



# Session 3

# Meaning, recognition, engagement

Human Resource Management



WOOC LAP

What's in the news?

LHH



# Brown-out, Burn-out, Bore-out: What Are These Work-related Syndromes?

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**US small business**

🕒 This article is more than **1 month old**

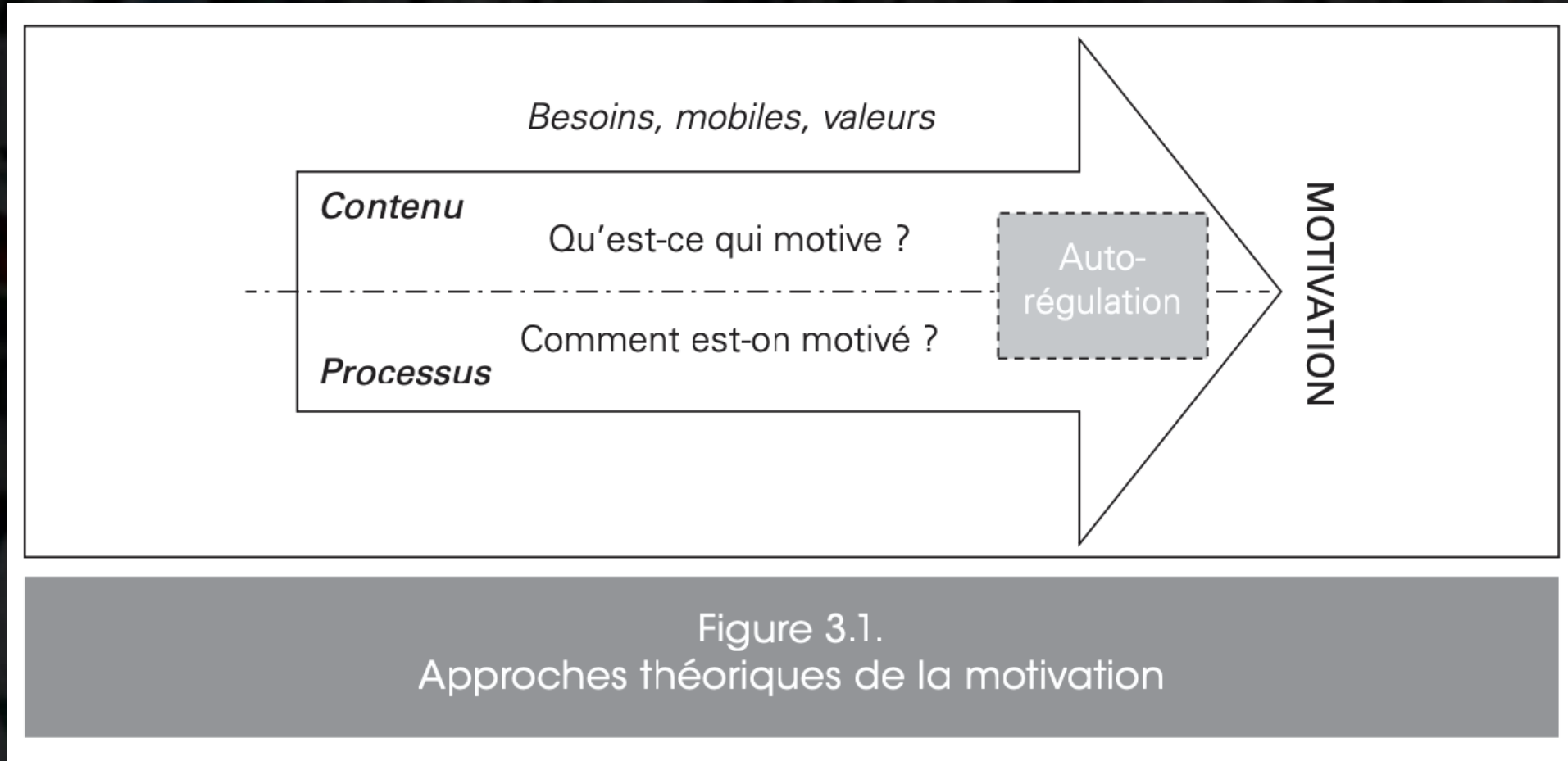
Feeling bored and disconnected from your job? You may be facing workplace 'rust-out'

Gene Marks

# 1. Engagement at work

- **A false obvious** : everyone thinks they know what it is (we experience it daily, cf. post-Covid “quiet quitting”), but intuition is not enough.
- **A misleading indicator** : the “engagement rate” expressed as a percentage lends itself to every interpretation, because a clear causal link between engagement and management policy can never be established
  - (too many factors are at play: governance, frontline management, atmosphere, personal life).
- **A genuine concern** : in a context of hyper-individualization, engagement becomes the **marker of the meaning of work** and of the organization’s capacity to produce it collectively.

## 2. The managerial framing: motivation



## 2. The managerial framing: motivation

- **The context.** The concept of motivation appears in the early 1930s, with the Human Relations school, at the moment when the organization becomes an object of study.
- **Why at that moment?** Work is organized according to Taylorist principles. No wonder the workers show little enthusiasm..
- **The traditional instruments** — discipline, authority, control, sanction, reward — have shown their limits.
  - (Galambaud) it is about “getting someone else to adopt a professional behavior they would not adopt spontaneously”.
- **The initial idea** (behaviorist, physiological approach): motivation is a force that drives one to satisfy a need, whose satisfaction provides pleasure or relief.

# 1. The managerial framing: motivation

## 1.1 Content perspectives on motivation: needs

### Maslow's pyramid (1943).



Maslow's hierarchy of needs



**Besoins physiologiques** : relatifs aux éléments de base nécessaires à la vie (air, eau, nourriture, sommeil...). Ils ont la préséance sur tous les autres. Dans une organisation, le salaire comble ce besoin en offrant des moyens de subsistance.

**Besoins de sécurité** : se protéger des dangers, des menaces, des privations. Dans une organisation, ce besoin s'exprime par ex. par la recherche d'un emploi stable.

**Besoins sociaux** : relations interpersonnelles, appartenance, acceptation, amitié, amour. Par ex., le désir d'appartenir de façon formelle ou informelle à certains groupes sociaux ou professionnels. Dans les organisations, les efforts consentis en matière de socialisation ou de culture organisationnelle contribuent à répondre à ce besoin.

**Besoins d'estime ou de reconnaissance** (a) de soi : désir de confiance en soi, de respect de soi, sentiments de compétence, de réussite, d'indépendance... et (b) des autres : désir d'être reconnu, apprécié, d'avoir un statut et du prestige. Dans l'organisation, les pratiques d'appréciation du personnel visent à répondre à ce besoin.

**Besoins d'actualisation** : réalisation de son potentiel, accomplissement de soi et expression créative. C'est une sorte de « méta-besoin » que peu de gens arrivent à combler.

Figure 3.2.  
La pyramide des besoins (Maslow, 1943)

# 1. The managerial framing: motivation

## 1.1 Content perspectives on motivation: needs

### Herzberg (1959) — the two-factor theory.

- **Hygiene factors** (conditions, relationships, status, salary): their absence produces dissatisfaction; their presence does not produce satisfaction.
- **Motivator factors** (autonomy, responsibility, work content): they produce satisfaction.

→ Herzberg recommends job enrichment

# 1. The managerial framing: motivation

## 1.1 Content perspectives on motivation: needs

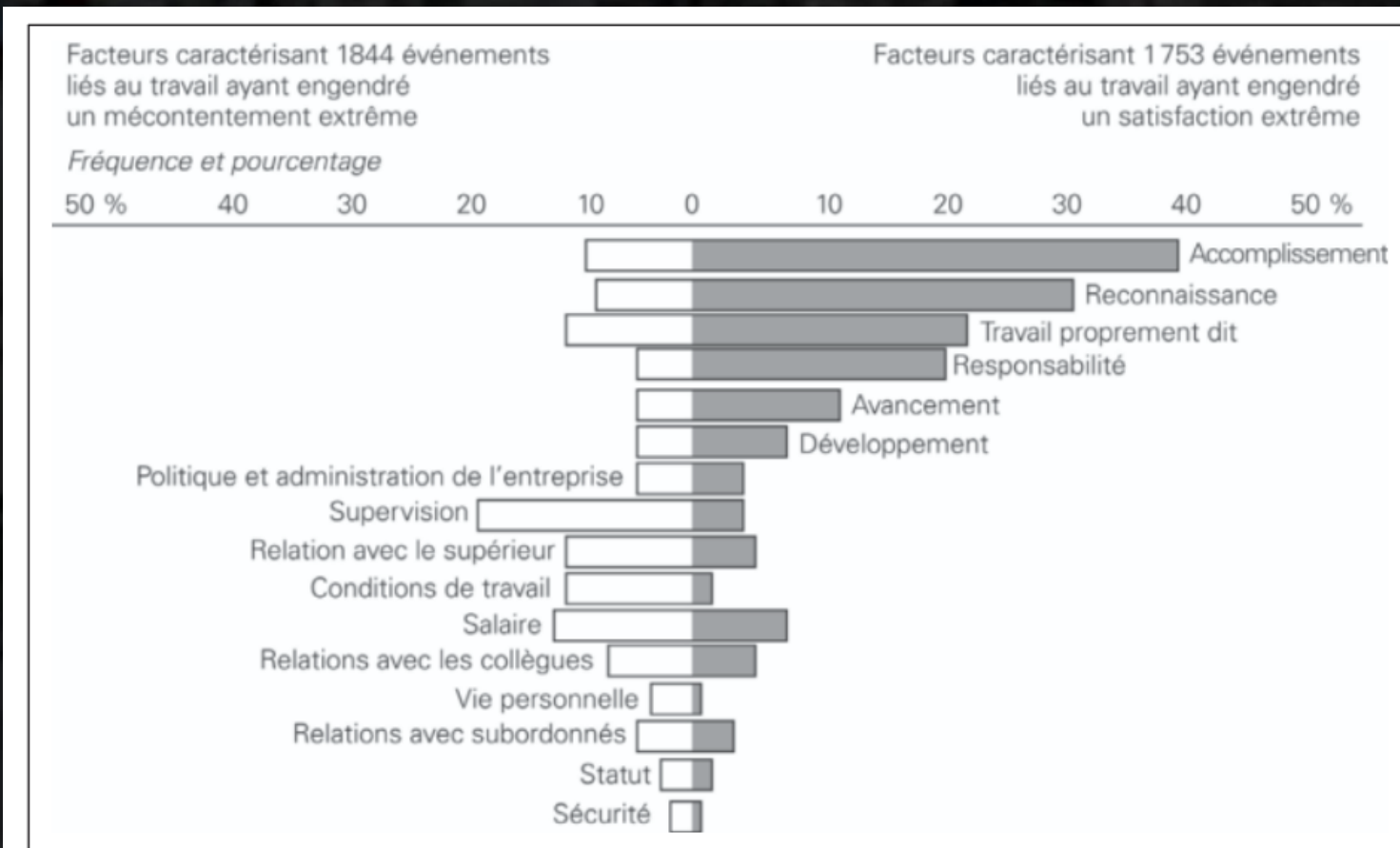


Figure 3.3.  
Facteurs moteurs et facteurs d'hygiène (Herzberg, 1959)

# 1. The managerial framing: motivation

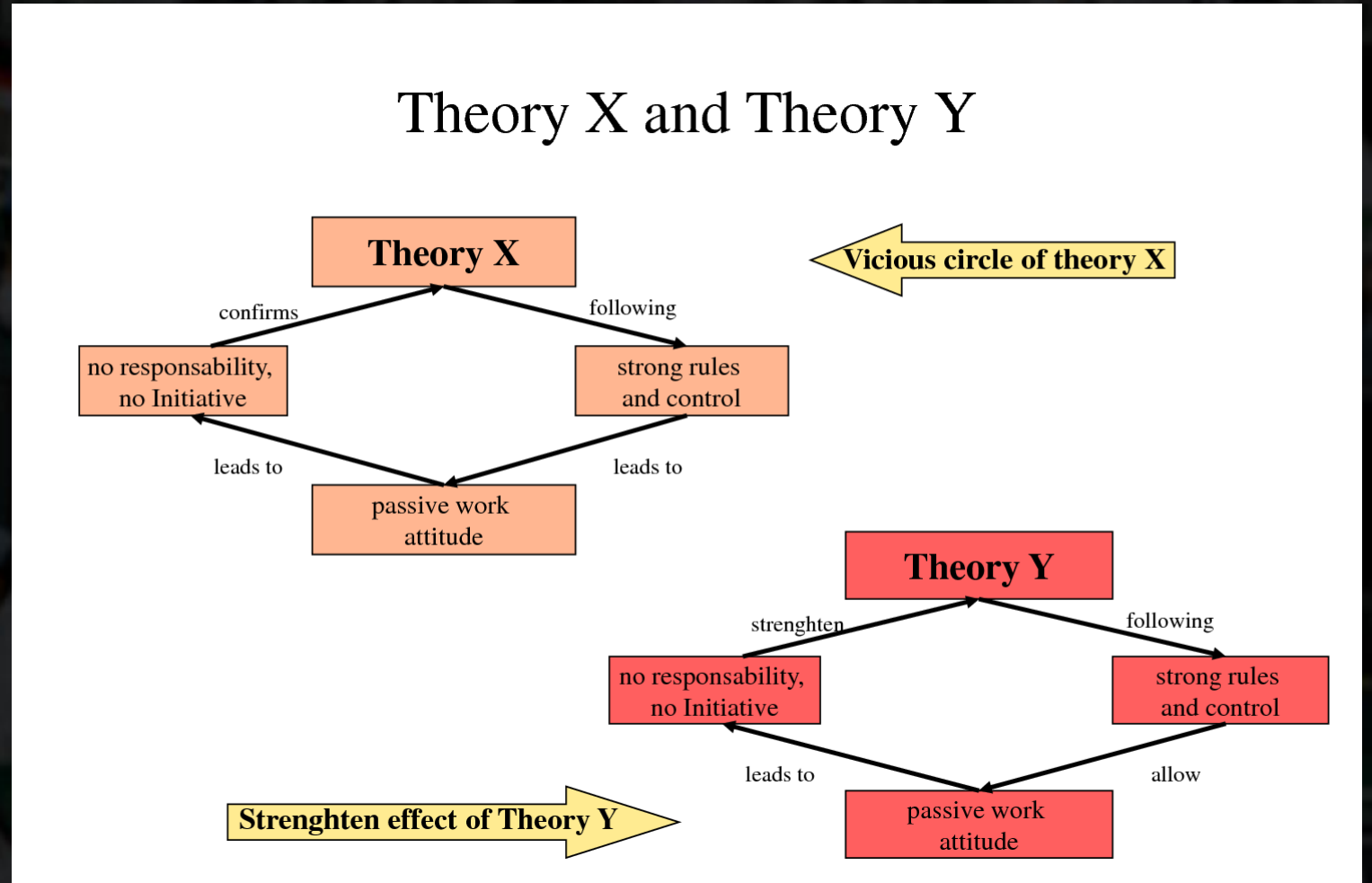
## 1.1 Content perspectives on motivation: needs

### McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y

The management practices depend on how leaders conceive of people's relationship to work.

X: people don't want to work → hierarchy, control.

Y: everyone needs to fulfill themselves → autonomy, responsibility.



# 1. The managerial framing: motivation

## 1.2 Process perspective: cognitive approaches

We move from the cause to the construction of motivation; the human becomes rational, calculating, and motivation becomes dynamic (no longer a stable state).

- Vroom (1964) — **model VIE** : Motivation = Valence × Instrumentality × Expectancy. Since it is a product, if one factor is zero, motivation is zero.
- Adams (1963, 1965) — **theory of equity** : the individual compares their contributions/rewards ratio to that of others; the feeling of inequity drives them to act.
- Porter and Lawler (1968) — synthesis leading to **management by objectives (MBO)**.
- Greenberg (1987, 1990) — **organizational justice**, distinguishing **distributive** justice (rewards) and **procedural** justice (decision-making processes).

# 1. The managerial framing: motivation

## 1.3 The self-regulation approaches

The individual self-determines and acts upon their own context.

- Locke (1968) — **theory of goals** : the clearer, more precise and more “challenging” a goal, the more it motivates → supports management by objectives.
- Deci and Ryan (1985, 1991) — **self-determination** :
  - behavior is motivated by the need to feel competent and to be the origin of one’s own actions. A **continuum** runs from amotivation to intrinsic motivation, passing through increasingly internalized extrinsic regulations (external → introjected → identified → integrated).

**Risk of this approach**: motivation dissolves into a multitude of disciplines (decision, identity, socialization...) to the point where one may wonder whether the word still has any meaning.

# 1. The managerial framing: motivation

## 1.4 Satisfaction, involvement and commitment

Other concepts are then created to complete (and blur) the picture.

Their common point: they lend themselves to “scores” meant to measure the “human health” of the company.

- **Job satisfaction** — an emotional/affective state in the face of a work situation. Never clearly correlated with performance.
- **Job Involvement vs organizational commitment**— Vandenberghe (2009): the former targets the work itself, the latter the organization.

# 1. The managerial framing: motivation

## 1.5. The limits of the motivation-based approach

### 1. Strongly situated theories

- Situated theoretically and geographically
- Behaviorist orientation
- Situated historically

### 2. A universalist approach

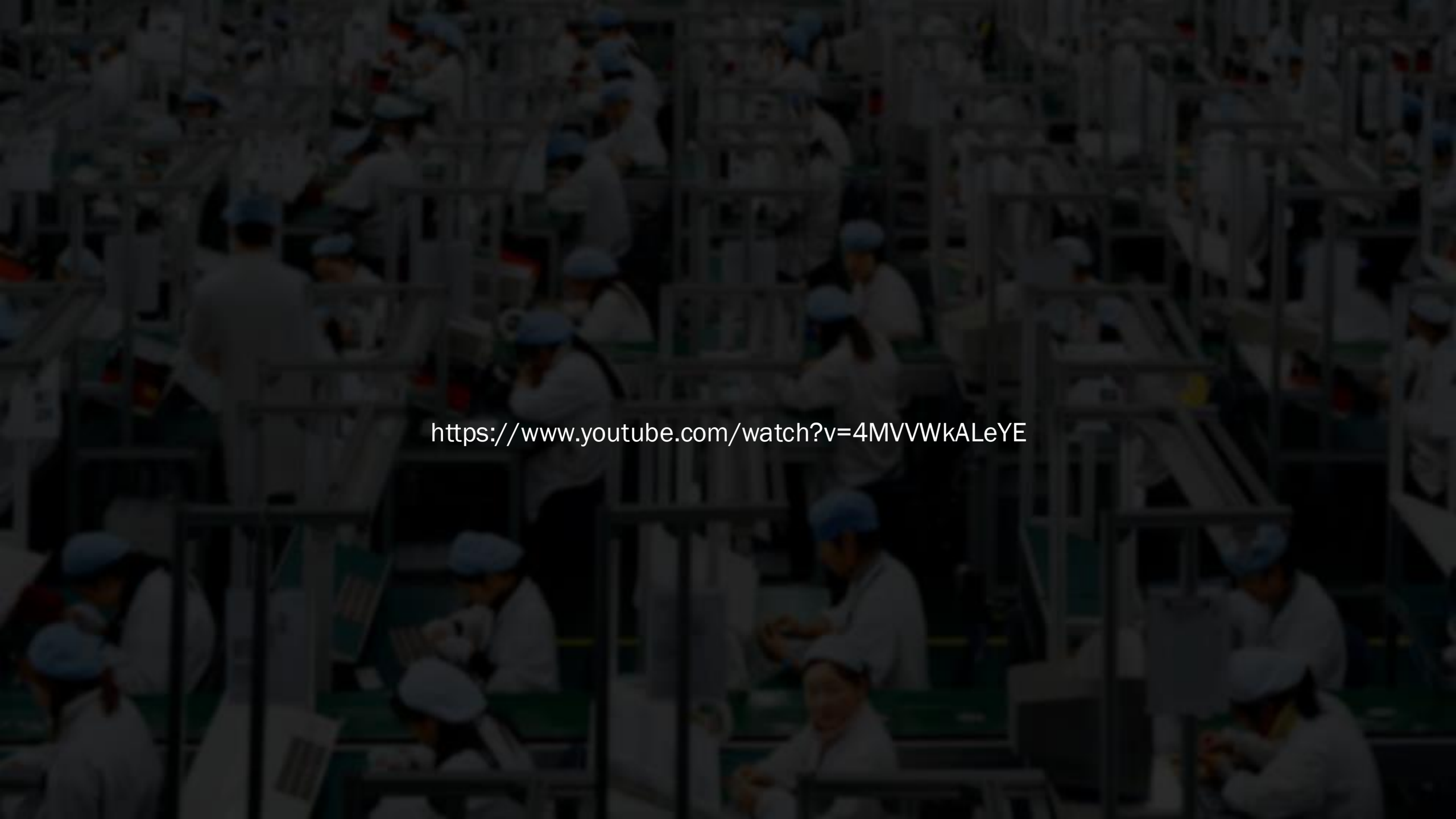
- Biological universalism
- Universalism of behaviors
- obscures the fundamental inequality of the wage relationship

### 3. Methodological limits

- Almost exclusive reliance on the quantitative, sometimes misused:

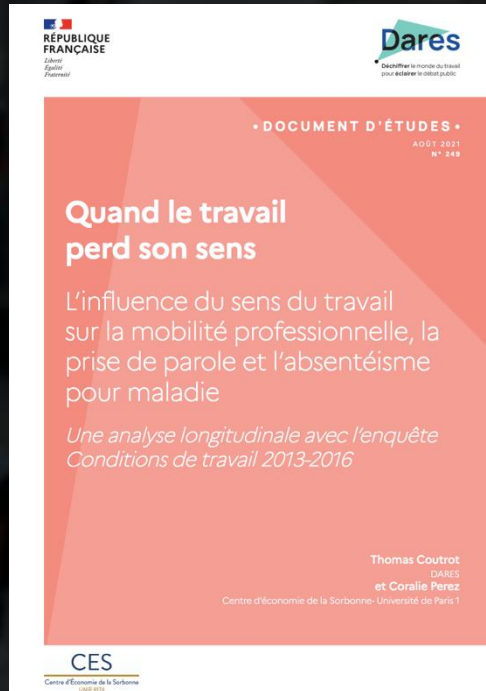
## 2. “Motivation” to mask meaning?

- “Motivation only became an important question, for the social sciences as for the organization of work itself, once **the meaning of work had disappeared.**” (Sievers, 1990)
- **Consequence: motivation is a managerial invention**, meant to put meaning back into work where there is none left.
- Livian and Louart reframe it: “The question becomes: *how to get people to act and produce under conditions that, normally, should not motivate them to work?*”

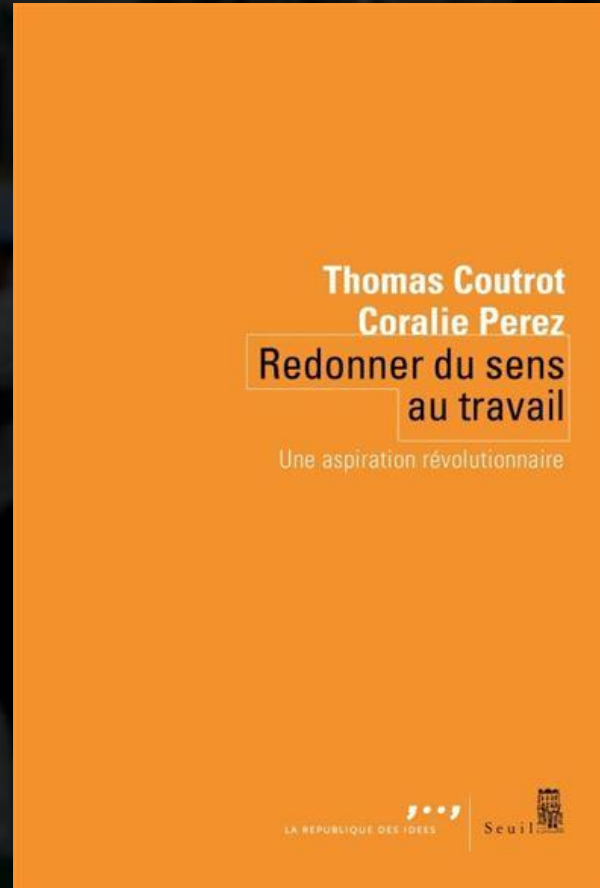


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MVVWkALeYE>

### 3. What gives work its meaning?



Less accessible



More accessible

**Thomas Coutrot** is a statistician and economist, head of the Working Conditions and Health department at DARES within the Ministry of Labor from 2003 to 2022.

**Coralie Perez** is a socio-economist, research engineer at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and a member of the Sorbonne Economics Centre.

### 3. What gives work its meaning?

#### 3.1 Distinguishing job from work

- We readily say “**my job has meaning**”. But what are we talking about?
- **The job (« emploi »)** is the institution that frames the exercise of work. It is not work itself.
- **Work (« travail »)** is the activity through which a person engages their body and mind in the act of producing: their know-how, their skill, their intelligence, their creativity.



**How could you measure  
the meaning of work?**



# 3. What gives work its meaning?

## 3.1 Distinguishing job from work

Work is an activity of transformation

...of the external world

Of the material world: social usefulness

Of the social world: ethical coherence

...of the worker themselves: capacity for development

Where one engages intelligence, subjectivity, sensitivity: living work

### 3. What gives work its meaning?

#### 3.2. The 3 dimensions of the meaning of work

1. **Social usefulness.** The feeling that what I produce meets a real need for the person my work is intended for.
2. **Ethical coherence.** Doing work one can be proud of. Respecting the rules of the trade.
3. **The capacity to develop.** Learning, drawing on one's skills, coming out of the ordeal having grown.

# 3. What gives work its meaning?

## 3.2. The 3 dimensions of the meaning of work

3 dimensions, across 9 questions:

### Social usefulness

1. “I do something useful for others”,
2. “I am proud to work in this organization”

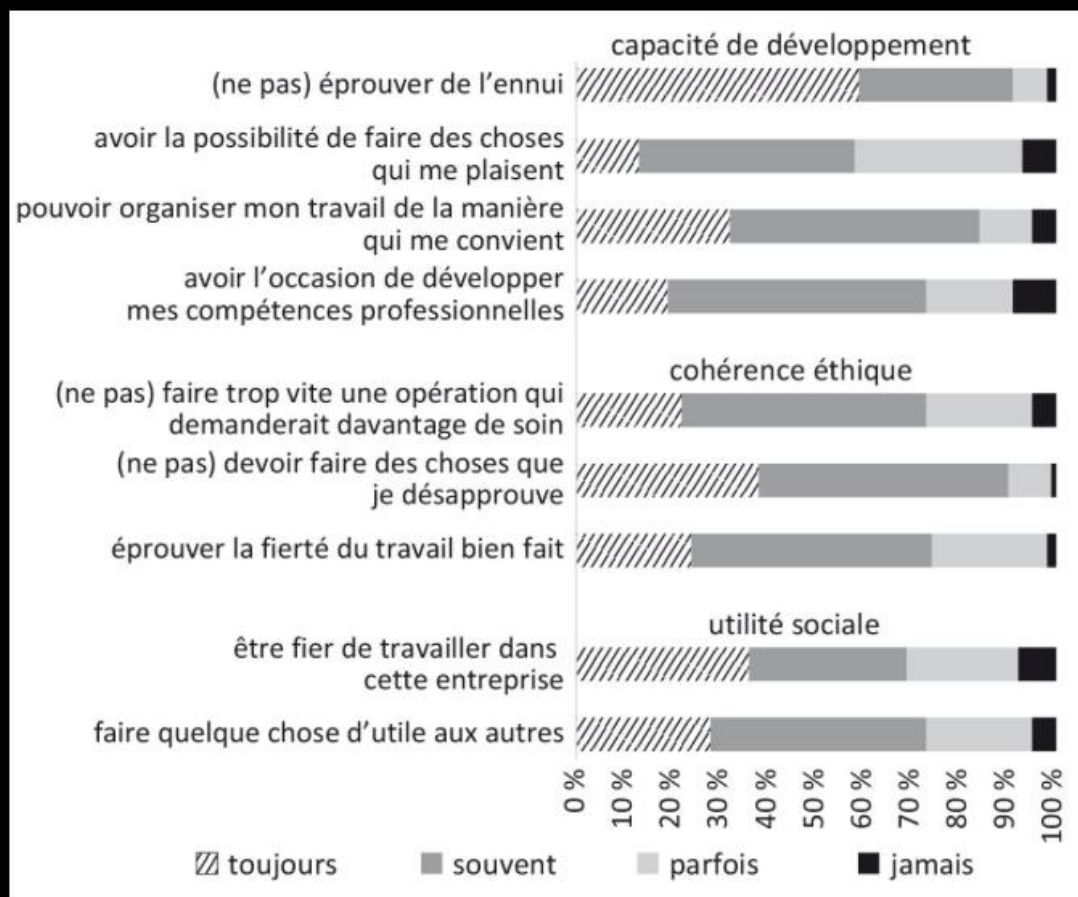
### Ethical coherence

3. “I feel I do a job well done
4. “I have to do things I disapprove of”
5. “I have to rush a task that would require more care”

### The capacity to develop

6. “I have the opportunity to develop my skills”
7. “I can organize my work as I see fit”
8. “I get bored”
9. “I can do things I enjoy”).

**FIGURE 1. Les dimensions du sens**



**Lecture : 29 % des salarié·es disent pouvoir « toujours » faire quelque chose d'utile aux autres dans leur travail.**

**Source : enquête CT-RPS 2016, salarié·es tous secteurs (hors intérimaires).**

Dev. capacity

Ethics

useful  
ness

**Les 15 métiers à plus faible sens du travail**

|                                                                        |   |   |   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| – Employés de la banque et des assurances                              | – | – | – |
| – ONQ de la manutention                                                | – | – | – |
| – ONQ des industries de process                                        | – | = | – |
| – Caissiers, employés de libre-service                                 | – | – | – |
| – Employés de la comptabilité                                          | – | – | – |
| – Agents de gardiennage et de sécurité                                 | – | = | – |
| – OQ de la mécanique                                                   | – | + | – |
| – OQ des travaux publics                                               | – | + | – |
| – Cadres de la banque et des assurances                                | = | – | – |
| – OQ des industries de process                                         | – | = | – |
| – Vendeurs                                                             | – | = | – |
| – ONQ du gros œuvre du BTP                                             | – | = | – |
| – OQ de la manutention                                                 | – | + | – |
| – Secrétaires de direction                                             | = | – | – |
| – Employés et agents de maîtrise de l'hôtellerie et de la restauration | – | = | = |

| Les 15 métiers à plus fort sens du travail                           | Capacité de développement | Cohérence éthique | Utilité sociale |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| – Assistantes maternelles                                            | +                         | +                 | +               |
| – Agents administratifs et commerciaux des transports et du tourisme | +                         | +                 | +               |
| – Ouvriers qualifiés du gros œuvre du bâtiment                       | +                         | +                 | +               |
| – Cadres des services administratifs, comptables et financiers       | +                         | =                 | +               |
| – Formateurs                                                         | +                         | +                 | +               |
| – Enseignants                                                        | +                         | –                 | +               |
| – Aides à domicile et aides ménagères                                | –                         | +                 | +               |
| – Techniciens et agents de maîtrise du BTP                           | +                         | +                 | +               |
| – Professionnels de l’action sociale et de l’orientation             | +                         | –                 | +               |
| – Cadres commerciaux et technico-commerciaux                         | +                         | –                 | +               |
| – Ouvriers qualifiés de la réparation automobile                     | +                         | +                 | =               |
| – Personnels d’études et de recherche                                | +                         | =                 | =               |
| – Médecins                                                           | +                         | –                 | +               |
| – Attachés commerciaux et représentants                              | +                         | =                 | =               |
| – Professionnels de l’action culturelle, sportive, et surveillants   | =                         | +                 | +               |

**Brut.**

C'est quoi un  
"bullshit job" ?

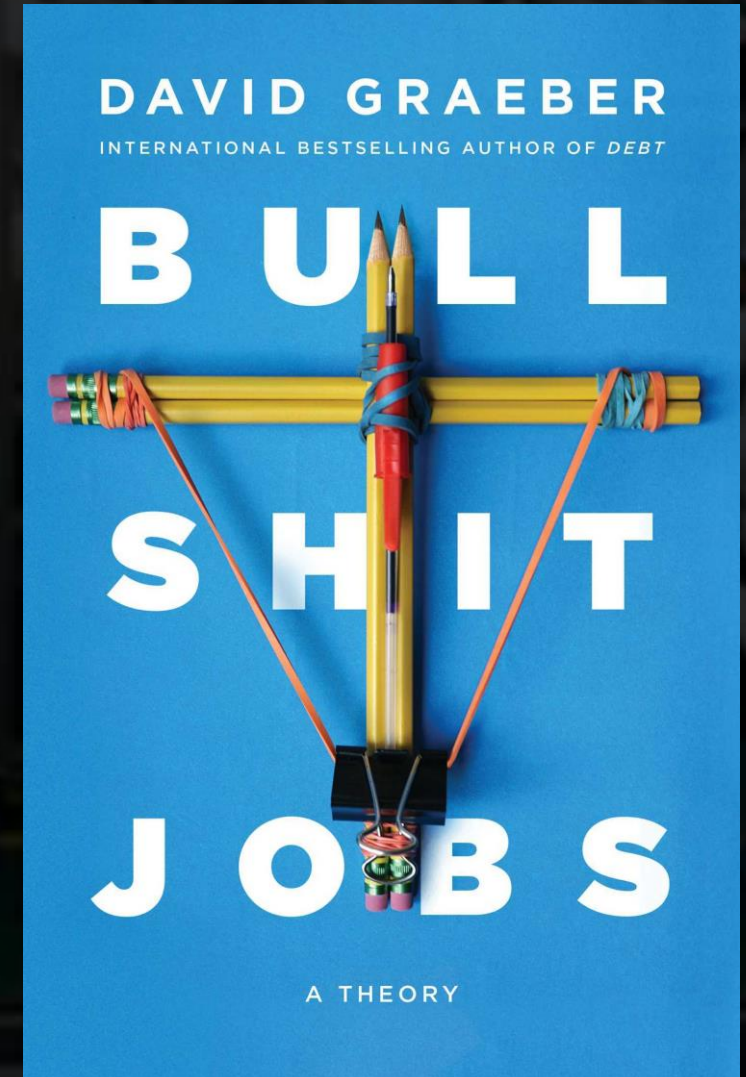
**Témoignage :**



### 3. What gives work its meaning?

#### 3.2. David Graeber's reading: bullshit jobs

- **Definition:** A job so useless that even the person holding it cannot justify its existence — while having to pretend otherwise.
- Bullshit job (useless) ≠ “shit job” (grueling but useful: garbage collector, care assistant).
- **Method:**
  - Graeber invited people to explain by e-mail why they consider their own work meaningless ([doihaveabsjoborwhat@gmail.com](mailto:doihaveabsjoborwhat@gmail.com))
  - It is the worker's own perception that counts in labeling the job as bullshit



### 3. What gives work its meaning?

#### 3.2. David Graeber's reading: bullshit job

5 types:

##### 1. Flunkies

Exist to make those above them look important.

*E.g.: a receptionist in a firm with no visitors or calls.*

##### 2. Goons

Sell what no one needs; an aggressive dimension; often exist only because competitors have the same role.

*E.g.: corporate lawyers, some call-center operators, lobbyists.*

##### 3. Duct tapers

Fix a problem that should not exist; would disappear if the organization were better designed.

*E.g.: a data checker in the absence of a simple VLOOKUP.*

##### 4. Box tickers

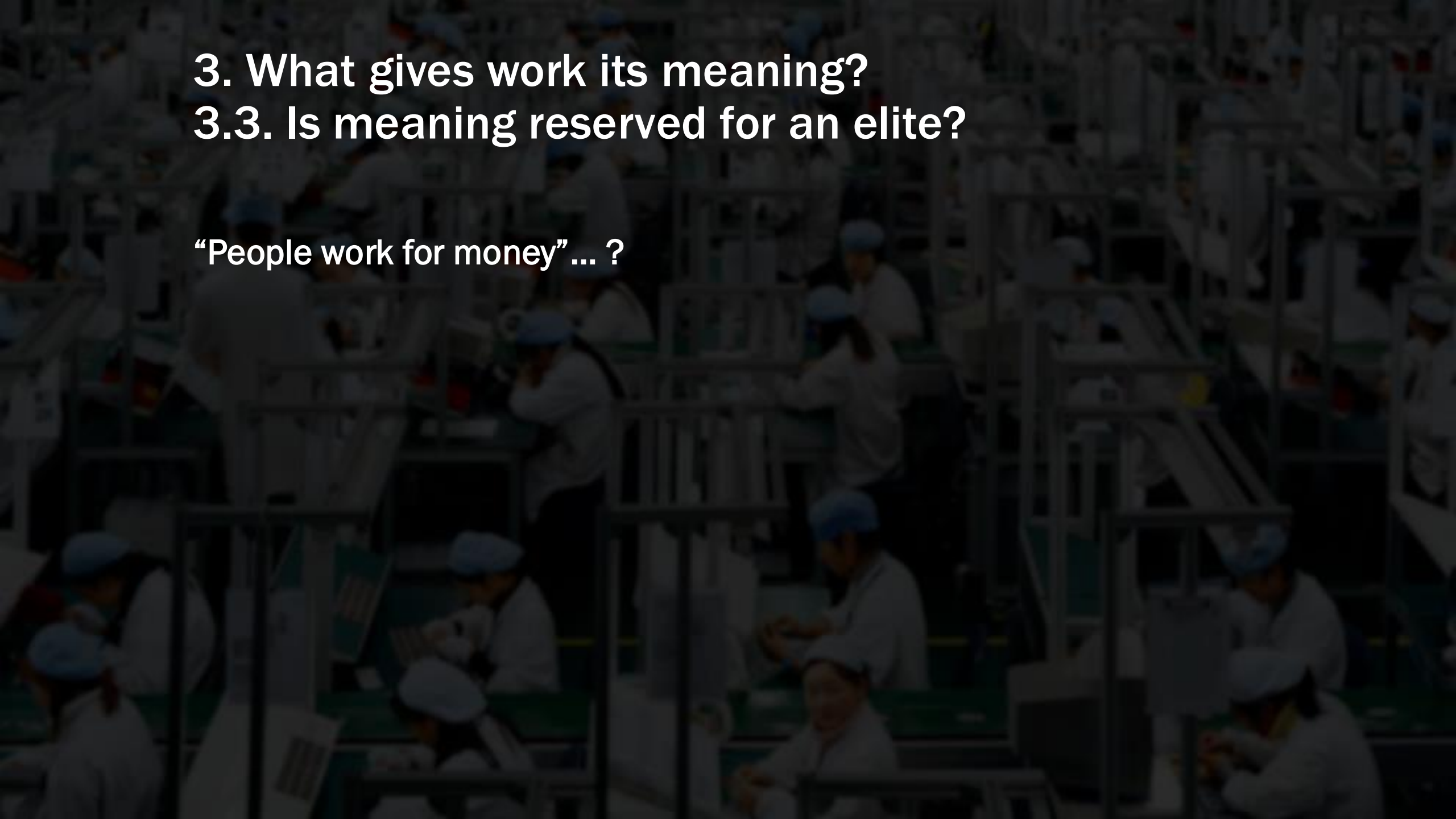
Allow the organization to claim it does what it does not.

*E.g.: a bank's corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs.*

##### 5. Task maskers

Either supervise people who don't need supervising, or create new bullshit jobs.

*E.g.: "strategy" managers in academia.*



### 3. What gives work its meaning?

#### 3.3. Is meaning reserved for an elite?

“People work for money” ... ?

### 3. What gives work its meaning?

#### 3.4. Is meaning reserved for an elite?

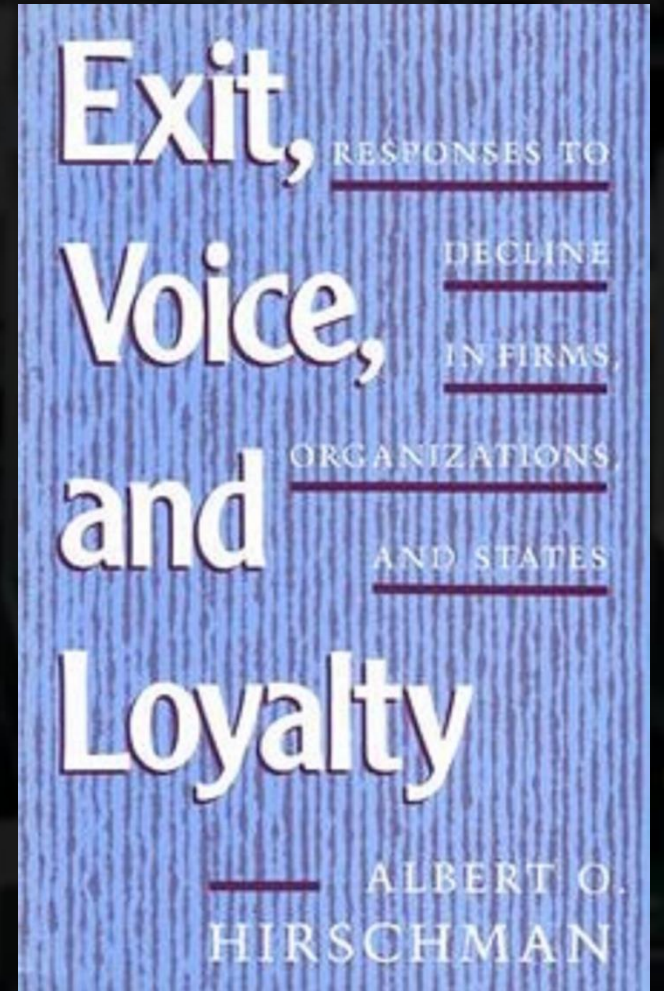
~~“People work for money”... ?~~

MIT researchers recruited 2,500 workers on Amazon Mechanical Turk.  
Task: labeling medical images. Results:

- Group A: processes 23% more images than the control group. With no drop in quality.
- Group C: work quality collapses. (Quantity does not change.)

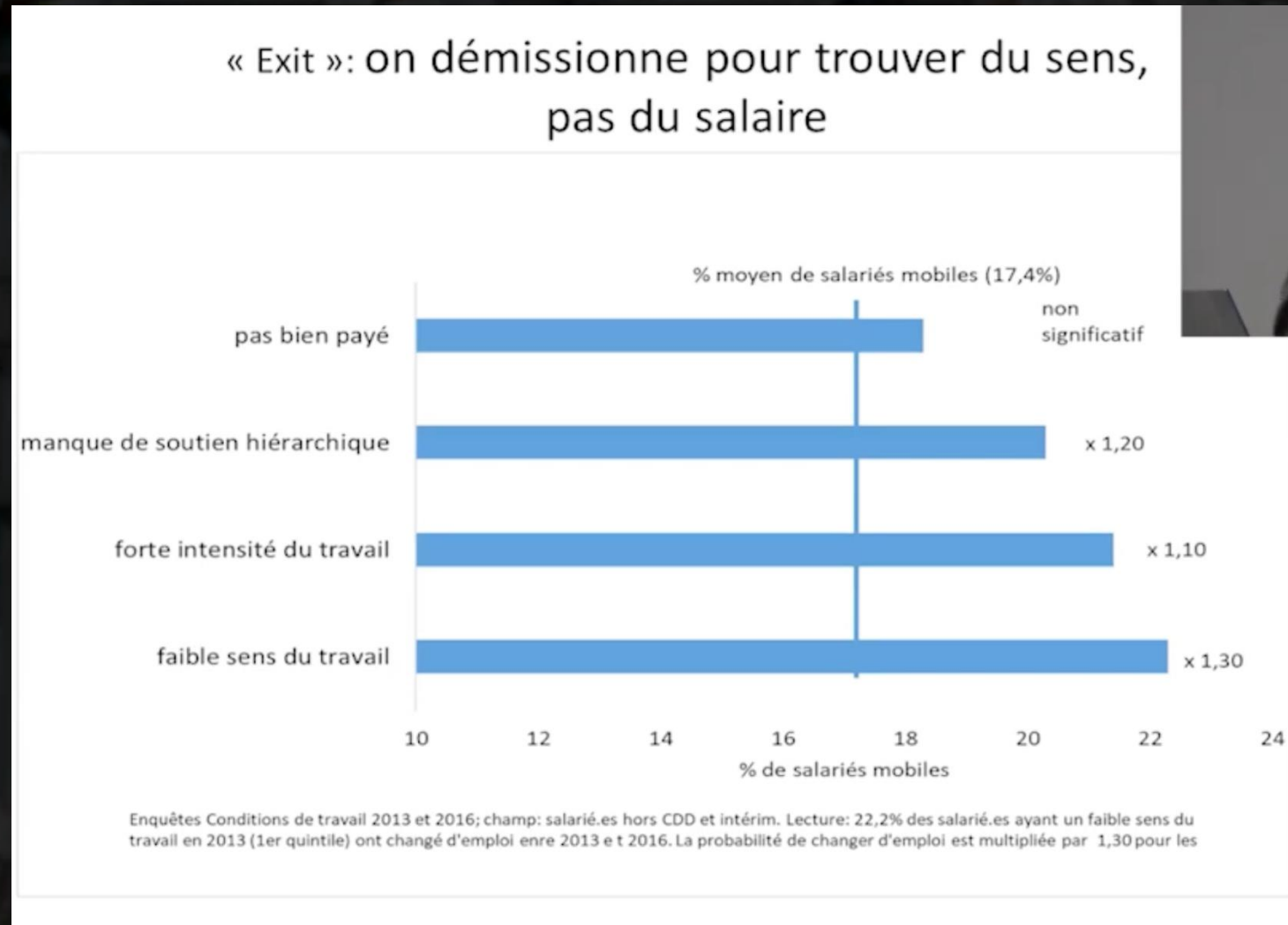
## 4. How do employees react to the loss of meaning?

Exit, Voice or Loyalty?



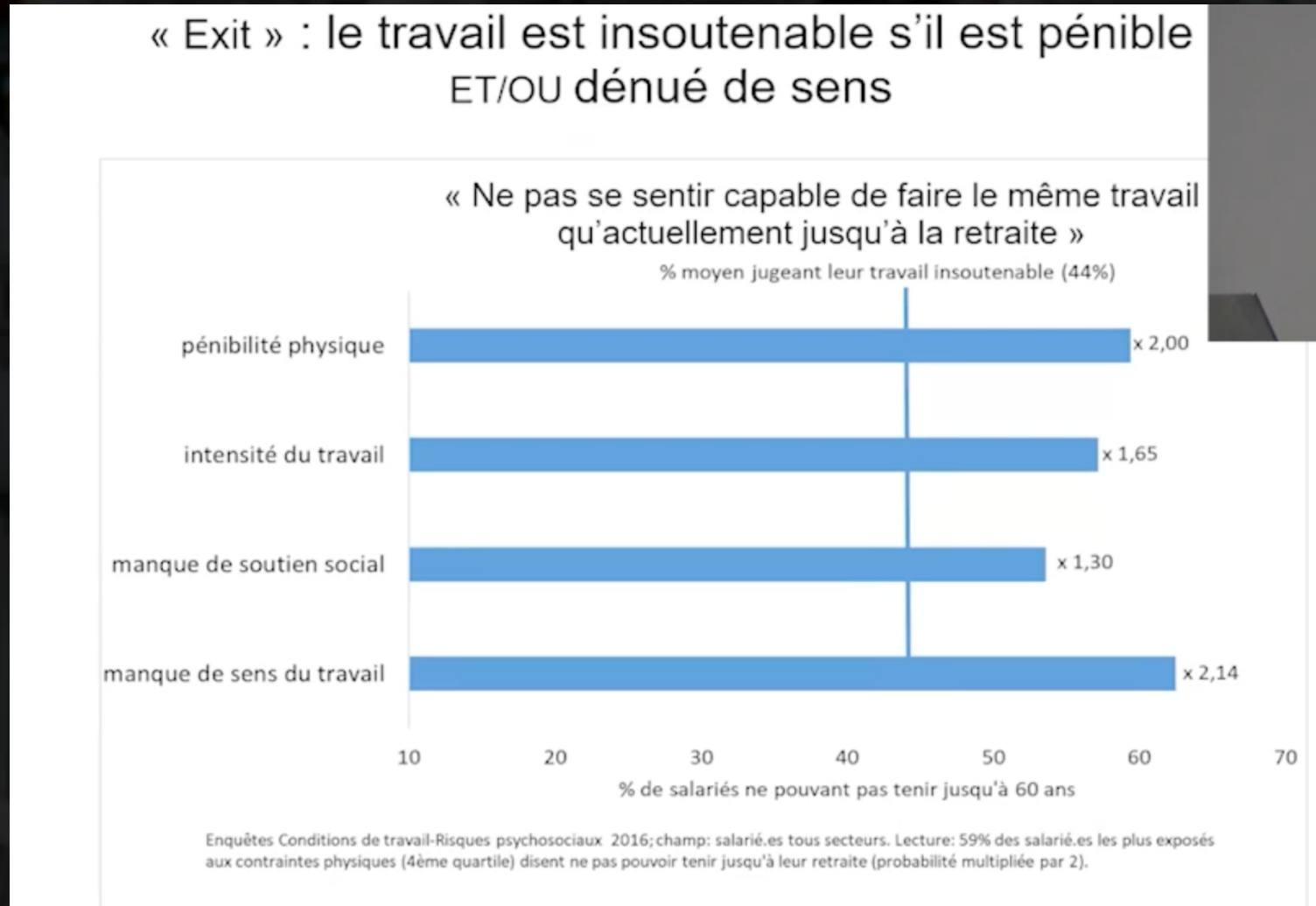
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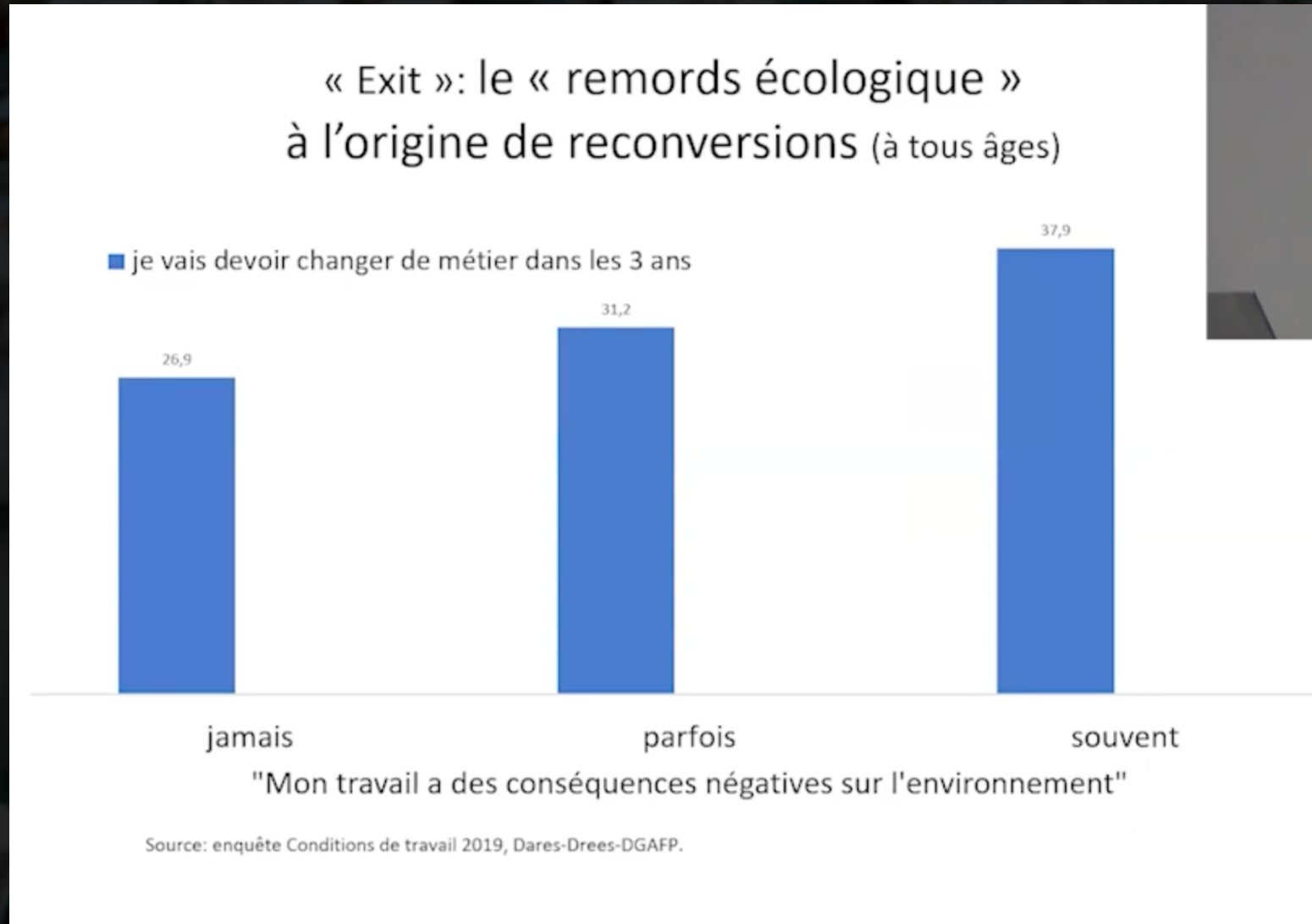
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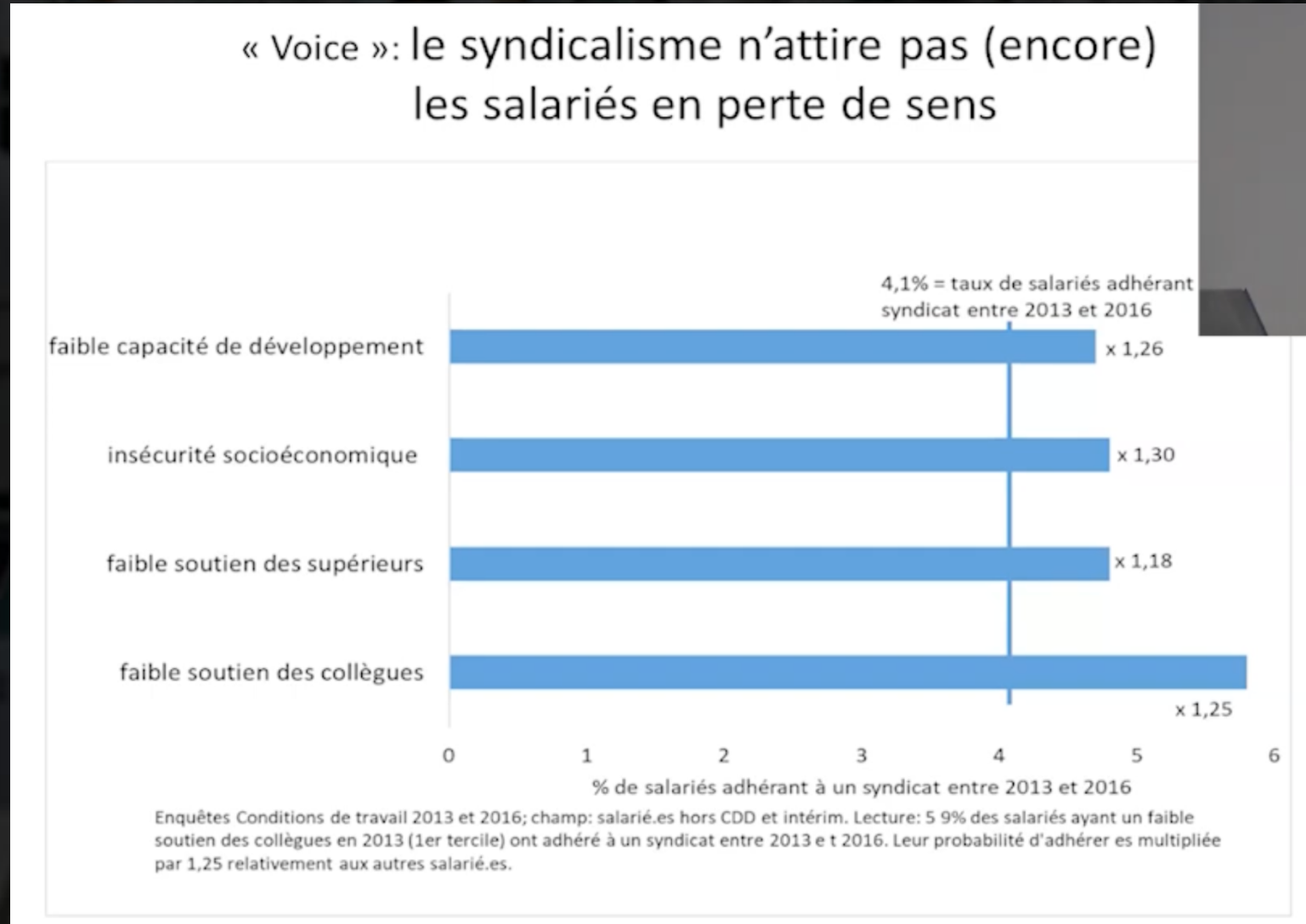
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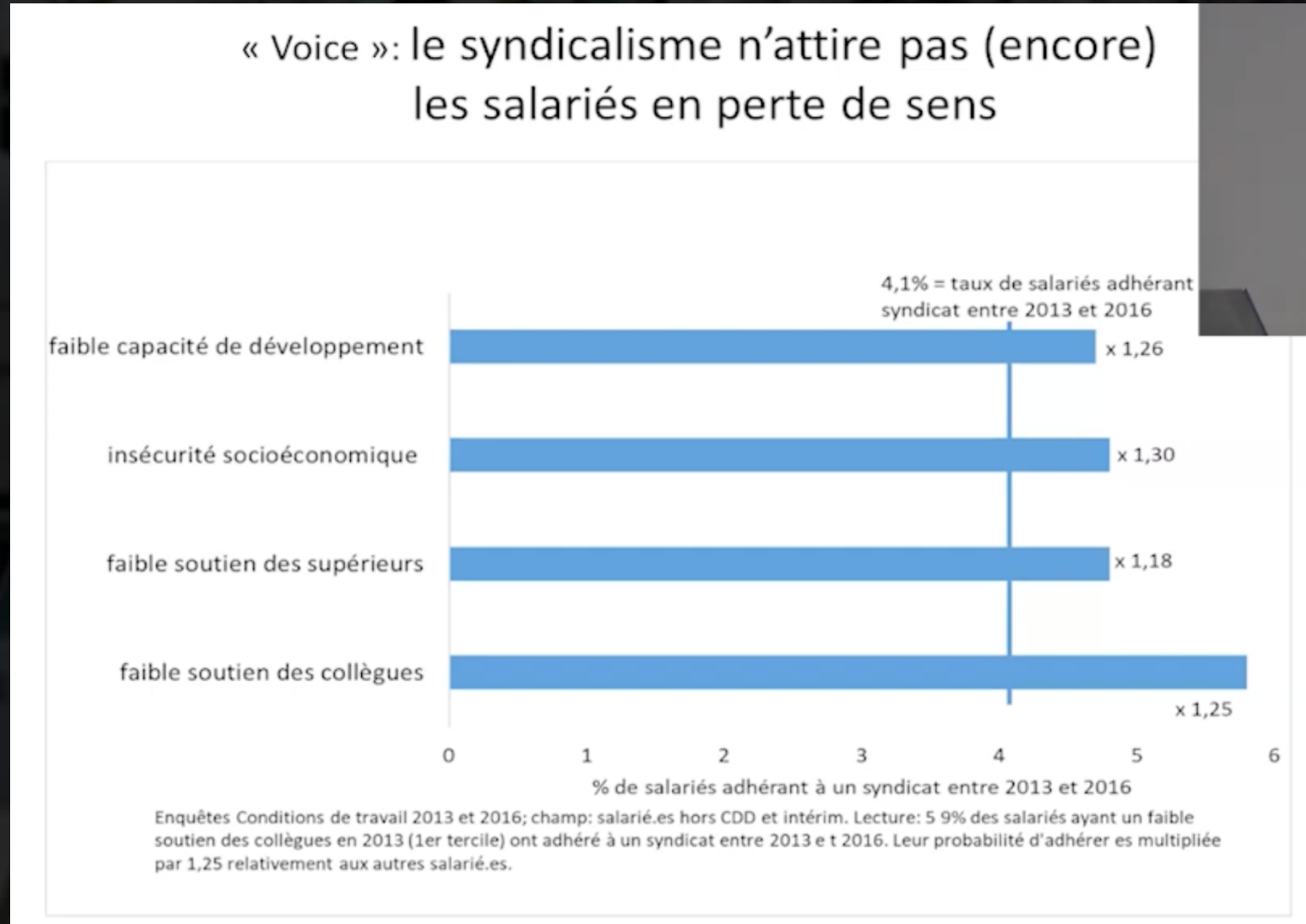
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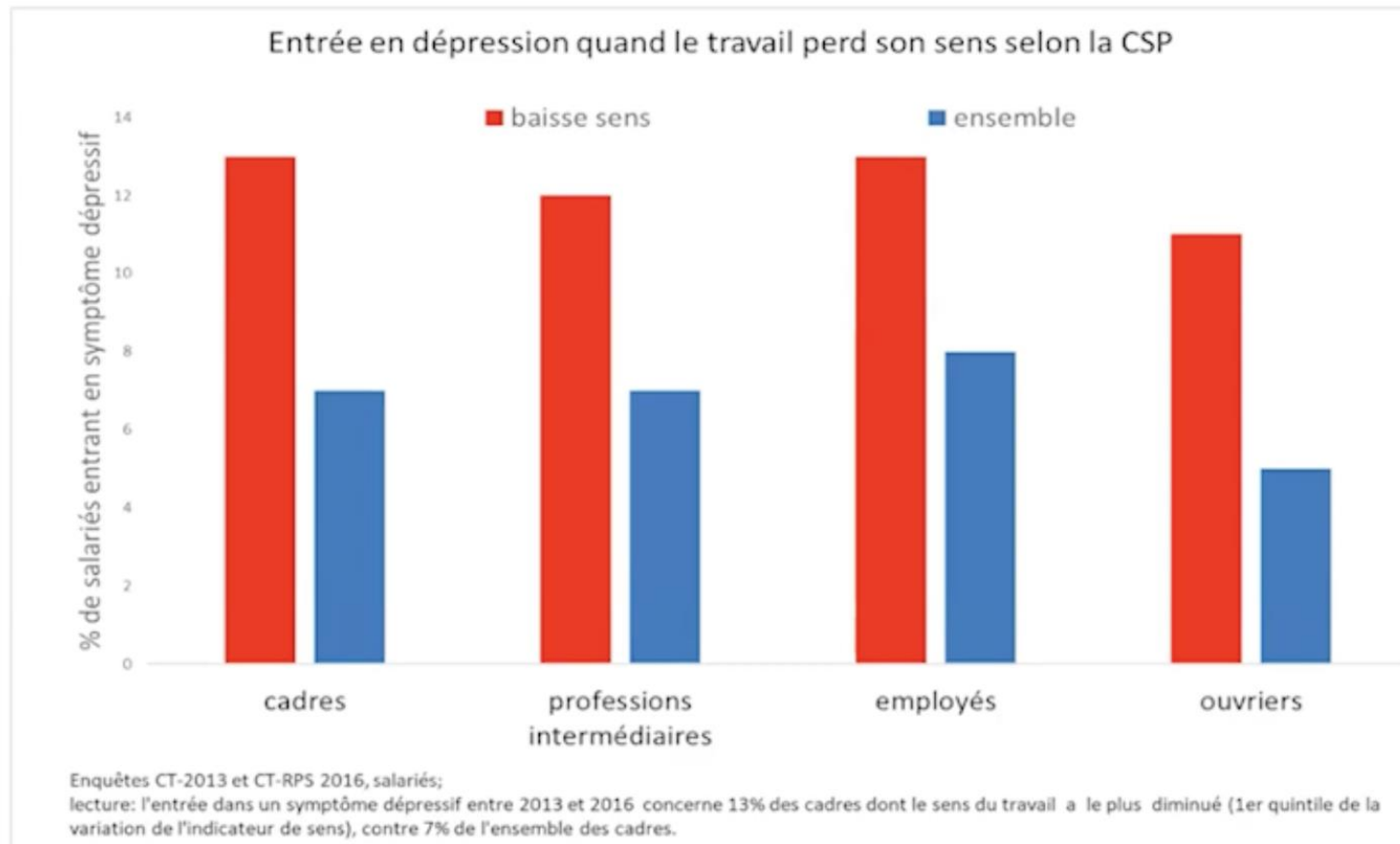


### 3. What gives work its meaning?

#### 3.4. Is meaning reserved for an elite?

Loyalty

« Loyalty »: la perte de sens dégrade autant la santé des ouvriers que des cadres



### 3. Recognition



René Magritte (1896-1967), *Infinite Recognition*, 1933 (detail)

## 5. Recognition

### 5.1 Being useful is not enough

We saw it in the ranking. Childminders, home helpers, cleaning staff, hairdressers know they are useful

But they are the least paid, the least regarded.

⇒ Social usefulness and recognition are not the same thing.

One can do work one knows to be essential, and receive no recognition for it — neither symbolic nor financial.

## 5. Recognition

### 5.2 Who can judge one's work?

Dejours distinguishes two judgments — which are not delivered by the same people:

1. **The judgment of usefulness**, delivered by the hierarchy and the beneficiaries.
2. **the judgment of beauty**. It can only come from peers. Only those who know the trade can legitimately judge the practice.

# LE MEILLEUR PATISSIER



LA FINALE



## 5. Recognition

### 5.2 What if the manager is caring?

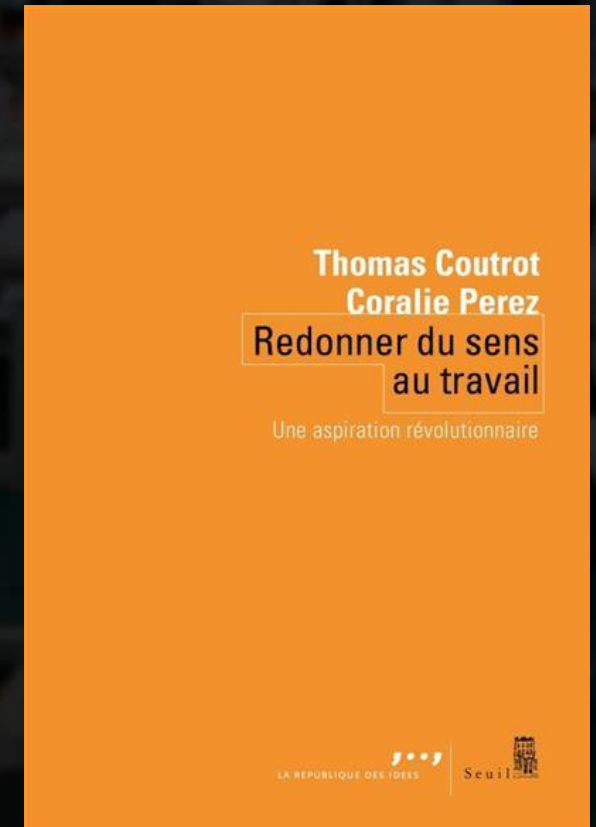
A manager can be as nice/caring as possible.

If the evaluation process bears only on objective results, workers will experience a denial of recognition — whatever the quality of their relationships.

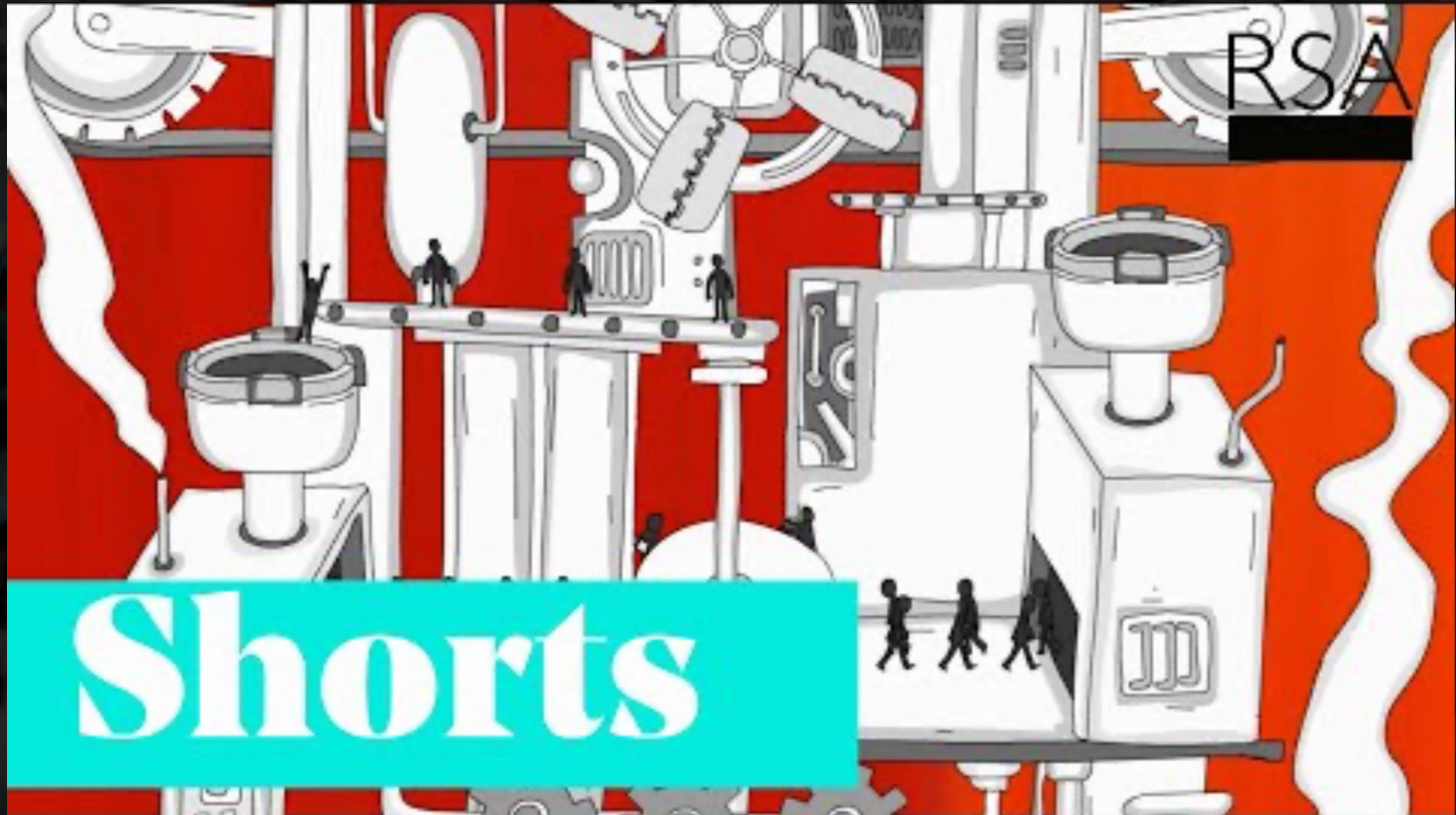
## 6. Where does the loss of meaning come from?

Coutrot and Perez:

- The loss of meaning comes from the erosion of the power to act on one's work
- => Work must be re-democratized.
- How?
  - More shared governance (e.g.: cooperatives)
  - Developing professional dialogue
    - Spaces for deliberation among colleagues
    - facilitated by frontline representatives
    - Reduction of subordinated working time
    - an obligation for management to respond
    - suspensive veto right over reorganizations affecting human or environmental health



## 6. Where does the loss of meaning come from?



## 6. Where does the loss of meaning come from?

- Coutrot and Perez:
  - The loss of meaning comes from the erosion of the power to act on one's work
  - => Work must be re-democratized.
- Graeber
  - The loss of meaning comes from thinking of work as having value in itself.
  - => We must reflect on what has value in work.
    - Solution: Universal Basic Income (Graeber). Allows people to be freed from the obligation to do a bullshit job while still meeting their needs.

# Key takeaways

- Engagement and Motivation are situated managerial concepts.
  - Meaning is a more interesting one.
- **Job  $\neq$  work** — the job is the frame (pay, contract); work is what you engage body and mind in.
- **3 dimensions of the meaning of work** — social usefulness, ethical coherence, capacity to develop (Coutrot & Perez).
- **Meaning needs recognition** — being useful isn't enough; judgment of *usefulness* (hierarchy) + *beauty* (peers) (Dejours).
- **Reacting to loss of meaning** — we mainly observe Exit (change in job) and Loyalty (decrease in health) behaviours
- **What to do?** — re-democratize work (Coutrot & Perez) / rethink work's value (Graeber).

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