

WOMEN & THE DIGITAL SECTOR

Self-Imprisonment of Female Employees Working in BigTech Companies: Reopening the Debate
on Psychological Contract Theory



Hi, I'm Corina!

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Problem statement

- Women are subject to disproportionately high turnover rates compared to their male counterparts, especially women between 30 - 44 years old.

Major stake for companies & governments:

- Companies are missing out on talent, innovation and profit;
- The annual productivity loss in the European economy is 16.1 bln. €;
- Europe faces a major projected talent shortage, estimated between 1.4 to 3.9 million employees by 2027.

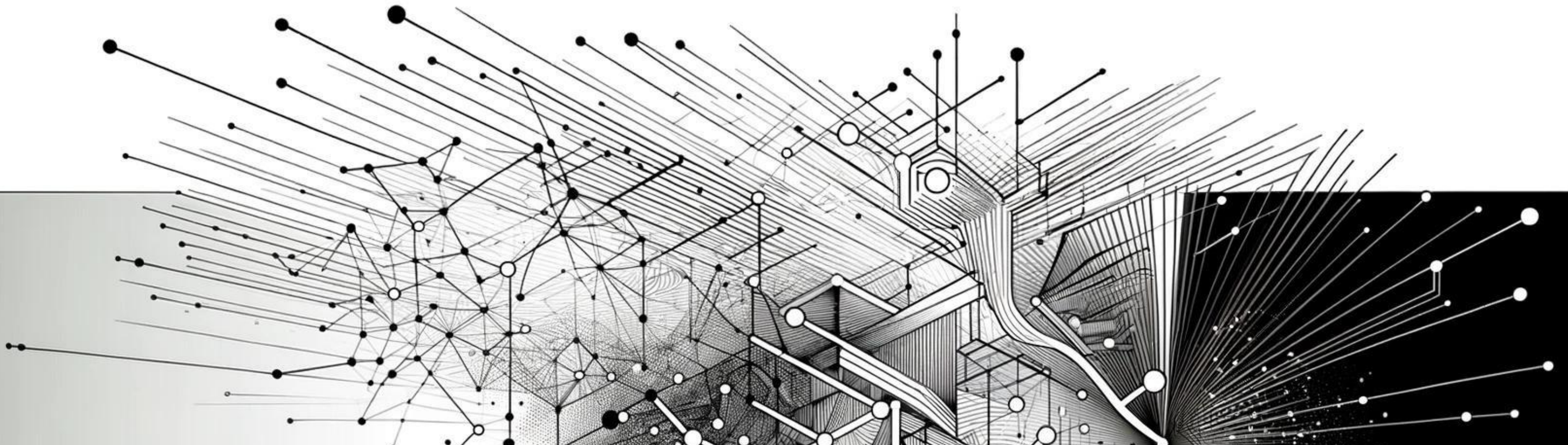
Theoretical Framework

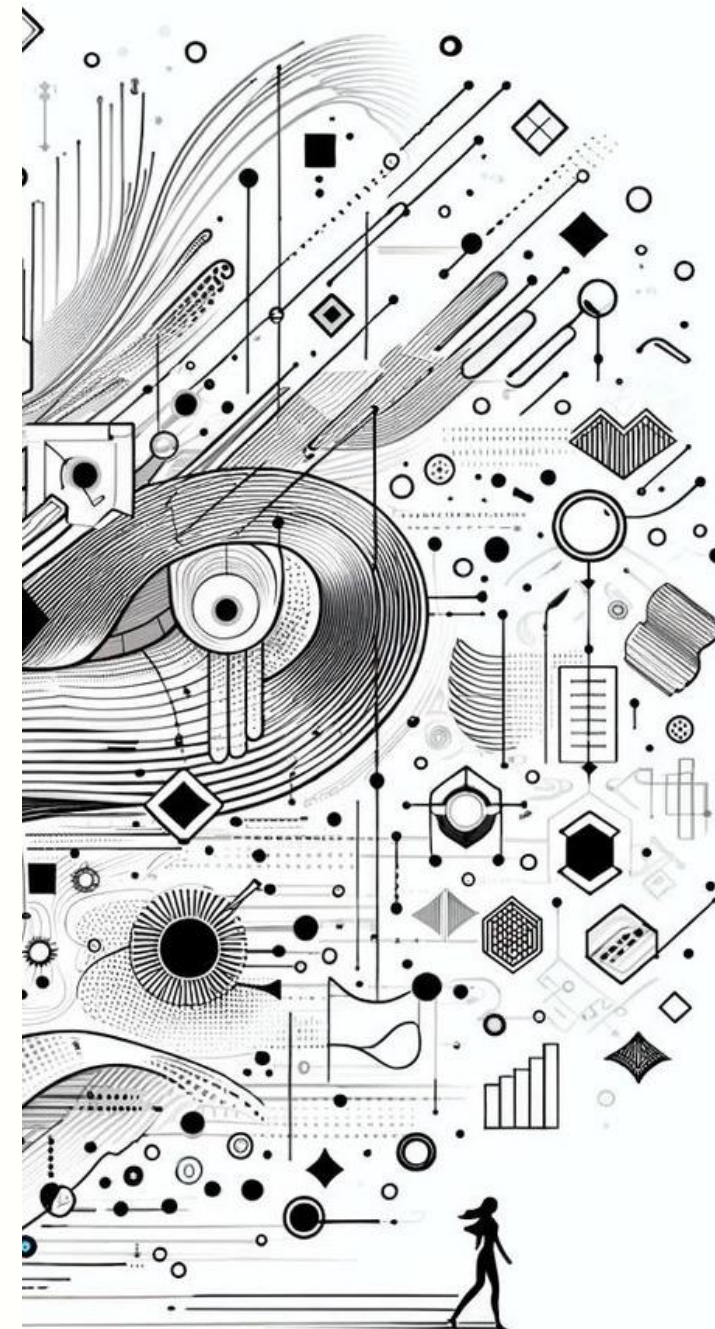
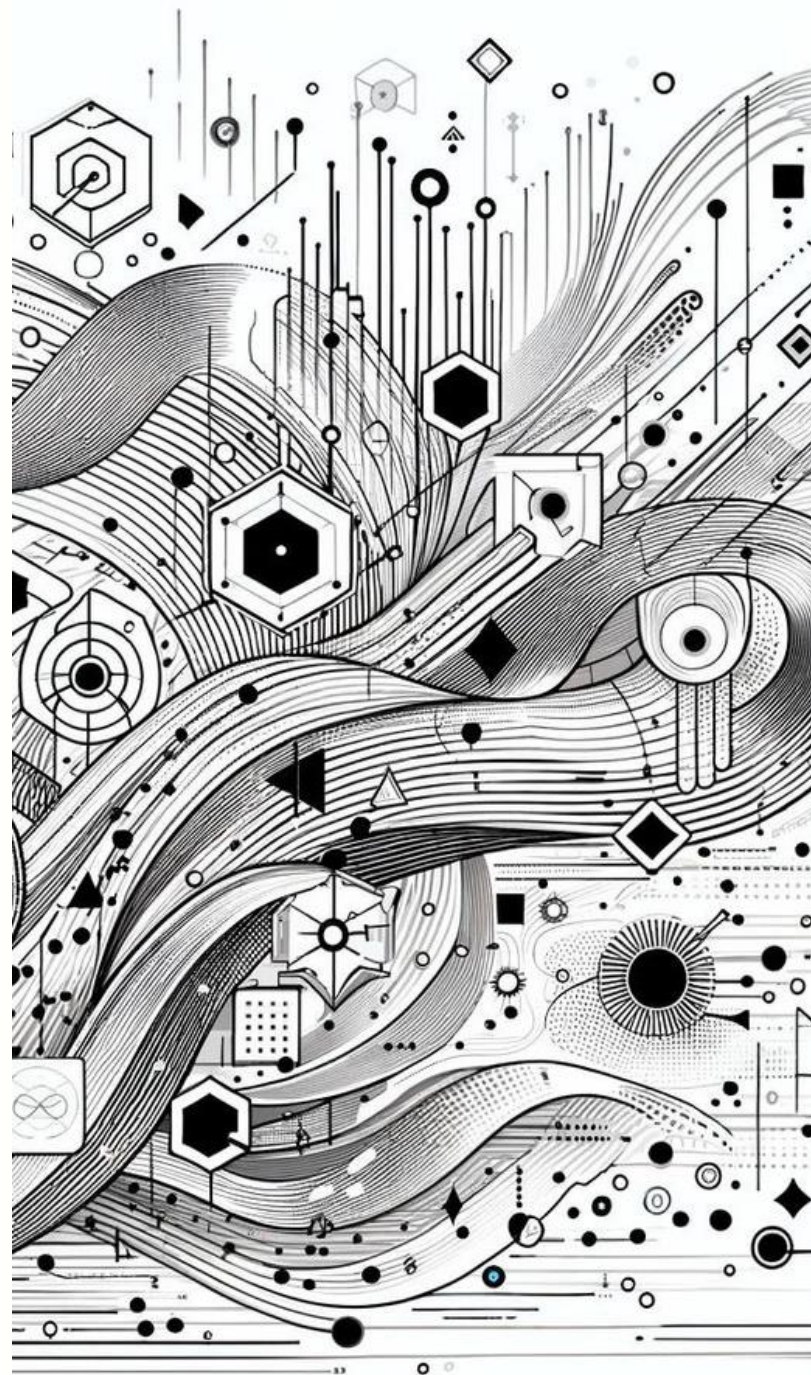
Psychological Contract Theory

- looks at the employee - organization relationship to understand the implications of obligations and commitments that the two parties made to each other;
- the relationship is dynamic and evolves over time on a relational - transactional continuum.

Psychological Contract Breach

- occurs when the employee perceives that the organization has failed to fulfill its obligations and promises;
- we propose that there may be a reverberation of the psychological contract from the digital sector employers to the digital sector itself.





Research Design

- qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews;
- aims to understand how the psychological contract of the participant is formed and potentially erodes over time

Sample

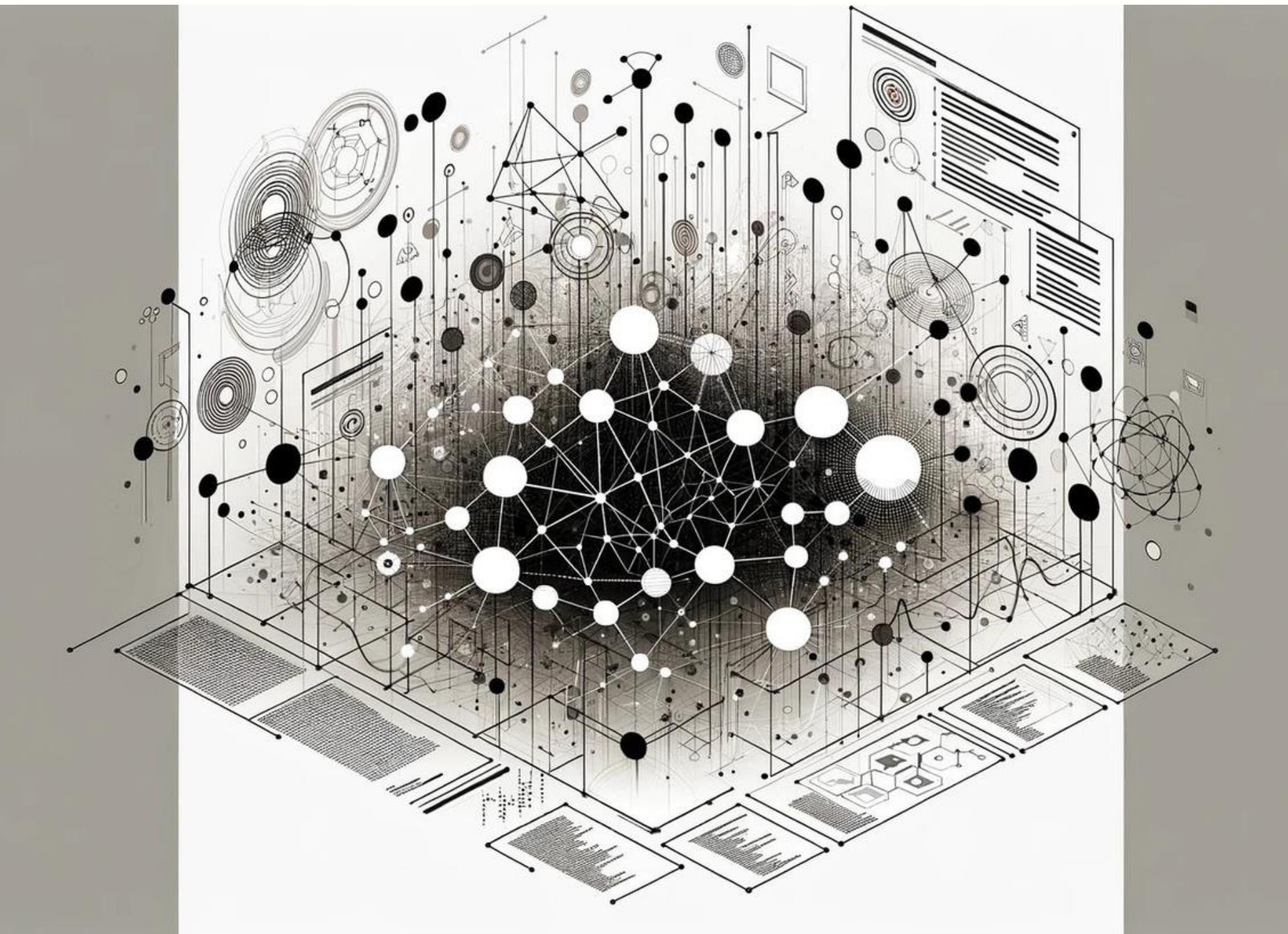
- 3 groups of women (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999):
 - women who still work in the digital sector,
 - women who are thinking of quitting the digital sector, and
 - women who have already quit the digital sector.

Characteristics:

- aged 30 - 44 years old,
- based in France,
- perceived high performers,
- have multi-cultural experiences,
- work in large international digital technology corporations.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

How can we explain that female employees in the prime of their career choose to remain loyal to a niche that limits their career path?



Data Analysis

- codes developed using qualitative psychological contract research & Psychological Contract Inventory tool;
- 3 major themes:
 - PC obligations
 - PC fulfillment
 - PC breach.
- the interviews are initially coded with a deductive approach, methodically looking for signs of fulfillment or breach.

Data Analysis - Limited Evolution Opportunities

TANÏA, 43yo, Brand & Creative Lead:

"This will go quick because I entered [company] at a certain level, which is the highest level at which you can be an Individual Contributor. And since I was never given a managerial position, I was never up for promotion. If you are not a manager, you can't go up from her. So there you go.

For me, the real challenge was moving from IC to manager, which was very difficult in my first role with the company. There really was no way to move up because my manager was blocking me. So I chose a side move in the same company. So I found myself in an environment I didn't like and wasn't keen on staying, so there was no question of being promoted. [...] When I took another role that was closer to my aspirations, I unfortunately had an opportunity to become manager, but it was right in the middle of my maternity leave, so the timing was not favorable even if I did all I could, it didn't work."

CORALIE

"It's been 6-7 years that I am with [company] and it's very difficult to advance at the moment. I'm someone who likes to evolve and change. Let's say the internal environment is not very favourable to new opportunities."

AMÉLIE

"After 6 years and maaaaannnnnyyy tentatives, I finally managed to become a manager." [N+1 of a 3 person team made up fully of women]

Data Analysis - Limited Evolution Opportunities

CAMELIA

"I arrived at [company], we function based on levels. I arrived a level 63 because I was already senior, so this corresponds to a level of Senior Product Manager. And after 12 years now with [company], I am a level 64, so basically I had one promotion, I moved on to Senior Product Manager level 2."

AMÉLIE

"And what will I do afterwards? You can't even imagine you are here and the labor market is there, you come from [company], you have [company] on your resume, you have an amazing experience, you are super competent and still you have the feeling that nobody will want to hire you. It's crazy when you think about it, 5 years of [company] is the equivalent of 15 years anywhere else."

Data Analysis - Other Breaches

LUCIE

"So I went through an enormous burn-out, in January 2023. And it had been a year that I was asking management to hire another person. We could have been at least 5 on the territory. In my previous role I had 16 clients, now I had 250, it was crazy. And they...let's say they gave me promotions and bonuses... so instead of giving me the resources I needed, they told me: "You are great, what you are doing is amazing!" And they gave me additional stock options so that I would shut up. Now that I think about it, they should have just gave me another headcount and it would have been much better for me."*

**promotion is not equivalent to vertical evolution*

CHARLIE

"I think my manager participated to my burn out. He is, I think, a very humane manager ... but the first thing he said to me when I arrived... it was actually more pictorial, but he basically said "children don't interest me before their 3 years old". It was a way of saying that as long as I am a debutante in the sector, I basically don't interest him. But he often uses sarcasm, so one often needs to put things into perspective."

ALICE

"I don't think they are very comfortable with burn-out management, to be very honest. In my own experience, I'm under the impression that they.... that it makes them uncomfortable actually... because I don't think they necessarily understand... my n+2 told le that burn-outs were part of the rite of passage. He didn't say it in a mean way, he told me he understood because it had already happened to him. I don't remember how he said it exactly, but it was on the lines that it wasn't surprising for this type of job. And that it happens to a lot of people, even to him one or two times. He told me that if it happens, I should take a couple of days off... but that is clearly not what I need! What I need is that we structurally change certain things."

Data Analysis - Other Breaches

CAMELIA

"So at [current company] it's a bit different because there has been an enormous amount of reorgs. There were many reorgs at [former company], but here there is one every 9 months, we completely change the paradigm."

LOUISE

"There are always new challenges, there is a lot of change, especially in the company I was in... so much change, always repositioning the scope, many reorgs."

ZOÉ

"It's been a year since I have arrived... there have been two reorgs, I've been on 2 different teams, two different scopes... it's quite annoying and it's not reassuring for me at all in terms of evolution opportunities in the company."

AMÉLIE

"So at [company], I've had a lot of different managers since it's a company that is constantly reorganizing. So I think I had 7 or 8 managers in 9 years."

Data Analysis - The Golden Cage

ROMANE:

"It's a golden cage, you have everything you want, you eat for free breakfast lunch and dinner, you have your gym, you are extremely well paid..."

CORALIE

"As you well know, you are much better paid than in other places... so you don't really search for something else. Or you do, but less. And you dig less into things. And I don't even know if, for example, if you take a male colleague with the same level of responsibility... I don't know if there would be an issue there."

LUCIE

"I would call it something of a golden prison, once you've tasted all of this, it's so hard to leave. At the same time, I think it's sad and then I ask myself "but why would you want to leave all this behind?"

ADÉLE

"We really work in a sort of microcosm... ok, there were layoffs, it's not always easy... but we are really privileged, even though it's not always easy when... it remains an organization with shareholders, we're paid a fortune, so taking the risk of being laid off at some point, I think that's OK. We have tons of opportunities, we are very well treated, I think."

Data Analysis - The Golden Cage

ADÈLE:

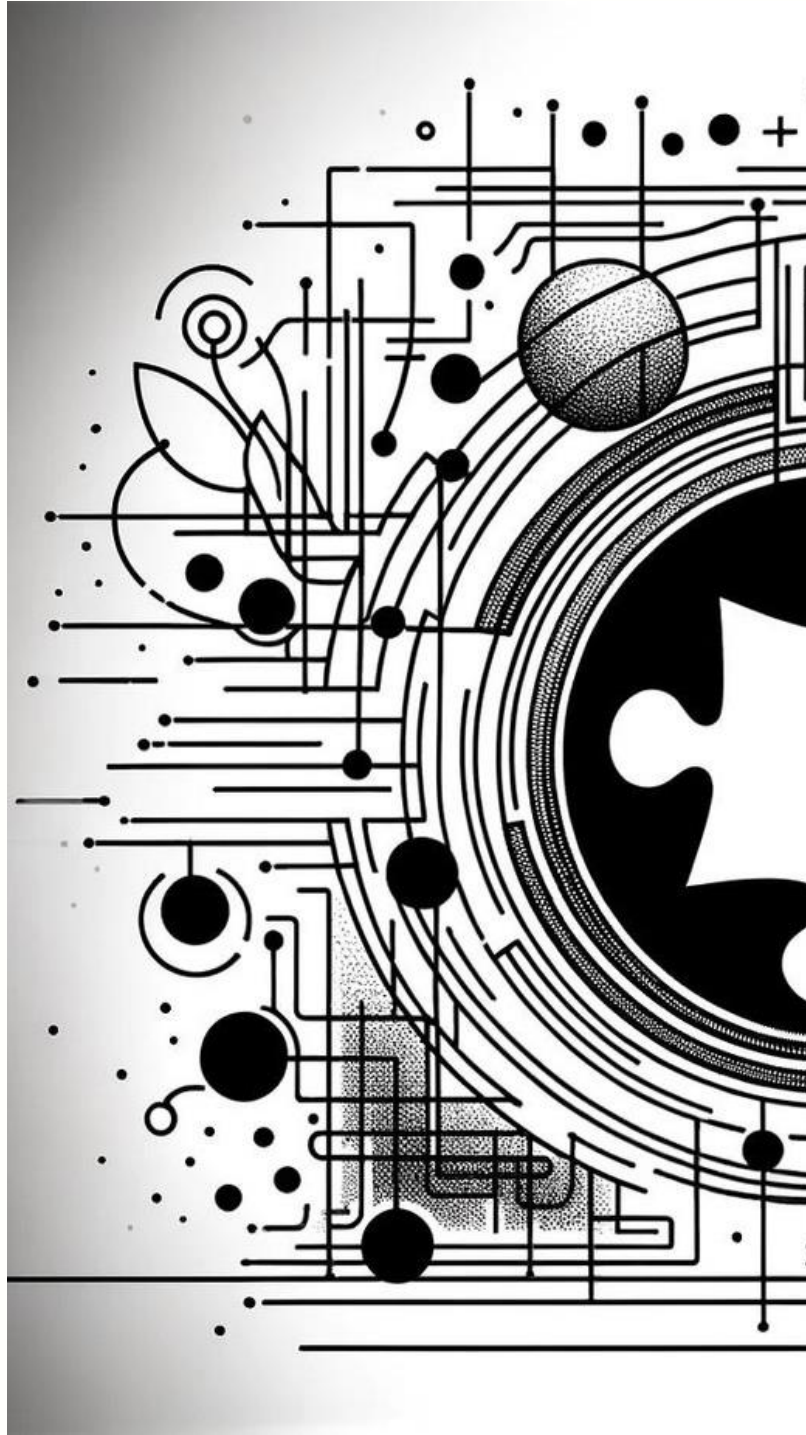
"I found that in tech people are more easily themselves. There's this thing of "come as you are", where people don't feel obligated to disguise themselves, to put on formal clothing. I'm less under the impression that people had a different personality at work and outside of work. We weren't "in the closet", and that helps. There's a virtuous cycle when everyone feels comfortable enough to be themselves."

LOUISE:

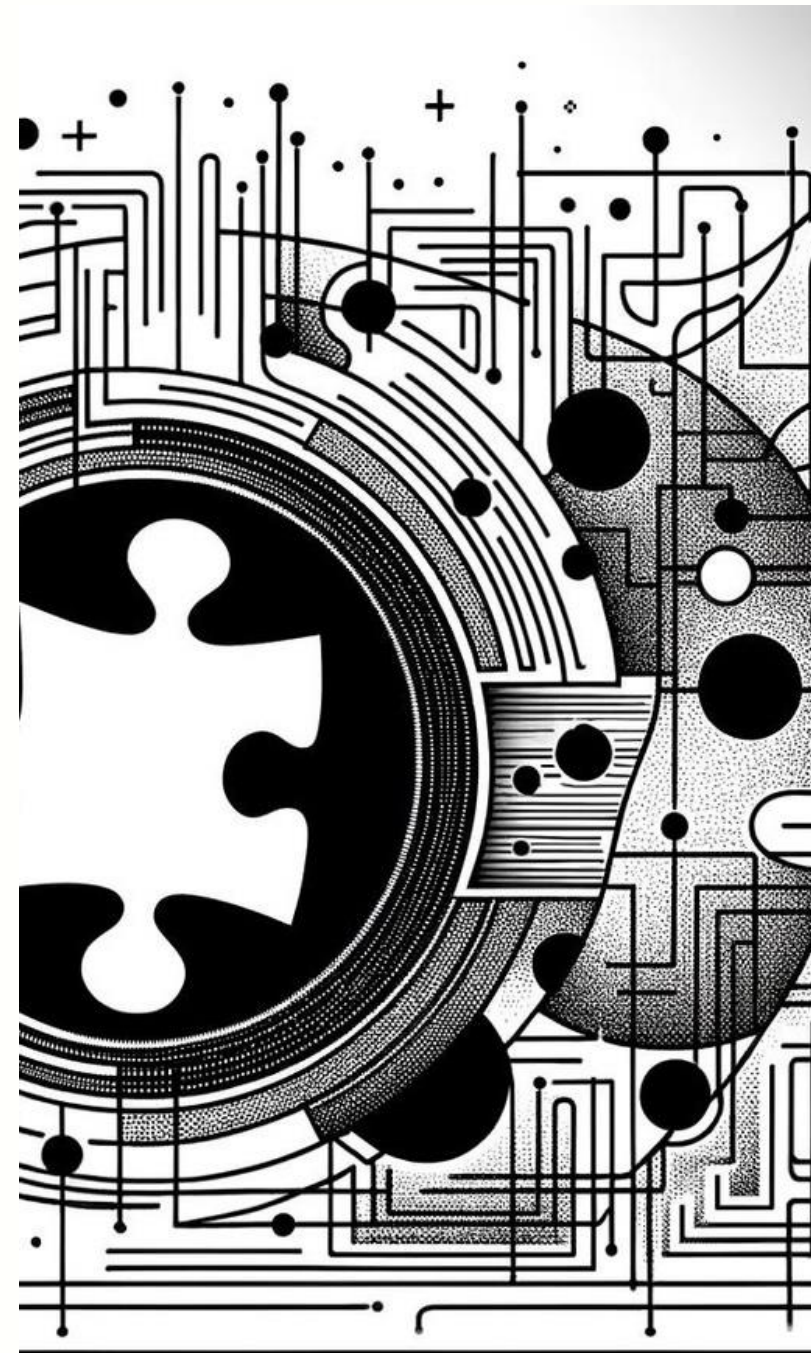
"And I think the humane side of the digital sector appealed to me too. So yes, one might think that as a sector it's a bit superficial, but I think that's more linked to the world of work in general. But at least the advantage here is that people don't worry too much and they are quite simple, communication and relationships are fluid. I find that overall, there are always some problematic individuals who are more difficult to handle, but overall I find that there is a good atmosphere, it's fun, which is a bit of the trademark of the digital sector. There you go, it's fun and very pleasant compared to other sectors that are more gloomy."

CAMELIA

"I really think I like the companies in this sector, be it [former company] or [current company], it's that the innovation doesn't only happen on the technology side, but there is also a question of innovation on the social side as well. And that, whatever anyone may say, today we have Netflix-like trainings for all the employees on diversity and inclusion, we've heard talk of "allyship" of "check your privilege" 5 years before everybody else did. Now I don't know if it's because it's a tech company? Or a global one? Is it that... I think it's an environment where we question things a lot. And that is something that I really find essential. I learned a lot in this company, on all levels. Here is where I first heard of unconscious bias... I heard it first in my company."



Conclusion: contribution, limitations, and further research



Contribution

- contribute to the psychological contract theory by reopening the debate on this theory and by questioning the relationship between the employee and the company and extending this relationship to the whole field.

Limitations

- focus on women who work in non-technical functions in major multi-national technology corporations.

QUESTIONS

