M@n@gement
2018, vol. 21(2): 738-772

Power to the People? How an energy company's strategic texts constitute the company-consumer interface working against collective action

Claire Burlat ● Colleen E. Mills

Abstract. This paper presents an instructive case study showing how strategic communication designed to achieve European Union directives regarding energy saving plays out in practice. The two-year qualitative study examined the impact of a French energy supply company's strategic practices. These practices were designed to transform not only the way consumers think about energy but also their consumption practices and how they made sense of these practices. Paradoxically, the texts that the supply company exchanged with customers, as their primary form of strategic practice, acted in ways that blocked the achievement of their strategic intent. The texts exhibited alternative forms of agency that (re)constituted the company-customer interface. In revealing this outcome, the paper contributes to a scant literature on the performance of mundane strategic tools, offering a unique example of an "ideological fantasy of 'empowerment'" (Wright, 2012) that was not realized in practice. The findings provide a warning, in this case to energy suppliers, that strategic texts have unintended and independent agency in the collaborative process of negotiating customers' understanding of energy and consumption options.

Keywords: strategy practice, strategic texts, energy supplier-consumer interface, communicative constitution of organizations, collective action, sensemaking

Claire Burlat
Department of Communication and Culture, Audencia Business School
Nantes, France

cburlat@audencia.com

Colleen E. Mills
Department of Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurship, University of Canterbury Business School
University of Canterbury, New Zealand

International Faculty Affiliate (FIA), Audencia Business School, Nantes, France

colleen.mills@canterbury.ac.nz

INTRODUCTION

French energy suppliers have been tasked with developing and implementing national policies that align with European Union (EU) directives regarding energy consumption. This entails educating customers about the consequences of high energy consumption and encouraging them to use less energy in order to decrease their country's carbon footprint. As the biggest electricity supplier in France, Electricité de France (EDF) has been at the forefront of this strategic thrust towards sustainable energy use and the transformation of the nation's sensemaking about energy use.

In cooperation with EDF, a two-year qualitative research was conducted to explore the impact of strategic communication practices designed to transform not only the way consumers think about energy but also their consumption practices. In keeping with the practice turn in strategy (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina & Von Savigny, 2001; Whittington, 1996, 2001), company communication can be construed as a strategic practice – as something people do rather than something an organization has

(Rouleau, 2013; Whittington, 2001). This means energy-saving discourses are a form of strategic social practice, "routinely recognizable as coherent social activity" (Barnes, 2001: 26) as are the semiotic and material artifacts that materialize these discourses (i.e. the company's strategic texts designed to transform consumers' 'thinkings and doings'). The discourses and the texts that manifest them are not innocent. They are a form of polyvocal social practice that creates relationships and constitutes organizations and their interfaces with external stakeholders. Our attention was drawn to how these multiple agencies are enacted through EDF's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) team's strategic use of semiotic and material artifacts in exchanges with consumers. Consumers' individual reactions to and sensemaking about invoices, websites and other CRM team strategic texts were examined in order to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What kinds of energy discourses are promulgated through CRM texts?

RQ2: How do CRM texts shape customers' energy discourses and reported consumption practices and constitute the company-consumer relationship?

The study revealed how the company's strategic communication practices, such as smart meters, invoices and other informational texts sent to domestic customers via mail and the company's website, materialize an energy sustainability discourse and in doing so act as mundane strategic tools (Arnaud, Mills, Legrand & Maton, 2016)[1]. Paradoxically, these mundane strategic tools fail to realize the company's strategic intent - to motivate consumer energy saving behaviors. Instead they exhibit alternative forms of agency that constitute a company-consumer interface which acts as an obstacle to energy saving behaviors.

The paper begins by briefly introducing the literature on the relationship between energy consumption and communication. It then explores the interfaces between the literatures on textual agency and the constitutive nature of communication. Following a description of the qualitative case study methodology, the findings are presented and then discussed in terms of the novel contributions they make to our understanding of how texts used as a form of multivocal strategic practice across the organization-customer interface can actually work against the company's strategic intent and (re)constitute this interface. It concludes by highlighting the implications of the findings for energy supply organizations that seek to construct an educative relationship with customers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines the literature on the influence of communication on energy consumption. It also addresses the constitutive nature of communication literature and what is known about how the interface between customers and companies is collaboratively constructed. It finishes by considering what the literature suggests is needed for this to constitute collective action.

THE INFLUENCE OF COMMUNICATION ON ENERGY CONSUMPTION

Despite energy security and the effects of carbon emissions becoming increasingly important themes in contemporary pro-environment

1. We also looked at the other energy supply companies texts as a form of comparison.

and social responsibility discourses, the relationship between energy sector agencies' communication and consumers' energy consumption has not been extensively investigated (Bolsen, Leeper, Shapiro, 2014). Consumers typically have very little idea about how much energy they use for different purposes (Darby, 2006). This is despite increased attention being paid to the roles information and information technologies might play in improving energy efficiency (Martiskainen & Coburn, 2011). Darby is one of the few researchers who has examined how information influences energy-consumption behaviors (Gupta & Darby, 2011). As a result of her experiments, she distinguishes between two forms of information: "direct feedback", when information is immediate (e.g., from the meter), and "indirect feedback", when information has been processed and represented by another party (e.g. in an energy company's bill). Studies on smart meter systems suggest household energy saving of up to 15% are achievable when direct feedback is provided (Darby, 2006).

A new perspective has emerged, called the ABC model (Shove, 2010), where A refers to attitudes and values, B to behaviors and C to choices. This model, which is derived from the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), considers the links between communication, information and energy consumption. By applying this model, Bamberg and Möser (2007) found 52% of individuals' pro-environmental intentions depend on three factors. The first factor is the "perceived behavioral control" (Ajzen, 1991:183), which refers to whether the individual believes that he/she can actively embrace the required behavior. The second factor is "attitude" and addresses the favorable or unfavorable appraisal of the behavior and its consequences. The third factor is the "moral norm", which is defined as "feelings of strong moral obligation that people experienced for themselves to engage in pro-social behavior" (Bamberg & Möser, 2007: 24). The formation of a moral norm is derived from the interplay between cognitive factors (e.g., awareness about environmental problems and the internal attribution of these problems), emotional factors (e.g., feelings of guilt) and social factors (e.g., behavioral expectations –as perceived by the individual – of aligning with important reference people who perform or do not perform a behavior). Hansla, Gamble, Juliusson and Gärling, (2008) have added an additional variable to consider when representing the consumer's intention to perform energy-saving practices: the concept of "self-transcendence (ST) value orientation" (Hansla, Gamble, Juliusson & Gärling, 2008: 769). In a study of people (N=26,840) drawn from all EU countries, Wicker and Becken (2013) found that consumers who were concerned about climate change (i.e. expressed self-transcendent values) were more inclined to take actions to mitigate climate change, agree to an energy reduction policy, and support change in relation to energy consumption patterns than individuals who did not report concern about climate change or who had concerns about energy availability.

These approaches, when applied to energy consumption, suggest exchanges between energy sector agencies and customers can construct an educational relationship that provides a means to influence individual consumption practices. While the first approach reduces communication to a process of transmission, the company-consumer relationship to one of information exchange, and constitutes the company-consumer interface as merely the site for this exchange, the ABC model proposes communication is a process of mutual influence through which values and norms are constituted. Both approaches assume "that environmental damage is a consequence of individual action and that given better information or more appropriate incentives damaging individuals could choose to act more responsibly and could choose to adopt pro-environmental

behaviors" (Shove, 2010: 1275). In doing so, the process of mutual influence is portrayed as occurring within an 'advocate-responder' relationship. This is not ideal if the goal is the creation of a 'community of common interest' united by sustainable energy practices.

As emphasized by Shove (2010), many international and governmental environmental agencies construct the supplier-consumer interface in this way and, in doing so, they reduce the role of institutions to "enablers whose role is to induce people to make pro-environmental decisions" (Shove, 2010: 1280). She proposes that agencies should "shift the focus away from individual choice and to be explicit about the extent to which states and other actors configure the fabric and the texture of daily life". We agree and so in our study, we assumed communication processes are more than strategic instruments by which information is shared and influence enacted. We assume exchanges between the energy supply company and consumers constitute and stabilize the organization-consumer interface (Arnaud & Mills, 2012) and that these exchanges, rather than being simply a mechanism for exchanging information, represent a form of strategy practice designed to promote energy consciousness and reduce individual energy use.

THE CONSTITUTIVE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION

This conception of communication is informed by the Communication as Constitutive of Organizations (CCO) perspective, which proposes that, "organizations are invoked and maintained in and through communicative practices" (Schoeneborn, et al., 2014: 286). Scholars proposing the CCO perspective regard communication as constitutive of social processes such as organizing (Ashcraft, Kuhn & Coreen 2009; Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen & Clark 2011; Putnam & Nicotera, 2008; Schoeneborn, et al., 2014; Taylor & Van Every, 2000), and the supply and consumption of goods and services. Kuhn, one of the leading scholars advocating this perspective, has developed the "communicative theory of the firm" in which communication is defined "as a process in which contextualized actors use symbols and make interpretations to coordinate, and control both their own and others' activity and knowledge, which are simultaneously mediated by, and productive of, 'texts'" (Kuhn, 2008: 1232). Thus, from this perspective, texts are inextricably implicated in the energy agencies' strategic practice (Rouleau, 2013; Schatzki, et al., 2001), as the means, mediators and outcomes of collective action, but also in consumers' interpretive processes (Arnaud, et al., 2016) and consumptive practices.

When analyzed from a CCO perspective, the CRM documents produced by energy suppliers operate as "organizational objects" (Ashcraft, et al., 2009: 2) that also have constituted the organization and its interface with its customers. This approach rejects the functionalist analytical position that regards texts produced by organizations as merely traces of organizational processes (Caronia & Cooren, 2014). Instead, the CCO perspective (Boivin et al., 2017), as notably but certainly not exclusively advanced by the Montreal Group, suggests that texts also have "material agency" (Caronia & Cooren, 2014; Cooren, 2010; Latour, 1996). From this perspective, the values, principles, norms and rules of societal and organizational discourses are embedded in the material objects like signs, contracts, invoices and specification notes that organizations produce. Not only does the use of "organizational objects" or texts constitute a form of strategic practice that materializes the discourse but at the same time these objects have the power to constitute

human activities both within the organization and among its key constituencies such as contractors and customers (e.g. Groleau & Demers, 2016). The image of the ventriloquist has been used to account for this idea that material objects can speak for human decisions and human decisions can express material objects' agency (Cooren, 2010, 2015):

> *If the ventriloquist can be seen as the one who makes the dummy or figure do or say things, then the dummy can also be seen, by this very activity, to make the ventriloquist do or say things.* (Caronia & Cooren, 2014: 45).

This metaphor captures how people can speak through objects but also how objects can make people say things (Cooren, 2015) and how "matters of concern not only express themselves but also dictate how people should proceed in a given situation" (Cooren, 2015: 479). Thus, informational websites and invoices can be considered as two forms of strategic practice: on the one hand, these objects embody discourses that direct strategic intent but then, on the other hand, these objects are intrinsic to the strategic engagement between the organization and its constituencies. This engagement constitutes the organization (as energy supply company), by defining its relationship with its consumers at the organization-consumer interface. Thus, the websites and invoices are the site of collaborative action. Their presentation to the customer (e.g., publishing on the website) combined with the customer's act of reading them gives these texts agency (e.g., Groleau & Demers, 2016).

Scholars working from the CCO perspective recognize the agentic capacities of texts and material objects and that they are situated in particular discursive and relational situations (Mills & Cooren, 2018). For instance, hygiene rules materialize healthy practice discourse in hospitals (Caronia & Cooren, 2014), the rituals during weekly meetings of non-governmental organization staff ""make present" abstract representations of organizational power and value in ways that convey authority" (Koschmann & McDonald, 2015: 229) and the mundane tools created by a middle manager in a bank materialize the company's global strategy in a way that is consistent with the manager's priorities and position (Arnaud, et al., 2016).

THE CO-CONSTRUCTIVE INFLUENCE OF STRATEGIC TEXT

Concrete texts are signs and symbols organized in a permanent form, such as a manager's discourse or a technical document, while figurative texts are abstract representations of practices or organizations (Kuhn, 2008: 1234). Drawing on this distinction, in this paper we are using "text" to mean "coherent, understandable piece of language (...) composed of many layers that correspond to the simultaneously ongoing occasions of communication that collectively realize organization" (Taylor & Van Every, 2000: 37). Indeed, an energy company's texts can be conceptualized as "communicatively constituted performatives" (Wright, 2016: 147). While strategic texts serving the strategy of an organization were examined in research by Vaara, Sorsa and Pälli (2010), few studies have focused on the performative effects of "mundane objects" (Arnaud, et al., 2016). We argue that not only do strategy texts have "force potential" (Fairclough, 1992) and "textual agency" (Cooren, 2004), but that mundane texts or routine objects also have such capacities through the norms, beliefs and symbolic representations they provide.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) can be broadly defined as "the cross-functional integration of processes, people, operations, and

marketing capabilities that is enabled through information technology and applications" (Payne & Frow, 2005: 168). The textual agency of the materials involved in CRM is manifested in the exchanges they allow between the customers and organizations. These two-way exchanges constitute a form of strategic practice that relies on mundane tools (Arnaud, et al., 2016) such as invoices, bills and letters and, Internet interfaces as mentioned previously. When read by the consumer, the energy company and the consumer collaborate "to produce a collectively negotiated interpretation of the world" (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, p. 40).

The acts of reading and then translating the reading into behaviors are collaborative acts between not two but three agents: those engaged in CRM (the writers), the customer (reader) and the text. We should not lose sight of the fact that mundane organizational tools can have their own agency (Cooren, 2004) that is independent of the company's strategic intent. They do not merely act on behalf of humans. They perform other roles such as routinely (re)confirming the relationship between energy supply company and customer. This means that the mundane tools produced by CRM provide an interesting focus for researchers seeking to "examine concrete and figurative texts at the point of contact with other firms and stakeholder groups", as recommended by Kuhn (2008: 1243), and appreciate how, their exchange is not only an example of strategic practice but also collective action.

COLLECTIVE ACTION

Collective action was a theory first proposed by Marcus Olson (1965). It refers to the coordinated action of people in groups who share common goals. As such, its focus is at the group or organizational level and its original conception reflects a time when face-to-face environments prevailed in groups and organizations. Digital media have changed the environment in which collective action occurs, providing more opportunity for individuals to choose how they collaborate with others (Bimber, Flanagin & Stohl, 2012). Bimber, et al., (2012) note:

> *organizations matter less than they once did, because people enjoy more agency to shape their experiences of collective action and of the organizations themselves. This agency arises from the structure and ubiquity of the media themselves—from the ways these break down boundaries and create choices* (Bimber, et al., 2012: 12-13).

Organizations relationships with their customers have radically changed as the ways of communicating have diversified to embrace new digital platforms. Consumers can choose to take collaborative action rallying support or critical evaluation of organizations. Similarly, groups and organizations can use digital platforms to create communities of common interest around products, services or ways of thinking with or without a sense of shared group membership (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh, 2015).

This is happening at a time when "energy literacy" is increasingly seen as a priority in both industrialized and developing countries (Cotton, Miller, Winter, Bailey & Sterling, 2016) but there is a persistent discrepancy between consumers' reported knowledge, values, attitudes and intentions and their household energy consumption (Frederiks, Stenner & Hobman, 2015). These authors suggest this is because energy consumers are not particularly rational decision-makers. This means that energy supply companies' efforts to mobilize collaborative action on energy conservation by providing more in-depth information about household consumption may have limited success. Bolsen, Druckman and Cook (2014), however, found

in a USA study that when communication with consumers emphasizes both individual responsibility and collective environmental benefits then collective action is stimulated.

METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative instructional case study (Yin, 2009) we were interested in explicating how the exchange of texts constitutes the energy company-consumer interface. In particular, we were interested in identifying the energy discourses that the most significant energy company in the French energy sector promulgates through its CRM texts, how consumers make sense of and act in response to this strategic use of semiotic and material artifacts and how, in the process of engagement, these parties and the texts communicatively constitute the company-consumer interface. We therefore sought to understand the agency of invoices (i.e. bills), websites and other texts that the CRM team members exchange with consumers and the individual customer's sense of and response to these artifacts. The questions we sought to answer were:

RQ1: What kinds of energy discourses are promulgated through CRM texts?

RQ2: How do CRM texts shape customers' energy discourses and reported consumption practices and constitute the company-consumer relationship?

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS.

To answer the research questions, we were guided by Yin's (2009) recommendations for case study designs that address "how" research questions. He defines a study case as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (Yin, 2009: 18). Yin (2009) lists five rationales for single-case studies: 1) a critical case for testing a theory; 2) a unique case; 3) a representative case; 4) a revelatory case; 5) a longitudinal case

A case study approach was judged to be the most appropriate method to explore the collaborative action that constitutes the company-consumer interface as very little is known about this interface, especially, since new European and energy supplier discourses have emerged. In particular, little is known about how mundane texts such as invoices exchanged at this interface promulgate these new discourses or how this strategy practice gets interpreted and contributes to consumers' practices. Our case therefore spans rationales 2 and 4. As we shall see, its findings provide insights into the way strategy plays out in practice and so have practical implications for energy companies' strategy practices. For this reason, we consider the case can be described as instructive.

Data were collected from three sources in order to look at the energy company-consumer interface from three contributing parties' perspectives:

1. The texts detailing the EU directive on energy consumption and energy company employees' accounts of how this was translated into strategic intent and a communication strategy;
2. The texts the energy supply companies produced through their CRM to engage with consumers;
3. Consumers' accounts of their sensemaking as they engaged with energy supply company texts and their associated energy consumption behaviors.

The textual data from these sources allowed the collaborative action constituting the company-consumer interface to be revealed.

Analyzing CRM documents

French energy policy over the past few decades has been characterized by a centralized, nation-based approach with strong government involvement. Originally there was a single energy supplier in France, France-EDF-GDF, which delivered all electricity and gas. This historical centralized context has changed dramatically in recent years, driven by two main forces: the introduction of competition into the electricity and natural gas sectors, and the growing internationalization of the energy sector in Europe as it moves towards a single market. France's energy market has now largely aligned itself with European laws requiring deregulation: since 2004 the business market (small and large) has been opened up and since July 2007 the mass market (residential customers) has been opened up. However, the supply of electricity has remained largely the responsibility of one company. In 2000 EDF became an autonomous (i.e. non-state owned) entity yet, somewhat curiously given the availability of other suppliers, relatively few consumers have switched from this original state provider to any of the other choices. In March 2012, EDF was still the major player, delivering energy to 94% of French consumers. By 2016, EDF still controlled 79% of the electricity market (see table 1) despite there now being four energy companies in the market. This means the discourses embodied in the company's CRM documents continue to be widely promulgated and these documents remain a hugely influential form of strategy practice at the company-consumer interface.

The invoices that customers receive each month provide an abundance of information. This information relates not only to the customer's consumption of energy, but also to regulations, corporate information, and details about customer service. This information is provided in a variety of forms, including written text, charts, graphs, drawings, icons, symbols, and numbers. To answer the first research question, one invoice and one information letter, when available, were collected from each of the four companies highlighted in **bold** in the following table. Additional Internet material, such as Internet pages of EDF customers' accounts, was collected.

Name	Date of creation	Country of origin	Market share
EDF	**1946**	**France**	**79 %**
Engie	**1946**	**France**	**6 %**
Alpiq	2009	Switzerland	3 %
E.ON	2000	Germany	3 %
Enel	1962	Italy	3 %
Vattenfall	1909	Sweden	2 %
Direct Energie	**2003**	**France**	**2 %**
Enercoop	**2005**	**France**	**<0.2%**

Table 1 - The French market of electricity supply
Source: Vottero & Dessimond (2016) and the suppliers' data

A semiotic analysis of the set of representative invoices and information letters sent to customers of the four main energy suppliers in France (EDF, GDF-Suez which became Engie in 2015, Enercoop, Poweo which became Direct Energie in 2013) was conducted. These CRM

documents were analyzed, paying particular attention to the content, topics, meanings, forms, styles, actions, and interactions described. This approach is consistent with the method endorsed by van Dijk (2001). What was found was that even though the information in these documents had an innocent appearance, when analyzed individually and in combination, they actually communicate a particular set of values.

Conducting and analyzing in-depth interviews

To understand the way the CRM strategy plays out in practice across the energy company-consumer interface requires more than simply examining the texts exchanged. It requires investigating how these texts are consumed in practice by consumers and the ways in which they exert strategic agency. This is an important point. We cannot infer strategic agency from the energy supply company's strategic texts alone. It is only by examining accounts of consumers' interpretations and behavioral changes that the process of collaborative action and textual agency can be explored.

> *It is this consumption that ultimately determines whether the 'force potential' of a text will be realized (Fairclough, 1992: 82), that is, what the text will accomplish socially: whether and to which extent the textual agency of the strategic text will be actualized, whether it will have performative effects, whether and how it will affect power relations and whether it will reproduce or transform ideological assumptions* (Vaara, Sorsa & Pälli, 2010: 689).

To gather accounts of the agency that the discourses exerted on the energy consumption practices, 26 in-depth interviews, and a focus group including seven further interviews with middle-class[2] energy consumers living in the Paris metropolitan area were conducted (see Tables 2 and 3). The criteria used to identify the customers to be interviewed controlled for income, but not for age, occupation, gender, household composition, source of heating, ownership, type of housing or geographic location.

The participant selection process had two stages. In the first round, a convenience sample of ten persons from personal and professional networks was interviewed. None had participated previously in any interviews or studies with EDF. For the second round of interviews, we adjusted the criteria, in a way that is consistent with the notion of "theoretical sampling", as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967), in order to include customers with a variety of backgrounds. The participants in the second round of interviews were members of the personal and professional networks of the participants in the first round. Thus, the second round of interviews were the product of a 'snowball' sampling technique – sometimes called chain sampling or chain-referral sampling. This technique is widely used in qualitative research across the social sciences (Noy, 2008) but particularly in sociological research (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981), when recruiting participants is difficult (e.g., when participants belong to a hidden population). The sampling approach involves identifying an initial pool of participants who meet a defined set of eligibility criteria. This sample then recruits subsequent participants who meet the same criteria. This non-probability sampling technique was chosen to take advantage of the social networks (Noy, 2008) of the first participants and ensured that a middle-class sample emerged.

We chose to constitute a middle-class sample for two main reasons.

2. For purposes of this research, "middle-class" is defined as a household with at least two adults having a combined monthly income of 2000-5500 Euros. EDF uses the same standard for identifying "middle-class" customers.

First, we believed a representative sample was not realistically achievable as we could not develop a profile of the French population of electricity consumers. However, a middle class Parisian sample was achievable. Secondly, 50% of the French population is regarded as middle-class[3].

3. Source: Observatoire des Inégalités, (2014)

Name	Age	Family status	Heating system	Type of accommodation	Own the house/ apartment	Residence place	No. of paid employment
Sophie	30	Non-marital relationship	Gas	Apartment	No	Suburb	2
Frédérique	32	Non-marital relationship	Gas	Apartment	No	Suburb	2
Anthony	30	Single	Electricity	Apartment	Yes	Suburb	1
Cécile.	37	Non-marital relationship, one child	Gas	Apartment	No	Suburb	1
Célia.	37	Single	Electricity	Apartment	Yes	Paris	1
Françoise	53	Single	Gas	House	Yes	Suburb	1
Nikita	30	Married	Gas	Apartment	Yes	Suburb	2
Audrey	30	Married	Gas	Apartment	Yes	Suburb	2
Cynthia	24	Married, 1 child	Collective	Apartment	No	Suburb	2
Jean-Marie	70	Married, 2 children	Electricity	House	Yes	Suburb	2 (retired)
Marie-Claire	65	Married, 2 children	Electricity	House	Yes	Suburb	2 (retired)
Sandra	45	Non-marital relationship, 2 children	Gas	Apartment	Yes	Suburb	1
Jean-Louis	60	Married, 1 child	Gas	Apartment	Yes	Suburb	1 (retired)
Josette	60	Married, 1 child	Gas	Apartment	Yes	Suburb	1 (retired)
Sarah	85	Single, 1 child	Electricity	House	Yes	Suburb	1
François	64	Divorced, 2 children	Gas	Apartment	Yes	Suburb	1 (retired)
Valérie	39	Married, 2 children	Oil and wood	House	Yes	Suburb	2
Béatrice	60	Non-marital relationship	Electricity	House	Yes	Suburb	2 (1 unemployed)
Dorothée	55	Non-marital relationship	Electricity	House	Yes	Suburb	2 (1 unemployed)
Nils	52	Married, 1 child	Electricity	Apartment	Yes	Paris	2
Isabella	42	Divorced, 2 children	Gas	Apartment	No	Suburb	1
Julia	25	Non-marital relationship	Electricity	Apartment	Yes	Paris	1
Sylvia	26	Non-marital relationship	Collective	Apartment	No	Suburb	0
Fanny	52	Married	Collective	Apartment	No	Suburb	2
Marianne	40	Married, 2 children	Collective	Apartment	No	Suburb	2
Guy	40	Married, 2 children	Collective	Apartment	No	Suburb	2

Table 2 - Consumer Sample

Name	Age	Occupation	Type of heating	Residence place
Anna	39		Gas	Paris
Jean	60		Gas	Paris
Barbara	55		Electricity	Paris
Michel	52		Gas	Paris
Claude	42		Gas	Suburb
Patrick	25		Electricity	Paris
Brigitte	26		Gas	Paris

Table 3 - Focus Group Sample

Each in-depth interview lasted between one and two hours and was conducted in the customer's home. The approach invited participants to share their interpretations of the texts they exchanged with their energy supplier. The interviewer also invited participants to talk about their domestic consumption practices and how these were affected by their interpretations of the texts exchanged with their supplier. As recommended by Kvale (2007), the interviewer used both professional distance and empathy when necessary (e.g., when signs of ignorance and associated feelings of guilt or shame were expressed) in the course of the interviews about energy consumption practices. In-depth qualitative interviews were chosen because of the facility they offer to seek clarification and to pursue emergent themes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As Rubin and Rubin (2012) observe,

> *If what you need to find out cannot be answered simply or briefly, if you anticipate that you may need to ask people to explain their answers or give examples or describe their experiences, then you rely on in-depth interviews* […]. (Rubin and Rubin, 2012, chapter 1: 3)

Semi-structured in-depth interviews also allow the researcher to respond to non-verbal cues and reframe questions in ways that respond to participants' understanding and put them at ease (Barriball & While, 1994). Each interview was conducted using a guide that we developed on the basis of research done in Norway by the University of Oslo/CICERO on energy consumption. In developing the question guide, we identified four different areas of inquiry:

(1) Invoices, information letters and contracts;
(2) General sources of information about energy issues;
(3) The individual customer's particular energy usage habits and the degree to which the individual customer values efforts to reduce energy consumption;
(4) The customer's personal knowledge about energy production and consumption and the natural environment.

The interviews were conducted in a conversational manner that allowed the customer to redirect the conversation towards topics of particular concern to them. Even though each customer was asked to respond to all of the questions, the order in which these questions were answered varied and the subsequent discussion ensured each interview

was unique. Interviews were recorded digitally and notes made to record nonverbal responses. In order to analyze the interviews systematically and focus closely on the nature of the language used the interviews were transcribed. In preparing the interview transcripts, special care was taken to include all verbal and non-verbal communication, including signs, laughs, silences, and intonations so a very comprehensive record was achieved.

We selected the analytical method that we considered to be most useful after conducting the first four interviews. This is an appropriate strategy when using an inductive approach (Tracy, 2013) that involves developing codes and analytical categories suggested by the data. We examined all of the responses for each question, looking specifically at word choice (lexicology) as well as recurring themes of concern to the customers (affordability, political attitudes, environment, health and comfort issues). Not only were the responses to each question individually evaluated, the interviews as a whole were examined in order to determine the chronology of when, and in response to which question, the customers addressed the recurring themes.

Understanding the institutional and social frames within the data

Since the mid-2000s, EDF and its competitors in France, have been fully involved in reducing energy consumption by being major players in the implementation of European directives. Notably, the Directive on Energy Efficiency 12/27/UE, enacted in December 2012, establishes a European framework for EU members to meet the targets on 20% energy savings[4] for 2020. It focuses on energy metering for consumers, among other measures. Detailed and frequent invoicing is described as a way for European inhabitants to achieve energy savings. Besides, since 2005[5], France has implemented a white certificate program though which energy suppliers have to testify that their customers have achieved energy savings. Otherwise, they can buy such certificates from other parties that have achieved energy savings.

From this perspective, EDF, together with the European Energy Efficiency Research Centre, has sponsored this research. For this reason, the first author was able to be part of EDF's research and development social science department for two years, collecting the discourses they produce as well as tapping into their main ideological framework. The researcher was able to engage in both observations and participant observations as well as both formal and informal interviews with co-workers. She was able to observe how the EU's directive on energy consumption was interpreted, how decisions were being made about how to communicate with consumers and then see the decisions enacted in the texts produced. While this paper is focusing on how these routine strategic texts played out in practice across the company-consumer interface between EDF and a group of middle-class consumers, it draws on the knowledge and sensitivities gained in this phase of the research in order to set the scene for the analysis it reports.

Our approach is consistent with Vaara, et al., (2010) who recommend a close textual analysis of discourses to shed light on the linguistic features of a text. Drawing from Fairclough (1995), Vaara, et al., (2010) specifically suggest that discourses should be analyzed at three

4. Article 13 of the 2009 EU Energy Directive, reinforced by articles 10, 11, 12 of the 2012 Directive

5. This law is know as *Loi de Programmation fixant les Orientations de la Politique Energétique*

levels: 1) micro-level through material texts; 2) meso-level through discursive practices on the interpretation of the above-mentioned texts; and finally 3) macro-level through the social practice itself and its situational and institutional context. These three analytical levels are captured in Figure 1 representing the design of our case study, embedded in a macro level (EU energy policies), a meso-level (energy suppliers' discourses) and a micro level (customers' discourses on energy consumption and reported practices)

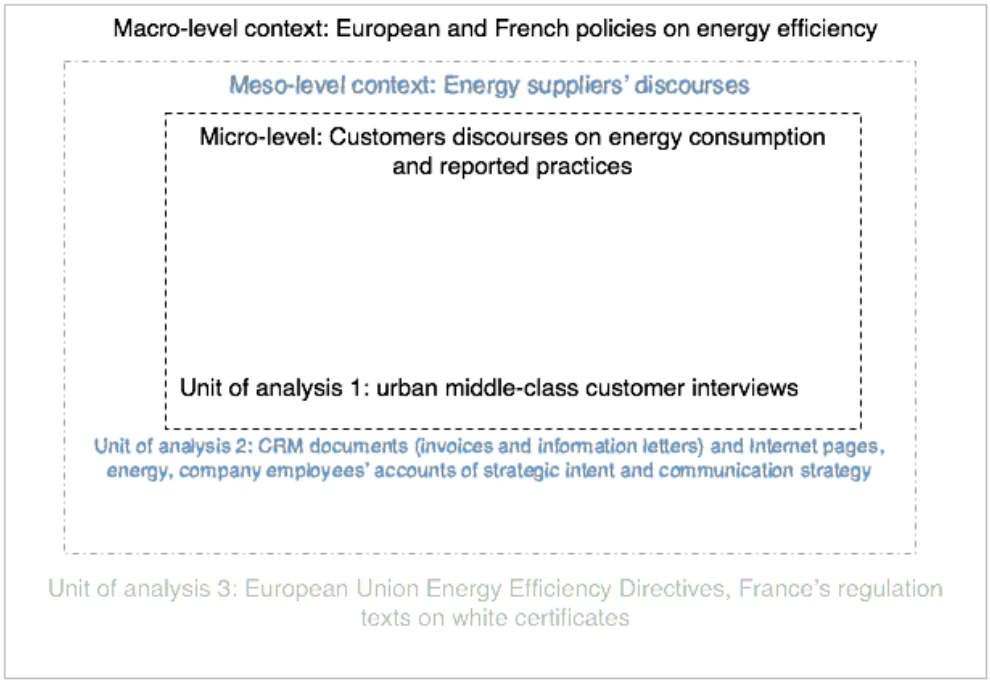


Figure 1 - Case study design

RESULTS

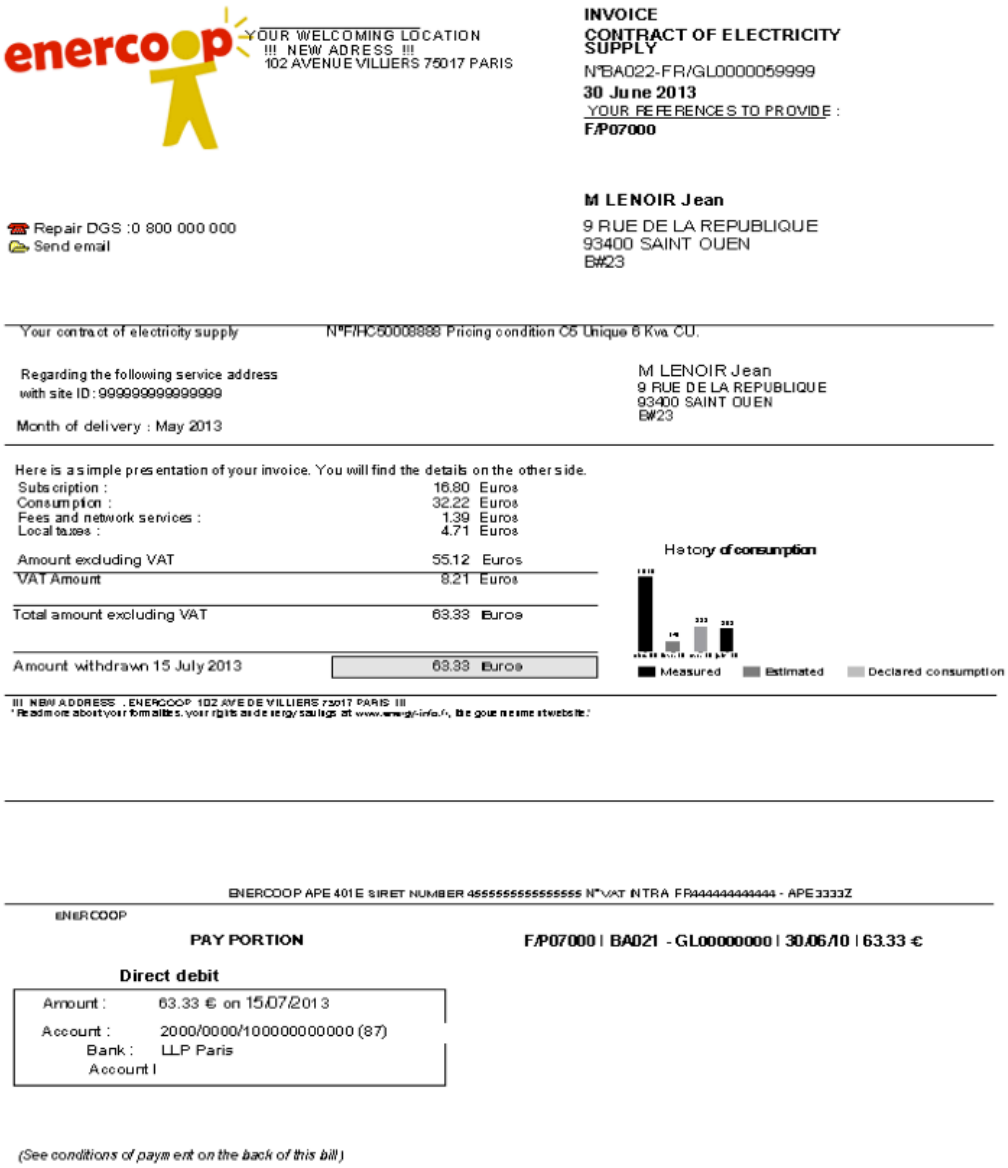
DISCIPLINING CONSUMERS' DISCURSIVE PRACTICES USING A PHATIC COMMUNICATION

One of the most significant results of this study is that, the documents, including the invoice, have a disciplining function on the individuals' practices. They have less of an informative function than a "phatic" (or contact) one (Jakobson, 1963) as they constitute a kind of "gate" through which customers are encouraged to contact the energy supplier. This fact is underscored by the importance of the parts of all of the documents (i.e. the bills and information letters) dedicated to providing contact information.

All invoices are divided into three to four main sections: one large section dedicated to the contact information (customer number, invoice number, hot line number and email, etc.), one section dedicated to energy consumption (energy consumption chart, consumption indexes and price), one section dedicated to the description of the taxes involved and one possible section dedicated to payment if not automatically programmed (see Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5). In the "contact" sections, the customer is

addressed in the first (example “My contract”) or second person (example “Your contract”) and a sense of personal relationship is cultivated.

However, as we looked more closely, we observed that the tone of the documents was internally inconsistent in how the customer is addressed. In the sections that explain the customer’s energy consumption, the tone of the document becomes very formal and distant, and the customer is referred to in the third person as the “contract holder” or “account holder.” In reference to billing, the documents threaten customers if they do not respect payment deadlines, and imperative language is frequently used to communicate the importance of the customer’s cooperation. In general, the documents employ icons to signal administrative actions, such as turning the page or contacting customer service.



enercoop

YOUR WELCOMING LOCATION
!!! NEW ADRESS !!!
102 AVENUE VILLIERS 75017 PARIS

INVOICE
CONTRACT OF ELECTRICITY SUPPLY
N°BA022-FR/GL0000059999
30 June 2013
YOUR REFERENCES TO PROVIDE :
F/P07000

Repair DGS :0 800 000 000
Send email

M LENOIR Jean
9 RUE DE LA REPUBLIQUE
93400 SAINT OUEN
BW23

Your contract of electricity supply N°F/HC60008888 Pricing condition C5 Unique 6 Kva CU.

Regarding the following service address
with site ID : 999999999999999
Month of delivery : May 2013

M LENOIR Jean
9 RUE DE LA REPUBLIQUE
93400 SAINT OUEN
BW23

Here is a simple presentation of your invoice. You will find the details on the other side.

Subscription :	16.80 Euros
Consumption :	32.22 Euros
Fees and network services :	1.39 Euros
Local taxes :	4.71 Euros
Amount excluding VAT	55.12 Euros
VAT Amount	8.21 Euros
Total amount excluding VAT	63.33 Euros
Amount withdrawn 15 July 2013	63.33 Euros

History of consumption

Measured Estimated Declared consumption

!!! NEW ADDRESS : ENERCOOP 102 AVE DE VILLIERS 75017 PARIS !!!
* Read more about your formalities, your rights and energy savings at www.energy-info.fr, the government website.

ENERCOOP APE 401E SIRET NUMBER 455555555555555 N°VAT INTRA FR444444444444 - APE3333Z

ENERCOOP

PAY PORTION **F/P07000 | BA021 - GL00000000 | 30/06/10 | 63.33 €**

Direct debit

Amount : 63.33 € on 15/07/2013
Account : 2000/0000/100000000000 (87)
Bank : LLP Paris
Account I

(See conditions of payment on the back of this bill)

Facture : N°BA021-FR/GL0000000 BA021 - F/P07000 Page 2
M LENOIR Jean 9 RUE DE LA REPUBLIQUE SAINT OUEN - B#23 -

Electricty Contract on PCS 9999999999999 (9 RUE DE LA REPUBLIQUE - 94300SAINT OUEN - #B23 -)

METER	New Index	Previous Index	Coef. Lecture	Consumption
N°179 (Electronic meter)	Declared	Declared		(kWh)
Consumption	63475	63345	1	130
Consumption	63653	63475	1	178

Subscription 16.80 €HT	Chosen base	Unit price €	Consumption € excl.VAT	Subscription € excl. VAT	Loc. Tx Yes/No	VAT %
From 01/07/2013 to 31/08/2013						
Subscription	2 months	100.78 /year		16.80	Yes	5.50

Consumption 32.22 €HT	Chosen base	Unit price €	Consumption € excl. VAT	Subscription € excl. VAT	Loc. Tx Yes/No	VAT %
From 13/04/2013 to 07/05/2013						
Consumption	130 kWh	0.1046 /kWh	13.60		Yes	19.60
Du 08/05/2010 au 18/06/2010						
Consumption	178 kWh	0.1046 /kWh	18.62		Yes	19.60

Fees and network services 1.39 €HT	Chosen base	Unit price €	Consumption € excl. VAT	Subscription € excl. VAT	Loc. Tx Yes/No	VAT %
From 07/05/2013 to 07/05/2013						
Contribution to Electricity Public Service 130		0.0045	Non			
Du 07/05/2010 au 18/06/2010						
Contribution to Electricity Public Service	178	0.0045	0.80		Non	19.60

Taxes 4,71 €HT	Base € excl. VAT	Rate %	Amount € excl. VAT	VAT %
City tax	13.44	8.00	1.08	5.50
County Tax	13.44	4.00	0.54	5.50
City tax	25.78	8.00	2.06	19.60
County Tax	25.78	4.00	1.03	19.60

VAT details	VAT rate	Amount tax excl.	VAT Amount	Total cost
	5.50 %	18.42	1.01	19.43
	19.60 %	36.70	7.20	43.90

Consumption class	Reduced P.	P
Power capacity (kVA)	6	6
Reduced Power rate	1.00	
Puissance atteinte (kVA)		

!!! NB: CHANGE OF ADDRESS : ENERCOOP 102 AVENUE VILLIERS 75017 PARIS !!!

INVOICE prepared on meter data produced by Electricité Réseau Distribution France (bimonthly estimations + 2 yearly meter readings) and/or declared by yourself. Bimonthly Enercoop invoicing (excluding monthly payments). If you haven't chosen monthly direct debit payment, please, send your payment to ENERCOOP : Enercoop, 102 Avenue de Villiers 75017 Paris.
Please note: any delays in payment will entail financial penalties according to conditions of sales.

For consumption class lower than 36 KVA, local taxes are applied on 80% of tax-excluded subscription and consumption amounts.
For higher powers, local taxes are applied on 30% of these tax-excluded amounts.

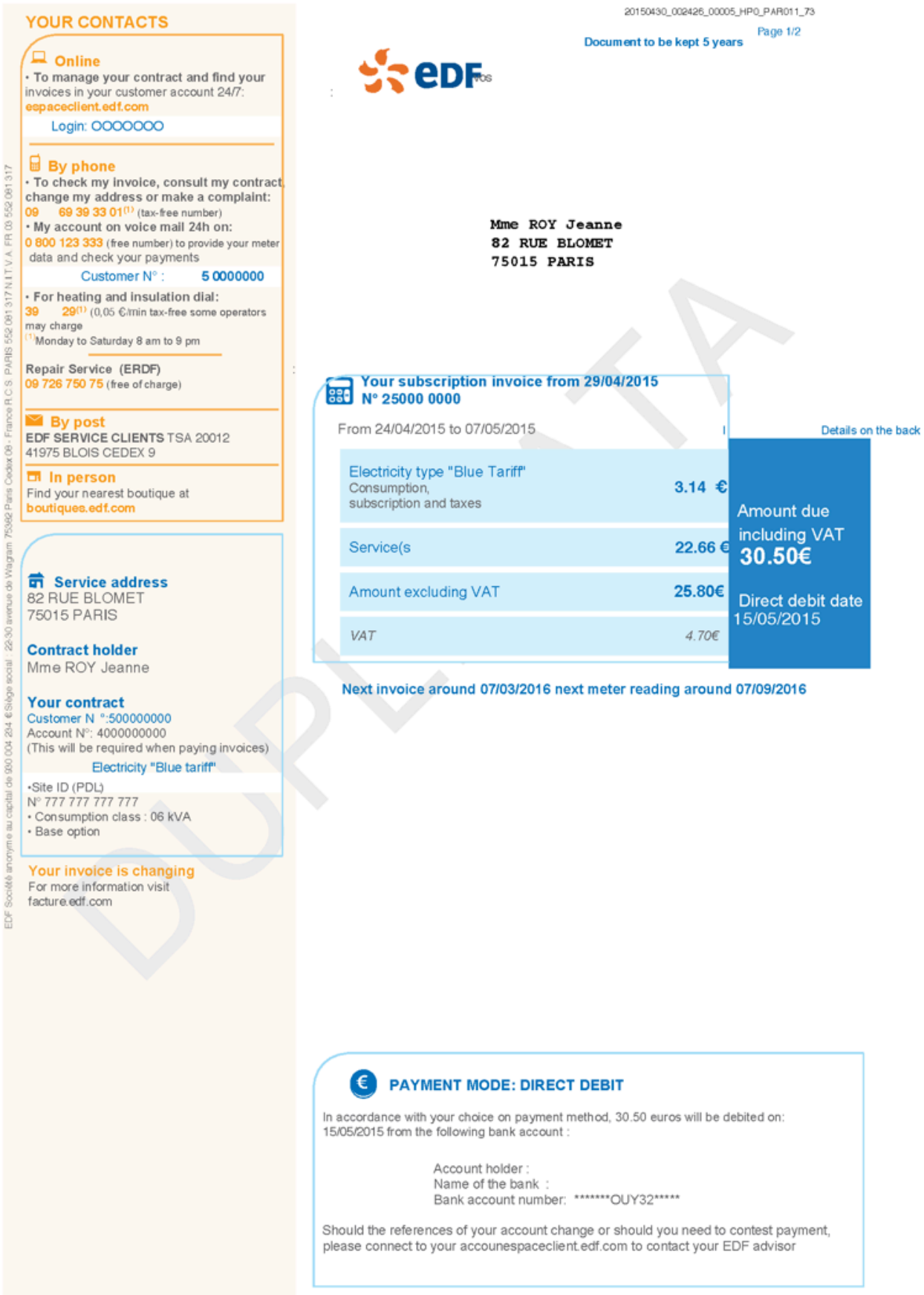
ENERGY TYPE: 100% RENEWABLE (Hydraulic, Wind, Photovoltaic panels, Biogas). Non-regulated offer.

CUSTOMER SERVICE: Phone : 0 811 093 099 (Free number) - Telecopy : 01 78 94 83 99
Monday to Friday 09:30 - 13:00 14:00 - 18:30
service-client@enercoop.fr

ENERCOOP : 102 AVENUE DE VILLIERS 75017 PARIS, Public Limited company with variable share capital
Phone : 0 811 093 099 (Free number) - Telecopy: 01 78 94 83 99
contact@enercoop.fr

INFORMATION : ENERCOOP TAX DECLARATION
REFER TO COMPLETED FORM 2042C
PARAGRAPH 7 SECTION CF : Subscription to the capital small and medium-sized businesses

Figure 2 - Enercoop energy bill
(translated with original layout and fake name, addresses and references)



YOUR CONTACTS

Online
• To manage your contract and find your invoices in your customer account 24/7:
espaceclient.edf.com
Login: OOOOOOO

By phone
• To check my invoice, consult my contract, change my address or make a complaint:
09 69 39 33 01(1) (tax-free number)
• My account on voice mail 24h on:
0 800 123 333 (free number) to provide your meter data and check your payments
Customer N° : 5 0000000
• For heating and insulation dial:
39 29(1) (0,05 €/min tax-free some operators may charge
(1)Monday to Saturday 8 am to 9 pm

Repair Service (ERDF)
09 726 750 75 (free of charge)

By post
EDF SERVICE CLIENTS TSA 20012
41975 BLOIS CEDEX 9

In person
Find your nearest boutique at
boutiques.edf.com

Service address
82 RUE BLOMET
75015 PARIS

Contract holder
Mme ROY Jeanne

Your contract
Customer N °:500000000
Account N°: 4000000000
(This will be required when paying invoices)
Electricity "Blue tariff"
•Site ID (PDL)
N° 777 777 777 777
• Consumption class : 06 kVA
• Base option

Your invoice is changing
For more information visit
facture.edf.com

EDF Société anonyme au capital de 900 004 234 € Siège social : 22-30 avenue de Wagram 75382 Paris Cedex 08 - France R.C.S. PARIS 552 081 317 N.I.T V.A. FR 05 552 081 317

20150430_002426_00005_HP0_PAR011_73
Page 1/2
Document to be kept 5 years

Mme ROY Jeanne
82 RUE BLOMET
75015 PARIS

Your subscription invoice from 29/04/2015
N° 25000 0000

From 24/04/2015 to 07/05/2015

Details on the back

Electricity type "Blue Tariff" Consumption, subscription and taxes	3.14 €
Service(s	22.66 €
Amount excluding VAT	25.80€
VAT	*4.70€*

Amount due including VAT
30.50€

Direct debit date
15/05/2015

Next invoice around 07/03/2016 next meter reading around 07/09/2016

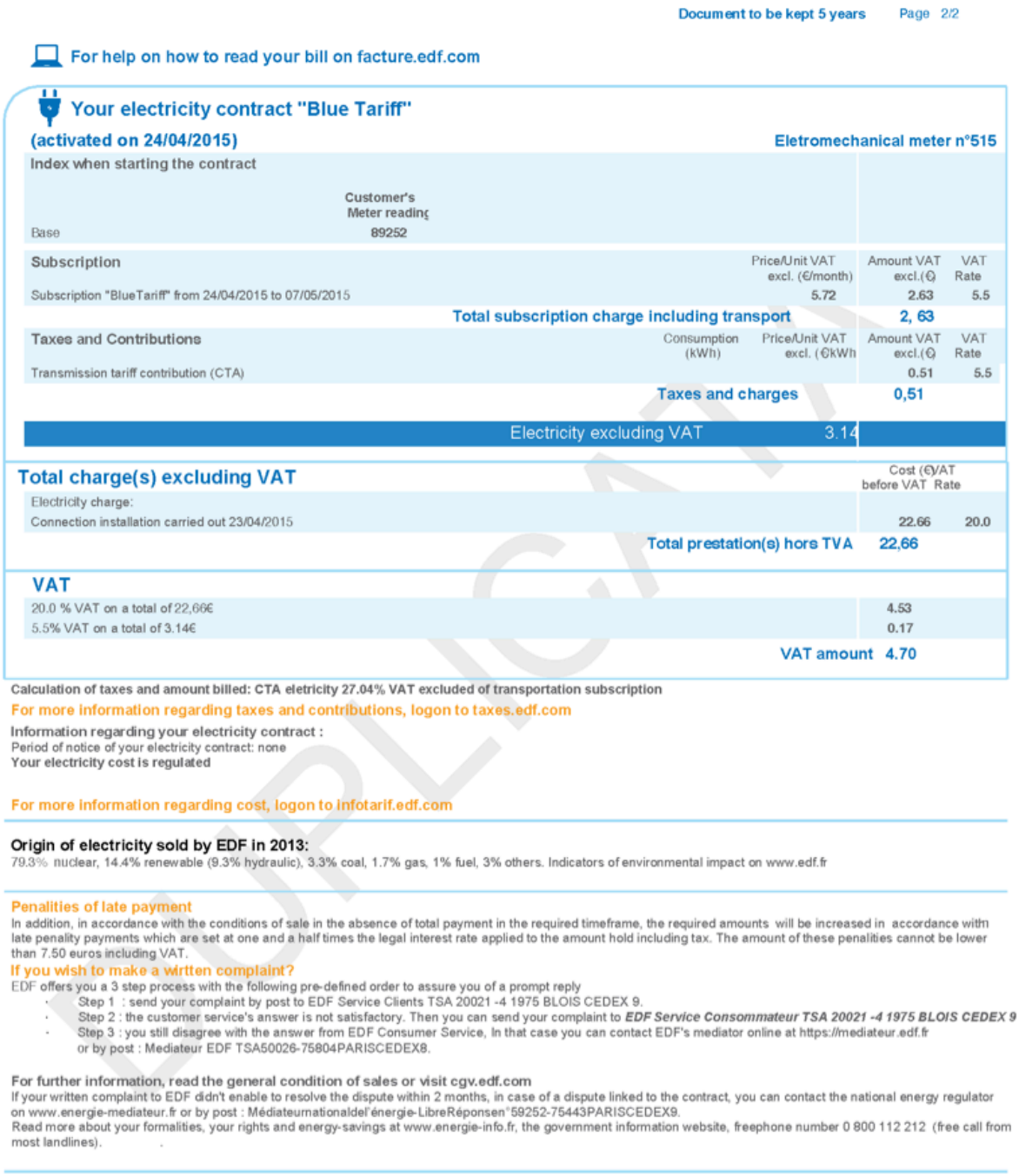
PAYMENT MODE: DIRECT DEBIT

In accordance with your choice on payment method, 30.50 euros will be debited on: 15/05/2015 from the following bank account :

Account holder :
Name of the bank :
Bank account number: *******OUY32*****

Should the references of your account change or should you need to contest payment, please connect to your accounespaceclient.edf.com to contact your EDF advisor

DUPLICATA



Document to be kept 5 years Page 2/2

For help on how to read your bill on facture.edf.com

Your electricity contract "Blue Tariff"

(activated on 24/04/2015) **Eletromechanical meter n°515**

Index when starting the contract

	Customer's Meter reading
Base	89252

Subscription	Price/Unit VAT excl. (€/month)	Amount VAT excl.(€)	VAT Rate
Subscription "BlueTariff" from 24/04/2015 to 07/05/2015	5.72	2.63	5.5
Total subscription charge including transport		**2, 63**	

Taxes and Contributions	Consumption (kWh)	Price/Unit VAT excl. (€kWh	Amount VAT excl.(€)	VAT Rate
Transmission tariff contribution (CTA)			0.51	5.5
Taxes and charges			**0,51**	

Electricity excluding VAT 3.14

Total charge(s) excluding VAT

	Cost (€)VAT before VAT	Rate
Electricity charge:		
Connection installation carried out 23/04/2015	22.66	20.0
Total prestation(s) hors TVA	**22,66**	

VAT

20.0 % VAT on a total of 22,66€	4.53
5.5% VAT on a total of 3.14€	0.17
VAT amount	**4.70**

Calculation of taxes and amount billed: CTA eletricity 27.04% VAT excluded of transportation subscription

For more information regarding taxes and contributions, logon to taxes.edf.com

Information regarding your electricity contract :
Period of notice of your electricity contract: none
Your electricity cost is regulated

For more information regarding cost, logon to infotarif.edf.com

Origin of electricity sold by EDF in 2013:
79.3% nuclear, 14.4% renewable (9.3% hydraulic), 3.3% coal, 1.7% gas, 1% fuel, 3% others. Indicators of environmental impact on www.edf.fr

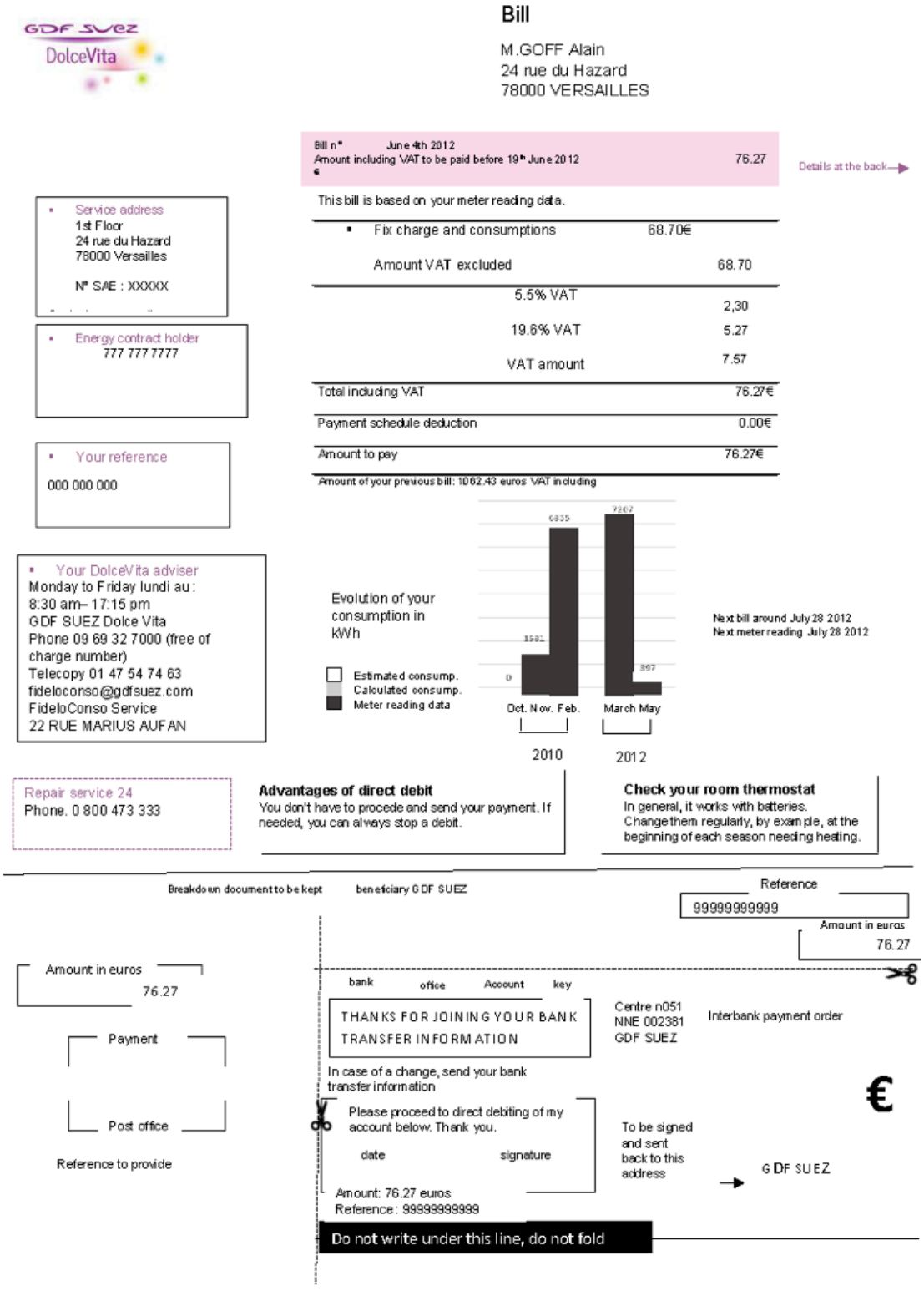
Penalities of late payment
In addition, in accordance with the conditions of sale in the absence of total payment in the required timeframe, the required amounts will be increased in accordance with late penality payments which are set at one and a half times the legal interest rate applied to the amount hold including tax. The amount of these penalities cannot be lower than 7.50 euros including VAT.

If you wish to make a written complaint?
EDF offers you a 3 step process with the following pre-defined order to assure you of a prompt reply

- Step 1 : send your complaint by post to EDF Service Clients TSA 20021 -4 1975 BLOIS CEDEX 9.
- Step 2 : the customer service's answer is not satisfactory. Then you can send your complaint to ***EDF Service Consommateur TSA 20021 -4 1975 BLOIS CEDEX 9***
- Step 3 : you still disagree with the answer from EDF Consumer Service, In that case you can contact EDF's mediator online at https://mediateur.edf.fr or by post : Mediateur EDF TSA50026-75804PARISCEDEX8.

For further information, read the general condition of sales or visit cgv.edf.com
If your written complaint to EDF didn't enable to resolve the dispute within 2 months, in case of a dispute linked to the contract, you can contact the national energy regulator on www.energie-mediateur.fr or by post : Médiateurnationaldel'énergie-LibreRéponsen°59252-75443PARISCEDEX9.
Read more about your formalities, your rights and energy-savings at www.energie-info.fr, the government information website, freephone number 0 800 112 212 (free call from most landlines).

Figure 3 - EDF energy bill- Back page
(translated with original layout and fake name, addresses and references)


GDF SUEZ
DolceVita
Bill
M.GOFF Alain
24 rue du Hazard
78000 VERSAILLES
Bill n° June 4th 2012
Amount including VAT to be paid before 19th June 2012 76.27
Details at the back
This bill is based on your meter reading data.
Fix charge and consumptions 68.70€
Amount VAT excluded 68.70
5.5% VAT 2,30
19.6% VAT 5.27
VAT amount 7.57
Total including VAT 76.27€
Payment schedule deduction 0.00€
Amount to pay 76.27€
Amount of your previous bill: 1062.43 euros VAT including
Service address
1st Floor
24 rue du Hazard
78000 Versailles
N° SAE : XXXXX
Energy contract holder
777 777 7777
Your reference
000 000 000
Your DolceVita adviser
Monday to Friday lundi au :
8:30 am– 17:15 pm
GDF SUEZ Dolce Vita
Phone 09 69 32 7000 (free of charge number)
Telecopy 01 47 54 74 63
fideloconso@gdfsuez.com
FideloConso Service
22 RUE MARIUS AUFAN
Evolution of your consumption in kWh
Estimated consump.
Calculated consump.
Meter reading data
Oct. Nov. Feb.
March May
2010
2012
Next bill around July 28 2012
Next meter reading July 28 2012
Repair service 24
Phone. 0 800 473 333
Advantages of direct debit
You don't have to procede and send your payment. If needed, you can always stop a debit.
Check your room thermostat
In general, it works with batteries. Change them regularly, by example, at the beginning of each season needing heating.
Breakdown document to be kept
beneficiary GDF SUEZ
Reference
99999999999
Amount in euros
76.27
Amount in euros
76.27
Payment
Post office
Reference to provide
bank office Account key
THANKS FOR JOINING YOUR BANK TRANSFER INFORMATION
Centre n051
NNE 002381
GDF SUEZ
Interbank payment order
In case of a change, send your bank transfer information
Please proceed to direct debiting of my account below. Thank you.
date signature
To be signed and sent back to this address
GDF SUEZ
Amount: 76.27 euros
Reference : 99999999999
Do not write under this line, do not fold

Your detailed bill

bill n°20023303530 of 4th June 2012

Document to be kept 5 years

	Meter Number	Previous index	New index	Consumpt. in m3	Consumpt. in kWh	Price/unit VAT excl. (€)	Amount (€)	VAT rate
Fixed charges and consumption	*Your regulated tariff: Tariff 3UR full comfort*							
Fixed charges								
From 31/03/12 to 30/05/12						238.80	39.80	5.5%
Consumption								
from 31/03/12 to 30/05/12	854-00078D45	65423	66020		597	0.0450	26.87	19.6%
Transmission tariff contribution						2.03		5.5%
TICGN*								
from 31/03/12 to 30/05/12					0	0.00119	0.00	19.6%
Services								
Itemised bill							Free	19.6%
Total amount in euros excluding VAT								68.70
Total with 5.5% VAT								2.30
Total with 19.6% VAT								5.27
Total including VAT in euros								76.27

Consumption details		*previous index*	*new index*	*consumption*
Hot water	*from 31st March to 30th May 2012 Meter n°XXX*	*25*	*27*	*Reading 2m3*
Heating	*from 31st March to 30th May 2012 Meter n°YYY*	*26088*	*26271*	*Reading 183kWh*

(for more details, refer to the technical appendix enclosed)

5.5% VAT % : applied to the fixed charge
19.6% VAT : applied to the consumption, services and local taxes
*TICGN : Domestic Tax on Natural Gas Consumption. 100% exempt
Conversion coefficient (in kWh/m3 of natural gas) : 14.00

Advance payment will not entitle you to a discount

- General information
  Consult all GDF SUEZ tariffs and prices on the website Dolce Vita http://wwwgdfsuez-dolcevita.fr.
  Any complaints can be sent to your customer service department. In case of a legal dispute, the procedure to follow is outlined in the General Conditons of Sale section of the website www.energie-info.fr
  For more information on energy, visit the website of the national energy regulator

- How to pay your bill
  Payment by cheque : pull off the Pay Stub along the dotted lines and send it signed and dated to the address indicated on the back. If the instruction « enclose an Account ID document » is given or if your bank details have changed, please enclose the required documents.

  For Direct Debit or for monthly payments, contact your customer service department.
  For payment by cheque please enclose the Pay Stub indicating the payment reference.
  For cash payments go to your nearest post office (with your Pay Stub)

Figure 4 - GDF-Suez energy bill
(reproduced and translated with original layout and fake name, addresses and references)

POWEO
Opérateur d'électricité et de gaz

YOUR INVOICE

Contact information

Your bill reference: XXXXXX
Your customer reference: YYYYYY
Billing date: 12nd September 2013
Your ID: 00000000

Mme LEROUX Alexandra
54 rue blanc
91940 Les Ulis

Your contacts

Repair 24/7
By your distirbution system operator
Electriciity : In case of a breakdown, of a technical problem or network problem.
Phone
Gas : In case of a gas leak, a network or meter problem
Phone :
CUSTOMER SERVICE
Phone :
(regular local call cost, excluding extra cost your operator may charge)
Opens Monday to Friday 9 am-6 pm,
Excluding public holidays..
E-mail : customerservice@poweo.com
Adress : TSA 34 173 – 77217 AVON CEDEX
poweo.com, for any information on our offers, tariffs and any explanation on your invoice.
energie-info.fr, the government information website. Read more about your formalities, your rights and energy savings..

Your contract (Non regulated tariff)

N°SID : 77777777777
N°-Meter type: 852 – EMC
Power capacity : 3 Kva
Energy type: BASE
Tariff code: CU

N°PCE : 1111111111111
N°-Meter type: 980 – mechanical
CAR : 5000 kWh
Profile : P011
Tariff zone: 1

Regulated tariff are changing : more details on the back

Your bill

Electricity excluding VAT	35.56€
Gas excluding VAT	28.64€
Other services excluding VAT	15.00€
Local axes and Contributions	6.02€
Total amount excluding VAT	
5.5% VAT on 19.59€ amount	1.08€
19.6% VAT on a 50,63€ amount	9,92€
Total amount due	**96,22€**

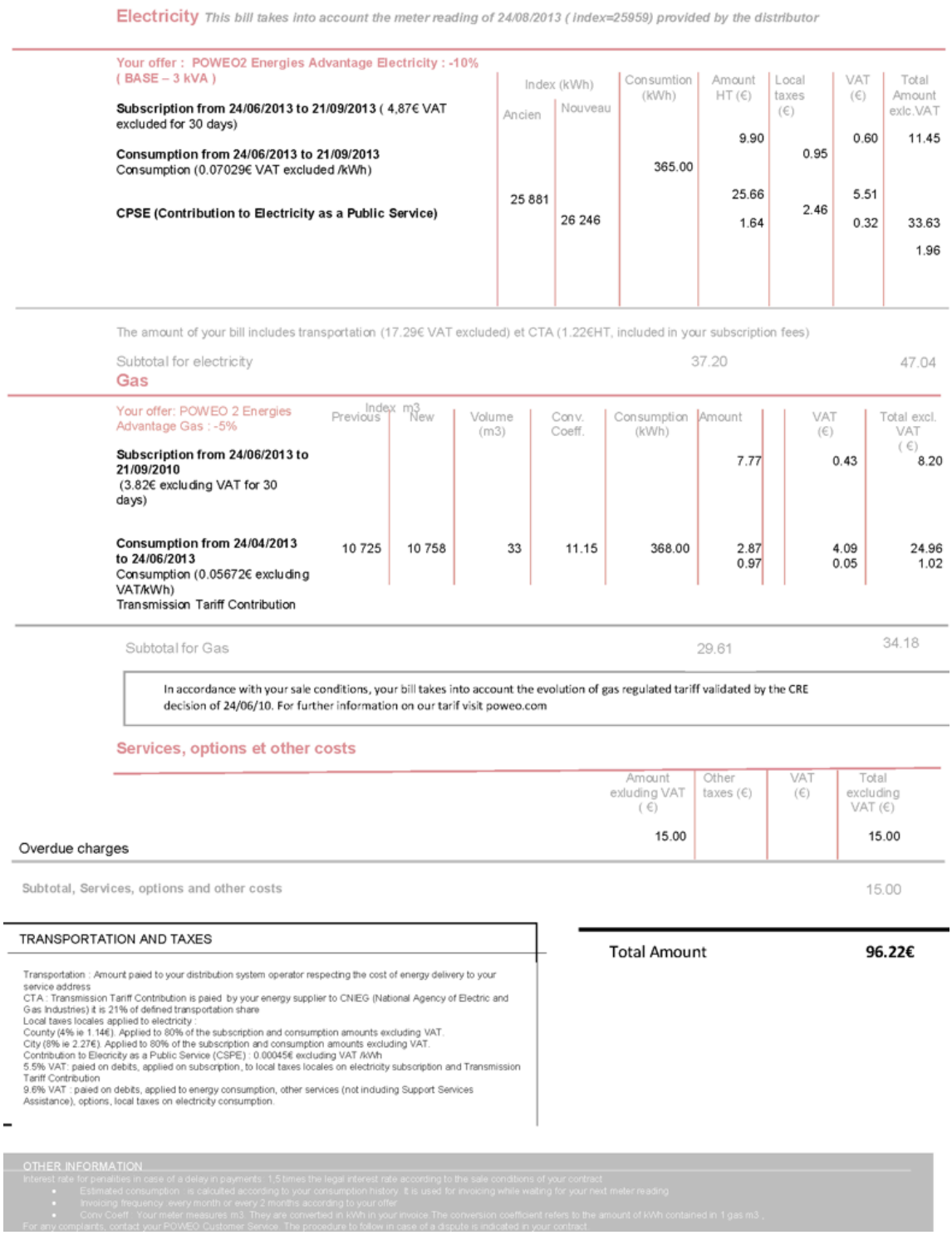
Consumption history (kWh)
Electricity Base

Gas

TOTAL AMOUNT DUE TO PAY * :

*Subject to proper collection of previous payments

With this invoice you are saving : 5. 05 euros compared to current regulated tariffs.
Saving based on billing period, on equal consumption and according to your contract characteristics



Electricity *This bill takes into account the meter reading of 24/08/2013 (index=25959) provided by the distributor*

Your offer : POWEO2 Energies Advantage Electricity : -10% (BASE – 3 kVA)	Index (kWh) Ancien	Index (kWh) Nouveau	Consumtion (kWh)	Amount HT (€)	Local taxes (€)	VAT (€)	Total Amount exlc.VAT
Subscription from 24/06/2013 to 21/09/2013 (4,87€ VAT excluded for 30 days)				9.90	0.95	0.60	11.45
Consumption from 24/06/2013 to 21/09/2013 Consumption (0.07029€ VAT excluded /kWh)	25 881	26 246	365.00	25.66	2.46	5.51	
CPSE (Contribution to Electricity as a Public Service)				1.64		0.32	33.63
							1.96

The amount of your bill includes transportation (17.29€ VAT excluded) et CTA (1.22€HT, included in your subscription fees)

Subtotal for electricity 37.20 47.04

Gas

Your offer: POWEO 2 Energies Advantage Gas : -5%	Index m3 Previous	Index m3 New	Volume (m3)	Conv. Coeff.	Consumption (kWh)	Amount	VAT (€)	Total excl. VAT (€)
Subscription from 24/06/2013 to 21/09/2010 (3.82€ excluding VAT for 30 days)						7.77	0.43	8.20
Consumption from 24/04/2013 to 24/06/2013 Consumption (0.05672€ excluding VAT/kWh)	10 725	10 758	33	11.15	368.00	2.87	4.09	24.96
Transmission Tariff Contribution						0.97	0.05	1.02

Subtotal for Gas 29.61 34.18

In accordance with your sale conditions, your bill takes into account the evolution of gas regulated tariff validated by the CRE decision of 24/06/10. For further information on our tarif visit poweo.com

Services, options et other costs

	Amount exluding VAT (€)	Other taxes (€)	VAT (€)	Total excluding VAT (€)
Overdue charges	15.00			15.00

Subtotal, Services, options and other costs 15.00

TRANSPORTATION AND TAXES

Transportation : Amount paied to your distribution system operator respecting the cost of energy delivery to your service address
CTA : Transmission Tariff Contribution is paied by your energy supplier to CNIEG (National Agency of Electric and Gas Industries) it is 21% of defined transportation share
Local taxes locales applied to electricity :
County (4% ie 1.14€). Applied to 80% of the subscription and consumption amounts excluding VAT.
City (8% ie 2.27€). Applied to 80% of the subscription and consumption amounts excluding VAT.
Contribution to Elecricity as a Public Service (CSPE) : 0.00045€ excluding VAT /kWh
5.5% VAT: paied on debits, applied on subscription, to local taxes locales on electricity subscription and Transmission Tariff Contribution
9.6% VAT : paied on debits, applied to energy consumption, other services (not including Support Services Assistance), options, local taxes on electricity consumption.

Total Amount **96.22€**

OTHER INFORMATION

Interest rate for penalities in case of a delay in payments : 1,5 times the legal interest rate according to the sale conditions of your contract

- Estimated consumption : is calcutted according to your consumption history. It is used for invoicing while waiting for your next meter reading
- Invoicing frequency : every month or every 2 months according to your offer
- Conv.Coeff. : Your meter measures m3. They are converted in kWh in your invoice.The conversion coefficient refers to the amount of kWh contained in 1 gas m3 .

For any complaints, contact your POWEO Customer Service. The procedure to follow in case of a dispute is indicated in your contract

Figure 5 - Poweo energy bill
(reproduced and translated with original layout and fake name, addresses and references)

In the information letters, customers are portrayed almost universally as a relaxed family group, with one person posed by the computer or telephone (see Figure 6). This imagery also echoes with the imagery used on energy suppliers' CRM websites (see Figure 7). Through these representations, customers never make eye contact with the reader, appealing to him or her, but, on the contrary, seem busy communicating with the energy supplier. Such imagery suggests that the customer is not directly concerned with energy management issues but expected to actively reach out to the energy supplier for information or assistance. The story being told by these materials is also that the energy supplier is always prepared to assist customers in meeting their energy saving goals. This representation of organization-customer interactions conveys an "injunctive norm" (Cialdini, Reno & Kallgren 1990: 1015) of how consumers should behave regarding their energy consumption management.

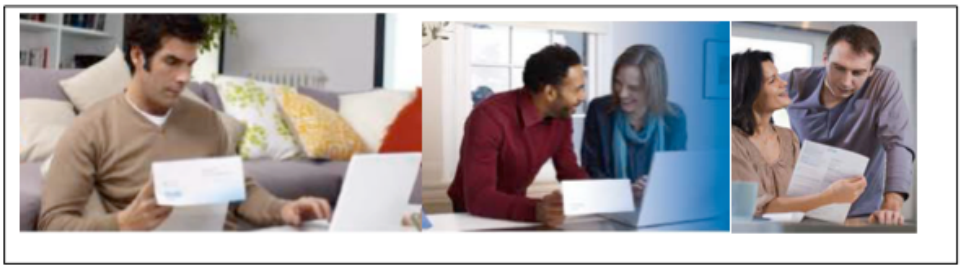


Figure 6 - Examples of imagery sent within information letters
"Bleu Ciel d'EDF"

Figure 7 - Examples of imagery on EDF customer's Internet account
(captured in 2015)

These materials suggest that energy suppliers do not seem to empower their customers to make informed energy decisions. On the contrary, the energy suppliers represent themselves as the unique reference in terms of energy management knowledge. This representation appeared to be widely accepted among energy consumers who regularly nominated their energy supplier when asked, "*If you had a question to ask*

about how to manage your energy better, who would you turn to?" Such is the case of Celia and Cynthia who explicitly referred to the invoice (i.e. bill).

> Celia: "*On a very practical level, I would call the phone number that is on my invoice. I would say "Hey, I have this question. Can you give me the name or number of a person I would call?*"
> Cynthia: "*Directly to the main key player. I will write an email, their phone number is here, there is everything you need in here (the bill). (…) I know who I have to talk to.*"

REPRESENTING ENERGY CONSUMPTION THROUGH A REFERENCE MODE AND SPECIALIST TERMINOLOGY: IMPLICATIONS FOR NORMING ENERGY CONSUMPTION

The written materials on the topic of energy consumption are usually presented in what the communication sciences call "reference mode" (Jakobson, 1963). That is to say, access to other information, which is not included, is necessary in order to understand the topic presented. One excellent example of this is the charts that accompany some bills (see Figure 2 and Figure 4). These charts are difficult to interpret since the consumption history they present does not provide a relevant timeframe for comparison. Besides there are no comments or explanations to help the customer understand the data presented. The materials also typically use technical language and acronyms, such as "PLD" for "Point De Livraison", i.e. "Site ID", or "CTA" for "Contribution Tarifaire d'Acheminement", ie: "Transmission Tariff Contribution", that would usually be used by technical or administrative experts on the topic.

What is striking is that some of this information can only be understood by the energy supplier. Also, in these sections (as noted earlier), the customer is referred to in the third person as the "contract holder" or "account holder." This could be interpreted as a diminution of the status and identity for the customer. Moreover, there are no energy consumption norms presented in this bill so the significance of the figures provided cannot be established. Energy suppliers convey the customer's energy consumption simply as "kWh" (i.e. kilowatt hours) and there is no clear, non-technical description of the customer's consumption. Furthermore, the documents contain no references to or explanations about the impact of energy consumption on the environment. Only the sentence " Read more about your formalities, your rights and energy-savings at www.energie-info.fr, the government information website", present in most of the bills, refers to energy-savings in very general terms.

The information provided (or not) and the vocabulary and style of communication "facilitated but also constrained the conventions associated with how to discuss strategies, how to write up the strategies, and how to interpret the final text of the document" (Vaara, et al., 2010: 691). Indeed, individuals believed having a degree of intelligence that is above average was necessary if people wanted to adopt energy-saving practices. This could be related to the widely held view that energy efficiency is a field requiring expertise that most consumers do not have. This link with intelligence played out when these individuals talked about their energy-consumption and energy related practices in the same way they would talk about their performance at school, resorting to an educational lexicon, like mentioning not being "a good example", "a good student" or being bad at "maths".

The following interview discussion illustrates how individuals felt ill-equiped to interpret the data provided on their energy consumption.

Researcher: "*Would you like to know more on energy, I don't mean your own consumption this time?*
Isabella: *Yes, I would be interested as long as there was no extra cost, but yes, yes. I struggle to figure out if there are some calculations to make. Well, there are the norms, A, B, C, D for example, on the fridges and this kind of thing, and I am so bad in maths! I am confused about the watts, the consumption, the figures, I'm totally lost. I should force myself one day, rack my brain to understand how the system works. I guess, I have to get on with it. I guess, this is a system that should be comprehensible.*"

The customers valued energy efficiency through the EU energy labels which rate the energy saving efficient of appliances from A+++ to D. This rating system was often spontaneously cited by consumers who were enjoying being able to establish what was a good grade for energy usage. Many expressed a desire to get a "good grade" – to get above a C or D grade. In the excerpt below, the will to perform well is ironically expressed by Julia:

Researcher: *How did you choose your electric appliances?*
Julia: *Like household appliances?*
Researcher: *Yes.*
Julia: *They are all AAAAA! (laughter)*
Researcher: (Laughter) *I see, well done. So that was energy saving criteria that prevailed?*
Julia: *Yeah, the brand too, but all in all, I tried to make three goals match: a brand that looks serious, energy-saving and a reasonable price. (…) I had a financial constraint so to say but between a ABA oven and a AAA oven, if it was 50 euro price difference, I indeed took the AAA one."*

The energy efficiency rating system was regularly commented on by the interviewees as they had not the slightest idea about how to assess their energy usage. They simply could not evaluate whether they used energy more efficiently than others so their consumption was interpreted only within the context of a personal consumption history and not in wider context of community or societal patterns. A large majority of them, even if reluctant to share their own data on energy consumption, expressed the wish to be able to compare their consumption to that of other consumers. In doing so, they mentioned their need for a "descriptive norm" (Cialdini, et al., 1990: 1015) that would describe how people behave. Sophie and Françoise expressed this same idea, stating explicitly that the energy suppliers have to provide such standards through the invoice (i.e. the bill), since they hold this information.

Sophie: "*Maybe, they should tell people, well, maybe it should appear in their bills: regarding your energy consumptions and the number of people in your household, you are above average or this kind of thing.*"
Françoise: "*I would be mostly interested in knowing my own geographical environment, my district for instance, and then why not the city I live in and then a regional comparison. If you want people to feel concerned, I think you have to give them information and comparative data*".

Other consumers, like Frédérique, called for feedback from the supplier, expecting "injunctive norming" (Cialdini, et al., 1990: 1015) of their individual consumption.

> Frédérique: "*(The supplier could give information) regarding the consumption indicated on the electric meter, a way to warn when you exceed a consumption level, for example, monthly. A kind of a warning, saying: "hey, you have exceeded your consumption". A light button or an email as soon as you exceed an average consumption, based on your former habits.*"

Thus, through the presentational style of the information provided to customers and the absence of norming of energy consumption practices, the energy companies effectively limit the consumer's access to knowledge and position them as relatively passive players in the energy supply process. The attainment of EU energy saving targets was therefore controlled by the energy company rather than by a genuine form of collective action (Olson, 1965) that included the consumers.

REPRESENTING ENERGY CONSUMPTION AS AN OBLIGATORY PRACTICE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON PERCEIVED EMPOWERMENT

Energy is primarily represented in its administrative and technical dimensions with half the customer's bill consisting of an Excel-like table indicating taxes. Doing this reinforces for the customer an image of the energy supplier as a heavily taxed public service. The word "information" is used only to give details about taxes or to explain the procedures to be followed in the case of a dispute between the customer and the supplier. A large amount of information is provided in notes that resemble obligatory legal notices. Rules and procedures are often referred to through the use of lexical fields (for instance, lexical field of "banning"), and of orders addressed to consumers. Taken together, these findings suggest that energy suppliers consider supplying energy to be a complex bundle of technical and administrative requirements that the customer has no right to question.

Data from our interviews suggests that energy consumers' dominant sense is that energy consumption is a necessity for modern life because it powers computers, phones, and other mechanisms essential to their work and family life. In the average family's budget, energy charges are approached as fixed expenses suggesting most families consider them unavoidable in the same way that taxes are unavoidable. Energy expenditure is not perceived as discretionary, and therefore, the customer's sense is that it is beyond their ability to control. The data confirmed that, like Fanny or Sylvia, the rest of the sample gave little priority to justifying their degree of energy usage and, similarly, considered consuming energy as something they can not avoid; as something they have little control over and not something they need to be able to explain. The following interview exchange was typical. It captures a 'mindlessness' in practice – an absence of strategic practice on the part of the customer.

> Researcher: "*So do you know how much you pay for the electricity you use?*
> Fanny: (Laugh) *No! Because I will pay and that's it. I know it is not good to act like this...*
> Researcher: "*No?"*
> Fanny: "I*t is not good but I have other problems to think about and anyway I have to pay, I will pay whatever. I will pay. Period.*"
> Researcher: *"Without trying to understand why this amount?"*
> Fanny: "*To be honest, no.*"

Sylvia: "*This is something, well, you cannot choose. I am forced to pay a rent, I am forced to pay for electricity. It goes together. To me it is as logical as putting fuel in my car if I have one*."

Some interviewees did express concerns about the administrative and technical obstacles that currently make it difficult, or impossible to assume personal control in order to be more energy efficient. Obstacles mentioned included having to wait for the technician to read the electric meter and problems reaching customer service by phone with questions regarding service and usage. Jean-Louis expressed clearly his doubts about the possibility of changing energy supplier. He claimed that consuming energy was not something he had control over, as it was a public service:

Jean-Louis: "*You cannot leave it (energy supplier) like that. Even the person you will sell your house to has to contract with this supplier. This is what I understood, although it seemed absurd to me. You have to check this, it was like before maybe it has changed*."
Researcher: "*You mean you feel stuck?*"
Jean-Louis: "*Absolutely! It was like that in past times when you took a premiums insurance contract for your home, you were bound hand and foot. You couldn't change at all.*
Researcher: "*What about electricity: it is a consumer good like any other or does it have special features?*
Jean-Louis: "*I told you earlier, you cannot choose, it is a necessity, it is a public service. I think EDF has the obligation to provide everyone with electricity. Wait, I'm not sure. But you have to pay anyway."*

In addition to the perception of energy consumption as a necessity, energy consumers have an overwhelming sense of not being empowered to monitor their energy consumption practices. The cost of buying and maintaining energy-efficient products and the difficulty of obtaining practical feedback regarding how their homes and appliances used electricity clearly shaped the customers' feeling of disempowerment. This was especially true for those who rented their homes. Renters stated that, because they did not own their homes, they could not be responsible for their energy usage. Finally, there were participants like Anthony who mentioned that in order to manage his energy-consumption he would have to become energy self-sufficient, meaning becoming independent from his energy supplier.

Anthony: "*To say it short, I don't like to have debts. I like to pay on due time this way, it is all good. You see, I would be ready to spend, I don't know, 5000 euros on solar panels to avoid having to pay EDF ever again.*
Researcher: "*Why? You want to become independent?"*
Anthony: *"I don't know, because it means yes, it is independence, it means if today you have the 5000 euros, you invest them into solar panels, you will not have to deal anymore with the little electricity bills. So this is great."*

ENERGY-CONSUMPTION PRACTICES AS DISCONNECTED FROM INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY ON CLIMATE CHANGE

One difficulty with the texts and images used by energy suppliers is that environmental concerns are presented as secondary to financial savings and comfort, and are not thoroughly incorporated into the rationale behind the energy saving policy. For instance, the images used in the information letters show customers sitting on their couch, reading their bill produced by the supplier in a comfortable home. Energy savings and environmental matters are mentioned in these documents from a technical point of view (e.g., as "*energy diagnostic performance*") or in a pedagogic mode, perpetrating the notion that the supplier is the instructor and the consumer a student, dependent on the instructor for information. In addition, in the invoice, when the customer looks for the words "energy savings" they are referred to a government website, indicating that the energy supplier is delegating this issue to the state, rather than taking responsibility to inform the bill reader directly.

According to our interviewees, energy-saving practices are a response to individual and private interests first. They are perceived first as a way to save money, even though the monetary savings derived from reducing energy consumption are not significant (a large portion of electricity produced in France comes from nuclear power which makes electricity relatively affordable). In addition, energy-saving behaviors are accepted as long as they do not negatively impact on the customer's comfort - defined by customers to include their health, pleasure, and hygiene. French energy consumers viewed efforts to promote energy savings as inconsistent with a state of technological and social progress. This view is captured in the following interview excerpts. They referenced candles and washing at a public washing place to symbolize a bygone age:

> Nils: "*Ok, from now on, I shut down the electric system [laughter], use candles for the light and buy four chickens for the heat!"*
> Jean-Marie: "*We will not go back to the time when you had to wash your clothes yourself at the public washing place!"*

The consumers interviewed considered that the amount of intellectual effort required to implement energy saving strategies could not be justified. While they indicate they would be pleased to know that their efforts, however small, did generate an environmental benefit, they were still most concerned about reducing overall consumption through activities that are easy to incorporate into daily living, such as turning off the lights when leaving a room or adjusting the temperature on their thermostats "just a little". The value that customers reported most consistently embracing related to overconsumption. This finding is echoed in other research (e.g., Moussaoui, 2007) that has concluded that moderating consumption is valued increasingly among energy customers. Our findings mirrored this. We noted that our participants typically approached energy consumption in terms of individual choices related to personal preferences (e.g. setting the thermostat at 20 or 22 degrees Celsius).

> Guy: "*Everyone can heat his or her house as much as he or she wants.*"
> François: "*You can choose 22, 19, 16. If they [individual] are cold all the time, they will make a lot of energy savings. So, this is about personal commitment."*
> Béatrice: "*This is true, the temperature depends on individuals.*"

The individuals in our study found it hard to associate individual responsibility with pollution, and generally did not consider CO_2 emissions from their household as a major contributor to climate change. In most cases, they associated carbon pollution with individual cars and air travel but put the majority of the blame for overconsumption of energy on industry and politicians. The data suggest individuals also viewed environmental issues such as climate change as being remote from their everyday experience. This could be attributable to the fact that most people did not know how the electricity that they use in their homes is produced; electricity was treated as an invisible, immaterial good that appears "magically" in their homes.

Moreover, because individuals saw a significant disconnection between the way energy is talked about publicly by energy authorities and how people actually use it, they perceived there was a degree of hypocrisy related to the matter of energy conservation that undermined the individual's desire to inconvenience themselves with energy-saving behaviors in the name of responsible energy consumption. For instance, Nikita wished that the average consumer had a stronger will to act according to the common good.

> Nikita: "*I know, it might sound arrogant but if most people would - wait, we are not the only ones to behave this way and certainly not a model to follow - but if people only had the will we have, just the intention. That would change it all"*.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the individuals interviewed in this study claimed that individual efforts in France to protect the environment contrast sharply with the environmental damage done by industries in countries like China and India. There was a view that until countries in the third world and their corporations get serious about protecting the environment, there was not much more that the individual French householder could, or perhaps should, do to advance responsible energy consumption. Besides, their sense was that many individuals had already embraced the need to recycle and save water in order to protect the environment and therefore they were reluctant to have additional requirements placed on them, especially when there was such a high degree of perceived hypocrisy.

REPRESENTING CRM DOCUMENTS AS AUTHORITATIVE TEXTS

Kuhn (2008: 1236) observes that, "As cooriented conversations and texts become imbricated and validated by interactants, an abstract text is produced that represents the firm as a whole. This 'authoritative text' emphasizes the relations of legitimacy and power characterizing firm practice." We can extend this notion of authoritative text to the routine texts exchanged at the interface between energy consumers and energy supply firms. We saw how, by using phatic communication to first engage the consumer (reader) personally and then a reference mode to address energy issues, the figurative texts project an authoritative energy supplier-uninformed consumer relationship between firm and customer in terms of energy consumption. Thus, these CRM texts qualified as "authoritative texts" as specified by Kuhn (2008) since they (1) specify roles and duties; (2) describe relations of power between sender and receiver; and (3) attribute values to practice, in this case actions designed to make energy savings. The discursive positioning of the energy firm enacted an authority relationship, even though the consumer was encouraged to believe they are dealing with mundane documents (i.e. a request for payment). The

form in which the energy firm presented its energy saving discourse paralleled the study by Vaara, et al., (2010) study of local government strategic texts. They noted that linguistic and symbolic representations such as those we found:

> *are significant in terms of the interpersonal positioning that constitutes social and political power relations. In simple terms, this means that the authors are constructed as 'experts' with related 'expert power' while the readers need an explanation of what the text essentially means.* (Bourdieu, 1991: 692)"

As Koschmann and McDonald (2015) noted when talking about symbolic actions and rituals within organizations, the presence of an authoritative text does not account systematically for its capacity for agency (2015: 236). This also requires the demonstration that individuals "perform the actions" described through the authoritative text through "symbolic actions and interactions" that can rely on "values, norms, ideals, distributions of power" (2015: 236). With respect to this point, consumers' interpretation of energy consumption costs as fixed and necessary and finally as disconnected from their individual responsibilities in relation to energy pollution captures how much the definition of roles assigned through the CRM documents was internalized and taken for granted. Customers consistently recognized EDF as a legitimate source of information about energy savings and proposer of new types of energy, when answering the question of who was qualified to provide guidance on energy usage. In answering the question, *"what would be the most important information you would need?"* many people responded that they would like to have an audit of their individual energy consumption at home, conducted by a technician sent by EDF. In doing so, they validated the dominant figurative text. When asked what they thought of the bill, a large majority of them replied that it is clear and they feel satisfied with it, although they admitted previously not reading it with much attention. They simply did not question the legitimacy of the energy supplier's discourse on energy, and in doing so they embraced it as an authoritative text.

THE EMERGENCE OF ALTERNATIVE TEXTS

Finally, among the documents analyzed were CRM documents from other energy suppliers. A comparative examination revealed that, despite competitors having the opportunity to develop alternative texts on energy consumption practices leading potentially to alternative readings by consumers, these other companies also followed EDF's approach, producing the same figurative text as EDF. Paradoxically, although interviewees saw EDF as a credible source of expert information, at the same time participants described the company's information letters (as opposed to their invoices) as useless documents and compared them to advertisements. The excerpt from Julia's interview shows this conflicted sensemaking. The interviewee both recognizes EDF as a supplier of a public service and a commercial organization seeking profit. Similar comments were by other participants. Spontaneously, like Julia, participants would recognize the legitimacy of EDF as a source of information while questioning the legitimacy or utility of other texts such as their promotional texts. In Julia's case (below), she spoke of an EDF advertisement that presented individuals who were obviously happy in a natural setting resplendent with bird song and expressed her doubts about the compatibility of these two images; the technical expert providing a

public service on the one hand and the private corporation seeking to attract customers for profit, on the other hand.

> Researcher:"*Do you think EDF is credible when they inform on energy?"*
> Julia: "[*…] On energy saving, I think they are not bad.*"
> Researcher: *"Why?"*
> Julia: " *I don't know, it occurs to me, there are birds, people that seem happy in their ads."*
> Researcher: "*You mean these ads are well done, they communicate well?"*
> Julia: "*This is actually an unclear issue to me. I don't know how much the other suppliers communicate on energy savings. This is why I would say it sounds like the old public-owned company."*

DISCUSSION

This section will discuss the study's contributions to our understanding of three key concepts; strategy practice, CCO and collective action and conclude with implications for policy.

STRATEGY PRACTICE

This case study analyses how strategic texts work in practice at the micro-level of the customer-energy supplier interface, an interface that is not widely represented in the strategy-practice literature. It explores energy consumption discourses as they are materialized for customers at the micro-level of enactment. In doing so, we were able to show that the texts in which they materialize operate as authoritative texts that instituted a macro "hegemony" (Gramsci, 1971).

Furthermore, the analysis of consumers' sensemaking and reported energy consumption practices revealed there was a "general consensus" (van Dijk, 2001) on values, norms and definitions held by the customers in relation to energy consumption and that these were at odds with the macro-discourse being promoted by the company. We concluded that there was a disjunction between company and customer at a very fundamental level. This is because a "hegemonic" discourse relies on "implicit premises and thus is taken for granted by the recipients" (van Dijk, 2001: 358). Since routine documents, such as energy invoices and information letters, are regarded as commonplace texts, they implicitly communicate points of view about energy consumption "without actually asserting them, and with less chance that they will be challenged" (van Dijk, 2001: 358). Many of these points of view were communicated examples of the unintended independent agency of the texts. Thus, in a very material way, the study shows that everyday texts act as strategic texts, socially negotiating meanings, and legitimating ways of enacting practices while delegitimating others (Vaara, et al., 2010). Therefore, our case study is a practical example of the (independently) hegemonic nature of strategy discourse (Levy, Alvesson & Willmott, 2003) and the texts that materialize it. This case study also presents a warning that the texts a company exchanges with consumers are especially powerful because they contain more than the basic administrative, technical, or financial information they are designed to provide.

Our findings provide an illustration of an "ideological fantasy of 'empowerment'" (Wright, 2012) for, while energy suppliers assert that they are willing to endorse the EU macro discourse and encourage their customers to adopt energy-saving behaviors, the case provides clear

evidence that the information designed for consumers actually directs energy management expertise towards the energy supplier. Therefore this customer-organization interface participates in disengaging customers from adopting energy-saving practices and causing them to have little concern for energy issues. It appears that this effect is reinforced by the historical fact that EDF was, until recently, a state-owned energy company, controlling all of the discourses on energy consumption. From a theoretical perspective this suggests that historical relationships are an important influence, imposing constraints on the way current strategy practice at the company-customer interface impacts (or not) on customers.

CONTRIBUTION TO CCO

In this study, we have investigated an organization's "(re)presenting object" (Ashcraft et al., 2009) by applying the perspectives of the CCO approach and strategy practice. Our findings contribute new insights on the nature of textual agency that can be achieved by the artifacts at the customer-supplier interface, in this case in the energy sector. The findings show how an energy supplier's strategic communication practice in the form of text exchanges with customers has unintentional outcomes. In particular, our findings reveal how routine texts "produce a collectively negotiated interpretation of the world" (Taylor & Van Every, 2000: 40) and, more significantly, how individuals' ways of "consuming" these texts make a common sense of energy consumption practices. Customers shared a sense that they were powerless consumers of energy; that consumption could be treated with the same inevitability as taxes. This is a significant theoretical contribution because, while the "agentic" power of discourses within organizations has been the subject of much interest, recently in the organizational communication literature in relation to mundane texts (e.g., Arnaud, et al., 2016), the constitutive capacities of mundane objects like consumers' energy bills in the interface between organizations and consumers have rarely been addressed and certainly not from the perspective of how they hamper the achievement of the very strategy they were designed to support. Like Koschmann & McDonald's study (2015), we show the textual agency of these bills was not merely a consequence of human intention but largely independent of human intent. Thus, we are highlighting their ability to have contrary and autonomous agency.

While some of the customers stated that the CRM documents had little impact on their energy consumption behavior, the analysis revealed these documents were also, somewhat paradoxically, operating as "authoritative texts". Our multiple sources of data enabled us to draw this conclusion through the identification of a reference mode of communication in use, the phatic function of CRM documents, the definition of roles (authoritative/uninformed) and the presentation of the practice as obligatory. No significant evidence of resistance, or subversion, towards this discursive strategy (De Certeau, 1983) was identified. This was the case in previous research on textual agency (Hardy & Phillips, 2004). The fact that energy consumers in the study reported here submitted to the authority of the invoices without question highlights the domination of the figurative text produced by energy suppliers. Yet, we also noted the emergence of alternative texts due to: 1) the recent energy market opening and the multiplicity of texts (e.g. advertising texts) that the energy suppler was now using; and 2) the will of consumers to moderate their energy consumption and "consume better" and eliminate over consumption. The study of these emergent discourses and associated texts and their

implications for the authoritative text identified in our article, could be, in our view, a fruitful research perspective to pursue further

CONTRIBUTION TO COLLECTIVE ACTION

The supply company at the center of this case was actively promoting a sense of collective action in relation to sustainable energy that was aligned to EU directives. However, while the study showed the strategic practices employed to communicate with customers constituted and stabilized the organization-consumer interface (Arnaud & Mills, 2012) these practices did little to construct a community of common interested that supported collective action towards energy consumption. Rather than feeling they were a member of a community of common interest and were motivated to participate in a form of responsible action they choose to see themselves as powerless to take action except in relation to overconsumption. The accounts from consumers suggest that there was a widespread sense that domestic energy conservation was not a theater they believed they could or needed to "act in" (i.e. there was little scope or need for agency). When coupled with the relatively low cost of energy, there was no motivation to collaborate either with the energy supply company or the wider community of consumers in order to reduce consumption rates. The texts exchanged with the company therefore did nothing to stimulate a community of common interest that supports collective action, despite the strategic intent.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENERGY CONSUMPTION POLICIES

Finally, the CCO epistemological perspective challenges the idea that the provision of clear and precise information is the same as "effective" communication (Caronia & Cooren, 2014). European institutions, in their directives on energy and the way they treat information as merely one lever among many that can be used to reduce household energy consumption (others include incentives and regulation), are attempting to produce an authoritative text that represents energy consumers as uninformed. Our case study suggests that such discourses discourage individuals from making the sort of sense that would make them feel empowered and motivated to act responsibly in the face of the climate change challenge. Our research may help these institutions rethink their approach to producing strategic texts and develop new ideas for communicating about energy consumption where the intention is to change consumer sense and encourage this to be enacted in practice. Our hope is that they may redesign their CRM documents to take into account how customers make sense of mundane texts exchanged at the company-consumer interface. For instance, customers already associate moderate energy consumption with a healthier lifestyle. Perhaps, by building on this imagery, CRM texts might help develop alternative discourses and collective action over energy consumption and climate change. This is just one practical possibility that emerges from this case study of how energy discourses are promulgated in practice through strategic CRM texts and how these texts constitute the company-customer relationship and customer's energy discourses and consumption practices.

CONCLUSION

This study showed how, paradoxically, the texts that the energy supply company exchanged with customers, as their primary form of strategic practice, acted in ways that blocked the achievement of their strategic intent. The texts exhibited alternative forms of agency that (re)constituted the company-customer interface. In revealing this outcome, the paper contributes to a scant literature on the performance of mundane strategic tools, offering a unique example of an "ideological fantasy of 'empowerment'" (Wright, 2012) that was not realized in practice. The findings also provide a warning, in this case to energy suppliers, that strategic texts have unintended and independent agency in the collaborative process of negotiating customers' understanding of energy and consumption options but fall short of encouraging collective action on reducing energy consumption even though today's digital platforms provide so may ways to connect customers with each other and the company.

REFERENCES

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211.

Arnaud, N. & Mills, C. E. (2012). Understanding inter-organizational agency: A communication perspective, *Group and Organization Management,* 37(4), 452-485.

Arnaud, N., Mills, C.E., Legrand, C. & Maton, E. (2016). Materialising strategy in mundane tools: The key to coupling global strategy and local strategy practice? *British Journal of Management,* 27(1), 38-57.

Ashcraft K.L., Kuhn T.R. & Cooren F. (2009). Constitutional Amendments: "Materializing" Organizational Communication. *Academy of Management Annals*, 3(1), 1–64.

Bamberg S., Möser G. (2007). Twenty years after Hines, Hungerford, and Tomera: A new meta-analysis of psychosocial determinants of pro-environmental behaviour, *Journal of Environmental Psychology,* 27(1), 14–25.

Barnes B. (2001). Practice as collective action. In T. R. Schatzki, K. D. Knorr-Cetina & E. Von Savigny (Eds.), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory* (pp. 17-28). London: Routledge.

Barriball, K. L. & While, A. (1994). Collecting data using a semi-structured interview: A discussion paper. *Journal of Advanced Nursing,* 19(2), 211-409.

Biernacki, P. & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. *Sociological Methods Research,* 10(2), 141-163.

Bimber, B., Flanagin A. J. & Stohl, C. (2012), *Collective Action in Organizations: Interaction and Engagement in an Era of Technological Change*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boivin, G., Brummans, B. H. J. M. & Barker, J. R. (2017). The institutionalization of CCO scholarship: Trends from 2000 to 2015. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 31(3), 331-335.

Bolsen, T., Druckman, J. N. & Cook F. L. (2014). Communication and collectiev actions: A survey experiement on motivated energy consumption in the U.S. *Journal of Experiemental Political Science,* 1(1), 24-38.

Bolsen, T., Leeper, T. J. & Shapiro, M. A. (2014). Doing what others do: Norms, science, and collective action on global warming. *American Politics Research*, 42(1), 65-89.

Bourdieu, P. (1991), *Language and Symbolic Power,* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Caronia, L. & Cooren F. (2014). Decentering our analytical position: The dialogicity of things. *Discourse and Communication*, 8(1), 41–61.

Cialdini, R. B., Reno, R. R. & Kallgren, C. A. (1990). A focus theory of normative conduct: Recycling the concept of norms to reduce littering in public places. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 58(6), 1015–1026.

Cooren F. (2004). Textual agency: How texts do things in organizational settings. *Organization*, 11(3), 373–93.

Cooren, F. (2010). Studying agency from a ventriloqual perspective. *Management Communication Quarterly,* 29(3), 475-480.

Cooren, F. (2015), *Action and Agency in Dialogue: Passion, Incarnation and Ventriloquism*, Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins Publishing.

Cooren, F., Kuhn, T. R., Cornelissen, J. P. & Clark, T. (2011). Communication, organizing and organization: An overview and introduction to the special issue. *Organization Studies,* 3(9), 1-22.

Cotton, D., Miller, W., Winter, J., Bailey, I. & Sterling, S. (2016). Knowledge, agency, and collective action as barriers to energy saving. *Local Environment,* 21(7), 883-897.

Darby, S. (2006), The Effectiveness of Feedback on Energy Consumption: A Review for Defra of the Literature on Metering, Billing and Direct Displays. Environ- mental Change Institute, University of Oxford, Retrieved from: http://www.eci.ox.ac.uk/research/energy/downloads/smart-metering-report.pdf

De Certeau M. (1983), *L'invention du quotidien, tome 1. Arts de Faire*, Paris: Folio.

Fairclough N. (1992), *Discourse and Social Change,* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. (1995), *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, London: Longman.

Frederiks, E. R., Stenner, K. & Hobman, E. V. (2015). Household energy use: Applying behavioural economics to understand consumer decision-making and behaviour. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Review,* 41, 1385-1394.

Glaser, B. G & Strauss, A. L. (1967), *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research,* Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.

Gramsci, A. (1971), *Selections from The Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, New York, NY: International Publishers.

Groleau, C. & Demers, C. (2016). Modes of design tools: Sociomaterial dynamics of a horticultural project. *Communication Research and Practice,* 2(3), 311-333.

Gupta, R. & Darby, S. (2011) Action research approach for gaining, and providing, feedback on domestic energy use to understand occupant behaviour, perceptions and expectations.. Paper presented at the Energy and People: Futures, complexity and challenges Conference, 21-22 September, 2011. Oxford, UK.

Hansla A., Gamble A., Juliusson A. & Gärling T. (2008). Psychological determinants of attitude towards and willingness to pay for green electricity. *Energy Policy*, 36(2), 786-774.

Hardy, C. & Phillips, N. (2004). Discourse and Power. In D. Grant, C. Hardy, C. Oswick & L. Putnam (Eds.), *Handbook of Organizational Discourse* (pp. 299-317). London: Sage.

Jakobson, R. (1963), *Essais de Linguistique Générale*, Paris: Minuit.

Koschmann, M.A. & McDonald J. (2015). Organizational rituals, communication, and the question of agency. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 29(2), 229–256.

Kuhn, T. R. (2008). "A communicative theory of the firm: Developing an alternative perspective on intra-organizational power and stakeholder relationships." *Organization Studies*, 29(8-9), 1227–1254.

Kvale, S. (2007), *Doing interviews,* London: Sage.

Latour, B. (1992/1996), *Aramis, or the love of technology,* Translated by Catherine Porter. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Levy, D. L., Alvesson, M. & Willmott, H. (2003). Critical Approaches to Strategic Management. In M. Alvesson & H. Willmott (Eds.), *Studying Management Critically* (pp. 92-110). London: Sage.

Martiskainen, M. & Coburn, J. (2011). The role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in household energy consumption - prospects for the UK. *Energy Efficiency,* 4(2), 209-221.

Mills, C. E. & Cooren, F. (Eds.) (2018). Discursivity, relationality and materiality in the life of the organisation: Communication perspectives. London: Routledge

Moussaoui, I. (2007). De la société de consommation à la société de modération. *Les Annales de la Recherche Urbaine*, 103(1), 112-119.

Noy, C. (2008). Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology,* 11(4), 327-344.

Olson, M. (1965), *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Observatoire des Inégalités. (2014). Riches, pauves et classes moyennes : comment se situer?. www.inegalites.fr

Payne, A. & Frow, P. (2005). A strategic framework for customer relationship management. *Journal of Marketing*, 69(4), 167-176.

Putnam, L.L. & Nicotera, A.M. (Eds.). (2008). Building Theories of Organization: The Constitutive Role of Communication. Oxford, UK: Routledge.

Rouleau L. (2013) Strategy-as-practice research at the crossroads, *M@n@gement*, 16(5), 547-565

Rubin, H. J. & Rubin, I. S. (2012), *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data.* (2nd edition),Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Shove, E. (2010). Beyond the ABC: climate change policy and theories of social change. *Environment and Planning* A, 42(6), 1273-1285.

Schatzki, T. R., Knorr-Cetina, K. D. & Von Savigny, E. (Eds.) (2001), *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory,* London: Routledge.

Schoeneborn, D., Blaschke, S. Cooren, F. McPhee, R, D. Seidl, D. & Taylor, J. R. (2014).The three schools of CCO thinking: Interactive dialogue and systematic comparison. *Management Communication Quarterly,* 28(2), 285-316.

Taylor, J.R. & Van Every, E.J. (2000), *The Emergent Organization. Communication as Site and Surface*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Tracy, S. J. (2013), *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analyses, Communicating Impact*, Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.

Vaara, E., Sorsa, V. & Pälli, P. (2010). On the force potential of strategy texts: a critical discourse analysis of a strategic plan and its power effects in a city organization, *Organization,* 17(6), 685–702.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2001). Critical discourse analysis. In D. Schiffrin, D. Tannen & H. E. Hamilton (Eds.), *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (pp. 352-371). Oxford: Blackwell.

Vottero F. & Dessimond A. (2016). Le marché et la filière de l'électricité en France, Xerfi, www.xerfi.com.

Wicker, P. & Becken, S. (2013). Conscientious vs. ambivalent: Do concerns about energy availability and climate change influence consumer behavior? *Economic Economics,* 88*,* 41-48.

Whittington, R. (1996). Strategy as practice. *Long Range Planning,* 29(5), 731-735.

Whittington, R. (2001). Learning to Strategist: Problems of Practice. SKOPE Research Paper, 20 (Autumn). Oxford: University of Oxford Press.

Wilhoit, E.D. & Kisselburgh, L.G. (2015). Collective action without organization: The material constitution of bike commuters as collective. *Organization Studies*, 36(5), 573-592.

Wright, A. (2012). Fantasies of empowerment: mapping neoliberal discourse in the coalition government's schools policy. *Journal of Education Policy*, 27(3), 279–294.

Wright, A. (2016). Organizational routines as embodied performatives: A communication as constitutive of organization perspective. *Organization*, 23(2), 147–163.

Yin, R. K. (2009), *Case Study Research, Design & Methods 4th ed*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Claire Burlat is an Assistant Professor of Management and Communication in the Department of Communication and Culture at Audencia Business School in Nantes, France. Her current research focuses on consumer perceptions and the influence of discourses on consumer behavior, particularly in technology-ridden sectors such as the retail energy sector. Her previous work was published in *Communication & Management, Communication & Organisation* and *Language & Communication.*

Colleen Mills is Professor of Management in the Department of Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurship at the University of Canterbury Business School in New Zealand and an International Faculty Affiliate at Audencia Business School in France. Her award-winning research examines organizational processes, particularly during times of uncertainty and change such as CEO succession, organizational change, business start-up and natural disaster, and is published in various journals including the *British Journal of Management, Group and Organization Management, Management International,* the *International Small Business Journal,* the *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research* and the *Journal of Managerial Psychology.* She serves on a range of editorial review boards and is the Editor-In-Chief of *Communication Research and Practice.*

We are thankful to CNRS and AIMS for their financial support.