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Toward a process and situated view of compromises

Introduction

In several disciplines, compromise has been defined as a necessary condition for human coexistence, exchange and social transaction (Nachi, 2004ab, 2010). The concept of compromise has also appeared as a fundamental question in many fields in the social sciences (Nachi, 2004b), and has been an important research subject for scholars for quite some time¹. Scholars have recently pushed forward this concept and have stressed the importance of analyzing compromise as a process (Nachi, 2004b, 2010). This approach echoes with research fields in organization studies that have addressed the process view of organization (Chia, 1995, 1999; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Nayak and Chia, 2011; Hernes, 2008, 2014; Hussenot and Missonier, 2015). In this approach, organization appears as constantly evolving and situated in practices. Following this assumption, organizational phenomena are understood as ongoing processes that are never entirely stabilized but partly changed throughout activities. A process view of compromise also offers an interesting approach to understand how people coordinate their activity, develop interaction patterns and continuity despite the fact that they are involved in an ongoing, evolving world. In such a view, compromises are not defined once and for all, and should be considered as situated in practices.

Nevertheless, as much as compromises seem important to understand the organizational phenomena, this notion has been barely developed in the field of organization studies, nor has it been considered from a process view. Excluding some notable exceptions in the fields of management and decisions (Follett, 1924; Sanver & Sanver, 2004; Churchman, 2006; Brenkert, 2008; Jensen, 2009; Moreau, Grima, & Paillé, 2012), and accounting (McNair, 2002), the majority of theoretical developments on the subject come from philosophical, sociological, juridical or political approaches. Although there exist multiple uses of the term “compromise” (Nachi, 2010) in the social sciences, scholars have often approached it from an ethical and moral perspective (Hallowell, 1944; Kuflik, 1979; Pennock & Chapman, 1979; Ricoeur, 1991), or as a way to solve conflicts and disputes (Simmel, 1999 [1917-1918]; Cohen-Almagor, 2006; Nachi,

¹ Morley (1874) appears to have been the first to develop a theoretical analysis of compromise.

2004a,b, 2010; Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006 [1991]; Habermas, 1992, 1996; Margalit, 2009; Gutmann & Thompson, 2012).

Certainly, this literature has made important contributions about compromise, as the scholars have highlighted the inseparability between coordination and moral values. However, with the exception of the seminal works of Follett (1924) in organization studies, the existing literature does not provide many insights about the process making of compromises in everyday activities. Mainly anchored in a moral-based approach of compromise, compromises were mainly understood as a way to maintain a stable and superior social order. Considering that activities are situated and always in a state of becoming, one can assert that the role of compromise would not only be about the maintenance of a social order, but rather makes possible an ongoing and evolving activity. As a consequence, by conceiving compromise as an agreement made once for all from moral values, this literature neither considers the situated aspects of compromises nor their ongoing definition and redefinition in organizational activities. Subsequently, it is still difficult to understand compromises as situated and evolving throughout activities.

In order to fill this gap, this article is an attempt to provide a process view of compromises to understand both the process making of compromises as well as their situated existence and role in organizing. I rely here on the Actor-Network Theory approach (Law, 1992; Callon, 1986, 2001; Law and Hassard, 1999; Akrich, Callon and Latour 2002ab, 2006; Latour, 2005, 2009) to provide a conceptual framework based on the translation and association dynamics, which are core in this theory. Mac Lean and Hassard (2004) and Hernes (2008, 2010) – among others - have highlighted the potential for this theory to create new meaning and representation about associated processes and practices. As a consequence, this approach has often been mobilized to develop theoretical frameworks related to the situated and emergent nature of organization (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1998; Czarniawska and Hernes, 2005; Pentland and Feldman 2007; Orlikowski and Scott, 2008; Hernes, 2008, 2010). By highlighting the ongoing dynamics of translation and association that exist between humans and non-humans - actors and actants in Actor-Network Theory vocabulary - and by focusing on the emergence of indisputable facts and meanings (Callon, 1986, 2001; Latour, 1988, 2005, 2008; Law, 1992; Venturini, 2010, 2012), Actor-Network Theory presents itself as a relevant theory for the task of following and understanding compromise as situated in practices.

This article suggests to understand compromises as constantly defined and redefined throughout activities. More precisely, compromise is here defined as a temporary result of the dynamics of translation and association, making the current tasks of the activity possible (meeting, production, etc.). Based on this first statement, this article also brings three contributions about compromise: compromises as situated in practices, the mediating role of compromises in organizational phenomena, and the interrelation between compromises throughout the activity. This article also extends the literature about compromises in organization studies and more precisely in the process organization studies research field.

The paper is structured as follows: the first section presents a brief literature review of the concept of compromise and insists on the limits of the existing literature for our understanding of organizational activities. In order to bridge this gap, the second section highlights the potential of the Actor-Network Theory approach for dealing with compromises as situated in practices. More precisely, I claim that the very basic notions of the Actor-Network Theory, i.e. the dynamics of association and translation, could provide a relevant framework to study compromise as situated agreement. This theoretical framework then serves to follow and describe the compromises through a case study. The third section presents the Banca case and details the method of collecting and analyzing data. This case is about the development of a Human Resource Management device in a bank in Luxembourg. More precisely, I focus on the various compromises encountered concerning the purpose of the Banca project to illustrate how these compromises emerged and were situated in practices, the role they played and their interrelation throughout the project. In the fourth section, the study's results insist on three main insights: the process making of various situated compromises about the purpose of the project, the mediating role of compromises and their interrelation. Using the results of this case, the last section discusses these contributions of such a process view of compromises. The situated aspect, the mediating role, and the interrelation of compromises are discussed.

Compromise: literature review and theoretical framework

This section is dedicated firstly, to the classical approaches of compromise that have defined compromise as a stable agreement. I address both their strengths and their limitations. Secondly, I develop a framework to comprehend compromises from a process view. I thus present and

incorporate the Actor-Network Theory into the development, which will help us to build a framework based on the translation and association dynamics.

Compromise as a stable agreement

Compromise has often been understood through a moral lens as a method to solve conflicts (Simmel, 1999 [1917-1918]; Cohen-Almagor, 2006; Nachi, 2004a,b, 2010; Boltanski & Thevenot, 2006 [1991]; Habermas, 1992, 1996; Margalit, 2009; Gutmann & Thompson, 2012). Compromise has also been defined as an agreement aiming to prevent and suspend disputes (Nachi, 2004a,b). For example, Habermas (1996) has proposed two ideal types of agreements, each according to the type of action it produces: axiological and interest. The former leads to consensus, as through it, actors seek out an entente regarding norms and values, i.e. what they share. Through the latter, actors seek a compromise that serves as an equilibrium of interests. Habermas (1996) has also distinguished between spontaneous negotiations, which are unconstrained by formal or legal rules, and regulation negotiations, which are defined by prerogatives. Whatever the type of compromise, Habermas (1996) underlines the inherent role of values.

In accordance with this view, Boltanski and Thevenot (2006 [1991]) have identified compromise as an arrangement between people that is founded on the search for a common good, which goes beyond the personal interests of individual actors. In Boltanski and Thevenot's (2006 [1991]) vocabulary, compromise finds its justification in the boundary between many "orders of worth", that is, the different systematic and coherent principles of evaluation that coexist in the same social space. Following this approach, a compromise can only be justified if its finality respects the general interest of that shared social space. The issues of values and ethics have also been at the heart of the theoretical developments and debates about compromise.

For other authors, compromise has been understood as an abdication and concession and has been entirely rejected, because it appears to be either an impossible social phenomenon (Durkheim 2008 [1912]), or an overtly moral consideration. According to Durkheim (2008 [1912]), society organizes the relationship between various groups before any compromise actually takes place. Society compels actors to act, to concede, to make compromises, and to consider an interest superior to their own during negotiations. While relationships are

contractual, social rules are not derived from the negotiation between various groups; thus, it is not negotiation that permits compromise (Kuty & Nachi, 2004). As noted by Nachi (2004a), the idea of compromise has also gained a pejorative tone and has been perpetually condemned in theory, yet consistently used in practice (Nachi 2004a).

It is for this reason that management scholars such as Follett (1995-1925) have suggested moving beyond the notion of compromise. Mary Parker Follett is one of the main authors in management who suggested the consideration of compromise as process making. She explained that a good compromise – called *integration* - is not a boundary solution between different individual interests, but a new solution built by and satisfying to stakeholders. Integration is thus an integrative group process aiming at reaching a solution “*in which both desires have found a place, that neither side has had to sacrifice anything*” (Follett, 1995-1925, p. 69). Integration also leads to *synthesis* (Follett, 1995-1925, p. 69), i.e. a new solution co-created that unifies all the interests and desires (Sout and Staton, 2011, p.276). This solution is not simply an aggregation of different interests; it is something greater than the original ideas of the actors. By insisting on the co-creation of satisfactory compromise – called *integration* – Follett’s approach (1924) leads to a view in which a compromise is defined from various interests and desires, and does not focus solely on the static moral dimension. Deeply influenced by philosophers such as Alfred North Whitehead, Follett (1995-1925) conceptualized the notion of integration - and organizational life in general - as a process, and insisted on the fact that in the end, purpose and organization at large are only moments in the process.

In the same vein in Sociology, Nachi (2004b, 2010) has moved beyond the mere static approach of compromise in highlighting the matter of process in its adaptation, as well as its historical and intellectual construction. In the Nachi approach (2004b), compromise is also a process that allows for mutual recognition: “*compromise would in a way be a matter of ‘common sense’ in that it implies an attitude conducive to acknowledgment of the other, cooperation, negotiation, understanding, in virtue of which the parties to the compromise process work towards coordinating their actions and coming to an agreement*” (Nachi, 2004b, p.294). This approach sheds light on the process by which a compromise is defined rather than focusing on its ethical or

moral dimensions. On one hand, Nachi (2010) has recognized that compromise is an ongoing process, and thus remains fragile, uncertain, and anchored in a history and context consisting of various stakeholders. On the other hand, Nachi (2010) has also argued that compromises are realities in themselves, even if these realities are limited to intellectual constructs. Compromise is also a process that creates the conditions for satisfactory coordination.

These two approaches bring us to a relevant starting point as Follett (1924) and Nachi (2010) insisted on the processual aspect of compromises. This approach is quite promising as it grounds compromises as both situated and always in a state of becoming. Nevertheless, very few insights have been provided about the process making of compromise. Follett (1995-1925) mainly developed a managerial approach aiming at building “good” integrations, but did not describe the process making of compromises when people are not trained in such a managerial method. Conversely, Nachi (2010) has opened on a process based understanding of compromises, but did not bring explanations about the dynamics leading to situated compromises. From an organization studies standpoint, what we need is to fully understand how people define and redefine their compromises throughout an activity. In other words, we need a conceptual framework to study compromises from the mundane interactions between people having different interests, desires, views, etc. to understand how temporary agreements that make possible the activity emerge.

For several decades, the Actor-Network Theory has provided numerous depictions of scientific and industrial innovation processes, such as the work done at the Salk Institute (Latour and Woolgar, 1979), the development of the electric car (Callon, 1980), the domestication of scallops at St-Brieuc Bay (Callon, 1986), and the Aramis metro failure (Latour, 1996). These works aimed at focusing on conflicts and tensions – called *controversies* (Venturini, 2010, 2012) – and understood the emergence of temporary shared representations and agreements in various areas. As the passage from controversies to indisputable facts (Callon, 1986) is a core aspect of the Actor-Network Theory, this theoretical framework provides a relevant basis for understanding how compromise is continuously defined and redefined in situated activities.

Compromise as process: the translation and association dynamics

Following the Actor-Network Theory approach (Law, 1992; Callon, 1986, 2001; Law and Hassard, 1999; Mac Lean and Hassard, 2004; Akrich, Callon and Latour 2006; Latour, 2005, 2009), the issue of organization is in fact an issue of *translation* and *association*. On one hand, translation is about the way humans and non-humans confront and negotiate their various meanings and views in order to define a sharing understanding of the world through shared interests. Through the dynamic of translation, actors define the activity, their goal, the meanings, but also their roles and their identity. Translation is also a co-creation dynamic in which everything in the world is mutually defined. However, this does not mean that translation leads to a single view of the world. Translation is ongoing because each task or action is situated and requires, more or less, a new way of seeing it. As a consequence, common understanding and individuals' identities are only a temporary result of translation.

On the other hand, associations are about the linkages between humans and non-humans. These associations are only made possible through the actors' mutual translation of their varying discourses and interests. Association also means that humans and non-humans only exist through their participation in networks. This is why actors are always actor-networks, i.e. actors have a concrete existence only because of their involvement in a network of other humans and non-humans. Based on these dynamics of translation and association, Actor-Network Theory examines how networks, facts, roles, status (etc.) are produced and reproduced (Law, 1992; Callon, 1986, 2001; Akrich, Callon, & Latour, 2006; Latour, 2005).

Furthermore, the Actor-Network Theory has insisted on the role played by both humans and non-humans. Following the *symmetry principle* (Callon, 1986), Actor-Network Theory scholars have insisted on the non-human role in the translation and association dynamics. That is why they have popularized the notion of *actant*, originally developed by Greimas (1984). Latour (2005) and Law (1992) have defined actant as any non-human having a role in the network. An actant can be a document, a rule, a technology, etc., and can be composed of heterogeneous elements, even other actants. An actant can be physical, abstract, real or imaginary. To play a role means an actant can influence, constrain, and sometimes impose their will. For example, a contract can play an active role in the interaction between actors (Hussenot and Missonier, 2010). It can constrain actors in their decision-making and circumscribe their activity. A contract might also

be considered as an actant playing a role in the making of compromises between stakeholders. Moreover, an actant is never alone and cannot be studied as an isolated entity. It follows that every actant is developed by other actants and actors, and exists only in a network of actants and actors. Actants are also engaged in the translation and association dynamics in which their forms and relationships evolve (Latour, 2005).

As a consequence, organizations can be understood as networks of heterogeneous elements that include both actors and actants that continuously evolve in activities both through the translations between heterogeneous elements and through the constant renewal of temporary associations². From these dynamics emerge other actants such as compromises and shared practices that both make possible activities and are temporary results of translation and association dynamics. This theory has often been mobilized in the study of organization (Whittle & Spicer, 2008). Actor-Network Theory can renew the organizing approach by focusing on the ongoing translation and association dynamics leading to the definition of actors and actants, i.e. anything playing a role in activity.

From this perspective, the process making of compromise can be followed from the translation and association dynamics among both actors and actants. This approach will thus serve as a framework to study compromises. Such an understanding of compromises can also be anchored in three assumptions:

- First, the process making of compromise is related to the translation dynamic. Compromise is here perceived as a temporary result of the negotiations between actors and actants about any element related to the activity, such as history, interests, desire, moral values, technologies, etc. Following the Actor-Network Theory, the translation dynamic tends to a shared, yet situated understanding of activity.
- Second, the process making of compromise is related to the association dynamic. To be associated means that actors and actants are involved in the same translation dynamic. In other words, they interact and build upon each other. These associations are never taken

² Important to note, the notion of actant enables us to insist on the importance of the non-humans elements. It has been the initial objective of the scholars of the Actor-Network Theory. Nevertheless, the difference between actors and actants is not obvious. Some authors have distinguished the notions of actors and actants (Latour, 2005), while others, such as Venturini (2010), have used the notion of actor to refer to any human and non-human that plays a role. Whatever the notion, the important idea is to recognize the active role that anything (human or non-human) can play in the network. Nevertheless, in this paper, I will use actant to deal with non-humans playing a role in a network, and actor to deal with humans playing a role in a network.

for granted but are situated and evolving. Associations are also produced and reproduced through everyday practices to define actors and actants and by doing so, make activity possible.

- Third, the process making of compromise integrates both actors and actants. Translation and association dynamics are not only about human actors. Non-humans - called here actants – also play an active role. As a consequence, anything playing a role in an activity is involved in the translation and association dynamics and has to be considered as an active participant in the process making of compromise.

The following case study thus illustrates this process view of compromise based on the translation and association dynamics. This approach will enable us to understand (1) the emergence and the situated aspect of compromises, (2) the role of compromises, and (3) the interrelation between compromises throughout the activity.

The Banca case study

This case study took place in a bank in Luxembourg that I will call “Banca”. The case study concentrated on the development of a Human Resources Management device. Between October of 2008 and February of 2010, the aim of this project was to develop a device to improve the Human Resources Management at Banca. The three main stakeholders in this project were: (1) Banca, a medium-sized bank specialized in private banking, with approximately 775 employees; (2) a Research Centre specialized in Information Technology and Management, with approximately 350 engineers and researchers; and (3) a freelance consultant working as a specialist in Human Resource Management. The consultant represented and assisted the bank. The team for this project was mainly composed of: a project manager, a consultant, a manager of the project at the Research Centre, a human resources manager at Banca, the training manager at Banca, and me, as a researcher working at the Research Centre. I followed the Banca case for 16 months, from October of 2008 to February of 2010. More precisely, I was involved in the project as a researcher in charge of the understanding of the project. I also participated in most meetings and in the writing of the deliverables.

The case study approach permits one to focus inquiry on a specific case in order to provide precise details (Stake, 2005; Langley & Royer, 2006). Similarly, this specific case study

provided me with an opportunity to study the making and the role of compromise in coordination. Indeed, this project involved multiple stakeholders (e.g. engineers, researchers, managers, consultants and end-users from different organizations and divisions), and each actor coming from a different country (France, Belgium, Luxembourg) having their own logic and interests within the partnership. As such, they needed to find satisfactory compromises in order to coordinate their actions, and produce relevant outputs for all stakeholders involved.

Data collection

The data was gathered in three stages: interviews, participant observation, and document gathering. The Project Manager, the consultant and I initiated the study with 31 semi-structured interviews lasting roughly 1 hour each (December, 2008). We interviewed three members of the human resources department (the human resources manager, the assistant human resources manager, and the training manager), nine managers and nineteen employees from two departments (Investment Fund Service and Securities Administration). Twenty-seven interviews were recorded and transcribed by different assistants between December of 2008 and mid January of 2009. Our aim was to understand the human resources practices in the bank, and accordingly, the context of the project. These interviews also provided us with a deep understanding of the hierarchy of Banca, the work routines and habits, but also the main past events that have defined, in part, the history of this bank.

Then, from October 15th, 2008 to August 27th of 2009, I carried out participant observations in order to follow the evolution of the project of building the Human Resources Management device. My formal observations were from my participation in relevant project meetings. There were three types of formal meetings : (1) working meetings, including Banca's Project Manager, the consultant and the researcher; (2) project committee meetings, organized by either the bank or the Research Centre, and including a Banca or Research Centre team leader, the Project Manager, the consultant and the researcher; and (3) steering committee meetings, made up of all the team leaders in each organization, the Project Manager and various other bank managers and employees, the consultant and the researcher. As neither a project manager nor an engineer, my involvement in the development of the device was limited to the project meetings. Each meeting was transcribed in order to note the topics, main ideas and decisions and to record quotes from

the actors. I also made note of most of my own operational actions and interactions so that I could take my own role into account in any later findings.

More precisely, I attended 40 meetings related to the development of the Human Resources Management device. I also participated in many informal conversations about the project during breaks, phone calls, lunches, etc. I noted all relevant informal conversations and observations in a research log (about 13,000 words), which I started on the first day of the case study (October 15th, 2009) and in which I detailed the study's methodological aspects, my initial intuitions, and my findings. I collected most of the emails, including attached files, exchanged during the project between October 15th, 2009 and February of 2010. My participant observations came to an end with my departure from the Research Centre in September of 2009, but I continued to collect emails and documents from the project until February of 2010, as forwarded to me by the Project Manager. I collected about 310 emails and 190 attached files edited or received by the Project Manager during the project.

Data analysis

Three main phases marked the analysis of this data collection: the reduction process of data from a simple coding of the corpus of participant observations and emails, the sharing of interpretations of the project between the actors and the researchers via written memos, and the writing process enabled me to integrate the theoretical framework. Nvivo was my primary tool for transcribing, coding, collecting and analyzing the data. In order to capture the main topics confronted by the actors in project meetings and emails, I coded the corpus early on in the project in order to build an overview of the project. Between October of 2008 and June of 2009, 17 nodes were defined in order to classify the data for each topic and to highlight links between the different topics (cf. Table 1). I did not code attached files as the numerous versions of each document created a risk of repeated coding of the same content.

Table 1: Data coding

Moreover, I wrote a descriptive, chronological memo on the project (Langley, 1999). This dealt with the steps of the project, the main points of view of the actors (with quotes), and the main decisions. The aim was to ensure that the interpretation of the project was as shared as possible. The step-by-step validation of the interpretations of the main events and compromises avoids an *a posteriori* rationalization by me regarding the project. In July of 2009, I sent a first version of

the memo to certain actors (the Project Manager, the person in charge of the project in the Research Centre, and the consultant). They agreed with the proposed interpretation of the sequence of the compromises made from October of 2008 to July of 2009, and did not send me a revised version of the memo. A second version was written at the end of the case study in May of 2010 and was presented to the Research Centre's main actors, which was revised by the Research Centre Project Manager and an engineer. Finally, an early version of this article was sent to the Research Centre actors in order to ensure that the statements were reliable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The third step was the back and forth process between theory and empirical materials in an abductive approach, which enabled me to move past the description of the case and to provide insights. My data analysis emerged throughout the process of writing this article. By constantly comparing empirical data and theoretical frameworks, a number of interesting insights emerged. More precisely, this comparison enabled me to select the relevant compromises to transcribe and analyze. As stakeholders met difficulties to find a shared objective about this project, I focused on the purpose of the project, which was also an opportunity to understand compromise from a process and situated view.

Generally speaking, Follett (1924-1995) highlighted that the purpose and the end are always moments in the process: *"it must seem clear that we must look for purpose within the process itself [...] What we possess always creates the possibilities of fresh satisfaction. The need comes as a need only when the possible satisfaction of need is already there"* (Follett, 1995, p.53). The purpose of this project also evolved throughout the project according to the possibility to build an increasingly complex device. The debates lasted several months and three compromises about the aim of the project were made: the development of a competencies management device, the development of a tool for the internal mobility, and the development of a new Information System. The following findings describe these compromises and how actors reached them through the ongoing process of translation of their views and interests, as well as their associations making the project possible. By describing the translation and the association dynamics in which compromises were defined, the results highlight the situated aspect of these

compromises, their role, and their interrelation. These three insights will serve as a basis to discuss this process view of compromises.

Findings

The very first meeting between Banca's team and the researchers and engineers of the Research Centre occurred in May of 2008. They had known of one another for a long time, but until that point they had not worked together. The Research Centre negotiated the development of a partnership in order to develop its business by providing collaborative research with private firms. For Banca, this was the first research collaboration. Yet, this collaborative research was an opportunity for Banca to develop networks with local institutions. The teams knew of one another and the chief executives supported the collaboration. However, at the beginning of the project, the actors were unfamiliar with one another. Banca and the Research Centre had very different missions and work practices; each had its own technical jargon and approach to management and collaboration. An example of this is at the end of the initial meeting and before the signing of the agreement (September, 2008) with the consultant's and the Banca team's inability to understand the Research Centre engineers and researchers. According to the consultant, the debate in the meeting was too abstract. Research Centre engineers used jargon too technical for the bankers, while the need of the bank remained unclear for the engineers.

“Even though I followed more closely than the other people, when I got out of the meeting, I did not understand the job of the Research Centre ” (the consultant, working meeting, October 24th, 2008).

First compromise about the purpose of the project: the development of a competencies management device

In spite of this lack of mutual understanding, Banca and the Research Centre decided to develop a tool to manage competencies. At this time, the motivation to develop this tool was not clear. The idea to develop a tool to manage competencies was brought by the Research Centre as they

had developed capabilities in this field. For several years, the Research Centre had conducted research and development about competencies management. Moreover, a lot of competitors of Banca had developed their own tool to manage competencies. For the HR manager, implementing a tool to manage competencies would thus help the bank to remain competitive. As a consequence, the Research Centre proposal – to develop a tool to manage competencies – appeared as a way to fill the gap between them and the other competitors. Even if the Research Centre and Banca had different interests, the development of a tool to manage competencies appeared as a satisfactory compromise for everybody. It enabled Banca to develop a partnership with a governmental institution and to get a new competitive advantage; and made it possible for the Research Centre to conduct some research and development.

Second compromise about the purpose of the project: managing internal mobility

Even though there was agreement on the objective, the economic crisis occurring in September of 2008 caused a slight change in the purpose of this project. As this crisis struck the banking sector deeply, Banca was about to lay people off. According to the HR manager, a way to avoid job redundancy was to improve internal mobility. Even if there was a crisis, Banca needed to replace people in key positions due to retirement, pregnancy, resignation, etc. For Banca, the project with the Research Centre about competencies management seemed to be a good way to improve the internal mobility. As a consequence, Banca asked the Research Centre to focus on the internal mobility in the development of the tool. It was an important change for actors. At this time, the aim was to make the internal mobility easier thanks to a device identifying and assessing the competencies required for each job. This new objective changed the status of the tool: the competencies management was not the aim of the project anymore but rather a way to avoid redundancies. This ambiguity also caused confusion among the team members, as it was difficult to understand the purpose of the project:

A Research Centre employee: *“What do you want to do, exactly?”*

The Project Manager: *“A device for staff mobility.”*

A Research Centre employee: *“Yes, I know, but what is the aim? Why does Banca have to work on staff mobility? What are they looking for?”*

The consultant: *“Actually, there is something other than mobility.”*

The Project Manager: *“This device will allow us to better understand the competencies of Banca staff.”* (Working meeting, November 7th, 2008)

Nevertheless, this ambiguity about the purpose of the project enabled stakeholders to translate their point of view without renouncing either the project or its first aim. The objective to improve internal mobility was a way for Banca to translate the worry about the economic crisis, while the Research Centre’s interest remained the same. It was still possible for the Research Centre to develop a tool to manage competencies. This second compromise also integrated the first – to develop a competencies management tool – and by doing so, this first compromise played a role of mediator between the stakeholders. In order to respect the interest of the Research Centre in this project, it was impossible for Banca to change the project entirely, but only to refine it by defining priority (i.e. internal mobility). Furthermore, this new purpose was a solution to the evolution of the Banca context since the first meeting between the stakeholders. The economic context also played an important role in the definition of the purpose of the project. The development of a tool to manage the internal mobility also materialized 1) a satisfactory compromise enabling Banca to bring a situated answer to survive the economic crisis, 2) a way to integrate the first compromise and thus ensuring the continuity of the project, and 3) a way to coordinate and maintain the partnership between Banca and the Research Centre.

The development of the tool started with the definition of a competency management model on October 23rd, 2008. According to the project manager and the consultant, the competency management model should have been at the heart of the project. Nevertheless, the stakeholders had different approaches to the definition of the competency management model. The Research Centre’s approach emphasized “resources”, i.e. what an employee “really does” to achieve his job;

whereas Banca's and the consultant's approaches were more function-oriented, i.e. the "expected tasks" that an employee must execute. These two very different approaches - competency management rooted in the tasks versus competency management rooted in resources - came into conflict with each other. From October of 2008 to February of 2009, the actors translated their different approaches and debated over the definition of a common approach to competency management. Although the actors agreed about the purpose of the project, the stakeholders did not find a compromise for the way to define and manage competencies.

As a way to get around this matter, the negotiation over the competencies model quickly moved to another negotiation: the definition of a job description document. In January of 2009, even though there was no compromise about the competency management model, the actors began to define the descriptions of some key jobs. More concrete than a theoretical model, this document enabled the actors to elaborate, test, and share job descriptions. In the end, the job descriptions should have served to identify the skills required for each job position and the relevant training to develop these skills. As it offers a concrete way to define the job position and to compare with others, the job description quickly became the core document of the device. Between February 13th, 2009 and April 16th, 2010, the stakeholders negotiated, wrote and tested different versions of each job description on relevant bank employees. The writing of different versions was an opportunity for stakeholders to translate their various points of view. The training manager was involved in this part of this project and was in charge of the identification of the relevant training for each skill required to perform the required tasks. In the end, the aim was to make the comparison between different positions possible and to define the possible internal mobility at Banca.

"The content of the job description emerged from itself. We carefully respected the description of each employee about the competencies of their function" (The consultant, Project Committee, Banca, April 6th, 2009).

Third compromise about the purpose of the project: the development of a new information system

While defining the tool, the need to concretize it compelled the actors to deal with specific equipment issues. From February of 2009, it appeared important to deal with the computerization of this tool and its implementation into the existing information system. After several attempts, stakeholders realized that it would not have been possible to implement such a tool into the existing information system and more precisely, the software dedicated to managing human resources. As a consequence, in September of 2009, the bank and the Research Centre decided to develop an entirely new information system for human resources management. The aim was to put competency management at the heart of human resources management.

“When we know the device really well, we will have to take into consideration the computer support. The pilot job must have its own computer tool”. (The assistant to the Human Resources Manager, Steering Committee, February 19th, 2009)

Whereas the project was expected to finish in September of 2009, stakeholders decided to extend it with the aim of developing an entirely new information system for human resources. Thus, the purpose of the project also evolved once again. Nevertheless, it was not an entirely new objective. The previous compromises were integrated into the new purpose: competency management had to be a core element of this new information system and internal mobility one of the main usages. To develop this new information system, the Research Centre engineers relied on the reports written at the end of August of 2009 about the pilot developed between February of 2009 and August of 2009; then they assessed the existing solution, and organized two meetings at Banca (November 13th, 2009 and November 26th, 2009) to interview human resources staff. This analysis highlighted the existence of various software lacking interconnections, which led to a duplication of data. Secondly, it underlined how non-user-friendly the information system was in relation to Banca’s expectations. The Research Centre gave a first version of these requirements to Banca in February of 2010. The final version, which

included many updates, was delivered to Banca on March 8th, 2010. The proposed system, which was to link all human resources activities, hinged on competency management; and the engineers emphasized the need to connect this future solution with software that supported the human resources processes, as well as the collection and exchange of information.

Even if it was not anticipated to develop a new information system by extending the project until March of 2010, this third compromise was satisfactory for the stakeholders. It was a situated answer to a concrete problem - to integrate competencies management into the Human Resource information system. However, it was not a disruption with the previous compromises but only an extension of them. In a way, a kind of continuity in the project was maintained in spite of this change. Finally, this compromise allows actors to coordinate their activities and redefine the finality and meaning about the project.

To summarize, actors made three compromises about the purpose of the project. Firstly, they decided to develop a simple tool to manage competencies to compete with others banks. Secondly, the economic crisis changed this first purpose. To face the crisis, the purpose of the project was to avoid redundancies by making the internal mobility easier and manageable. The development of the competencies management tool was thus no longer the purpose of the project, but rather the way to achieve the objective. Thirdly, actors realized this tool could not be integrated into the existing information system. The HR manager of Banca decided to renew the information system of Human Resources entirely. Consequently, the project was extended and its purpose changed again. The development of a new Human Resources information system integrating a tool to manage competencies and internal mobility became the new purpose. Consequently, the aim of the project evolved to fit with the evolution of the context and thus leads to the making of three different compromises about the purpose of the project. Each compromise was thus a situated one, and helped actors to coordinate their activities and define a shared meaning about the project. Furthermore, the compromises were not disconnected. Rather, they were interrelated and provided a sense of continuity in the project. The following table summarizes the the translation and association dynamics leading to the process making of these three compromises about the purpose of the project.

Table 2: The three compromises about the purpose of the project

Discussion

The aim of this article has been to understand how people make compromises in their activities. Compromises have thus been understood as constantly evolving, and not as stable agreements (Follett, 1924, 1995; Nachi, 2010). By relying on the Actor-Network Theory (Law, 1992; Callon, 1986, 2001; Law and Hassard, 1999; Mac Lean and Hassard, 2004; Akrich, Callon and Latour 2006; Latour, 2005, 2009), compromise has been defined as a temporary result of the translation and association dynamics in which actors and actants are involved. The case study was also an opportunity to illustrate this approach and bring three insights about compromises. By showing how compromises emerge and evolve throughout activities, case studies insist on the situated aspect of compromises, their roles and interrelations. I now discuss these contributions of such a process view and their implications in our understanding of compromises. First, I will highlight the situated aspect of compromises. Based on this first point, I will secondly emphasize the mediating role of compromises; and thirdly, I will deal with their interrelation.

Compromises as situated in practices

The literature review pinpointed the importance of the works of Follett (1995) and Nachi (2004b, 2010) in our understanding of compromise as a process, in spite of the lack of explanation for the dynamics at work when actors are involved in activities requiring compromises. Based on these insights, the very first contribution of this research is the development of a process view of compromise claiming that compromises are only situated in practices. As such, compromise is not defined as a stable social agreement based on values, which would have been defined by actors once and for all, but is rather an ongoing process. The Banca case study has thus served as an illustration of this process view of compromises. By describing the process of defining the purpose of the project, this case has demonstrated how actors defined several compromises about the purpose of the project that can be understood only in their specific context as a way to integrate the various concerns, interests, points of view, etc. For example, the translation and association dynamics also provide an interesting framework to understand how the concern about the economic crisis was translated by stakeholders and helped them to redefine a temporary

purpose of the project and make their association possible. Following this approach, compromise is a temporary result of the translation of various interests, past events, other compromises, contexts (etc.) enabling and maintaining the associations of actors and actants. As Ollagnon underlined (2006), the concept of compromise thus addresses the exchange between actors that is aimed at defining a framework for collaboration.

This process view of compromise based on the Actor-Network Theory (Callon, 1986; Callon, 2001; Law, 1992; Latour, 2005) has also made another contribution. By considering actants - i.e. non-humans - this approach takes into consideration all of the entities playing a role in the process making of compromises. Compromise does not only depend on human agency but on the association of heterogeneous actors and actants. The case study has also been an opportunity to highlight the importance of actants in the process making of compromises. For example, in this Banca case, the economic crisis and the existing software for human resources played important roles in the evolution of the purpose of the project. They required actors to redefine their previous compromises about the purpose of the project. They acted concretely in the process of making compromises and imposed, in part, their will. In the end, associations in the network included both actors and actants, while compromises acted as mediators, making these associations possible. This leads to the second contribution: the mediating role of compromise.

The mediating role of compromise

Latour (2005) has argued that face-to-face interaction does not exist; rather, innumerable mediators are present in any interaction. By making, circumscribing and enabling associations and translations, compromises play a mediating role. Furthermore, by assigning compromise the mediating role in coordination, it thus defines the scope and the conditions of the activity: both enabling and constraining it. On one hand, it is enabling because it makes coordination and action possible. Compromise is also a resource that facilitates the development of a variety of possible worlds and the ways in which relations are constructed and maintained within these worlds (Papilloud & Rol, 2004). Nachi (2010) has argued that the process of compromise leads to a new space of possibility, and is thus a territory that defines coordination and activity. On the other hand, it is constraining because compromise circumscribes, in part, the conditions of association and translation dynamics. The status of compromise is thus dual: it is both the result of the translation and association dynamics, and the condition that makes translations and

associations possible. From this, we can understand the mediating roles of compromise within a number of different concepts, such as the concept of the boundary object (Star & Griesemer, 1989; Carlile, 2002) or mediation object (Hussenot and Missonier, 2010), in which the meaning of these objects must be common enough to achieve coordination between actors, even if these objects do not represent a full agreement for every stakeholder involved.³

Furthermore, the mediating role of a current compromise is not only about the translation of current interests, desires, points of view, etc., but also about past compromises. The Banca case has shown that a current compromise depends not only on the current context, but also on past compromises. Even if these compromises constantly evolved, past compromises were considered by actors and thus are continuously redefined. The process making of compromises is thus immanent: each compromise is poured into the next. Any new compromise is always different from the previous compromises, but ensures continuity at the same time. For example, the actors persistently reconsidered the very first compromise about the purpose of the Banca project. As a consequence, each new compromise took into consideration the previous ones. This point leads to the third contribution of this process view of compromise: the interrelation of compromises.

The interrelation of compromises

The Banca case has illuminated a third insight about compromises: their interrelation. By following the compromises about the purpose of the project, one can note that these compromises were not isolated but rather interrelated. To find a new compromise about the purpose of the project, actors had to take previous compromises into consideration. Past compromises are thus integrated into the current one, providing a sense of continuity in spite of the evolution of the activity and context. In the Banca case, actors changed the purpose of the project several times, but they could not ignore their first compromise about the development of a competencies management tool. This compromise played a role in the making of two other compromises about the purpose. More precisely, this process view of compromises insists on the fact that compromises only exist in a network of other compromises. Compromise, as any other actant, is thus involved in the translation and association dynamics. It simultaneously creates and

³ Hussenot and Missonier (2010) have dealt with the mediating role of the object as a contract in organizational activities, arguing that the nature and the role of the object evolve over time. Nevertheless, compromise must not be confused with a mediation object. Mediation objects can carry compromise, but may also carry controversy or rupture.

regulates coordination: “*It facilitates bringing individual perspectives together, without fusing viewpoints. Thus compromise permits the emergence of an intersubjective organization of the real, while defining the context of that emergence. In this sense, it is at once the creator and the regulator of social reality*” (Ollagnon, 2006: 307). Furthermore, because of the involvement of compromises in the translation dynamic, past compromises are never set in stone but can always be redefined. As a consequence, meanings, roles, and the status of past compromises are never stable. They can always be defined and redefined throughout the activity.

Conclusion

The process view of compromise presented in this article suggests that compromises are constantly defined and redefined throughout activities. This view is far from the classic perspective that defines compromise as a stable agreement made once for all in order to preserve a social order. This research has shown that compromises are only temporary and can always be called into question by actors. More precisely, from a process view, compromises can be defined as the results of the translations and associations among actors and actants. Consequently, the compromises are only situated in practices and they play a mediating role in the translation and association dynamics. Moreover, compromises are not isolated but interrelated. Past compromises are involved in the process making of a new compromise, ensuring the continuity. This research also insists on the active role of compromises. Compromises are not only the passive result of negotiation; they have an active role. Compromises are thus both the outputs of the process making of organization as well as actants participating in the making of organizational phenomena. This process view anchored in the Actor-Network Theory thus opens on an alternative view to study organization, and can only be considered as a starting point for future research.

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Table 1. Data coding

Data	Codes
Interviews	Advancement and mobility Enculturation Involvement in decision making Training and competencies assessment Work life management Workforce management
Participant observations Mails Research logs	Actors' interest Analysis of researcher Balanced score card Behavioral competencies Competency management model Competencies management tools Context of project from Banca's point of view Context of project from Research Centre's point of view Context of project from the consultant's point of view Continuation of project Job description Method and analysis of interviews Operational actions of researcher Operational method Research method Structure and practices of the bank Uses of the Information System for Human Resources Management

Table 2: The three compromises about the purpose of the project

Date	Compromises about the purpose of the project	Translations of interest and point of view	Associations of actors and actants
May, 2008 – September, 2008	First compromise: the development of a competencies management device	The development of a competencies management device enabled the Research Centre to conduct research about competencies and Banca to develop a tool that competitors already had. As the concurrence was intense, this device should have provided a competitive advantage for Banca.	The development of a device was a way to develop a partnership between a governmental institution, the Research Centre, and Banca.

September, 2008 - July, 2009	Second compromise: managing internal mobility	The compromise negotiated several months before between the Research Centre and Banca was redefined as a way to cope with the economic crisis. The aim was to develop a tool to mainly manage internal mobility in order to avoid any lay-offs at Banca.	The economic crisis occurring in 2008 played an important role in the evolution of the purpose of the project. This crisis had an impact on Banca and the project as well. Stakeholders had to take into consideration this context and thus changed the purpose of the project. However, this context offers a good reason to legitimate the project and thus reinforce the partnership between Banca and the Research Centre.
July 2009 – March 2010	Third compromise: the development of a new information system for human resources	As a way to manage internal mobility, Banca was going to implement the device into the existing software to manage human resources. However, it was not possible to proceed with this implementation. Therefore, Banca and the Research Centre decided to develop an entire new information system. The project was extended and the purpose of the project also evolved toward the development of an information system for the HR department.	As soon as Banca and the Research Centre decided to computerize the device, they had to take into consideration the existing information system. The software also played an important role in the definition of the project's purpose and in the associations between the Research Centre and Banca.