maintain self-coherence while enduring a change towards agile adoption? To answer this question, the narrative theory is therefore the first one we will turn to as this question deals with personal identity. It considers identity work as an act of narration in which the individual incorporates his/her experiences into his own history to make sense of who he/she is (Bruner, 1991). In times of transitions, identity work is required to sustain a feeling of authenticity despite the changes the person is experiencing (Ibarra, 2004). And narratives, described as a sequence of events that the individual accounts for, to make a point or a statement, are the way how people make this continuity of who they are, who they have been and who they are becoming (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). These narratives are in fact a way in which actors perceive their lived experience and are used by individuals to make sense of ambiguous or equivocal situations by aggregating selected, fragmented and sometimes contradictory experiences into a consistent whole (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). To build their stories people rely on discursive resources (Beech and Johnson, 2005) or a repertoire they progressively construct getting to know what kinds of story work or not, the story making them comfortable with themselves and the ones socially accepted (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). Part

of these resources are to be found in normative discourse surrounding the individuals (Watson, 2009). Watson (2009) shows for example how cultural resources such as the “Indian immigrant resource” can fuel the identity work of Indian family entrepreneurs. However, narratives sometimes fail in providing the actor with a sense of authenticity which is a kind of conviction of being truthful to oneself, and with a validation of the story from others (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010). Sometimes, the narrative discourses contain breeches and contradictions that are showing the struggle an individual can go through while constructing a coherent self-image (Arnaud and Vanheule, 2007). This is where the psychodynamic theory and especially the Lacanian perspective will help.

Indeed, from a Lacanian perspective, the image of the self is forever incomplete, pierced by a lack, that individuals constantly try to fill in (Arnaud and Vidaillet, 2018). The psychodynamic theory can therefore be precious to unveil mechanisms that people undergo to construct these constantly “failing” identities helping the researcher to better understand the interactions between individual narratives and the discourses individuals are surrounded with, especially organizational discourses, as well as their practical experience. It will allow researchers to touch upon the unconscious part of identity work and to understand the mechanisms these failures can reveal (Arnaud and Vanheule, 2007; Driver, 2009, 2015, 2017; Vanheule et al., 2003). We will now give in simple words an overview of the Lacanian theory as a basis for understanding the psychodynamic identity theory.

For Lacan, the psyche is structured around three dimensions: the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real. The Symbolic is the world of signifiers or symbols that we as individuals are surrounded with. It is a given, it is already there when we are born and it therefore constrains us in a way. When we account for our experiences, we always do it with words that are already there and invented by others, and our speech therefore constantly fails in describing what we really want to express. The Symbolic has also an order, a structure and conventions, and can be encountered in the form of discourses, Lacan will speak about the Symbolic Order (Arnaud, Fugier and Vidaillet, 2018). The individual is confronted to this Symbolic Order in every moments of his life. It takes for example the form of the parents’ expectations for their child; later in life, it takes the form of institutional discourses that exist in the institutions the individual is part of such as the school where he studies, the company he works for, the political party he belongs to. These are a maelstrom of injunctions or statements directed to the individual. The sum of these discourses are what Lacan calls the Other with a capital O. This Other is to be envisioned as a kind of third party that is always present when individuals talk.

They determine themselves in relation to this Other. This Other can be for example God for someone religiously engaged, or a Cause for someone who is politically engaged, a management doctrine in an organization. Individuals will therefore attribute specific demands to this Other in the form of what it is supposed to expect from them. In organizations, people are therefore less engaged in interactions and identifications from one to another but rather in individual relations to an Organizational Other (Arnaud, 2002; Naulleau, 2010; Keegan and Hoedemakers, 2010 cited by Arnaud, Vidaillet, Fugier, 2018).

As individuals, we also associate signifiers from the symbolic order, and in so doing we create meanings for ourselves or images. This is what happens for example during the mirror stage when the baby first sees his image in the mirror, and when people around it, and his mother, tell its name showing the image of itself in the mirror. The baby is then able to name itself for the first time and this identification is validated by the mother. As we grow, we will continue to create images of ourselves validated by others and the Other. These images constitute what Lacan calls the imaginary register. Through our own discourse constructed in relation with the Other, we take the world for the image we constructed of it. In other words, the imaginary is how we picture the world. But for Lacan, the language is always imperfect and there is always something in our experience, a surplus, that escapes the symbolization. We can never account and create images that perfectly represent our experience, there is always a residue, and images we build and stories we tell ourselves are always missing something. This something, this residue, this surplus is what Lacan calls the Real. In the same way, the Symbolic Order can therefore never provide enough symbols to account for the world. There will always therefore be a lack in the Other, through which the Real when it bursts becomes traumatic making the Other inevitably fail, (Lacan, 1966, 1974; Arnaud 2002; Arnaud and Vanheule, 2007; AArnaud, Fugier and Vidaillet, 2018, Driver, 2008, 2009, 2015, 2017).

The Lacanian theory has therefore implications on identity work both from an organizational perspective and from an individual perspective. If we consider the organizational level, organizational identity has first been defined as the central, enduring and distinct characteristics of an organization that exert some kind of force in the organization. This idea of a single identity is considered as a strong lever to enhance organization's members loyalty, or sense of belonging (Driver, 2009). Other scholars view organizational identity in a plural perspective, and that there is not necessary a unique answer to the question "what is our organizations' identity?" In fact, the responses to the question may depend on which organization stakeholder answers the question. For Driver (2009) this dual conception of

organizational identity as either stable, coherent and enduring or on the contrary dynamic, fragmented and changing or even both is the sign that organizational identity discourse is an imaginary collective construction that it is structurally lacking or structurally fails. It means that the organizational identity discourse will inevitably fail when the Real bursts for example in the form of a crisis (Driver, 2009). The official organizational identity discourse often held by an elite (Driver, 2009) can also be interpreted from a Lacanian perspective as an Organizational Other (Arnaud, 2002; Naulleau, 2010; Keegan and Hoedemakers, 2010) informing the subjects who they are and how they should behave providing them with a set of signifiers and a set of norms. Indeed individual identity work is always informed by organizational identity discourse (Driver, 2009).

This has therefore implications on personal identity work taken from a narrative perspective. When we as individuals talk about ourselves, we constantly engage in constructing a unitary and coherent image of ourselves that we will present to others as an official version of ourselves that we call our identity (Driver, 2017). This individual discourse as every imaginary construction, informed by the Other, is always troubled by breaches, slips, contradictions, inconsistencies which are meaningful and have their own structure or are structured as a language. They are the language of the unconscious (Arnauld and Vanheule, 2007). They are evidence of the lack the individual is always facing while trying to construct a unitary and coherent image of the self. It is through these slips and breaches that another part of the individual, often repressed or ignored, can appear: the subject. The Lacanian subject is therefore not to be understood as a consciously constructed self in a reflexive process as there is an always existing distance between the elusive subject and the constructed individual identity. This distance or structural lack that every individual experiences eventually becomes the source (or the cause) of their desire (Arnaud & Vanheule, 2007). In terms of research, these slips and breaches are therefore to be deciphered by the researcher to understand what the subject is undergoing. It is there that unconscious mechanisms at work while the individual engages in identity work, reside. The narrative theory can therefore be envisioned through a Lacanian psychodynamic lens which will provide a potentially rich understanding of a change process while insulating on one side the dominant organizational identity discourse and understand how it interacts with individual intrapsychic identity work. French clinical sociologists also propose a perspective that offers also indications to decipher the individual narrative. The researcher will have to analyse these narratives to understand in which register (Symbolic or Imaginary) the identification work resides, in other words, who is speaking in the subject and how the

lack appears in the discourse as a sign of the Real of the subject (Fugier, 2019). The Real, when it bursts often in the form of an event that doesn't fit in the stories, destabilizes the identification work introducing a crisis which has two opposite consequences. The first one is a process of de-subjectification that can lead the individual to self-destruction. Or it can become an opportunity for the individual to question, update and renew his/her own narratives and to resist or criticize the official discourse while questioning it (Fugier, 2019), what Driver (2009) calls an opportunity for creative performativity (Butler, 1993; cited by Driver, 2009).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH FIELD

To answer our research question, we investigated a software engineering department of ABC, a large multinational aerospace company. ABC is present in around sixty countries and employs approximately 80 000 people. The department that is the field of this research develops Flight Management Systems (FMS), which are software installed onboard aircrafts to assist the pilots. Until 2015, the department was organized in three main teams: a system engineering team in charge of the functional specification and the global architecture, the software development team, in charge of developing each technical component of the system and finally the maturity team who oversees testing and validating the different components, integrating them and validating the integrated system. In 2015, the development of a new generation of the FMS, the FMS-NG, is launched and the management team decides to reorganize the department according to agile methodologies.

3.2. RESEARCH AND POSITIONING

The researcher has a specific positioning as he is a management consultant working within ABC for many years and who is pursuing a PhD in Management in parallel of his professional activity. Agile Methods and their effect on people's subjectivity are the subject of his PhD. In November 2019, he met one of the managers of the department during a training in ABC's headquarters, who told him about difficulties his team was facing while adopting Agile. The researcher asked for the permission to carry out investigations in the department. This particular positioning is worth mentioning because, being immersed in ABC, implies being immersed in its organizational discourses. Indeed, at the time of the research, the vice-president of engineering in ABC, had put the adoption of agility at the heart of ABC's engineering transformation, and the researcher as he worked for two years for that person prior to engage in the research accounted for in this paper, was therefore immersed in this discourse. The main

question for the researcher was therefore how to be able to maintain a critical distance, and somehow an independent judgement given this particular context. This research positioning makes the researcher at least partially an insider (Alvesson, 2003) with both advantages and possible risks such a position induces. The advantages are obvious and twofold. First, our position provided us access to rich data. In particular being considered as an ABC colleague created some kind of trust with the actors and allowed therefore a clinical posture “at the bedside of the actors” (Faure, 2019). Second, our knowledge of ABC as a company made for example the understanding effort of the language used by the stakeholders, a lot easier. The inherent risks are on the other hand manifold. The insider researcher could for example appear to the actors as if he was pursuing subversive or political goals or on the contrary have some kind of loyalty to the organization that could lead to a form of self-censorship. He could also be too emotionally invested towards his research ground, which could lead to present the reality without enough critical distance or on the contrary be over critical. The researcher could also know the organization he studies too well which would prevent him from being surprised by what he observes, and last but not least, it could be difficult for the researcher to get rid of the organizational mental frames, or to be somehow emancipated from the organizational discourses (Alvesson, 2003). We believe our positioning was outsider enough to mitigate those risks. ABC is a very large company and the department that was investigated is in a different division unknown from the researcher, and he didn't know any of the actors, before conducting the research. We all worked for ABC but in very different fields. There was no emotional involvement with the organization itself or its members. The researcher had though been immersed in ABC for long enough to be somehow influenced by the organizational discourses, but he believes he was able to maintain a critical distance by participating in a doctoral program where his findings and interpretations were shared with constantly challenged by PhD students, professors and his supervisor. While engaging in the research we also promised as much anonymity about the department and the company as we could, to ensure no harm was to be made and to preserve some kind of independence in our judgement. We will though not pretend our subjectivity was completely clean of any prejudice (is that ever the case?) but we believe our sense of loyalty to the research community, significantly balanced the loyalty we had to ABC, and we took the precautions we could, to maintain a critical distance.

3.3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To capture identity work we need to understand its epistemology. According to the narrative theory of identity, identity work is an act of narration in which the individual incorporates

his/her experiences into his/her own history to make sense of who he/she is (Bruner, 1991). In the same way for the psychodynamic perspective, identity work is to be found in people's narrative that are to be deciphered to be fully understood (Arnaud and Vanheule, 2007; Fugier, 2019). Identity work is also a situated diachronic process that happens at specific moments for various reasons and for various objectives and it needs to be contextualized to be understood (Caza et al., 2018). This is especially true in times of transitions (Ibarra, 2003). That means for us to give a comprehensive view of the identity work mechanism that occurs during an agile transition, we must provide description of the organizational context in which the identity work takes place to understand how the organizational and individual levels interact.

If we look at the organizational level, organizations can be considered as a system of collective narratives in which telling stories is a key element in the creation of collective sense among organization members. And individual narratives are always enmeshed with organizational, social and historical ones. Therefore, one can learn about organizational identity by studying the stories and accounts that organization members make of it (Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006). To understand the organizational dynamics at work in the department we will draw on Dumez's recommendation that every researcher who wants to explain a social dynamic must make a narration (2016). A narration is a description of a passage from a state of stability to another state of stability, it is also a series of action and experiences endured by characters, and following a story becomes therefore to understand their actions, thoughts and feelings (Dumez, 2016). Part of our work then, was to try and make clear for the reader the story of the change at organizational level as told by the actors, the characters of that story. This narrative will inform about the construction of a new "Agile" organizational identity discourse (Driver, 2009), and on the emergence of an Organizational Other (Arnaud 2002; Naulleau, 2010; Keegan and Hoedmakers, 2010).

To understand the individual identity work we draw on Michaela Driver's contribution when she highlights that stories of change are indeed lived experiences through which storytellers both construct and disrupt fantasies of work, self and organization and therefore engage in identity work (Driver, 2009). These stories reflect people's unique experience of how lack in work, self and organization is lived with at a particular moment in time. The material we collected is therefore stories of the change as accounted by actors who lived during interviews with the researcher.

The data were collected between February 2020 and beginning of October 2020, and accounted for events taking place since 2015 and is therefore ex-post, which means that the individuals

were telling their story retrospectively. We did also two complementary interviews in March 2023, with two of the stakeholders, namely one coach and one manager, to verify whether the chronology of events of the organization change accounted by the researcher was consistent with their experience. The researcher's point of view is therefore like the one of a historian making a retrospective analysis of the account made by the actors. 200 employees were working in the department we investigated so we needed to select the people we were going to interview. We first interviewed people who worked on the FMS-Ng project and who were therefore able to account for a rather long experience of several years in the department so they could tell us their own story of the change and share their subjective experience. These people were either part of the agile teams who were developing a set of functionalities or part of the project core team, who was responsible for ensuring consistency among the developments done by several agile teams and managing the overall project. We also interviewed some line managers of the department to whom the agile and core team members were hierarchically reporting, and who were involved in the decision to adopt agile. The last category of actors that we interviewed were 2 agile coaches, that were supposed to help everyone in the department to adopt agile and therefore played a crucial role.

We interviewed in total 21 individual. The interviews lasted from 33 minutes up to 1 hour 48 minutes and were recorded and transcribed. We have asked them to tell us about their professional life since the end of high school, to tell us their own stories of organizational change. We followed Driver's recommendations to her students to focus on meaning rather than facts and consider the storytellers' emotions as a fellow traveler (Gabriel, 1991, 1998 2000) cited by Driver 2009) letting the storytellers tell their stories as undisturbed as possible "prompting them only occasionally to inquire about the meaning of events." (Driver, 2009 p.6). We must mention that all the interviewees were told about the aim of the research which was to explore their individual subjective experience about the encountered change, the researcher even mentioned that this research was part of a doctoral work investigating "the psycho-social effects of agile methodologies adoption". Some were sharing more than others, and we believe our mentioning "psycho-social effects", may have created reluctance to share for some. We tried though to remain the least directive we could to make sure that the interviewees would not feel pushed in sharing something they didn't want to. The list of interviewees, their respective jobs, is summarized in the table below.

Name	Role	Date of the interview	Duration

Nicolas	Head of Engineering department – Line Manager	02/10/2020	1:48 min
Thierry	System Engineering Head of Discipline (HoD) – Line Manager	28/09/2020	59 min
Eric	Software development HoD – Line Manager	24/02/2020	41 min
Xavier	Maturity Team Leader- Line Manager	15/03/2023	1 hour
Remi	Lean and Agile Coach – Transformation team	28/09/2020	54 min
Violeen	Lean and Agile Coach – Transformation team	27/03/2023	1 hour
Alexis	Dev team leader (Scrum Master) then Software developer again – Agile team member	24/02/2020	1 hour
Pascal	Software developer – Agile team member	24/02/2020	54 min
Nathalie	Development team leader – Agile team member	24/02/2020	48 min
Elodie	Product Owner, Team Leader, function referent – Agile team member	10/01/2020	1 hour 21 min
Valérie	PO – Agile team member	29/09/2020	46 min
Orso	Developer – Agile team member	30/09/2020	1 hour 5min
Emmanuel	PO – Agile Team member	29/09/2020	57 min
Yoann	Develop – Agile team member	30/09/2020	1 hour 3 min
Rod	Maturity Engineer – Agile team member	24/02/2020	49 min
Marie	Software Engineering Manager – Project core team member	04/09/2020	30 min
Stéphane F	Bid manager – Project Core team member	29/09/2020	51 min
Pierre	Product Design Authority – Project Core team member	29/09/2020	51 min
Vincent	System validation manager – Project Core team member	06/10/2020	33 min
Maria	PO – Agile team member	24/02/2020	40 min
Jean	PO – Agile team member	29/09/2020	59 min
Stéphane Y	Global System Engineering Manager – Project Core team member	01/10/2020	52 min

From this material, we were therefore able to extract two main results. The first one is the context of the identity work which is an organizational change process. The second one is the individual trajectories of the actors reflecting their identity work during the period. We coded our interview material twice: first to describe the organizational dynamic that took place in the organization through a narration and description, then to analyze the subjective individual stories of the lived change.

We described the organizational change using both narration and description. And we used two kinds of codes¹. The first ones were “descriptive codes” coming from a thematic coding (Ayache and Dumez, 2011). It helped us insulating and describing the **object** to be managed by the different actors, that is the FMS itself, the **regulations and constraints** it is submitted to, the **nature of the work** people were engaged in, and the **different stakeholders** the people in the department had to interact with, the successive **management doctrines**, the **actual roles** taken by some stakeholders, the **main decisions** that were taken, the **justifications of the decisions**, as well as the **reactions** or **judgement** about these decisions, and the **apparent obstacles** to the decisions. For the second coding we used chronology templates (Dumez 2016) to establish a succession of events. As we had asked every individual to tell us the story of the change, we were able to spot in the interview’s transcripts the **analepsis**, the **crystallization** moments (Arendt, 1970; cited by Dumez, 2016), the **inflection points**, when actual changes happened, the **different sequences** of the change process, and **epiphanies** (Denzin, 1989; cited by Dumez 2016). In so doing we are finally able to make apparent how the agile organizational order, takes place in the organization, and how the Organizational Other (Arnaud, 2002) imposes itself. We made the different points of view of the actors explicit to allow the readers to build their own perspective on the context in which the identity work of the actors took place. The second part of our results is dedicated to the individual trajectories of actors. As we mentioned earlier not all the actors interviewed were as willing to share how the change affected them, we therefore selected among the interviews the ones where the individuals were telling the most about themselves and where an individual and subjective dynamic was visible. These were first structured as individual narratives, our codes were here based on identity work theory from a Lacanian perspective (Arnaud and Vanheule, 2007; Fugier, 2019). We tried to spot the imaginary identity discourse, the way the actor describes himself or herself, that is the **official version** of the self (Arnaud and Vanheule, 2007; Fugier, 2019), the **discourse of the symbolic** order that reflects the norms to which the actors are submitted to (Watson 2009; Fugier, 2019).

¹ In this paragraphe, the codes used to analyze the material appear in bold in the text.

or the discourse of the Other. We also spotted in these narratives the **breaches, contradictions and inconsistencies** or the **lacks** in the discourse (Arnaud & Vanheule, 2007; Fugier, 2019). We tried to give a meaning to these inconsistencies and contradictions, as for Lacan, there is always a logic to be deciphered behind those breaches and inconsistencies (Lacan, 1966). It is this logic that we tried to make apparent. In so doing we were to be able to capture both the conscious and unconscious part of the identity work they are engaged in to accommodate their subjectivity to the new work organization that is offered to (or forced upon) them.

4. RESULTS

4.1. THE RAISE OF THE AGILE ORGANIZATIONAL OTHER

4.1.1. Analepsis

The FMS is a software system installed onboard commercial aircrafts. It is designed to assist pilots and has progressively replaced the third cockpit crew member. The FMS is made of several technical *components* such as a *positioning system*, a *navigation database*, a *flight plan*, a *fuel calculator* etc. Functions of the FMS, such as the aircraft *descent* function when activated by the pilot will use several components. Developing an FMS takes many years, “*300 people, 1,3 million of code lines*” and its lifespan is decades. It requires to be qualified by aviation authorities, to ensure the highest level of safety. ABC has been developing such systems for 25 years and has created a dedicated engineering department (the FMS-Dep). Its main client is BTF, a long haul aircraft manufacturer. In the early 2000s, ABC was developing an FMS for BTF in partnership with another company named GA. The R&D department of BTF was coordinating the work of both providers. “*They had their own R&D department, with their pilots and they were defining the stuff... they were seeing us simply as a subcontractor, doing the development for them*”. (Thierry). BTF was specifying, ABC and GA were coding. ABC was also subcontracting parts of the developments to software companies for economic reasons. In 2004, for the first time, ABC is awarded a contract as a single provider by BTF to develop an FMS system for long-haul military aircraft called F500. The project was developed in the same fashion as the previous ones, with ABC acting an integrator of subcontracted parts. In 2010 however, the project is in crisis and a new Program Manager, Nicolas, is appointed on the project. Started in 2004, “*the program was supposed to be terminated in 2011 but in 2010 we had not delivered the first version of it (...) The program was in crisis at BTF side, but also on our side. You had human problems, technical problems, customer relationship problems, BTF didn't seem to know what they wanted... you had orders, counter orders.*” (Nicolas). Valérie,

explains that *“BTF was doing military aircrafts for the first time so they really didn’t know the military specifics, it explained the orders and counter orders”*.

Recognizing the difficulties, the management of both parties clarified the way to work together: *“we told them we wouldn’t develop anything until they were clear on what they wanted”* (Nicolas). To better master the development, Nicolas decides to internalize as much as possible the development activity, leading to hire many of the subcontractors in 2010. In the same spirit, he and his management team decide to rationalize the organization of the FMS-Dep and to manage the project in *waterfall mode*: specify and freeze the requirements first, then develop, then validate and integrate. The FMS-Dep was restructured in 3 main sub teams: the system engineering team, the software development team, and the maturity team. The system engineering team oversaw designing the architecture of the product based on the functional requirements from BTF and translating those into technical requirements. The development team was itself sub-divided into *component teams* according to the technical architecture of the FMS. Each component team was composed of approximately ten developers and led by a *component referent*. The maturity team oversaw integrating the different components of the FMS, installing them on a simulated testing environment, and performing validation tests. The Program Manager, Nicolas and the head of the three teams coordinated the activities of the different teams. To ensure the quality of the development, controls had been set at every step of the process *“We had cops at every step of the process, traffic light at every carrefour”* (Nicolas). In 2011, the project was back on track and the first aviation authority qualification was granted in 2013 when a first complete version of the F500 FMS is delivered. *“A complete program review is made in 2014, and it shows that the technical foundations of the product are solid, the schedule was being held, the quality of the product was good, and the customer relationship was also rebuilt”* (Nicolas). However, costs of the program were higher than expected, and according to Nicolas, if the productivity was not improved the losses could be huge.

4.1.2. Crystallization: at the origin of Agile adoption

When he arrived, Nicolas was positively surprised by the attitude of the people working on the project: *“despite the chaotic situation, the teams were really motivated, they loved what they were doing, (...) I think this is really what saved us”*. But there was something more. *“The teams had understood that as the system was designed to replace part of the pilots’ actions, it needed to be tested very often (...) So they had started continuous integration, we were coding small parts and testing it early, it was already bits of Agile ”* (Nicolas). Other experiments were

also going on in the department while developing FMSs for smaller aircrafts manufacturers. Thierry who was working on such projects explains to us: *“We worked directly with their pilots, (...) we changed the way we used to work, with short loops, light specifications, frequent testing and with real products directly in flight putting the pilots in stress, developing and specifying at the same time. (...) We had called this method early validation, it was almost Agile” (Thierry).*

Eric the manager of the software development team, was also thinking about adopting agile *“to gain in competitiveness, the interest was to work in a continuous improvement mode and to work a lot more in a pull approach, pulled by the user’s needs”*. According to Eric, the main objective while implementing Agile was to increase efficiency and productivity, while breaking the silos that existed between the component teams.

At the same time ABC Corporate was also promoting a transformation of engineering and were encouraging the adoption of alternative methodologies such as Agile. According to Nicolas, working in waterfall was affecting performance. *“We needed to remove the cops at every corners, make it fluid, make things simple, implement only what’s necessary... we thought we’d check (...) [Agile] was also quite fashionable...”* Nicolas was convinced the ways of working needed to change but needed help. He says *“In the group there was a team offering Lean and Agile coaching (...) they were doing it at very small scale, so I went to see them and told them I was offering my project to be a pilot for large scale deployment, I told them I thought it could really help us”*. Several coaches were called from corporate to help and to train local coaches in lean and agile methodologies to help implementing these new practices.

4.1.3. First inflection point: The FMS-Ng as an opportunity to implement new ways of working despite potentially large obstacles.

In 2015, leveraging the stabilized F500 product, ABC decided to invest on a new product called the FMS-Ng, *“that was designed to upgrade current FMSs in commercial aircrafts but also designed for private jets as well as drones.” (Eric)*. This FMS-Ng, as designed for multiple aircrafts was a more complex product but relied on the architecture of the existing F500, based on components. Nicolas had now become the FMS-Dep head supervising all the projects. For everyone in his management team, it was evident that the ways of working needed to change. This change should leverage on the stability of the F500, the pre-agile methods that appeared so efficient, as well as the coaching offered by corporate.

Shortly after the launch of the FMS-Ng development, Nicolas engaged discussions with BTF who was the main targeted client. Given his experience in implementing new ways of working

with customers, Thierry presented the “*almost agile early validation*” method to BTF to highlight the benefits of working in what they now called “*Agile mode*” a new business model was also presented to BTF. The FMS would be paid by BTF regularly for its development, in several releases, instead of a lump-sum at the end of the full development of the product as it used to previously do. BTF had never asked for an FMS-*Ng*, and neither had they asked to change the ways of working nor the business model. “*Not only new ways of working were proposed but also a new business model, a new way of selling the FMS to them*” (Thierry). BTF’s reaction was not the one expected. “*They must have felt like we wanted to cheat on them, we were not very convincing at explaining it*” (Thierry). Instead of agreeing to work in this way, BTF launched a call for bids that put ABC in competition with two other suppliers. As a result, instead of working closely with essay pilots and engineers from BTF as expected, the main interface was still BTF procurement team and R&D departments as before.

Despite the obstacle of not being able to work with the customer, the decision to work in agile is taken. When asked if it was a problem not to work with users as imagined, Eric is elusive: “*well this is what we looked for, and we structured ourselves to work in this way*”. They took though palliative measures to compensate the absence of customer: “*we activated our own network and were able to contact pilots working for commercial airlines... Sometimes we have organized visibility points with BTF to show them where we stand and get their feedback*” (Eric). These interactions were not very frequent though and nothing like what Thierry had experimented. “*Work in agile without an actual customer in front of you, that was an issue*” (Thierry).

4.1.4. 1st sequence: implementation of agile with the help of coaches

A new organizational structure

Regardless of this situation, Nicolas and his management team had made up their mind and Agile was going to be adopted. This was in 2015. To work in a “*pull approach*”, the development team would no longer be structured by component but by groups of functions corresponding to user’s needs. The component driven architecture of the FMS in which the previous organization was rooted had not vary though and this was not seen as an obstacle either. These “*function teams*” were composed of developers from the previous “*component teams*”. By doing so, the first expectation was to increase “*developers’ skills versatility and to make sure developers could move from one team to another*” (Eric). After some time, in 2016 the system engineers and the maturity engineers were integrated in the newly built function teams.

In addition to the function teams described above, there was also a *project core team* which was supposed to manage the project and to coordinate the function teams. This core team was in fact in charge of splitting the FMS-Ng into functions assigned to the different teams. A “*transformation team*” composed of two newly appointed internal “*Lean-agile coaches*”, Remi and Violeen, completed the organization to help the teams implement the newly adopted ways of working. On top of this team organization, “*they had kept the same hierarchical structure*” (Elodie). The people assigned in the function teams kept as hierarchical managers the ones they had in the previous organization but their role was unclear: “*they presented to us organization, so you had the core team, the other function teams, and they had drawn a cloud, with the names of the managers*” (Elodie; she laughs as she describes it).

A new management doctrine: The Agile Organizational Order.

Following this decision to move to agile, coaches from corporate and external agile coaching companies are hired to train and help the teams and the local coaches. A new management doctrine emerges in the form of a discourse where axiological arguments coexist with technical arguments. Axiological arguments are the first to appear in the coaches discourse “*the F500 was in Command and Control*” says Remi, it was necessary to get rid of “*this kind of management*” he believed to be evidently “*toxic*” for everyone. An external coach quoted by Nicolas confirms “*the Group’s command and control is bullshit!*”

Remi describes the principles that were now to guide the development activity insisting first on principles of Lean engineering where technical prescriptions, “*there was a principle of having a flow of activities, a principle of quality*”, again coexist with axiological ones “*transparency as a core value*”, and behavioral ones “*and a problem-solving attitude*”. To have a flow you “*need to work on small parts, a very small granularity of activities, and in sequence*”. The quality principle means that this small part is developed “*extremely thoroughly*”, making sure when it’s developed that it works according to the “*definition of done*”². Transparency is ensured while using visual management. As for problem solving attitude, people were supposed to “*provoke interactions as soon as they had a problem*”. Scrum was introduced to facilitate the adoption of these principles: “*Scrum was introduced, because to do agility, although I don’t like the word “do agility”, you have to rely on methods like Scrum*”. An additional principle these coaches brought to the table was also to insist on the “*autonomy of the agile team (...) the teams know what they are doing, they are able to self-organize*” (Remi). Another principle that was highlighted by Remi as being part of Lean and Agile, was to work in *short loops*: “*in the*

² “definition of done” is an agile expression referring to the precise specification of a task.

principles of lean and agility, we work in a lot shorter cycles. We talk about timeboxes, we cut the time in slices and we do no exception. We have a cadence, and it is this cadence that makes everyone cooperate and makes all of us have the same biorhythm.”

Saying so, previous expertise and practices are overlooked, for example the need for longer time to pursue activities like for example architecture design are depicted as illegitimate demands from detractors: *“well this is what Agile detractors are saying, their argument is always: I cannot comply with your cycle, I cannot cut my work into smaller pieces, so Agility is not for complex systems because you need a great Guru to think about everything”.*

The Coaches discourse was also ambiguous towards management. They described some managers as reluctant to adopt Agile. Remi has a stereotyped discourse about managers picturing them as bossy people afraid to lose their power: *“some managers were saying this could not work: people cannot self-organize, they need a boss to tell them what to do (...)”.* He adds: *“anyway, what we told the teams was that they knew [better how to organize] whereas the manager as his role was defined, (...) he’s here to organize resources, (...) so if they self-organize, he is not useful anymore”.*

Managers needed to change: *“we were also saying that the manager has a very strong added value, he has to help the team achieve a greater performance, he must be a coach. So we were trying to develop this coach side of the managers”.* This “coach side” of the manager was described as follow: *“it’s the guy who asks the right questions (...) the questions that makes [the team] find the solution (...) it’s the manager who sees what the teams don’t see”* (Remi). The coaches claimed to help the managers by attending meetings they had, observing them or by having working sessions with them where they were for example trained to ask open questions and invited them to attend rituals *“with the permission of the teams”* (Violeen).

The roles of the managers were lacking description in the agile adoption, and that was on purpose. The corporate Lean and Agile Director advocated for a change strategy where *“you have first to get the permission from the top management to implement the lean and agile practices, then work with the people who do the work and who know, then the middle management will be a bit like a prisoner between the two”* (Rémi). Immediately after saying this, he expresses a kind of a doubt: *“if it was to be done again, I don’t know if I would do it in the same way”*

Working in the teams

Let’s describe how this doctrine was implemented. Each of the teams was autonomous in developing a group of functions. These functions were then split into smaller pieces called “user

stories” (US) by the system engineer or the PO. These US were then prioritized and piled into a *backlog*. Each team was composed of 6 to 8 team members, among which a *scrum master* whose role is to facilitate the interactions within the team, and a *product owner* (PO), whose role was to manage the backlog and to prioritize the USs.

The development work was then sequenced in *sprints* of 2 to 4 weeks. Each sprint was managed through rituals the team had to organize. At the beginning of each sprint the teams had to do a sprint planning meeting during which they were to evaluate the workload of the different USs that were pre-selected by the PO for the sprint. If a US was rated as too complex, the system engineer had then split it down in simpler pieces as elementary as possible. Each of the user story was materialized as a “post-it” on a team board visible to anyone within or outside the team. All the post-its were arranged in columns, each column representing a status. During the sprint, every morning the teams have a ritual called the “stand up meeting”. They all gathered around the board, and the scrum master takes the post-its one by one to discuss them. For each of them the person responsible for it gives a status about it, usually in three parts: what he/she has been doing the day before on that user story, the issues he/she is facing and if help is needed, then what he/she intends to do today. According to the status, the post-it is moved (or not) from one column to another along the board: the post-its on the board materialize the “flow” that Remi was talking about. Too many post-its in one column, would mean there is a bottleneck. At the end of each sprint, all the user stories were supposed to be completed, and if some are not, they are then pushed into the next sprint. Finally, at the end of the sprint the teams were encouraged to have a retrospective meeting in which they discuss possible improvement they could implement in the next sprint.

Elusive roles of the managers

What had then become of the department managers? We have seen above how the organization chart had represented the managers as a vague cloud above the rest of the organization. The concept of “manager” seemed in fact unclear when the researcher mentioned it with interviewees. Most of the participants referred to what we understood as people taking decisions in the department with an impersonal “*they*”. The pronoun “*they*” referred alternatively to “*the people who decide*”, or “*the core team*”, or “*the bosses*”. The researcher had to ask precise questions: “*who are the people you talk to when you have a problem preventing you to move forward or when you need to take a decision?*” The answers were threefold. It could either be someone in the core team, someone with a leading role in the function team or a hierarchical manager. Indeed, most of the participants when asked about how they worked with their

hierarchical managers or how their managers were helping them mentioned, often with a smile, that they didn't see them much, except for the yearly appraisal or to say "*good morning every day*". When asked what their managers were doing, the answer was most of the time elusive.

The coaches as guardians of the management doctrine

On the other hand, the coaches exerted then a significant power or influence in the organization, and were given legitimacy both by the management of the department, and some of the team members, based on what seemed a knowledge or science they were believed to have. Nicolas sees them for example as "*agile professionals*". Remi says "*Nicolas had given us full delegation to coach everyone*" Alexis, seeks recognition from them about his Agile knowledge. Thierry also withdraws from his manager's role "*feeling not expert enough in agile*" and "*somehow impeached by the coaches*". The way the coaches saw their mission in the organization was to be the ones who would change "*the mindsets, break the silos: what is important is not to do lean or do agile but to be agile*". This mindset consisted of having continuously in mind while working the principles described above. The coaches in the transformation team were acting as guardians of the "Agile Mindset". To do that, Violeen explains her role consisted in observing teams, making "*gemba walks, questioning them, giving feedback*". Sometimes they "*needed to be hard*" (Violeen) . "*If you really want things to change, people need to suffer a little. If they don't suffer it means that you are not really changing...*". Their role as coaches was to be understood as a "*sports coach: to change a behavior you need to practice, practice, practice*" (Remi). Groups of coaches were then roaming from one team space to another, attending the rituals, observing the teams and "*questioning them*". These interventions were not always well perceived, some developers describing the coaches as people "*sitting there, observing and asking intrusive questions*" finding them "*(...) most of the time, unpleasant*". They also felt empowered enough to act in teams without even asking the manager, for example planning training sessions without referring to a line manager and claiming "*He doesn't have to know*" (Xavier).

They also sometimes imposed practices that appeared disconnected from the real activity, as for example new ways of evaluating the workload. This was done using an agile game called "*sprint poker*", where everyone was to evaluate a US with points on a Fibonacci scale instead of working hours. Such practices were not explained, nor understood but not questioned either.

4.1.5. 2nd inflection point: The Real of project management bursts

Once the organization was running for some times, towards the end of 2017, the "*atmosphere was horrible, everyone was yelling at each other, it was at a moment we were a little in crisis...*"

we had to downsize the project, we didn't have enough money to continue" (Nicolas). There was a conflict between the core team that needed to control the project better and the agile teams who claimed that reporting was not part of Agile. *"You had the Agile professionals that were saying: the teams know what to do, (...) so the teams were saying, "we manage" and as they claimed to be the ones to know, they were doing their stuff in the way they wanted..."*. On the other side, the core team was saying *"yeah, it's nice but I have a responsibility to say to the customers when the project will be finished, I'll have a budget and I need to know what we are spending."* The teams were replying, *"are you asking us to do reporting? If you want to know where I stand, you just come to see the board"*, to what the project teams would answer *"I don't care to know where you stand, I just want a date on when you'll be ready!"* (Nicolas). The teams were also working independently and not synchronized. Sometimes the work of one team needed to be integrated with the work of another one before testing it, and some team members doing maturity testing could remain idle for weeks waiting for that team to finish its work before being able to do their tests. According to Nicolas, *"everyone was right and acting as per what they were told"*.

4.1.6. 2nd sequence: An epiphany allows questioning the Agile Organizational Order but under certain conditions.

To help solve the crisis, Nicolas turns to HR who advise him to require support from an executive coach. The coach reminds him that as a manager he has a "pilot role" to play, this is for him an epiphany. Reassured by this coach allowing him to play a pilot role, Nicolas, his n-1 and the coaches engage in a discussion that lead to establish, at the beginning of 2018, a new ritual called the "release planning" that would take place every 3 months. It was a 2-day ceremony hosted by the Core team and facilitated by the coaches and to which all the teams were invited, that is up to 60 people and that was taking place in the largest room of the building. The ceremony was to be facilitated by agile coaches, who, according to Nicolas, insisted on having an *"inclusive ceremony where everyone is present"*. The coaches insisted also on the fact that it shouldn't be *"command and control"*. Management seemed to be willing to take back control over the project but the appearances of Agile needed to be preserved. Where Nicolas wanted to define *"objectives"*, the coaches insisted on giving the teams *"a vision"*. Nicolas, wanted to have a *"cost baseline"* but the coaches insisted that this word would be too much recalling the old ways and suggested the word *"prevision"*. The teams were then composed according to the split that was defined by the core team. The system engineers and the maturity engineers were distributed according to the functions they knew best while the

developers, if they were recognized as expert for a given component, were asked to join a team that was using the most that component. The teams then had a “*grooming session*” where they were to decide what they would develop in the 4 3-week sprints until the next release and to take a “*commitment*”. Here again the coaches didn’t want to hear about the word “*commitment*”, Nicolas therefore negotiated the term “*ambition*”. This ambition represented what they thought they could develop during the next three months and the team had to present it to the whole assembly. All the teams synchronized now on a 3-month timeframe and some sort of control indicators that didn’t tell their names were put in place: vision, prevision, ambition could now be measured.

At the end of 2019, a final adjustment took place, at the initiative of the coaches. According to Alexis, “*the coaches had heard of the consulting company called “Lean-Agile Institute” that had had “extraordinary results in the Group”* and hired them to reflect on improvement that could be brought to the organization. The main outcomes were to stabilize the teams for at least a year and to compose them in the same way: the same number of people, with similar competences and led by a team leader. This team leader was responsible to facilitate the team’s daily meeting, to make sure the activities of the team were within prevision and alert if the ambition was not to be reached. These identical teams were now called “*capacity teams*”. The Release planning was maintained but was attended now only by the Core team, the team leaders sometimes assisted by a team member. We discussed about this meeting with Marie a member of the core team. She describes the emergence of a hierarchy. The release planning started with a review of the events taking place during the past three months, the core team giving its feedback to the team leaders in the form of an evaluation of the perceived quality of their respective teams’ work. This kind of feedback was only one-way: from the core team to the development team. The core team also reviewed the team composition, and discussed perceived performance of some of the team members, as if they were their legitimate managers. A third indication of this hierarchical relationship between the core team and the capacity teams, was the fact that when the next release was discussed, the capacity team leaders gave their *ambitions* to the core team, who in return gave them a “*challenge*”. The capacity teams had now 2 kinds of objectives: the *ambition* that they gave and the *challenge* that was given by the core team. The ambition was the minimum expected. The challenge was an expected surplus: “*if they achieve it, it’s really great! It’s to give an extra motivation...*” (Marie). Although the core team didn’t formally “*command and control*” the capacity teams, a real asymmetry seemed to have emerged. A “*command and control*” mechanism that didn’t say its name emerged anew.

4.2. INDIVIDUAL TRAJECTORIES

In this section, we describe how the actors subjectively coped with the transformations we described above. We adopted the actor's individual perspective about how they "lived" the change. A plurality of individual identity work took place in relation to the new Agile Order in the department; we have identified four categories that we'll illustrate individual examples.

4.2.1. Resistance : Elodie

Elodie is a 35-year-old System Engineer. She holds an aeronautical engineering degree. She started her career as a System Engineer for an R&D consulting company that was working for BTF on the "*flight alarm system*" of the most recent long-haul aircraft at that time. She speaks about it with emotions saying it was her favorite position in her career. "*It was amazing; (...) this system displays for the pilots all the possible alarms concerning a breakdown during the flight and the recovery procedures (...), so I had discussions with the engineering offices to understand what were the possible breakdowns, and the recovery procedures, and discussions with the pilots to understand how they wanted them to be displayed*". But after a year and a half, the company lost the contract on the alarms system and won a new one on the FMS. She was therefore working for BTF engineering office as a contractor, on the specifications of the FMS system. "*I was creating the detailed specifications we were then giving to ABC*". She then discussed with engineers from the FMS-Dep and decided to join ABC's FMS Dep. She joins the FMS-Dep and the F500 project in 2011, when the department had just been restructured with the 3 subdepartment working in waterfall. She works first as a functional analyst which consists of translating bits of a functional specification received from BTF into component technical requirements for the development team. After some time, she's promoted to the job she wants as a "*Function Referent*" within the system engineering team: "*I wanted to do that (...) it's the person who really works with the customer to specify for our engineers, for the ones who do the functional analysis, who presents the function to the development team and follows up its development until its validation*". That is her desired imaginary self. She does that for three years and then takes her first maternity leave. She comes back when the reflections on the FMS-Dep are starting: "*it's at that moment that they were putting agile, so they appointed me Product Owner of an agile team*". She nervously laughs while saying that, as if she doesn't really believe in the word she says, showing the distance she immediately takes with Agile. She has understood the move to agile to be for "*cost cutting reason, (...) and also because they followed the trend, it's fashionable to be agile, they didn't say it of course... but we were clearly*

following the trend". She is straight away distancing herself from this decision using the pronoun "*they*" every time she speaks about new organization decisions that are taken in the department.

Every time she speaks about her experience with agile, she either sighs or laughs being alternatively annoyed or adopting a tone that seemed to express that what was asked of her was pabsurd. When she speaks about the rituals, she explains all the rituals and says: "*it was so fake you know!*" or "*I felt like I was back in play school*". She rejects all the agile symbols: the rituals, the ritual names, the use of the "*sprint poker*" to estimate the workload, the board. She gives an explanation: "*I'm not in this school of thought, you know... I'm old school, I'm not on social networks (...) you know you had two school of thoughts in the department, people who are pragmatic and who want to do the job, and the ones who want to always do new things, I'm one of the pragmatic ones*". The "*new things*" she talks about are the agile experimentations she considers disconnected from actual work. She's also especially severe when she describes the coaches: "*There was this external coach that looked like a magician, like he was doing a show, he had a colored baseball cap, had a whistle around his neck, looking artificially cool... it looked so artificial!*". She explains also how she openly resists the coaches when one of them tries to impose to her to block a weekly helping slots in her agenda, to "*timebox*" the time she spends helping others and work in a sort of "*guichet mode*" with her team mates. She tells the coach: "*I will simply not do it*". She continues: "*I think this coach will remember me*". Later she will also compare the agile coaches to a political activist in her familiy, "*judging everyone who doesn't agree with her*".

She rejects all the agile artefacts as not bringing any value. This situation does not make her suffer though: "*I was just very angry!*". She hated the PO part of her work because it somehow forced her adopt a form of language or symbols she didn't see value in. She says: "*I don't like it when people make up or invent words, that don't mean anything... why do they need to do that?*"... To her, the adoption of agile is also like an un hold promise. This is evident when she gives with regrets her definition of agility: "*I thought agility was about working in a more flexible way*". Agile as she lives it, seems in fact extremely rigid.

But luckily, this PO role was just on top of her "*Real work*" which was still Function Referent and that was taking most of her time. She claims that her second maternity leave "*saved her*" after 2 years as a PO. When she comes back, she says the situation was a lot better, because she had again "*big functions*" to take care of but without "*being a PO*". We interpret this "*being a PO*" from her perspective as having to play a role and to comply with agile language and rituals

she is allergic to. Things improved again for her after the crisis, when the situation started stabilizing, although she still didn't like the *"rituals and ceremonies"* especially how the release planning was organized *"blocking 60 people for two days in the same room (laughs)"*. The past year she's been assigned team leader of a capacity team, she seems to have more peace, but somehow *"[not knowing] if [they] are still doing agile (and she laughs)"*. She describes her role as the one of function referent with some administrative and cost controlling tasks. This role of Function Referent, a solid imaginary self she was not ready to give up despite the symbolic pressure, seems to have been like a refuge which she's hold on to the whole time. She was able to maintain throughout the transformation a connection to what she considers her "Real work", that is the system engineering activity, while actively resisting injunctions she found absurd.

4.2.2 Neutral Acceptance

Some team members seemed indifferent to the adoption of agility. This is the case of Valérie, Yoann.

Valérie is one of the most experienced team members. She has more than 20 years of experience on the FMS, she started her career when the first FMSs were developed, in the early years 2000. She's worked on many projects: the first FMSs that were first developed in partnership with GA, the F500 for BTF, and now the FMS-Ng. She has seen many organizational attempts, some working others not. She's been alternatively a developer and a system engineer. Developing the FMS-Ng following the agile methodology made sense for her at the beginning, because *"as compared to the F500, when we started we were a very small team, so we could experiment"*. But she adds with a brutal realism, *"but to be honest, you know, if you take FM projects, they are often involving 200 people so it's often the opportunity to try new things. So they say "we are going to try that" (...) but then the number of people on the project grows and then it systematically questions the organization principles you had at the beginning (...) it could work but most of the time you need to adapt."* Agile is therefore nothing more than trying something new as was done on the previous FMSs projects at the time. She describes pretty neutrally the agile rituals that are in place, the different roles, starting with her own: *"I'm the PO, so the one who manages the backlog, who presents it to the teams, who organizes the work, synchronizes with the core team on technical issues. That's the administrative part, not the one I like the most (...) But I'm also a normal team member, what I like the most is the technical part"*. She adds *"I'm very often helping the guyz who have less experience, explaining to them why we need to do thing in this way, and not in that way"*. She seems to be a recognized expert and feels

legitimate giving others advises. This recognized expert is her imaginary self. And she adds, *“when I want to have fun, I even develop a function or correct a problem report myself”*.

The changes of organization in the different projects she has experienced, seem not to have affected her. She recognizes advantages of the Agile organization as it is now, as she feels it's more efficient and people are not waiting for other teams to finish for them to work. She recognizes though that for other people it can be difficult, but she doesn't seem to be affected. In fact she tells us the most difficult part in this kind of project has not really changed: *“it's not the fact of working in agile that will remove the fact that when you have to deliver something to be installed in a plane, you have to prepare tons of documents, validations certificates, (...), “sometimes it's dantesque”*. From her perspective, nothing has really changed much, she's still helping people who need help, answering questions about the FMSs, the role of PO seems really to be a minor change. When asked what her previous job was, she says, *“I've always done a little bit of everything, I've done all the jobs... except validation, because I don't find it interesting to make tests...”*. In fact when we ask her how she defines herself, she says: *“I identify myself with the product, I've always done that, I know it, I know it's complicated so when they give us an assignment I don't get scared”*. At the beginning of her career she left the Group to try something else, but came back, because *“[she] really liked working on the FMS;”*. It seems finally that as long as the Group will develop FMSs, no organizational change can affect her occupational identity.

Yoann is younger, but talks as well about agile also in a very neutral way. For him working in agile is an opportunity to learn. The change is an opportunity to learn about the product, to better understand a function whereas before while he was working on a unique component he could only see the inputs and outputs of the component in the form of digits without fully understanding what these digits were translated into a useful information for a pilot. He also highlights the benefits of working on a function with other team members, and *“knowing what other team members are doing (...) to see that we are all progressing”*. For him as well, the product he is developing is more important than the methodology or the organization, or even his role. He doesn't necessarily project himself in terms of roles, or work. He wishes to continue working on FMS, considering Valérie as a kind of model. He says *“it's such a vast subject and complex product, if you look at Valérie, it's taken her years to reach that level of knowledge”*. His imaginary desired self is related to the product not with the work or with the role. What he wants to become, the official version of his self is to be *“an FMS Engineer”* and for him the new Agile Order is an opportunity to access to this Imaginary Self.

4.2.3. Conflicted acceptance

We provide here two identity work examples where the subjects accept the new Agile order with reluctance appearing in their narrative. Both the stories are interesting because they show different destinies of the identity work carried out by the subjects.

Nicolas and Thierry: Managers saved by the Real

Nicolas is the Director of the FMS-Ng Department, he has been working in the Group for almost 30 years, on rather complex hi-tech projects. He was appointed as the project manager for the FMS-Ng in 2010. He describes himself (his imaginary self) as *“having done many things, but [he has] always been at crossroads: [he likes] the business side of project management but [also] to understand what is done (...)”* He adds *“we are not making or selling ties, so you need to understand a little to be able to take the right decisions.”* He claims to have a kind of proximity with engineering and development teams: *“I like to understand the technical part of things, so I very often work with the engineering and development teams in an integrated team, with whom I exchange”*. He is also the one who took the decision in 2010, to reorganize the project in waterfall mode, which seems to have worked well. He is also the one who took the decision to implement a lean / agile organization in the FMS-Ng project.

He explains his decision with an ambiguous discourse made of enthusiasm and doubt. He first justifies this decision by the need to find a way to develop the FMS-Ng in a manner that is less costly than the F500 *“we needed to make things more fluid, more simple”* which perfectly aligns with the Lean/Agile discourse from corporate. But he seems also to be conflicted as ambiguities arise in his discourse. For example, he talks about the first discussions he had with the corporate coaches that were to help his team implement lean and agile. He first talks about an experience he had with lean and agile coaches he had once met: *“I had met two or three guys before, who came with their bullshit vocabulary that was really blocking me!”*. But while he talks about the coaches from corporate he says *“they still had that vocabulary, but they also had a very operational language”* as if he was to convince himself they were different from other coaches. The second ambiguity appears when he tells us that people from the software teams were in fact considering agile at the same time he was considering Lean. He says: *“we also see that lean and agile go together”* as if it didn't require any explanation and adds immediately, *“well from my perspective as a manager which is a bit far, from the development teams...”* In this verbatim he distances himself from the image of the manager who has proximity with the teams which seemed to be his original imaginary self. He was distancing himself from the responsibility in the adoption of agile by the development teams. This distance becomes more

apparent when he moves from the pronoun “we” to the pronoun “they” when he talks about the teams: *“I thought, we’re already doing continuous integration, working in teams... I thought if we generalize it should be great, it can bring us something, and as they were willing to go for it, I trusted them... but something was blocking me”*. He explains that this something was that he, as a director, has commitments and milestones to honor, so when he heard *“this discourse”* about letting the teams decide *“because they know better, it [was] a problem”*. He adds with some sort of irony in his tone: *“we don’t do agile for the purpose of doing it or because it’s fashionable”*, although he justified his decision in the same interview saying *“it was a bit fashionable”*. He also complains about the fact that the teams were not following any KPIs, that he didn’t know much about what was happening in the teams. In fact he complains that he never heard in the coaches discourse, that agility *“would help deliver on time”*. *He says he understands it, “and that of course he’s not an expert [in agile] (...) but it’s a really small imperfection in the discourse of the coaches”*. Let’s stop on the word *“small imperfection”*. A part of him doesn’t dare to express what can be a huge lack for a project director, not to be able to predict the cost and schedule of the project. He calls it a *“small imperfection”*. Every time he will express his doubts about agile, he will come up with a statement like *“I’m not an agile professional”*. As if his management skills were all obsolete in this new order.

His understanding of the team autonomy and of the coaches discourse that the *“teams know better”* and that *“you cannot ask for KPIs, because otherwise it’s reporting”* appears to be a *“small imperfection”* that seem to generate a lot of stress, as he repeats that his job is to make everyone deliver on time. But, he is stuck in an internal conflict, talking positively about a training he received from an agile coach saying *“I really learned a lot of things”* but still saying that what the coach had not understood is the need for him to deliver on time and for people to commit on what they would deliver. He emphasizes this last point as important saying *“this is what I’m paid for”*.

He also tells us about a Project Directors Convention he attended and where he hears a Project Director from another division sharing his exact same concern about agile adoption. He felt reassured when he heard that this person was saying that *“if you want things to change, then you have to change and trust the teams, and trust doesn’t exclude synchronizing and control”*. He describes this moment as a tipping point for him. However although he just quoted the project director saying *“trust doesn’t exclude synchronizing and control”*, he adds: *“agile is their playground, and I have my project manager playground, I can give them the keys (...) I didn’t want to enter the lives of the teams, it wasn’t my role to understand whether things were*

going well or not...". Saying so, he excludes control and interest in the team out of his job. The Imaginary Director he claimed to be who is close to the engineering teams seemed now to invent a new story for himself that the teams could continue work in agile on their side while he can continue to work as a project manager on his side without interacting. He was acting as per the Agile Order, command or control were banished as being toxic!

However, the Real bursts in the form of a crisis making the lack in the Agile Discourse evident. He analyzes it with some sort of lucidity though saying, *"Everybody was yelling at each other but everyone was right"*, but this analysis doesn't trigger his action straight away or question his organizational choices. Something else triggered his action. He had an epiphany! For him a turning point in this crisis, was when his HR partner suggests to him to discuss with ... another coach. Not an Agile coach this time, but an executive coach, from a company called "My life, but better". This coach's intervention changed the game for him. He says: *"you know that coach, she came really with a very simple framework about management, she simply told us, you know as managers, you have three postures you need to play with: the leader, the coach and the pilot"*. He adds *"you know, maybe we insisted too much on the coaching manager posture"*. And it is only after having that epiphany, the experienced director, feels authorized to negotiate with the other coaches he had himself brought into the project, a wording and a way of controlling as we've seen above. Being a director with thirty years of experience, he needed an authorization by yet another coach to re-endorse the manager role he desired.

Thierry experiences a similar dynamic, feeling impeached of doing the job he likes as a manager close to his teams. He tells us *"there was an interdiction"* of intervening in the project. But he is not sure where this interdiction came from, whether it was actually the coaches who prevented him to discuss with the teams *"I think it was the coaches"*. He also felt that *"he was not expert enough in agile"* to know what was right. His discourse is also filled with ambiguities as for Nicolas, he balances between interest and frustration. He finally has an opportunity to strike back when the Real bursts in the form of the lock down, during the COVID. The Caring Manager he likes to be, is useful again : *"we were here, on Sundays, in the evening at 22.00 to speak with the teams who were kind of lost for the future, they were really happy we were here"*

Orso: Accepting Agile while losing enjoyment

Orso is a developer. He has a degree in computer science. A software company hired him, and placed him as a contractor in ABC. In 2010 he is hired as part of the plan to put the F500 back on track. *"I've been working in the FMS-Dep for 10 years now"*. He's mainly worked on one component, the flight plan, until he became the component referent. He did that for two years

but, asked to be a developer again. *“With all the coordination and management work it required, I was losing my technical knowledge, everytime someone was coming to ask me a question, the only thing I could do was to tell them to talk to someone else, whereas before I had the answers”*. He is attached to technical activities. He talks about his work before the change with nostalgia: *before when I was working on the flight plan component for eight years, I really had a feeling of expertise, effectiveness and efficiency*”. He has also great memories explaining the great moments he experienced when for example he had to rework in a *“commando mode, a complete part of the component, and did it in 3 months. We were seven together, and it really brought us together!”*. His imaginary self appears to be a recognized expert of the flight plan component, rooted in years of work, who finds enjoyment in working on complex problems. He’s worked most of the time for the F500 project and joined the FMS-Ng project only in 2018. His account of how he lived the adoption of agile is ambivalent and contradictory criticism emerges in his story in the form of cynicism.

He understands for example the adoption of Agile methods on the FMS-Ng as a tentative to reduce costs, to gain efficiency, he says: *“they told us they thought it could help us being more efficient”*. However, he distances himself from that statement with what we interpreted as a bit of cynicism by saying *“I think everyone needs to say they are agile these days, if you’re not doing agile it’s like you’re outdated”*. He distances himself from the adoption explaining he’s not qualified to judge whether it is a good idea or not. He explains first that *“[he’s] been doing agile for 2 years now, well agile in quotation marks, it’s Agile in ABC’s fashion, although [he is] not an expert in theoretical agile (...) is it a bad thing or a good thing, I don’t know”*. Right after he says that Agile is *“really good”* in the sense that with visual management you really see things progress, *“it’s nice to know what other people are doing”*. But cynicism is never too far when he speaks. For him it didn’t change the way he’s working except that now *“we sit every day for 15 minutes together to discuss what we will be doing for the day”*. There is even a funny slip when he elaborates about agile. When asked what were the big changes for him that were brought by Agile, he answers as if he was repeating the question and says in his own words with a pensive way: *“Does it revolutionize the way we talk, ... I mean the way we work, absolutely not”*. We interpreted this use of “we talk” instead of “we work” as a way to tell us that as for Elodie, for him Agile is a new language, with new signifiers, that he needs to comply with.

He sometime directly expresses what annoys him in the organizational discourse that working in agile will facilitate discussion: *“you know, we didn’t wait for agile to discuss with one*

another when we had a problem...it's not like before agile we were not talking to each other and now that we have stand up meeting, we suddenly are!"

What seems to be particularly painful for him is to work in a multidisciplinary functional team and to work on a component he doesn't know well makes him feel that "[he's] losing time, [the team] is losing time". He says: "asking for help is ok for me, but asking for help all the time, it's unbearable". He compares the fact of developing on one component one day and on another the day after, "it's like being a cook one day and a mechanic the day after!". It seems important for him to have the ability to become either a "good cook" or a "good mechanic" which he feels he has lost while working in agile. His imaginary self as a flight plan expert doesn't hold anymore. But immediately after, in an attempt of recreating a positive story, he recognizes that "an opportunity to learn something new is always good".

Enjoyment of working on a complex problem has also disappeared, since he works in agile, where the horizon of a "successful task" is always a few days. This feeling is even stronger as he explains that since his team had finished the "big functions", they were working on problem reports from the last releases: "we are the garbage team". The lacks that he is facing are twofold. The first is the impossibility of preserving or attaining an expertise in his domain, which is his imaginary desired self, the second seems to be the absence of an opportunity to complete a hard and demanding task that somehow makes you proud. His imaginary self cannot hold on to anything offered by Agile. He seems to take refuge in an identity narrative of a lonesome good soldier: "you tell me to go there, I go there, you tell me to do that, I do that, (...)". He finally recognizes: "I'm totally cynical, there's nothing we can do about these changes". Finally reflecting about any alternative organization that would make sense, he as Nicolas and Thierry, hides behind a lack of expertise in agile: "should we stop agile, I don't know... I've had a training of three days in agile, so I cannot say that this is not the type of agile that we need, maybe there could be another agile method that would make more sense". We interpret this last statement as him repressing any alternative from agile despite his cynical statements above. If anything is to be changed it can only be to move from one agile method to another one and speaking of something else than agile is a taboo. As Thierry and Nicolas, he questions his legitimacy of thinking about an alternative. This last statement appears as his final allegiance to the new Agile Symbolic Order. But, for Orso, no Real bursts to disrupt the Agile order, leading to seek refuge in this somehow resigned and cynical identity.

4.2.4 Adhesion

Alexis graduated from an industrial and computer engineering school in 2009. During his studies he developed a strong interest for quality and processes related matter and concluded his studies with an internship he really liked, in quality management at ABC. After that he was offered a job as a software developer on the FMS. He's now been doing that for 10 years. He's been working for 5 years on the F500 on the same component. He even was promoted as a component referent as Orso. After 5 years working on the F500, he's one of the first engineers of the department that moved to the FMS-Ng project. He is appointed scrum master of one of the first teams, a team that will last for almost two years. He explains his experience with a lot of contradictions with a mix of anger, passion, pride and a lot of frustration.

The anger appears when he explains how the Scrum methodology was first *“imposed by the N+2 whereas the environment was not conducive for change”*³. He said he expressed *“his dissatisfaction”* arguing he knows scrum as he studied it during his engineering studies. In the same time he has developed a real interest, if not passion about Agile. He explains with very much details the scrum methodology that was adopted at the beginning, the rituals, the differences between the different possible agile methodologies. In fact he has learnt about Scrum Methodology during his engineering studies, and claims with a certain pride: *“I was very advanced in Scrum although I never practiced it, I had learnt it at school (...) I was, let's say one year ahead of my team mates.”* He seems also to be a very informed observer of the agile adoption by the different teams, explaining how *“one team practices Scrum in a way that resembles more another method”*. Unlike Elodie, he speaks the agile language fluently and with enthusiasm and drops a lot of agile vocabulary.

The paradox with Alexis, is that despite the fact he knows the conditions were not met to do Scrum, he will still be willing to play the game and be a Scrum Master, and even a Scrum Master by the book. He has identified the lack in the fact that the conditions are not met for doing Agile, but consciously or not decides to ignore it and still embraces the role of Scrum Master which appears for him as an opportunity to realize this imaginary self, being an expert in Agile processes.

He invests a lot emotionally in his first two years in the role of scrum master of one of the first teams that were set up. He talks about the ambition he had, to help the team learn all the rituals, and how he could see that sometimes his *“team was not mature enough in Agile”*. He again says with pride that once, a coach told him *“you're crazy, you're going way to far, with a team that doesn't have your maturity in agile”*. Being recognized as an advanced Agile practitioner is

³ He refers to the obstacles described in 5.1 : the customer not willing to work in agile for example.

important. But he expresses also a lot of frustration, if not anger, directed mainly towards the managers of the department, while saying that *“they had not changed the organization surrounding the agile teams”*, and more importantly they hadn't changed their behavior: *“They were still asking for the same KPIs , going to see the same persons to understand what was happening”*. For example, he felt that he was held accountable for the well-functioning of the component he used to work on, as he was the former component referent, but claims he didn't have the power to hold that responsibility and that his loyalty was first to the team he was building: *“I had duties to my team first”*. Another point that frustrates him is that the managers consider scrum masters as team leaders with accountability on the delivery of the team. However according to him (and according to Scrum theory) the Scrum Master should just be a team member like any other whose role is to facilitate most of the rituals, and *“the team is collectively accountable”*.

But after two years the team he was building is dismantled, mainly because people are leaving *“on maternity or paternity leave, [the team] went from 7 to 2 left”*. He speaks about these two years as a scrum master with emotions, saying that he considers the building of this team as a real achievement for him, this role of Scrum Master was the desired imaginary self he projected himself into. The experience becomes though painful when teams are reconstructed every three to six months along the different release plannings set up in early 2018. He says many of the scrum masters left, and he himself didn't want to invest again as a scrum master *“because you couldn't see the team become a team in such a short period”*. When they finally set up the capacity team, he says he didn't want to have a leading role in the team any more, and that he'd given enough. He simply wants to go back as a developer. We learnt that after the burst of the covid, he took advantage of the downsizing of the activity to find another job.

But he expresses some kinds of regrets: *“you know, I've always wanted to be a « qualitician », but one integrated in the teams... in fact, the role of Scrum Master is really what I wanted to do (...) I wanted to help people through processes, practices, being able to help people progressing, I've always wanted to do that”*. He seems to try so hard to make this fantasy somehow come true despite the evident obstacles that he himself identified. In the end, the crisis bursts, the agile organizational identity fails, as his own imaginary Scrum Master identity. Exhausted trying to make this fantasy come true, he finally leaves.

5. DISCUSSION

We will here discuss what happened at the organizational level and how it then affected individuals in their identity work. We first propose a Lacanian interpretation of the

organizational dynamic that explains the conditions of emergence of a dominant Agile Other and we then explain the conditions for successful identity work in such conditions.

5.1. A VAGUE PROMISE LEADING TO THE CREATION OF AN AGILE OTHER

If we look at the story of the change, it seems that it all started with a beautiful promise that the management of the department wanted to believe in. It emerges in the form of a new narrative that is carried by some managers in the department. The application of lean and agile principles, working in close collaboration with customers and users, developing in “pull approach”, and in autonomous teams would help solve the cost issue that were anticipated if the department was to work with “*controls at every carrefour*” as done for the F500. From an identity discourse perspective, the FMS-Dep was to move from a self-image of a rigid and heavy organization to a flexible lean and agile one, that was the new desired Organizational Identity Discourse (Driver, 2009). The management team, at least Nicolas and Eric, as well as the coaches held on to this discourse despite evident obstacles. They ignored as well that the implementation of more control and specialization had put the F500 project back on track. The choice of moving to agile relied on an implicit promise that it could solve many, if not any, problems the department had encountered so far.

This narrative finally fails, a crisis occurs and a new form of organization with controls every three months and a new form of hierarchy are finally put in place. What we can qualify a failure of the agile transformation or the failure to comply with the desired image was not necessarily due to a general reluctance to adopt an agile mindset or an absence of training. On the contrary, a lot of effort was put in accompanying the team in the adoption with the help of coaches, contradicting here Paasivaara (2018). Nor did we encounter any concurrent identity discourses that could be the sign of a fragmented identity, that would make the new narrative fail (Driver, 2009). This new agile identity seems rather accepted though with questionings and doubts. Except for Elodie, these doubts are never clearly articulated nor discussed but rather involuntarily appear in actors' discourses. This desired and imaginary discourse rather fails when the Real inevitably bursts in form of the crisis making the lack in the new organizational identity narrative (Driver, 2009) evident. This lack appears in the form of a need for some kind of control of the activity. Was this failure predictable? The answer is probably yes when we look at the story ex post, but it was not that simple for the actors involved in the transformation. The question inevitably raises as to why they believed these new ways of working would help them solve their problems despite their own experience of the activity, despite the foreseen obstacles. Let's try and give an explanation in the form of a set of proposition.

Proposition 1: the social factor, Agile is everywhere

The first hypothesis we make is about the existence of a social or institutional pressure that surrounds the department. “*If you don’t do agile these days, you’re outdated*” says Orso, it was a “*bit of fashion*” says Nicholas. In ABC there is a transformation plan promoting agile ways of working across all engineering departments. Managers also interprets certain practices already in place that seem to provide good results as “*almost agile*”. If the rationale behind the adoption is the supposed cost effectiveness of these methods, we didn’t hear of any specific work that had been carried out to evaluate possible gains. The fact that the group advocates for its adoption and that there seem to be local cues of the potential efficiency were considered as sufficient to engage in such a “*revolutionary*” change, despite very apparent obstacles. This social factor seems both compatible with an institutional logic, where an organization will seek to comply with the institutional norms in order to gain legitimacy and therefore access to more resources (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). We see as well that the decision of moving to agile does not obey to a structured and rational reflection about the benefits it could bring to the department and to the development activity of the FMS. Lean and Agile seem rather to appear as an available promising “solution in search of a problem” demonstrating that the decision is barely rational (Cohen et al., 1972).

Proposition 2: The coaches considered as “subjects supposed to know”

Managers believe that the success of the project relies on a different knowledge than the one hold by the managers of the department. That is the knowledge of Agile. The second hypothesis that we propose to explain the adoption, is therefore the existence of a group of actors who are considered by others “subjects who are supposed to know” (Lacan, 1973), or people to whom the other actors attribute a supposed superior knowledge or expertise of the solution that is identified. This Group of people is of course the Coaches, to whom the management seems to have given the keys of the organization. If they don’t have any formal power in the organization, and although they don’t seem to have any expertise in the activity, they still act with legitimacy, prescribing ways of organizing, forcing practices, or giving advice for example on “team maturity”. These prescriptions and advises are based on principles and a science that no one really questions and that is hardly explained by the coaches, but are considered as a pathway to the vague promise. And if a questioning or a doubt appears, it seems immediately repressed by the ones questioning it, as they are “*not experts enough in agile*”. It leads them to qualify the absence of consideration of the department’s obligations and commitments from the coaches as “*small imperfections*”. The coaches almost play the role of a clergy in the organization,

guardians of a secret science that if applied will resolve all the problems and from whom the managers will seek a blessing if a change is to be made.

Proposition 3: Propositions 1 and 2 create the conditions for the emergence of an Agile Other

Both the propositions above, the social environment of the department made of agile ideas promotion within and around ABC on one hand and the existence of this group of people who are “supposed to know” about it, pave the way for an Agile Other to emerge in the department. For Lacan as we explained earlier, the Other with a capital O is a maelstrom of statements the subject is exposed. For some it can take the traits of God, for others of a Cause. For Lacan, the Other has an imaginary instance. It is a figure always present in the interactions of individuals as a third party to whom everyone needs unconsciously to pledge. This is an unescapable phenomenon: when we converse, there is always a virtual someone, the Other, we are also talking to, in addition to the person in front of us, as if we were reassuring ourselves that we are complying with the rules of the symbolic orders we live in. The Agile Other’s statements are in many of the verbatim we presented. Let’s summarize few of them:

- The previous organization was rigid and in “command and control” which was toxic,
- Working in pull mode in collaboration with a customer and with short timeframes whatever the complexity is always the best way,
- People who want to work on long term activities are detractors,
- The teams know better what they are doing and don’t need to be told what to do,
- Autonomous teams is the best way to organize,
- Managers need permission from the coaches to intervene in the teams
- Managers job is not to organize the work but to coach the teams
- The Coaches are the ones who know the Other better than anybody else

Proposition 4: the Agile Other is both dominant and impoverished and constrains solutions creation

The Other has also a symbolic instance, that manifests itself in language in the words we use, authorizing some words and forbidding others. The Agile Other, and the signifiers it allows, has saturated the symbolic space, Agile is the only option. People are careful to use the authorized language. This language appears as too restricted though to cope with the organizational problems when they appear. Indeed when the Real bursts as the need to better control the project. The Agile Other rejects the word “control” and managers then lack signifiers to be able to discuss operational needs, censoring themselves, seeking permissions. Many signifiers are forbidden as “control”, “commitment”, restricting possible discussions about

alternative. Only Agile alternatives can be discussed. Resolving the crisis will take a negotiation with the coaches, who are the embodiment of the Other, the ones who know the Other (Arnaud, 2002). The solution to the crisis will be found with ways that will not offend the Other. It will be inventing the appropriate words (ambition instead of commitment for example) or recreating a hierarchy and a chain of command that doesn't say its name.

5.2. INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY WORK IN PRESENCE OF THE AGILE OTHER

What are then the consequence for individuals of such a phenomenon? More than qualifying its resulting effect of working in agile, we were able to describe the mechanisms that people undergo while submitted to such a change. The individual mechanisms are quite complex, not necessarily conscious and always dynamic and are better understood when put in context. We believe therefore that our research completes the ones on the effects on people in terms of well being and recognition.. We believe our work shows also a diversity, a plurality of identity response when such a dominant Other emerges. These identity responses can be viewed as diverse positions towards the Agile Other. Indeed, As Driver mentions, the organizational identity discourse formation informs the identity work of the individuals (Driver 2009). We have summarized in the table below the four different types of identity work we have encountered in our exploration: the Resistance, the Neutral Acceptance, the Conflicted Acceptance and the Adhesion.

The table below summarizes the different trajectories and their characteristics.

Identity work type	Main characteristics	Identity work Outcome	Explanation of the outcome
Resistance (Elodie)	Unambiguous critical discourse about the Other, evidence of resistance acts in Discourse. The subject holds on to what he/she likes doing whatever it takes.	Positive but risky outcome	Her imaginary self is not shaken by the Other, or resists the Other. The object of her desire: the job she loves: working on complex functions. The subject while resisting maintains a continuity with who he/she believes he/she is.
Neutral Acceptance (Valérie, Emmanuel, Yoann)	Neutral discourse and distance towards the Other. The Other is at the periphery of the discourse. The subject is attached to something beyond and independent of the Other.	Positive outcome	The Other is not the object of desire, the FMS is, and it remains intact despite the Other. Actors see themselves as FMS Engineers. Their Identity

			expectations is undisrupted or favored by Agile Other
Conflicted acceptance (Nicolas, Thierry, Orso)	Original hopes are placed in the Other. Doubts persist but are repressed while remaining decipherable in a discourse filled with ambiguities, contradictions, and in which sometimes clear critiques emerge. Feeling of loss is apparent. Lack of knowledge of the Other is mentioned as a reason not to question it despite actually endured issues. Allegiance or submission to the Other prevails.	Uncertain	Negative in general. Can turn out positive if the bursts of the Real creates an opportunity to restore the imaginary self. If not, cynical distance seems to prevail.
Adhesion (Alexis)	Places Identity expectations in the Other. Applies injunctions by the book. Blames other people for the failure of the Organizational Discourse	Negative	The Real when it inevitably bursts make the Lack obvious in the Agile Other, somehow making the Identity expectations placed in the Other impossible to attain, leading actors to leave.

What appears from this table is that a positive outcome will in fact depend on the ability of the subjects to sustain what they are attached to in their work or in Lacanian terms, their ability to sustain their desire for work (Guinchard et al., 2011). The positive outcomes depend on the possibility of sustaining their desire. For Elodie, it's a job as a function referent that passionates her. For Valérie, Yoann and Emmanuel, it's working on the FMS product. For Thierry and Nicolas, they first experience a loss but are saved when the Real offers them an opportunity to reattach to what they like. Orso, is not that lucky and his refuge identity is the one of an obedient however cynical soldier he does not seem satisfied with.

As for Alexis, he is the only one that actually genuinely finds a destination for his desire in the Organizational Imaginary Identity Discourse. He seeks and obtains recognition in the Other, when the coaches tell him his Agile ambition is far too big for his team maturity. But this organizational imaginary construction inevitably fails (Driver, 2009), and therefore the identity expectations that Alexis has put in it, inevitably fail with it, leading him to quit the department. Counterintuitively, Alexis is probably the ones that adopted the most the Agile Mindset as

requested by the coaches, and that has complied the most with the injunctions of the Other, or the desired identity discourse but in the end he is actually the one who abandons it.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we told the story of an agile transformation in an organization and we described also the subjective processes that individuals undergo while facing such a transformation. A first contribution we believe we have made is to describe the agile adoption in a department more as a psycho-social process guided by hope and imagination rather than a rational one, grounded in materiality. As Agile is increasingly adopted far beyond IT and Engineering, this leads to question what makes Agile so attractive to managers in organization that they blindly adopt it. This irrational process leads to create in the organization an Organizational Other, in relation to which individuals will engage in identity work that will have a plurality of outcomes. These outcomes depend on the possibility for them to sustain during this transformation a connection to what they like to do or to their desire for work (Guinchard et al., 2011). If we are to draw a few lessons about this outcome, the first one would probably be to encourage employees not to believe too much in organizational identity discourses as these, at one point or another, as Lacanian theory predicts it, will inevitably fail. Neutrality or resistance seem a lot healthier postures for employees. Another one would be for managers, to try and reconnect management doctrine they envision with the actual activity they are managing, and to take into account the plural desires of their employee as there doesn't seem to be any recipe to bring well being to everybody, even while adopting a methodology that puts individuals and their interactions at its heart. We also discovered the essential role played by agile coaches in such transformation and the impact they have in making an Agile Other emerge. In fact Agile interest has led to creation of jobs as agile coach that are pretty unique and play a key role in an organization as Guardians of the doctrine defining the behavioural norms without any reference to the technicality of the activity, without anyone questioning where their knowledge comes from. As such, they constitute an object of research to understand better their mode of actions and why in Agile, there are needs for coaches whereas, if we are a little provocative no one has ever needed a coach to implement bureaucracy.

Our research has of course its limits as an exploration of one particular case of agile adoption in a particular context. This case calls therefore for other researches in similar or different industries or in different industries using a similar research methodology, to either confirm or contradict the theorization we made of the phenomenon we observed.

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