

# **OUT OF SERVICE? INDIVIDUAL EXPERIENCES OF AN OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITY EXISTENTIAL THREAT**

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## ABSTRACT

This work focuses on an Occupational Identity Existential Threat (OIET): the experience of a possible permanent loss of an individual's ability to claim, enact, or draw meaning from a valued occupational identity. OIETs occur among members when their occupation is in such decline that it may not survive. Identity threats from occupational demise can affect entire collectives and impact not only individuals' identities but their relationships at and with their work; and consequently, can have important consequences on occupational members' lives. Yet, our current theories are ill-equipped to understand how individuals experience these threats as they tend to focus on non-existential threats coming from clear losses. To address how occupational members experience an OIET, I followed a grounded theory approach and conducted an inductive qualitative study of Les Clefs d'Or concierges in the USA. I have completed about 130hrs of observations and I collected a total of 101 interviews (with 85 informants) over a period of two and a half years, plus longitudinal interviews with key occupational actors. At the occupational level, I find that the leadership of the occupation entered a 'survival' mode by providing support to their members, as well as narratives generating hopefulness for the maintenance of their occupation. At the individual level, I uncover several paths that Les Clefs d'Or members followed when faced with OIET: *withdrawing*, *waiting*, *searching* and *defending*. Each path had distinct outcomes on how individuals related to the occupation, as well as their mental health and relationships with other members. Finally, I describe the theoretical and practical implications of this work.

**Key words:** Occupational Existential Threat, Occupational Identity Existential Threat, Identity threats, Existential Concerns, Meaningfulness, Occupations, Hope, Emotions, Relationships, Mental Health

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“The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown.”

H. P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1973)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

From telemarketers to nuclear power reactor operators, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022) predicts that many occupations will decline within the next 10 years. Some occupations may lose up to 35% of their workforce by 2030 in a variety of industries (e.g., service, manufacturing, etc.).

Research has begun to look at the rise and fall (and resurrection) of occupational communities (e.g., Howard-Grenville, Metzger, & Meyer, 2013; Nelson & Irwin, 2013; Raffaelli, 2019). An occupational community is a group of individuals who “consider themselves to be engaged in the same sort of work; whose identity is drawn from the work; [and] who share with one another a set of values, norms and perspectives that apply to but extend beyond work” (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984: 294-295).

With the changing nature of work and rapid advances in technology, the risk of occupations dying is growing (Barley & Kunda, 2001; Kahl, King, & Liegel, 2016). As a result, occupational members may face the prospect of never being able to perform their work or to remain within their occupational community. I refer to this phenomenon as an Occupational Existential Threat (OET), which I define as *the collective perception of the possible end of an occupational community*.

Yet there is still very little work looking at individuals’ ongoing experiences of the possible extinction of their occupation.<sup>1</sup> Occupations are interesting because they span different

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<sup>1</sup> Some exceptions include work by Jiang and Wrzesniewski (working paper) and Reid (working paper) on the profession of journalism.

workplaces and usually require a high degree of identification (Anteby, Chan, & DiBenigno, 2016), which is defined as the perceived “oneness with or belongingness to” the target (Ashforth & Mael, 1989: 21). That is, the possible extinction of an occupation may cause individuals to lose “what they do,” “where they do it,” and “who they do it with” – i.e., the main bases of identification (Cardador & Pratt, 2006). Therefore, during an OET, an individual’s identity (the answer to the question ‘who am I?’) is threatened, and occupational members face Occupational Identity Existential Threats (OIET), which I define as *the individual experience of a possible permanent loss of an individual’s ability to claim, enact, or draw meaning from a valued occupational identity*.

Scholars have characterized such experience as an identity threat: something that poses potential harm to the “value, meanings, or enactment of an identity” (Petriglieri, 2011: 644). Generally, identity threats occur when individuals face internal identity conflicts, inter-group conflicts, or dramatic external events (Petriglieri, 2011). The latter in particular can be especially traumatic and impactful for individuals (e.g., Maitlis, 2009; Neimeyer, 2001; Neimeyer, Prigerson, & Davies, 2002; Pals & McAdams, 2004). However, different research streams predict different responses to OIETs. Research on identity threat suggests that individuals will engage in identity-restructuring responses – i.e., “changing an aspect of the threatened identity” (Petriglieri, 2011: 648) – especially if they perceive the threat as strong. By contrast, research on existential concerns – i.e., the fear people experience when questioning ‘what makes life worth living?’ – suggests that individuals will engage in self-protecting responses when faced with such threats (Grant & Wade-Benzoni, 2009; Koole, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 2006).

While both theories note that social support is a key resource for identity protection (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989; Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Petriglieri, 2011), such support

may be at risk during an OET. As Crosina and Pratt (2019: 69) note, when there is an impact on a collective such as an organization or an occupation, “former co-workers may be perceived as ‘competitors,’ and thus may be unable or unwilling to offer social support to one another.” Therefore, theory offers contradicting conclusions, and it is still unclear how individuals react when their occupation’s existence is at risk.

Furthermore, most research involving identity threats has focused on clear losses – i.e., when the target of the loss is clearly gone. For instance, job-loss and organizational death may lead to grieving and mourning practices (Crosina & Pratt, 2019; Kates, Greiff, & Hagen, 1990), as well as post-traumatic growth (Maitlis, 2009). However, OETs are inherently ambiguous, as it is unclear whether the occupation will actually disappear (Boss, 1999, 2007). Consequently, facing the unknown impacts individuals’ psychological well-being and relationships differently from facing clear-cut losses. For example, ambiguous loss may heighten the intensity of mixed emotions – e.g., hope and despair – and prevent individuals from engaging with expected grieving practices (Boss, 1999).

It is therefore unclear how individuals react when facing an OET, and with what consequences for their mental health and relationships. If, as some have argued, occupations are increasingly facing existential challenges (Barley & Kunda, 2001; Kahl et al., 2016), it is important to delve into how individuals experience OIETs and how they may cope with them – i.e., what cognitive and behavioral efforts they employ to manage stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This leads us to the following main research question: ***How do individuals experience the risk of their occupational identity disappearing?***

In this dissertation, I investigate the impact of OETs on individuals, specifically occupational members. Answering this question requires not only studying occupational

members' responses to the OET, but also studying how the occupation itself collectively reacts to the threat. In Chapter Two, I build on research on identity and existential threat, ambiguous loss, and occupations that is directly relevant to this phenomenon. I identify two shortcomings in the identity threat literature – (1) existential concerns and (2) ambiguous loss – that need to be investigated to further our understanding of OIETs. To explore this issue, I study a dying occupational community, an occupational community of hotel concierges named Les Clefs d'Or USA (Chapter Three). Chapters Four and Five dive into the findings of this study. At the occupational level (Chapter Four), I find that the leadership of the occupation entered survival mode by supporting their members and generating hopeful narratives about the maintenance of their occupation. At the individual level (Chapter Five), I uncover several paths that Les Clefs d'Or members followed when faced with an OIET: *withdrawing*, *waiting*, *searching* and *defending*. Each path had distinct outcomes regarding how individuals related to the occupation, as well as their mental health and relationships with other members. Finally, Chapter Six highlights how these findings may extend our understanding of identity threats and contribute to the literature on occupations. More specifically, it reveals the role that hope – an emotion emerging from the positive anticipation of the outcome of an uncertain event (Sawyer & Clair, 2021) – plays in how individuals deal with OEITs.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

As explained in the previous chapter, this dissertation introduces the concept of Occupational Identity Existential Threats (OIET), *the individual experience of a possible permanent loss of an individual's ability to claim, enact, or draw meaning from a valued occupational identity*. I argue that OIETs are an extreme form of identity threat that raise existential concerns. I draw from four main literatures: identity threats, occupations, existential concerns and ambiguous loss. In this chapter, I explain how OIETs can contribute to these literatures, and I call for further exploration of how individuals experience these important threats.

### **Identity, Identity Threats and the Importance of Occupations**

Discussing identity threats requires us to define identity. Drawing from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and Identity Theory (Stryker, 1987; Stryker & Burke, 2000), I define individual identity as one's self-definition, which describes 'who I am' (based on 'what I do' or 'what group I am a member of') (Caprar, Walker, & Ashforth, 2022). Following this school of thought, Petriglieri (2011: 644) defines individual-level identity threats as "experiences appraised as indicating potential harm to the value, meanings, or enactment of an identity."

Building on this definition, Petriglieri (2011) claims that identity threats can originate from three different sources: individuals themselves (i.e., identity conflict), their social world (e.g., intergroup conflict) or their external environment (e.g., crisis or traumatic events). I argue that threats in the external environment, specifically occupational decline, may be a critical source of identity threat, as occupations can be central to people's identities.

### ***Occupations as a Key Source of Identity***

As defined by Van Maanen and Barley (1984: 291), occupations are social entities characterized by “common tasks, work schedules, job training, peer relations, career patterns, [and] shared symbols.” I refer to members of an occupation as a community of members who “consider themselves to be engaged in the same sort of work; *whose identity is drawn from the work*; [and] who share with one another a set of values, norms and perspectives that apply to but extend beyond work” (1984: 294–295, emphasis mine).<sup>2</sup>

As this definition suggests, members of an occupational community will identify with their occupation to a certain degree. By identification, I refer to the perceived “oneness with or belongingness to” the target (Ashforth & Mael, 1989: 21), such as an occupation or organization, where “members adopt the defining characteristics of the [target] as defining characteristics for themselves” (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994: 242; see also Pratt, 1998).

Building on Cardador and Pratt’s work (2006), research has found that occupational identification can be very strong given that it nearly always draws on all three bases of identification – i.e., relational, behavioral, and symbolic (Cardador & Pratt, 2006). First, individuals hold social identities based on their occupational membership (i.e., relational base). For example, professional associations (e.g., Academy of Management, American Medical Association, Professional Pilots Association etc.) can provide an anchoring point for such identification with occupations and professions (Abbott, 1988; Anteby et al., 2016; Kahl et al., 2016).

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<sup>2</sup> In doing so, I acknowledge that I am looking at occupations from the inside out and will focus on the members’ perceptions, as a community with a similar understanding of the work. This approach contrasts with research that looks at occupations from the perspective of external audiences (see Anteby et al., 2016 for a review).

The second base of individuals' identification is rooted in "what they do" or what Cardador and Pratt (2006) referred to as the "behavioral basis" for identification. For instance, in an occupation, such roles relate to the tasks that people engage in as outlined by jurisdictions that the occupation holds control over (Abbott, 1988; Anteby et al., 2016; Lepisto, Crosina, & Pratt, 2015).

Third, symbols constitute another source of identification for individuals. Such symbols include physical artifacts and stories (Cardador & Pratt, 2006). Physical artifacts refer to "anything that can be associated with someone and can be represented physically" (Cardador & Pratt, 2006: 177). Some examples might include a workplace, a uniform, a medal or a membership card. Such artifacts have been shown to play an important part in occupational dynamics to claim jurisdictions. For example, Bechky (2003a) described how the relations between several professions (engineers, technicians and assemblers) were influenced by how each occupational group claimed expertise and knowledge over the engineering, drawing and functioning of machines.

Stories include the idea that individuals form personal narratives about who they are. Research suggests that these narratives influence how people interpret their context and make sense of the different roles, groups, events, thoughts and feelings that they integrate in their self-definition (McAdams, 2001; O'Conner, 1997). For example, Humphreys and Brown's (2002) study of a UK university showed that as the organization changed its narratives around attaining higher status (i.e., becoming more research oriented), individuals also changed their identity narratives and the strength of their identification with the university. Therefore, occupational members may also draw from different symbolic stories about their work and their occupation to form their personal narratives.

### ***Identity Threats and Occupational Decline***

Thus, occupations can engender strong bonds with individuals. Although individuals may find other sources of identification beyond occupations, scholars have even argued that the strength of identification with one's organization has been getting stronger as people now tend to identify more with their work (e.g., their organization) than with other affiliations, as it may be a more stable source of identity (Anteby et al., 2016; Barley & Kunda, 2001).

I argue that an occupational decline can threaten all three bases of identification – i.e., the relationships, symbols and behaviors that people have at work (Cardador & Pratt, 2006); therefore, it can be an important source of identity threats. Thus, an occupational demise may be devastating for people's occupational identities. In addition, such identification may become even more problematic if individuals value their occupation to such a degree that it becomes a dominant source of identification. This is all the more important as many occupations' very existence may be more and more at risk.

With the changing nature of work and rapid advances in technology, the risk of losing one's job, one's organization and even one's occupation is getting more and more prevalent (Barley & Kunda, 2001; Crosina & Pratt, 2019; Kahl et al., 2016; Sutton, 1983). Declining occupations in particular are characterized by important potential losses: loss of members (collective job losses and increased career insecurity, as there are fewer opportunities to perform the work elsewhere); loss of control over jurisdictions that represent the link between an occupation and its work tasks (Abbott, 1988); loss of legitimacy and structure (e.g., symbols, image and reputation, cultural support, the disbanding of associations); and loss of occupational identity. For example, Raffaelli (2019: 580) showed that as the Swiss watchmaking industry was challenged by technological innovation, the watchmakers underwent an important decline: "By



1983, over half of watchmakers had gone bankrupt and two-thirds of all Swiss watch-industry jobs had disappeared” (Perret, 2008).

Although occupations may recover from decline (e.g., Howard-Grenville et al., 2013; Nelson & Irwin, 2013; Raffaelli, 2019), they may reach a point when people perceive the decline as the possible extinction of the occupation. I refer to this phenomenon as Occupational Existential Threats (OET). Because of occupations’ ties to all three bases of identification (Cardador & Pratt, 2006), the threat to an occupation is likely to involve identity threat. Therefore, Occupational Existential Threats may be an important cause of individual identity threats.

### **Responding to Occupational Existential Threats**

OETs are particularly interesting to study because when the very existence of an occupational identity is at risk, individuals have to make decisions regarding not only *who they are*, but also *what matters to them and why* (Niemic et al., 2010; Proulx & Heine, 2010; Sartre, 1905; Webber, 2018). I refer to this phenomenon as Occupational Identity Existential Threat (OIET) – i.e., *the individual experience of a possible permanent loss of an individual’s ability to claim, enact, or draw meaning from a valued occupational identity*.

However, in reviewing literatures that might be relevant in understanding how people react to OETs, I find that existing theories struggle to explain this phenomenon. I argue that this is because OEITs are (1) existential and (2) ambiguous in nature. With regard to the existential nature of the threats, extant theorizing is equivocal. In particular, research on identity threats offers insights that are not particularly clear, and to the degree that they suggest a response to OIETs, that response is quite different from those predicted by scholars studying “life or death”

(i.e., existential) threats. It may be that introducing the issue of mortality into identity threats changes their nature, but empirical research is needed to address this.

Another reason current theory may be limited in explaining OIETs is that such threats involve the unknown. Indeed, the large majority of academic studies examining identity threats have looked at them through the lens of clear losses (e.g., job loss, career-ending injuries, and organizational death) and therefore assume that individuals have to cope with such loss. However, this may not be the case with existential threats, as they leave room for ambiguity around how people should feel and react.

### ***Identity Threats vs. Existential Concerns***

#### **Identity Threats**

Petriglieri's (2011) work has been critical in our current understanding of identity threats in organization studies. She theorized that when individuals go through an identity threat, they have to appraise the event as a threat and develop coping strategies. Appraisal is the process "by which people evaluate the significance of an experience for their well-being (primary appraisal) and determine what to do in response to it (secondary appraisal; Smith, 1991)" (Petriglieri, 2011: 644). Following secondary appraisal, individuals may engage in coping, a construct developed by Lazarus to describe the "cognitive and behavioral efforts" a person employs to manage stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Petriglieri (2011) explains that people may cope with identity threats in two different ways: via either identity-protection or identity-restructuring responses. She defines identity-protection responses as the actions taken toward the source of the threat in order to keep the threatened identity intact. Such a reaction involves discrediting the validity of the source of the threat through derogation, concealment, or positive distinctiveness. Identity-restructuring

responses “are directed toward changing an aspect of the threatened identity” and influence the salience of the threatened identity, its meaning, or its very existence.

She further argues that if an event is appraised as an identity threat, two elements that guide the individual’s response to the identity threat are (1) the strength (or importance) of the threat and (2) the social support available to the individual. Both of these conditions should be particularly salient when an occupation’s existence is at stake.

First, she proposes that the greater the strength of the threat, the more likely individuals will be to adopt an identity-restructuring response. As noted in the previous section, occupations are tied to individuals’ identities. Thus OETs are likely to represent a very strong threat to individuals’ identities, as individuals may lose their relational, behavioral and symbolic bases of identification (Cardador & Pratt, 2006). Petriglieri (2011: 648) notes that such identity loss following a threat “can be very costly for the individual” (Thoits, 1983).

Second, she suggests that social support should guide individuals toward an identity-protecting response. She further argues that this social support should, in fact, surpass the strength of the threat, stating that “even when an identity threat is strong, [...] identity-protection response may be triggered if the individual has a significant level of social support for the threatened identity” (Petriglieri, 2011: 650). Occupations can also be a source of social support, defined by Ashforth and colleagues (2007: 160) as “the instrumental and expressive aid provided by others that helps an individual to cope with the rigors of his or her role” (e.g., Peeters, Buunk, & Schaufeli, 1995; Pithouse, 1994). For example, research shows that social support allows occupational members to maintain the ties to their occupation and be protected from identity threats (Ashforth et al., 2007; Kreiner, Ashforth, & Sluss, 2006).

However, OETs may jeopardize such social support. Indeed, occupational declines can result in a significant number of people losing their jobs and can impact the relationships between colleagues, as coworkers can become competitors in the job market (Crosina & Pratt, 2019). Such competition can impact an important source of social support that is crucial in coping with a job loss (Buzzanell & Turner, 2003; Latack, Kinicki, & Prussia, 1995; Shepherd & Williams, 2018). This would reinforce the idea that occupational members should engage in identity-restructuring responses.

### Existential Concerns

Another literature offers a different approach to thinking about how individuals may deal with the possible loss of their occupation: the literature of existential concerns. Existentialist philosophers (see Martin, 1962 for a review) have focused on a broad question: what does “being” mean? A logical consequence of looking at this question was to consider what “not being” means. In doing so, they defined existential concerns as the experiences people have when considering the end of “being” – i.e., what does it mean to exist?

For individuals, such experiences can arise when they perceive an event as life-threatening, when the meaning of their lives, of what they do, is challenged. Existential threats are therefore closely tied to meaningfulness – i.e., what makes something worth doing – and include “deep” adjustments in people’s lives, which makes them distinct from other forms of threats. Reacting to existential threats requires individuals to consider what makes life worth living, while most identity threats (e.g., identity conflicts or intergroup conflicts) do not put one’s life at stake. As Steger and colleagues (2006: 81) state, meaning in life is the “the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one’s being and existence.”

Organizational scholars have long recognized that understanding “meaningfulness” implied “broader existential questions about the purpose of one’s existence” (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003: 311). Specifically, Pratt and Ashforth (2003) note that individuals may construct meaningfulness in working (i.e., through what people do) and at work (i.e., through people’s membership). In doing so, they suggest that meaningfulness and identity are closely tied, stating that “one path to answering ‘Why am I here?’ [...] is to first answer ‘Who am I?’” (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003: 312). Thus, existential concerns have also been raised when discussing meaningfulness, identity and work. This link is especially strong when discussing traumatic events. For example, Wrzesniewski (2002) described how individuals shifted the meaning they attached to their work after 9/11.

Several theories have tackled existential challenges. In a philosophical branch of “existentialism,” Albert Camus (1913-1960) used the metaphor of “the myth of Sisyphus” (1942) to illustrate the choice individuals have when facing existential concerns. He explains that once individuals realize that their effort to survive is pointless – i.e., they will ultimately die – they feel a lack of control over their fate. Thus, they are left with only two choices: death (i.e., suicide) or accepting their fate and find meaning through their own actions. Indeed, evoking one’s own mortality raises an important question: why am I here? If people lose the meaning of their life, what are their reasons to live?

Building on this philosophical claim, scholars in psychology and management have considered this dilemma by investigating ‘mortality salience’ – i.e., when people think about death – as an important source of existential concerns (e.g., Greenberg, Koole, & Pyszczynski, 2004; Koole et al., 2006). Most notably, terror management theorists have focused on how people deal with their desire for life while facing the certainty of death (Pyszczynski, Greenberg,

& Solomon, 1999). For example, following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 9/11, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon (2003) examined how considerations of one's own mortality became particularly salient in individuals who were directly affected (i.e., who lost a loved one) and indirectly affected (i.e., witnesses). The authors described the impact of the event as a "one-two punch of mortality salience coupled with a major attack on our cultural anxiety buffer" (2003: 93). Such anxiety may lead individuals to threat rigidity – i.e., when people are less flexible in their thinking when facing a threat. Withey (1962: 118) explained that during an important threat, individuals may experience "a narrowing of the perceptual field and a limitation of the information that can or will be received" and even "greater constriction of cognition, rigidity of response, and primitive forms of reaction."

Researchers in organization studies have also studied this phenomenon through the lens of 'death awareness.' For example, Grant and Wade-Benzoni (2009) have theorized how death awareness can lead to 'death anxiety' – i.e., the emotional state attached to death awareness – which is detrimental for individuals as it favors stress-related withdrawal behaviors like turnover, tardiness and absenteeism. By contrast, they propose that 'death reflection' – the cognitive state attached to death awareness – may protect individuals from anxiety and favor prosocial motivation and generative behaviors like helping and mentoring.

These theories assume that individuals will systematically engage in self-protecting responses when facing existential concerns (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997) to avoid being "overwhelmed by suffering and [...] unable to cope with the situation" (Henoch & Danielson, 2009: 228). To do so, scholars of terror management theory have suggested that self-esteem – i.e., positive self-evaluations (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Solomon, Arndt, & Schimel, 2004) – and social support are key in understanding how people may protect themselves against existential

concerns during a threat (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997; Koole et al., 2006; Pyszczynski et al., 2004). For example, Pyszczynski and colleagues (2004: 435) explained that self-esteem “provides a buffer against the omnipresent potential for anxiety engendered by the uniquely human awareness of mortality.” This research suggests that people with lower self-esteem may be more prone to suicide (e.g., Neuringer, 1974).

On social support, Grant and Wade-Benzoni (2009: 603) also noted that individuals may defend against existential threats by “connecting with and contributing to people and groups who share their world views and showing hostility toward people and groups with alternative world views that challenge the legitimacy of their own.” This last point echoes the “derogation” strategy, which “condemn[s] the views of these people and does not necessarily require any direct interaction with them” (Sykes & Matza, 1957) – as a self-protecting response to identity threat (Petriglieri, 2011: 650).

Therefore, research on existential concerns shares traits with research on identity threats. Both theories highlight (1) the strength of the threat, and (2) the important role of social support in how people respond to these threats. However, theories looking at existential threats offer slightly different conclusions as to what people should do when faced with an existential threat, as would be the case in an OIET. Identity threat theories assume that people may restructure their identities to reduce the impact of the threat on their lives, while theories of existential threat assume that people will try to protect their sense of self and save their own lives. Thus, it is unclear which theory would be correct in the case of an OIET. The question calls for further investigation, which is what I aim to provide in this dissertation.

### **Clear vs. Ambiguous Loss**

A second critique of the identity threat literature relates to another aspect of the threat itself. Most research looking at identity threats has investigated clear losses – i.e., when the target of the loss has effectively disappeared. Losses are an part of individuals’ work lives, as Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly (2014: 67) described:

Our work lives involve loss. None of us makes it through a career without loss of a cherished sense of self that comes from work, whether loss of a valued position, close work relationship, treasured team membership, or prestigious work location.

Note that all of the losses mentioned above are clear ones. Numerous studies looking at losses at work have investigated how loss may impact individuals’ identities (Brown, Lewis, & Oliver, 2019). For example, a majority of the research on losses at work has focused on the implications of job loss, organizational death and career-ending accidents (Ashforth, 2001; Crosina & Pratt, 2019; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2016; Maitlis, 2009; Sutton, 1983). Table 2.1 summarizes the literatures that look at clear losses and their impact on individuals.

#### INSERT TABLE 2.1

However, losses that individuals may face at work are not necessarily clear-cut, as is the case during an existential threat. Indeed, as Koole and colleagues (2006: 212) summarized: “Humans live out their lives knowing that their own death is inevitable, [...] that their most cherished beliefs and values, and even their own identities, are uncertain.” Building on the concept of anomie developed by Durkheim<sup>3</sup> (1893), Lepisto and Pratt (2017: 106) also highlight “the subjective experience of uncertainty and ambiguity regarding the value or worth of one’s

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<sup>3</sup>Lepisto and Pratt (2017) define anomie as the subjective experience of uncertainty and ambiguity regarding basic norms, values, and conceptions of value or worth.



work.” Such ambiguity is core to OIETs as the occupation is in a state where it may disappear, but it isn’t gone yet.

Such a phenomenon has been referred to as ambiguous loss. As defined by Boss (1999, 2007), ambiguous loss refers to events where there is uncertainty or a lack of information about the state (i.e., absent or present, dead or alive) of a something cherished by individuals. I argue that distinguishing between clear and ambiguous losses at work is key, as ambiguous losses are qualitatively different from clear losses (Carson, Madhok, & Wu, 2006; Hartley et al., 1991; Klandermans, van Vuuren, & Jacobson, 1991). Indeed, while clear losses involve a transition from one state (“having a job/a career/an organization/an occupation”) to another (“not having one”), dealing with ambiguity means facing an uncertain future where possibilities are still open.

This distinction is therefore important, as ambiguous loss leaves space for the unknown as well as a lack of control. Like scholars interested in existential concerns, psychology researchers who look at ambiguous losses highlight the important trauma that occurs when individuals have difficulty attaining closure, as the ambiguity may “prevent cognition, thus blocking coping and decision-making processes” (Boss, 2007).

The limited body of work on ambiguous loss suggests that individuals may treat the object of the loss as dead to solve the uncertainty or engage with the struggle of uncertainty. Indeed, to limit the impact of ambiguous loss, people may engage in anticipatory grief – i.e., grief occurring prior to a loss (Sweeting & Gilhooly, 1990). Lindemann (1944) showed that following the Second World War, when the possibility of death was high and communications about the status of each soldier could be erratic, families of soldiers were experiencing ambiguous loss. Surprisingly, when soldiers returned home, they were not always welcome as we would expect. As Sweeting and Gilhooly (1990: 1073) summarized: “Relatives not only

passed through the phases of grief but occasionally the resolution of their grief was so complete that a returning soldier would be met with rejection.”

In the management literature, Harris and Sutton (1986) described a similar phenomenon: the practices that employees engaged in when they knew the organization was dying. Such practices included parting rituals such as parties, picnics and dinners that occurred while the organization was dying. Thus, they treated their organization as already gone.

However, other individuals dealing with ambiguous loss may engage with the uncertainty in different ways (e.g., Ashforth, Rogers, Pratt, & Pradies, 2014; Carson et al., 2006). For instance, Ezzy’s (2000) study of patients with HIV showed that in the face of such a life-threatening and yet ambiguous threat, individuals developed different narratives to either remain hopeful about the future (being cured), expect the worst (dying), or focus on the present moment. This means that individuals may also keep experiencing competing feelings and expectations about their situation and remain ambivalent – i.e., they may experience “simultaneously oppositional positive and negative orientations toward an object” (Ashforth et al., 2014). Embracing the uncertainty, however, may leave people feel lingering anxiety about the future outcome of the loss, which weighs on their psychological well-being.

In sum, despite the importance of ambiguous losses and their impact on people’s cognition and emotions, management research has yet to study these losses during an OET. Indeed, it is unclear whether individuals in a dying occupation engage in similar processes as outlined by theories of ambiguous loss – i.e., anticipatory grief or embracing the uncertainty – and if so, how.

### **Summary: Occupational Identity Existential Threats, An Opportunity for Research**

Taken together, the studies described above show the need for a better understanding of identity threats in the face of existential concerns, or what I refer to as Occupational Identity Existential Threats (OJET) – i.e., *the individual experience of a possible permanent loss of an individual's ability to claim, enact, or draw meaning from a valued occupational identity*. Threats to an occupational community's existence are unique and important to study because identity threats involving the decline of an occupation are likely to be particularly severe and affect individuals' social support. Yet it is unclear whether theories of identity threat are adequate when looking at existential threats, as these threats may suggest different outcomes such as death or self-protecting behaviors.

Further, OETs involve ambiguous rather than clear losses. Indeed, OETs are, by definition, an ambiguous loss (Boss, 2007; Sweeting & Gilhooly, 1990), as there is still uncertainty as to whether the occupational community will die or not. Unlike those experiencing other threats (like incapacitating accidents) whereby individuals *cannot*, physically or psychologically, engage with their work, members affected by an OET may still see their occupation revive. This leaves space for individuals to experience competing feelings and thoughts, which have yet to be investigated when an occupational identity is at risk. This calls for further investigation of the phenomenon and leads to the guiding research question of this dissertation: *how do members of an occupational community experience an occupational identity existential threat?*

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHOD**

Given my interest in elaborating theory on the individual experiences of an occupational existential threat, I conducted an inductive qualitative inquiry of an occupational community, Les

Clefs d'Or Concierges, using a grounded-theory approach (Locke, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998). Inductive, qualitative methods are particularly suitable for research questions that aim at developing theory rather than testing hypotheses (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Further, as Creswell (1998) suggested, inductive, qualitative work is especially appropriate for developing theory about process and social mechanisms.

Following the tenets of grounded theory, I iterated between theory, data collection and analysis in order to develop theory. In this process, preexisting theories helped determine the research design (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablinski, 1999), but the theoretical development evolved based on the discoveries and analysis made during the research process (Locke, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As detailed in Chapter 2, I draw from the literatures on threats to occupations and identities as an initial theoretical foundation of the study while keeping an open mind about emerging themes (Locke, 2001). As data collection and analysis progressed, I iteratively moved between emerging themes in the data and theory and adjusted both the research question and the data collection strategies accordingly (Locke, 2001). I further elaborate on this process in the following sections.

Finally, in qualitative work, the choice of context must be theoretically driven. In other words, there needs to be a fit between the research site and the research question (Creswell, 1998). In this chapter, I explain how I found this fit based on theoretical interest and the analysis of some data collected through a pilot study. Indeed, this preliminary study allowed me to develop theoretically driven criteria to confirm that my research context would allow me to capture the phenomenon of interest – in this case, how occupational members react to an occupational existential threat. Hotel concierges, specifically Les Clefs d'Or Concierges, provided an ideal case to study this phenomenon (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003).

I first describe the research context for my dissertation (i.e., Les Clefs d'Or Concierges) and the pilot study that led me to the current research question and sampling. I then explain the criteria used in the sampling strategy for my informants and provide details about my data collection strategy (triangulating from interviews, observation data, archival material and contextual elements). Finally, I detail my data analysis strategy, following the tenets of grounded theory (Locke, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; 1998).

## Research Setting<sup>4</sup>

### *Concierges*

According to Sumner and Quinn (2017), the term *conciergerie* is said to come from the Old French word *cumserges*, which itself originated from the Latin *conservus*, translated as “fellow slave.” The more modern origins of the word are associated with the contraction of a 19<sup>th</sup>-century French phrase “*Comte des cierges*” – i.e., Count of Candles – which referred to the individuals responsible for keeping the lights on.

Since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the term has also been associated with gatekeepers (Stiel & Collins, 1994). This meaning remained in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century France where the *conciergerie* was the person in charge of monitoring the entrances and exits of buildings; this use of the word *conciergerie* continues to this day. In the USA, the term is more widely used and has been associated with any individual providing services within a building. Therefore, several occupational communities use the term “conciergerie” to represent what they do: hotel concierges, corporate concierges, mall concierges, personal concierges, etc. In the USA, the National

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<sup>4</sup> This information is based on personal communications with Les Clefs d'Or concierges and on Sumner and Quinn's (2017) work. Therefore, some of this information might only be part of the lore that is transmitted from mentor to mentee among Les Clefs d'Or members and may not reflect verifiable historical accounts.

Concierge Association (NCA), established in Dallas, Texas, in 1998 – has embraced this diversity by including concierges of all types in its network. Thus, the “NCA has members worldwide representing the corporate, hotel, retail, entertainment, academic, civic, medical, residential and privately-owned sectors of the hospitality industry” (<https://www.ncakey.org/>).

### ***Hotel concierges***

In hotels, the concierge is more commonly the person in charge of attending to any and all guest requests. According to Stiel and Collins (1994), by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, every good hotel in Europe had a concierge, but it was not until 1936 that a social law was passed to pay them a wage. Before that, concierges had provided guest services such as dry cleaning and laundry for gratuities only (Stiel & Collins, 1994).

Stiel (2011) suggests that the hotel concierge is considered to be the epitome of good service by embracing “a curious partnership of idealism and realism in order to deliver true hospitality.” The concierge desk in hotels usually occupies center stage in the hotel lobby, and the concierge is expected to assist guests in a wide range of requirements or needs that they might have during their stay at their destination – e.g., recommendations for activities or restaurants, directions, bookings, etc.

### ***Les Clefs d’Or Concierges***

Les Clefs d’Or Association (also referred to as “the Association”) is a well-established international association of hotel concierges, also known as Union International des Concierges d’Hotel (UICH). It was created some 90 years ago, in 1929, by hotel concierges in France and currently has over 3,500 members worldwide. Les Clefs d’Or USA started in 1978 and had more than 600 members at the start of this study (2019). This Association brought the role of concierge into the USA’s hotel industry and arguably established the first boundaries of the

occupation (i.e., establishing what “concierge” means, selecting and training new members, and educating outsiders).

Usually present in luxury properties in the USA, these concierges are considered to be the “cream of the crop” in the concierge world. They are known for their versatile skills and capacity to make the “impossible possible” for their guests (Les Clefs d’Or website, 2020). The key to their effectiveness is their important network of contacts within the city and the world of *conciergerie* (Kickham, 2018), as well as their ability to take care of all guests’ needs. Specifically, Les Clefs d’Or concierges are famous for the effectiveness of their service and their legendary connections that allow them to grant their guest access to the most inaccessible places – i.e., making a reservation at an overbooked restaurant, getting a private guided tour of a museum, securing a private tour of the Vatican, etc. Therefore, these concierges are known for providing privileged access and service (Kickham, 2018).

To join this association and “get your keys,” an applicant needs to have been at the concierge desk in a hotel for five years and have two or three sponsors from the Les Clefs d’Or association who will write recommendation letters. The applicants must then go through a selection process that lasts for about 3 months before receiving a decision on whether or not they will receive their keys (the acceptance rate is usually below 30%<sup>5</sup>). Once certified, new members are provisionally approved for a year before becoming members in good standing. Members also need to pay an annual fee to keep their membership. As Les Clefs d’Or concierges, members can wear their keys at work or at Les Clefs d’Or-approved events<sup>6</sup> – e.g., national and international meetings (i.e., congresses). In addition to these “key wearing members” (i.e., active concierges)

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<sup>5</sup> This statistic comes from a personal communication with a Les Clefs d’Or administrator.

<sup>6</sup> Members are not allowed to display their keys outside of their workplace or pre-approved events – e.g., local concierge association meetings, interviews with journalists, etc. Members may ask the authorization to wear their keys at a specific event by requesting the approval of the Les Clefs d’Or administration.

are individuals who belong to the Les Clefs d'Or network as affiliate members but are not allowed to wear the golden keys. Affiliates are all former Les Clefs d'Or members who have either retired from the occupation (i.e., Social Affiliates) or have taken other responsibilities within the hotel (i.e., Professional Affiliates), such as general manager or front desk manager, but wish to remain associated to the Les Clefs d'Or community.

These concierges can cater to the demands of the “rich and famous” (Page, 2017), from government officials to celebrities, who are valuable hotel guests. They also play an important role in hotel ratings (Kester, 2020). Indeed, they are actually the only department that is “shopped” twice by rating agencies<sup>7</sup> (personal communication with Les Clefs d'Or concierges and Forbes Hotel Report). These characteristics should, in turn, make the Golden Key concierges valuable to their organizations. Yet their occupation's very existence is now at risk in the USA.

## **Pilot Study**

Before homing in on my current research question about occupational members' reaction to an existential threat to their occupational community, I conducted a pilot study with Les Clefs d'Or USA. This study allowed me to explore and observe their work as well as their perceptions of their craft and the kind of challenges they were facing as individuals and occupational members. Through this pilot study, I identified both my primary sample and the main theme that became core to this dissertation work – i.e., that these concierges were facing an existential threat to their occupation.

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<sup>7</sup> Being “shopped” refers to the assessment made by rating agencies who send their inspectors as secret shoppers. Inspectors from hotel rating agencies have a list of criteria to assess, including their interactions with the personnel. Concierges are evaluated on two distinct interactions, whereas other hotel employees – e.g., receptionists – are evaluated only once. This may speak to the importance and attention that hotel rating agencies like Forbes Travel Guide pay to the service concierges provide in the hotel.



From June to December 2019, I conducted interviews with 15 concierges (7 of whom were non-Les Clefs d'Or members) and one general manager; I also observed 2 hotel concierge desks. All interviews and observations took place in the Boston area. The primary research question for the pilot study was to understand how people managed relationships at work through very quick interactions (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Stephens, Heaphy, & Dutton, 2012). I chose to focus on hotel concierges because they represent an extreme case (Yin, 2003) of an occupational community that puts relationships at the center of “who they are” as professionals.

After casting a wide net on the type of informants I interviewed first – i.e., both Les Clefs d'Or and non-Les Clefs d'Or concierges – I chose to narrow the focus of the study to Les Clefs d'Or concierges for two main reasons. First, after discussions with several informants, I found that some non-Les Clefs d'Or concierges did not see their job as a long-term career but rather as a “fun way to make some money.” They did not have a strong or well-articulated identity regarding their occupational community and thus did not seem to be as affected by and/or thoughtful about the current changes and challenges to the work. By contrast, Les Clefs d'Or concierges have a strong connection to their work and see their craft as part of “who they are” as individuals. Most of them affirm their wish to keep performing the craft not because they could not do other jobs – i.e., “what else would I do?” – but because this is their commitment to their identity and the meaning they attach to their work – “this is what I want to do.” Going through the Les Clefs d'Or recruiting process demonstrated their long-term commitment to the craft of concierge, which is why I chose to focus my dissertation primarily on Les Clefs d'Or members.

Second, the Les Clefs d'Or concierges interviewed in this pilot study expressed a similar concern regarding the future of their profession. Following Spradley (1979), I chose to change the research focus to a problem central to the group studied – i.e., the existential threat to the

occupation – rather than the questions that theory would deem important. In doing so, I learned that the Les Clefs d’Or concierges in the USA were being challenged at different levels and by different sets of actors, all targeting the relevance and value of this occupation. Indeed, concierges are facing rejection from or are being overlooked by both guests and hotel management as two major alternatives to their services have emerged: technology and outsourced services. For example, guests can now use recent technological innovations that can replace part of the concierge’s tasks – e.g., Trip Advisor and Yelp to find restaurants, Open Table to make reservations, Google Maps to find directions. A few decades ago, any hotel guest looking for information about the city would go to the hotel concierge, and the occupation was relied upon for its members’ capacity to retrieve hard-to-access information about the city or the hotel to guide the experience of the guests and create a unique experience for them. Nowadays, however, this kind of information has become accessible to anybody with Internet access.

Another important challenge to the Les Clefs d’Or concierges in the USA was the emergence and use of alternatives to the concierge desk by hotel managers. Certain luxury hotel properties started to hire outsourced concierge desks. Concierges employed by independent companies are stationed within the hotel and are responsible for giving information about the city, but they usually have little power to impact the guest experience in the hotel. These outsourced workers act as “consultants” in the hotel but are not hotel employees. Other hotels are merging the front desk with concierges, putting out an iPad with apps instead of employing concierges. As shown in Charts 3.1, the number of overall members of Les Clefs d’Or has been

steadily declining in the past few years, and some hotels are starting to remove the concierge desk entirely.<sup>8</sup>

### INSERT CHARTS 3.1 ABOUT HERE

Taken together, these challenges offered an ideal context to study how occupational community members react to such important threats to their occupation. According to the informants from this pilot phase, Les Clefs d'Or concierges need to reassert themselves as valuable and profitable for hotels and indispensable to guests in order to “survive” as an occupational group. These changes have created significant challenges: since online search engines, review websites and outsourced services are threatening to completely overlap with their tasks, they face an existential question (“why are the Les Clefs d'Or concierges here?”). Further, concierges in the USA perceived that increasingly fewer guests (especially younger generations) seemed to know what hotel concierges were for, what the Golden Keys represent, or what additional information or benefits concierges provide beyond their alternatives. Hence members of the profession face an identity threat, as the need to understand “what being a concierge means” and “who we are as an occupation” becomes more salient again.

### **Access & Sampling Strategy**

I gained access to the Les Clefs d'Or Association by being introduced to the Les Clefs d'Or administrator as well as the current president of the Association, who both played a crucial role in providing me access to the list of Les Clefs d'Or members and making sure that I would be able to get in contact with enough members, following my sampling criteria, throughout my data collection phase.

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<sup>8</sup> While the number of key-wearing members is declining, the number of affiliate members is increasing, so the overall membership numbers have remained stable in recent years.

### *Les Clefs d'Or Concierges*

In order to capture the magnitude of the threat and how it is perceived and experienced by Les Clefs d'Or concierges, I used purposeful sampling. More specifically, I followed a maximum variance strategy (Patton, 1990) “for the purpose of documenting unique or diverse variations that have emerged in adapting to different conditions, and to identify important common patterns that cut across variations” (Palinkas et al., 2015: 3). To do so, I sampled Les Clefs d'Or concierges by where they work. In particular, I started by focusing on several key dimensions of their workplace: location, hotel rating and hotel ownership type.

Location was an important factor to consider in this sample, as different cities have different characteristics that might impact how the threat is perceived by Les Clefs d'Or concierges. For example, the number of hotels and possible competitors (e.g., outsourced services) may vary from one city to another, which might accentuate concierges' perception of the threat. Therefore, I conducted interviews and observations (in person and virtually) in the following cities within the USA: Boston, New York, Chicago, Miami, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco. These cities were selected as part of the sample because they host the highest number of Les Clefs d'Or concierges and luxury properties in the USA. Furthermore, according to the Les Clefs d'Or association, these locations are representative of the different broad “cultures” within the USA – i.e., East Coast, West Coast, and Midwest, North and South – and are host to a wide variety of hotels – i.e., leisure, business, country clubs, resorts, etc.

Hotel star rating as well as ownership helped me gather perspectives from concierges dealing with different types of clientele – e.g., high-end luxury, family, leisure, and business – and different management styles – i.e., chains or privately owned (also see Lockwood, Glynn, & Giorgi, 2022 for a review of types of luxury hotels). Therefore, I collected data with Les Clefs

d'Or concierges who belonged to a variety of properties: 5-star hotels and 4-star or below, as well as a different ownership types. Star ratings are based on Forbes Travel Guide USA (<https://www.forbestravelguide.com/>).<sup>9</sup> The type of ownership could also have impacted the intensity and breadth of the threat to concierges: it is more difficult for concierges in a big chain hotel to have an influence over company policies than it is for those in privately owned ones where they may have a more direct interactions with the owners. This allowed me to account for the different perspectives within this industry to paint a clearer picture of how Les Clefs d'Or concierges are impacted.

These dimensions were meant to help me account for any variation within the sample regarding Les Clefs d'Or members' reactions to the existential threat. Table 3.1 illustrates the distribution of my sample along those dimensions.

#### INSERT TABLE 3.1

As data collection progressed, I could not see any significant differences in how the Les Clefs d'Or concierges were perceiving the threat to their occupation. However, at the start of 2020, an important factor emerged as the most consequential: working status. This criterion became particularly relevant after the pilot study as the Covid19 pandemic began to affect the hotel industry and the employment of Les Clefs d'Or concierges starting in February 2020. Since the start of the pandemic, the Les Clefs d'Or members have been strongly affected by the crisis (e.g., American Hotel and Lodging Association, 2021; Krishnan, Mann, Seitzman, & Wittkamp, 2020). The Les Clefs d'Or Association estimated that in March 2021, less than 30% of their members were working in their hotels. Some of these were performing non-concierge tasks (e.g.,

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<sup>9</sup> While I acknowledge that there are other rating agencies (e.g., AAA, Booking.com, etc.) Forbes Travel Guide is widely recognized in the USA and used in hotel lobbies as proof of their standards.

replacing front desk agents taking bookings, working as a doorman, performing accounting tasks, etc.) or working in other organizations or areas, which, according to the Association's bylaws, would jeopardize their eligibility to keep their keys.<sup>10</sup>

The year following the start of the pandemic has had important repercussions for the hospitality industry, particularly its employees (Davahli, Karwowski, Sonmez, & Apostolopoulos, 2020). In January 2021, Les Clefs d'Or Association surveyed its members to assess, among other things, whether they were: (1) still employed and working at a hotel; (2) furloughed and waiting to be called back by their hotel; or (3) laid off. In the last case, the survey asked whether the person would still be looking for a job as a concierge in a hotel or if the person had left the hospitality industry.

Therefore, as I moved from purposeful to theoretical sampling – i.e., sampling based on the desire to collect data that helps elaborate and refine emerging categories and themes (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008) – I included working status (employed, furloughed, or laid off) as a criterion to capture how these differences affected their perception of the occupational existential threat. Specifically, I made sure to interview a sample of members who were employed (at the time of the interview), waiting to be called back, laid off and wanting to remain a concierge, and laid off and not willing to remain part of this occupation.

### ***Les Clefs d'Or's USA Board & Administrators***

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<sup>10</sup> The bylaws state that in order to remain a Les Clefs d'Or concierge, members must be “employed by hotels and resort hotels having a transient clientele and ... work full time at a desk located on the main lobby level of such hotels, from which they provide services to all the guests of the hotel. The desk must have a sign that includes the word ‘concierge.’ Concierges employed to provide services to certain guests on VIP floor or ‘towers’ or on any other floor other than the main lobby level of the hotel shall not qualify for membership. Concierges employed in any other type of establishment other than a hotel, even if they house a transient clientele, shall not qualify for membership.”

In order to understand how the Les Clefs d'Or association might contribute in shaping how individual members reacted to the challenges and threats at hand, I paid particular attention to the board members of the association. This board is constituted of 8 members: President, Vice President & Congress Liaison, Secretary, Treasurer & Director of Concierge Relations, Director of Development, Director of Marketing & Media, Director of Membership and Assistant Director of Membership.<sup>11</sup> The administrator of Les Clefs d'Or also attends board meetings. By regularly communicating with the President and Administrator, I was able to account for the decisions that are taken at the Association level.

### ***Complementary Sample: Key Extra-occupational Stakeholders***

Finally, in order to complement my sample of Les Clefs d'Or concierges, I included a sample of informants who occupy positions that had an influence on how Les Clefs d'Or members experienced the occupational existential threats – i.e., Hotel General Managers and executives at Hotel Rating Agencies. Although this sample of individuals was not the main source of data for this study, collecting their perceptions shed light on the context in which Les Clefs d'Or concierges have to work, and it helped characterize the occupational existential threat (see the discussion of extra-occupational stakeholder narratives in the Findings section).

## **Data Collection**

I used multiple sources of data to understand how these elite hotel concierges face the threat to their occupation. This allowed me to approach the phenomenon from multiple angles and triangulate the data (Jick, 1979; Yin, 2003). Specifically, semi-structured, in-depth

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<sup>11</sup> Members of the Board are elected each year at the National and International level during the National and International conferences, respectively. However, because of the Covid19 pandemic and the cancelation of the conferences, the [specify year—2020?] elections were postponed and the previous Board members remained in office.

interviews, observations and archival material were the primary sources of data. Table 3.2 summarizes each of the sources used.

INSERT TABLE 3.2 ABOUT HERE

### ***Semi-structured in-depth interviews***

Interviews allow for a targeted investigation of a particular phenomenon and give the informants the opportunity to explain and reflect on their perception of the phenomenon (Weiss, 1994; Whyte, 1984). I conducted a total of 85 interviews that lasted an average of 80 minutes (from 20 to 150 minutes). Following grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, Locke, 2001), the interviews were semi-structured, which allowed informants to add new topics to explore. The protocol changed based on emergent themes as more information was collected (Locke, 2001). The initial wave of interviews aimed at capturing “grand tour” and “mini tour” observations about the work of hotel concierges. Building on Spradley (1979: 77, 79), I started by asking “grand tour” questions, which revolve around the broad features of social events – e.g., one’s job schedule – and “mini tour” questions, which are more focused on a particular aspect of the work – e.g., one specific task (see Appendix). These questions allowed me to understand what the informants’ work generally entails, what their specific roles are and whom they interact with, and their perspectives on the challenges and evolution of their craft. Other questions targeted how informants define themselves and others at work, how they position themselves relative to other groups or organizations (i.e., hotels, other concierges, other Les Clefs d’Or members), and how they might cope with the challenges to their position. I also conducted 16 follow-up interviews with informants who had been interviewed before the Covid19 pandemic to capture any changes they may have had in their perception of the future of their occupational community. I continued collecting this data until I reached “theoretical



saturation” – i.e., the point at which “fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your theoretical categories” (Charmaz, 2006: 113).

To account for the influence of key constituents of the occupational community, I also conducted interviews with board members of Les Clefs d’Or USA and recurring interviews with two key informants (i.e., the President and the Administrator). These interviews focused on their evolving perceptions of the threat, the decisions that were being taken, and their reaction to emerging themes as the analysis unfolded.

When possible, I conducted the interviews in person. However, since March 2020 and the breakout of the Covid19 pandemic, the subsequent lockdowns and states of emergency have prevented most researchers from collecting data in person. Therefore, most of the interviews collected until the end of my data collection were over the phone or via a virtual communication application (Skype, Zoom, FaceTime) until face-to-face interviews were possible again. In total, I conducted 85 interviews (37 interviews in person and 48 interviews over Zoom and phone).

I created three separate interview protocols (see the Appendix), one for general members of the Les Clefs d’Or association, which represents most informants; one for administrators and board members of Les Clefs d’Or USA; and one for General Managers and accrediting agencies. For the administrators and board members, I interviewed two key members on a regular basis to track the evolution of their thoughts and decision processes as new events unfolded, such as post-lockdown layoffs. These additional interviews allowed me to understand how the occupation was reacting to the threat. I was able to get further insights into the decisions being taken to address the current threat, the evolution of their reaction to the threat over time, and the impact of the threat on individual members. It was important to capture such

changes to the occupation and how they might influence individual members' perception of the threat. I was also able to discuss elements from my observations detailed below and follow up on emerging themes from other data sources.

Finally, I also conducted interviews with General Managers and representatives of important accrediting agencies. These interviews were important, as these actors play a direct role in determining what tasks concierges perform at work and whether or not they can keep their jobs. I interviewed three General Managers, one from each of type of hotel outlined in my sampling strategy. Moreover, since hotel rating agencies play an important role in how Les Clefs d'Or members are assessed within hotels, I interviewed two executives at an American hotel rating agency. These executives represented an important source of contextual information. It was important to have some idea of the criteria used by such agencies in their evaluation process and to hear the executives' perspectives on the role concierges play in hotels. Understanding their view of the future of the industry and this particular occupational group was useful in assessing the strength of the occupational existential threat.

### ***Observations***

In order to get a better understanding of how Les Clefs d'Or concierges behave and interact at work, I engaged in on-site observations. These observations had two main goals: (1) to identify what practices concierges engage in at work and what matters to their work; and (2) to establish a more trusting relationship to improve the interviews. Observations are critical to understanding the work practices of informants (Junker, 1960; Pratt & Sala, 2021; Wolcott, 1994). Following Spradley (1979), I paid particular attention to what people were doing and

whom they were doing it with.<sup>12</sup> These observations were intended to provide me with a richer understanding of how Les Clefs d'Or concierges interact with guests, coworkers and managers, vendors, and other concierges. While observing, I did not engage in clear participant activities (e.g., giving recommendations to guests) and only stood by the concierge desk and shadowed concierges at relevant times. This allowed me to write down notes and record observations without obstructing their work. At first, I observed for entire shifts to capture as many interactions as possible. During meetings (e.g., hotel trainings, local concierge association gatherings, and Les Clefs d'Or meetings), when possible, I observed from afar and did not engage with the people present so as to not disturb their behavior. My observer status was meant to be visible and known to the informant(s) as well as the rest of the staff of the hotel and guests present. Toward that end, I wore a badge that stated my name and my role as a PhD student at Boston College.

These observations occurred concurrently with interviews so that my observations could provide important cues for future interviews and help improve my interview protocol (Pratt & Sala, 2021). For example, I asked concierges why they engaged in certain tasks or behaved a certain way during a particular event. This process was helpful in establishing a connection with informants prior to interviews and allowed for more in-depth questioning, especially about a sensitive topic such as the existential threat to their occupation.

I kept track of observation notes and memos in a field journal. Field journals provide a space to record stream-of-consciousness observations, as well as reflections and reactions (i.e., memos). I wrote field notes that reflected the practices, conversations and interactions that I had

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<sup>12</sup> I used Spradley's (1980) dimensions of social situations as an observation protocol to describe the unfolding events (space, actor, activity, object, act, event, time, goal, feeling).

observed. These thick descriptions of how the actions and interactions unfolded (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) were transcribed and coded during the analysis stages. As with interviews, observations stopped once I had reached theoretical saturation.

### *Archival Material*

Finally, to take advantage of another important source of information to help me understand the context of the Les Clefs d'Or Association and the threat to the members' occupation, I collected several archival documents. For example, I gathered newspaper articles using the keywords "concierges" and "Les Clefs d'Or," considering only the ones that concerned the USA. Other archival materials included Association Board of Director meeting notes and minutes, professional conference presentations and written reports, books, newspaper articles and online reports, and social media posts. This additional data was used to enhance and corroborate the findings from the interviews (Yin, 2003).

I also collected archival materials on important extra-occupational stakeholders within the hospitality industry (General Managers and executives in the main hotel rating agencies in the USA) that might affect the nature and evolution of the threats to Les Clefs d'Or concierges. I collected material that reflected how these actors perceive Les Clefs d'Or concierges, including articles from hotels.com, publications in specialized magazines in the hotel industry as well as the accreditation agencies' websites, recorded interviews, and social media posts.

Only when I was confident that the major concepts and categories were well developed and told a compelling theoretical story did I stop collecting new data (Locke, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This applied to all three data sources: interviews, observations, and archival material.

## **Data Analysis**

Alongside data collection, I engaged in data analysis following a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Locke, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). Grounded theory offers a rigorous empirically based framework to develop theory. Given my interest in studying individuals' experiences and reactions to OETs, this method was a good fit for my analytic strategy. As detailed by Locke (2001), I did not move through the analysis steps linearly but rather travelled back and forth between data collection, data reduction, coding and theory. The different sources of data – interviews and field notes, memos, and archival material – were also analyzed on an iterative basis.

In gathering the data, I also adopted practices to increase the trustworthiness of the data (see Golden-Biddle & Locke, 2007) by engaging in an insider/outsider approach as described by Strike and Rerup (2015) and others (Crosina & Pratt, 2019). More precisely, I regularly checked with my dissertation chair, who played the role of “devil’s advocate” (Strike & Rerup, 2015: 888) to ensure the rigor of the data throughout its collection and analysis.

As part of my analytical approach, I started by engaging in data reduction by completing contact summary sheets (Miles & Huberman, 1994) for interviews and field notes. These forms synthesize the important features of each interview, observation or archival document, and they can facilitate the analysis by highlighting relevant information within the data. I used these forms to document main themes and recurring topics as data was collected. Following previous work using a similar approach (e.g., Harrison & Rouse, 2014; Pratt, Rockmann, & Kaufmann, 2006), I performed my analysis in three stages, moving from the initial transcripts and notes to a theoretical framework. Figure 3.1 gives examples of how I moved to higher-order coding and the relationships between codes.

### INSERT FIGURE 3.1

#### *Open Coding*

In the initial stage of data analysis, I started by coding every interview transcript, archival material and field note, and I stayed very close to the data to generate “open codes” (Locke, 2001). In doing so, I identified statements that described my informants’ perceptions, opinions and feelings about the decline of their occupation and the threat of its disappearance from hotels. At this stage, I remained open to new, emerging themes and adjusted my interview protocol as these themes became important to this study to allow the “discovery” process to unfold (Locke, 2001).

For instance, at the occupational level, these open codes included accounts related to how the occupation as a whole was perceived by extra-occupational stakeholders (e.g., need for change in occupation: “they [concierges] need to change if they want to stay relevant to this industry”; proving occupation’s worth: “they have to prove they’re valuable to the bottom line”); or actions taken by Board members to address the occupational existential threat (e.g., staying connected: “we have to stick together, stay united and connected”; sharing positive achievements: “we keep sharing positive achievements by our members”; keeping concierges engaged in the occupation: “we have these concierge ‘challenges’ that we send our members to keep them engaged as concierges”; maintaining hope: “we have to keep hoping that this will get better if we want to go through these tough times”). At the individual level, I coded how my informants perceived the existential threat that weighs on their occupation (e.g., fighting for occupational survival: “we are fighting for survival”; worry about losing occupation: “I worry because many hotels don’t see us [Les Clefs d’Or concierges] as valuable anymore and are getting rid of the [concierge] desk”); how they thought and felt about the future of their

occupation (e.g., concierges will survive: “I don’t believe that concierges will disappear”; hoping for survival of occupation: “I still very much hope that concierges will be in their lobby as long as there are hotels to host them”; feeling anxious: “I feel anxiety because I don’t know what will become of us”; feeling uncertainty: “I’m not sure what to do”).

Once these open codes were named, I then revisited the data and compared the open codes to determine which were the most relevant, avoid redundancy and confirm that these open codes reflected my informants’ perceptions and experience accurately.

### *Axial Coding*

After this initial coding, I began to aggregate the open codes into higher-order codes, referred to as “axial codes,” that provided me with the building blocks for theorizing. I compared differences and similarities among the open codes – e.g., Les Clefs d’Or concierges’ experience of the threat to their craft, how they react to the threat, and the context in which they do so (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As I engaged in this constant comparative work, I developed more conceptual categories that allowed me to start theorizing my findings<sup>13</sup> (Locke, 2001).

For example, at the occupational level, I aggregated open codes from extra-occupational stakeholders related to the issues with what the Les Clefs d’Or concierges do and the ones related to why they are valuable as “identity and meaning-threatening narratives.” I also aggregated open codes related to the shared feelings of hope that Les Clefs d’Or members felt towards the future survival of their occupation as “occupational hope.” At the individual level, “Occupational Identity Existential Threat” (OIET) compiled the open codes related to the ambiguity Les Clefs d’Or concierges experienced as to whether they could keep identifying with their occupation.

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<sup>13</sup> At this stage, I did not notice any significant differences in how informants looked at the following criteria: locations, hotel types and ownership.

Building on the American Psychiatric Association's classification (American Psychiatric Association, 2000) and particularly common mood disorders (Beck, Brown, Steer, Eidelson, & Riskind, 1987), I identified statements associated with depressive and anxiety disorders, which were usually coupled with visible signs of distress, panic (i.e., trembling and shaking, heavy breathing) and sadness (i.e., crying and sobbing), that I abstracted to "symptoms of depression" and "symptoms of anxiety."<sup>14</sup>

### ***Theoretical Coding***

Finally, once sufficient axial codes had been generated, I took a step back and looked at them together so as to understand (1) whether they were tied to broader theoretical categories and (2) how these concepts might relate to higher theoretical categories and to each other. First, my theoretical coding involved compiling certain axial codes under a broader theoretical category. For example, the narratives related to the extra-occupational stakeholders were abstracted to "Extra-Occupational Stakeholder Narratives," while the axial codes associated with the actions taken by the Les Clefs d'Or board were abstracted to "Occupational Support." At the individual level, the axial codes related to the Les Clefs d'Or mental and relational consequences of their attitude towards the collective OET identified through the DSMD were grouped under "mental health" and "relationships."

Second, as I generated these broader theoretical categories, I reflected on the relationships between them to theorize my findings. Indeed, theoretical coding consists of understanding how such categories might fit together in a broader theoretical framework (Locke, 2001) so as to "tell an analytic story that has coherence" (Charmaz, 2006: 63) and "weave the

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<sup>14</sup> Symptoms are defined as "any characteristic of a person's action, thoughts or feelings that could be a potential indicator of a mental disorder" (Gray, 1999: 605)



fractured story back together” (Glaser, 1978: 72). Thus, I compiled and compared the abstracted codes and created several models on a blackboard (one based on the occupational-dynamics codes and one on the individual-level ones). As I did so, my theorizing started to focus on the role of hope (organizational and individual) in how individuals experienced and reacted to the OET. I also analyzed the effects their reactions had on their mental health and relationships. For example, generating occupational hope while facing the OET reinforced the experience of Occupational Identity Existential Threat for occupational members, since it strengthened their belief that the occupation could survive. Another example, at the individual level, was establishing how the differences in appraisals by Les Clefs d’Or concierges (e.g., occupational hope, job hope, self-efficacy) led them on distinct paths and, ultimately, had different mental health and relationships consequences. I also considered several possible conceptual frameworks to find the best match with the data and see how they might fit within existing theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Alongside this theorizing process, I conducted member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to confirm the validity of the findings and the robustness of the theoretical framework. For instance, I shared emerging findings with 5 key informants (one General Manager, three senior Les Clefs d’Or members, and one junior Les Clefs d’Or member), and I asked them to reflect on whether their experience was captured in how I depicted the phenomena. These member checks led, for instance, to an important distinction between Les Clefs d’Or members who were out of a job but wanting to go back to their work and stayed passive (referred to as the “waiting passive” path in the Chapter Five) and those who were proactive in looking for different ways to go back to work as a concierge (i.e., “waiting proactive”).

## **CHAPTER FOUR: GENERATING OCCUPATIONAL HOPE IN THE FACE OF OCCUPATIONAL EXISTENTIAL THREATS**

By definition, OETs involve a shared sense of dread that the occupation is at risk of disappearing. As described in the method section, the Les Clefs d'Or members were already aware of and struggling with occupational decline prior to the Covid19 pandemic due to challenges in their occupational environment, namely new technology and competing services (i.e., outsourced desks). In this section, I describe several narratives that emerged among extra-occupational stakeholders (particularly General Managers and owners of hotels, and hotel rating agencies and reviewers) that conveyed an existential threat to this occupation and were perceived as a decrease in the understanding of what hotel concierges do and what their worth is. The occupational decline accelerated and the existential threat heightened with the impact of the Covid19 pandemic on the hotel industry (e.g., American Hotel and Lodging Association, 2021).

In this chapter<sup>15</sup>, I first describe how the occupation's leadership (Board members and administrators) perceived these environmental factors as identity- and meaning-threatening narratives and ultimately as a sign that their occupation might disappear (OET). Second, I explain how the occupation itself reacted to the OET and tried to survive by providing occupational support and hope to its members. Figure 4.1 illustrates how these macro dynamics unfold.

INSERT FIGURE 4.1 HERE

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<sup>15</sup> I will use the following abbreviations for my informants: General Manager (GM), Hotel Reviewer (HR), Les Clefs d'Or Board member (LCDB), Les Clefs d'Or Administrator (LCDA) and Les Clefs d'Or member (LCD).

## *Environmental Factors and Occupational Existential Threat*

### Extra-occupational narratives

Beyond the decline in the number of Les Clefs d'Or concierges in the industry as a whole (see Chart 3.3 in the Methods chapter), in the past decades, several extra-occupational actors have expressed doubts about the ultimate survival of the Les Clefs d'Or concierges in hotels. The hotel industry as a whole was employing fewer and fewer concierges; in the early 2000's, rating agencies removed the requirements of having a Les Clefs d'Or member as one of the criteria for a 5-star rating, and hotel managers both restricted the scope of what concierges could do (e.g., managing the Bellmen) and allowed other staff members to take on tasks usually performed by hotel concierges (e.g., making restaurant reservations, providing advice to guests on what to do in the city, etc.).

First, an important emerging narrative was that extra-occupational stakeholders had concerns about what a hotel concierge does and consequently questioned the value of the tasks associated with their work. In particular, there was a question about the role of hotel concierges when new technology was directly competing with their services. For instance, some General Managers perceived the limited adoption of new technology by many concierges as problematic as guests embraced technology as a normal part of their travel. As one General Manager mentioned:

People are expecting us to stay on top of things and have the latest technology. When thinking about the concierge it's not just face to face, it's texting and messaging online and using different technology that are now the new "normal" for our guests. [...] so I think concierges, they need to adopt these new ways of communicating now more than ever. (Sebastian, GM, Fall 2021)

A former General Manager, Daniel (2010), in an article entitled “Is the Role of the Hotel Concierge Going Obsolete?” also wrote the following:

Technology has placed a world of resources at the fingertips of travelers. Mobile applications allow us to walk out of our hotel, point our phone into the street, and find local restaurants and entertainment, peruse reviews, consult maps and make reservations. In a PhoCusWright survey last year, 67% of travelers reported having used a mobile device to find local services. Almost daily, hotels and travel companies are releasing mobile apps and mobile-compatible websites packed with information normally dispensed by the capable hotel concierge.

Further, some General Managers saw hotel concierges as part of the “front desk” more broadly, blurring the lines delineating what tasks should be associated with concierges: “our concierges are part of the front desk team [...] ultimately everyone has to be able to multitask so that guests won’t have to wait and speak to too many people. So if someone asks one of our employees at the front desk where to go in the city, they should be able to answer” (Clara, GM, Fall 2019). Ultimately, these challenges made General Managers wonder about what role hotel concierges should occupy and whether they would even be there in the future or be replaced and engage in other tasks within the hotel. As Daniel, former GM, concluded in his article from 2010: “Where does that leave the concierge? Parking cars? Slinging drinks in the lounge? Let’s hope not.”

Second, perhaps more troubling to the Les Clefs d’Or community were the narratives questioning the value (or the worth) of their work. This narrative emerged following the layoff of long-time concierges and the removal of the concierge desk in many hotels of all luxury categories.<sup>16</sup> As former General Manager Daniel (2010) stated: “Some hotels have replaced concierges with touch-screen kiosks.” Further, even though hotel reviewers acknowledged their

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<sup>16</sup> One notable exception is Boutique Hotels, a group of the highest luxury brands, where the concierge is perceived as core to the services offered to guests (see Lockwood et al., 2022)

expertise – as Kate’s article (Weir, 2018) expressed: “A top-form concierge is the hotel’s oracle, an omniscient Golden Keys-award-winner with an encyclopaedic knowledge of the town’s hottest tickets and tables, all of which they can access as if by magic” – accounts by hotel reviewers also took a highly critical look at the hotel concierge’s ultimate value. As Kate continued in an article on a traveling blog explicitly entitled “Killing the Concierge” (Weir, 2018):

Self-determination has caused the dust to settle on the concierge’s desk. Savvy travellers, fuelled with niche suggestions from the social-media sphere, now arrive at hotels with fully realised itineraries. They may not know the sister-in-law of the third cousin of the owner of Berghain or have the star power to nab a last-minute table at Le Gavroche, but who cares... These digital nomads have already sought out the Next Big Thing. Our verdict: The concierge falls into the ‘comforting to know it’s there’ category, but – if we’re honest – we can’t remember the last time we dinged that bell. Sorry concierges, but we’re sending you packing.

### Impact of the Covid19 Pandemic

The Covid19 pandemic that hit the USA in 2020 started having an impact on the hotel industry as a whole and also accelerated the perception that Les Clefs d’Or’s survival was at risk.

As Oscar (LCDB, Fall 2020) explained:

With Covid, it was like a time-lapse, it’s like 10 years happened into one and suddenly everyone was being laid off and furloughed everywhere, you name it [...] even [luxury hotel brand] concierges were being let go... it was everyone and it happened so fast. Much faster than any of us would have expected prior to the pandemic.

Ultimately, the leadership of Les Clefs d’Or felt like the very existence of Les Clefs d’Or concierges was even more at risk. As Florence (LCDA), an Administrator of Les Clefs d’Or USA, puts it:

Members are being stripped away of their identities, they’re being stripped away from what matters most to them and it’s catastrophic. [...] Now people are calling me to ask “what should I do?”, we are quite literally talking about the survival of our members and the survival of our profession and our craft. (Summer 2020)

### Collective Occupational Existential Threats: Questioning “What We Do” and “Why We Do It”

As a result, the Les Clefs d'Or concierges collectively interpreted these trends and emerging narratives from extra-occupational stakeholders in two ways: (1) as a questioning of the actual tasks that Les Clefs d'Or concierges accomplish (i.e., “what we do”) and (2) as affecting the very worth of their work (i.e., “why we do it”). Ultimately, these narratives were interpreted by the broader Les Clefs d'Or community as a signal that their situation was desperate and that these concierges could “disappear” from hotels in the near future. I detail each of these perceptions below.

First, Les Clefs d'Or concierges saw a disconnect between their own perception of who they are, and how others perceived them, especially regarding guests who used mobile technology. As one informant from the Board of Les Clefs d'Or explained:

Some guests are not the same definitely from like 10-15 years ago and some are more well-travelled than others but more and more, many will have no clue as to what a concierge is for. [...] I mean the GenZ are now glued to their smartphones and it's harder to get them to our desk because they think you can do everything with your phone. (Mary, 2019)

This narrative emerged from interactions not only with guests (particularly the ones who were unfamiliar with hotel concierges) but also with hotel management and owners. As a result, Les Clefs d'Or concierges interpreted this as a signal that what they were doing was wrong or at best limited, and that they were becoming outdated, as a Board member of the Les Clefs d'Or explained:

I think there is a misunderstanding sometimes when it comes to technology. I think... I believe that we [hotel concierges] need to be better at using new technology and be aware of all the tech innovations that actually could help us in our work. But that doesn't mean that what we currently do is wrong. I know how to take care of my guest better than any technology can provide. [...] I just think we need to show it more though to the people around like our guests of course but the management too that we have a set of skills that actually go beyond what they seem to think. (Harry LCDB, Fall 2019)

Oscar (LCDB, Summer 2019) also added:

I couldn't believe when [Chain Hotel Brand] got rid of the [concierge] desk. It's such a renowned luxury brand, and they don't have a concierge desk and they have an iPad instead. [...] Like how can you give a 5-star service? That's impossible to me and it shows that really we need the human touch more than ever and we need to show this because people and owners seem to forget that the service of a Les Clefs d'Or is, is like magic to many of our guests and so valuable too... (Oscar, LCDB)

Second, Les Clefs d'Or members perceived these reactions from extra-occupational stakeholders as a sign that the very meaning of what made their work worth doing was under attack. As reported by the Administrator of the Les Clefs d'Or Association (Fall 2019):

During our international conference...when Mobil<sup>17</sup> announced that having a Les Clefs d'Or was not going to be a requirement for a 5-star rating, that was like a bomb in the concierge world. [...] ultimately the challenge was really to prove ourselves again and having to show the world that we are valuable to our hotel, to our guest and that we can make a difference. [...] We are an important part of what makes service excellent at a hotel. (Florence, LCDA)

Other members in the Les Clefs d'Or Board also perceived a similar threat. As Gary (LCDB, Fall 2019) reflected:

It's a very frustrating thing to think or to feel like you're being labelled as "not valuable" or something like that. It's not that I think that Les Clefs d'Or should not be better and we always try to get better and better at what we do, we're passionate...I'm passionate about the service I give and I want every person that I give service to, to have the best experience they've ever had. [...] but so that's really not how some people in the management or in our industry more broadly see it sometimes... it's like we're a liability to them and an extra line of credit to put on the financial report.

Therefore, at the occupational level, the Les Clefs d'Or community acknowledged that the threats to their occupation constituted an existential one (i.e., "our occupation may disappear") that needed to be addressed. Even before Covid19, the President of Les Clefs d'Or had already described the situation as follows:

I think we're all on the same boat even if some members are more at risk [of losing their jobs] than others ... in the end it's a problem for all of us. We want to keep our jobs and Les Clefs d'Or strong and keep growing our Association. [...] We are all at risk here.

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<sup>17</sup> Mobil Travel Guide was a star-rating organization that was acquired by Forbes and became Forbes Travel Guide in the late 2000s.

That's why I've been, with the rest of the Board... I've been focused on providing ways for us to answer when one of us is being asked "why are you valuable to us" or "what do you do here" so that we can defend ourselves. (Oscar, Fall 2019)

As this last quote illustrates, on top of acknowledging the possible death of the occupation triggered by a threatening environment for hotel concierges in the USA, the Board of Les Clefs d'Or USA felt the need to react to the threat and provide a path forward for the occupation to survive.

### ***Occupational Survival: Occupational Support and Collective Occupational Hope***

To counter the threatening environmental factors that triggered the OET, the occupational community (through the Board of the Les Clefs d'Or Association) reacted by entering an "occupational survival mode." Occupational survival mode refers to the collective efforts to keep the occupation from disappearing. Like doctors dealing with a life-threatening wound, they need to first stop the bleeding and then cure the patient. Similarly, to promote occupational survival, the Les Clefs d'Or Board took two main actions: (1) providing support to members and (2) generating a collective narrative of occupational hope.

#### **Providing Occupational Support**

In order to provide opportunities for Les Clefs d'Or members to remain within the occupation despite the threat, the Association took concrete actions: it offered its members support – both financial and social. Financial support was provided in various ways: for example, the Les Clefs d'Or Association offered grants to its members to help them pay for membership dues as well as expenses to attend the different conferences held by the association nationally and internationally (Les Clefs D'Or, 2020). Florence (Fall 2019) explained that "Les Clefs d'Or always try to support its members when their hotels are not able to pay for their expenses.



Members are able to apply for a grant that can cover for the dues or other important expenses like traveling for international conferences.”

During the pandemic, the Les Clefs d’Or Board also decided to waive the annual membership dues for all members to reduce their financial burden. As a Les Clefs d’Or Board member explained:

Waiving the dues seemed like the most obvious thing to do to remove further financial burden on people’s shoulders when many of us are unemployed or have a harder time financially. (Gary LCDB, Fall 2020)

Additionally, the Les Clefs d’Or Association provided social support to reaffirm its important level of care and concern for its members. Prior to the pandemic, conferences and local gatherings (e.g., through local concierge Associations) were core to how Les Clefs d’Or concierges were able to support each other. As another Board member, Nadia (LCDB), summarized: “I love going to conferences. For me it’s a way to gather with friends and get to improve my skills and learn from each other. It’s such a valuable part of what we do because it’s where we can help each other most.”

During the pandemic, in-person meetings were cancelled and, like workers in most occupations and organizations, Les Clefs d’Or members had to resort to virtual solutions to remain connected (e.g., virtual gatherings via Zoom). Providing social support entailed organizing virtual gatherings and activities, as well as checking members’ status to keep track of what members were doing and how they were feeling. Indeed, it was very important for the leadership of Les Clefs d’Or to maintain the connection with and between members to support each other. As a Board member expressed on social media:

On behalf of the Board of Directors, we sincerely look forward to more opportunities to support each other during these difficult and unprecedented times. (Mary LCDB, Facebook post, Fall 2020)

Gary, a board member (LCDB, Fall 2020), further added:

We are also trying to check on the status of our members because now that not all of us are at our desk, it's hard to reach out to people or know if the information we have about them is still accurate. And so we try to have gathering and chats over Zoom and be there for each other.

Finally, the Board also implemented “Gratitude Challenges” whereby Les Clefs d’Or members were encouraged to send thank-you notes to essential businesses (e.g., hospitals, nursing homes, etc.). The idea was to keep some concierge-related tasks as part of their everyday lives even when members had been laid off or furloughed. As Oscar (LCDB, Fall 2020) explained: “it’s just a fun way to keep everyone engaged and connected. It’s such a difficult time for everyone. But we send thank you cards like all the time and so now we can still do that, and hopefully that can make a difference for those people.”

Ultimately, these actions taken by the Les Clefs d’Or Board aimed at keeping members from leaving the occupation and remaining united in the face of the OET. As Oscar continued: “I hope that what we’re doing ultimately serves its purpose and that we can save our members who, I know, want to remain concierges. I’ve received so many calls from members saying how desperately they want to go back to their desk so I want to help them do so.” In providing such support to its members, the Les Clefs d’Or association also strengthened the sense that the occupation might indeed survive the OET. In the following section, I explain how the occupation managed to generate a collective sense of hope in the face of the OET.

### Generating Collective Occupational Hope

On top of trying to “stop the bleeding” through occupational support, the Les Clefs d’Or Association tried to offer “prescriptions” for a possible cure and took steps to strengthen the motivation of their members to help save the occupation. To do so, they conveyed occupational

narratives and provided tools that encouraged members to remain hopeful about the future of their occupation and fight for their vision of “service.” As Mary (LCDB, 2019) declared: “I am hopeful that there will be more applications to come soon and our number will keep growing as the guests need us more than ever.”

To generate such a strong collective claim of hopefulness, the leadership of Les Clefs d’Or responded to the combined identity- and meaning-threatening narratives put forth by extra-occupational stakeholders by openly communicating their pride in their identity and in the value provided by Les Clefs d’Or concierges. Indeed, in the organization’s communications with members and a broader audience, there was a consistent pride in the standards of excellence that the Les Clefs d’Or upheld. On its website (Les Clefs D’Or, 2020), we can find the following statements:

Anything Is Possible represents the promise Les Clefs d’Or USA makes to its guests and hotels to deliver the highest level of service possible and find ways to surprise and delight each guest.

Further, as a Board member explained:

We [Les Clefs d’Or] are the ones who defined the standards of having excellent service in hotels. [...] any hotel can have a comfortable bed or fancy amenities, but the real difference is the quality of service that you get. [...] I am proud to belong to a group of people, a group of friends, who are all driven by that passion for giving the best service to our guest every day, no matter the challenges. (Nadia LCDB, Fall 2019)

Even during the pandemic, the Board of Les Clefs d’Or tried to highlight the importance of Les Clefs d’Or concierges’ role in keeping guests “safe” in order to improve members’ chances of remaining employed. As stated on their website: “Our only concern is our guests’ safety, enjoyment and satisfaction” (Les Clefs D’Or, 2020).

Building on this pride in their identity as Les Clefs d’Or concierges, the occupation was reaffirming the value of the concierges to (1) hotels and (2) to the experience of guests. The

value to hotels was reinforced following a presentation (which was later shared to all members in PowerPoint form) at a US national Les Clefs d'Or conference entitled: "Think Like an Owner." This presentation combined several pieces of advice and cues to help individual concierges show the worth of their work to the management. For instance, it included advice on how to create a report to show "productivity" and include metrics such as a "Concierge P&L (Profit & Loss) Review"; the volume of calls; the number of people sent to the hotel's restaurant, spa or other hotel-related areas and the revenue it generates; etc. The purpose of such measures would be to establish how profitable the concierges can be.

However, such tasks were not intuitive to most informants, as they were contrary to the Les Clefs d'Or's DNA. Indeed, the Les Clefs d'Or website reads: "Les Clefs d'Or concierges are trustworthy and discreet." Because they were accustomed to operating behind the scenes and valuing discretion, trying to promote themselves was particularly difficult.

Further, the idea of "proving their worth via numbers" remained difficult, as "service" is hard to measure. As Simon, a former board member, described:

It is very hard to have all give an actual number to what we do because some of it is based on returning guests and I mean how do you show that this guest is returning because of the concierges... so because sometimes people in our hotel don't know as much about what a concierge does or because they don't interact with us much, they don't see us as a great resource for them or the hotel but more like an extra thing we give to our guest.

Therefore, Les Clefs d'Or members struggled with conveying their own value to their management with traditional metrics (i.e., performance, revenue, etc.).

They also tried to express their value via the communication accessible to a wider audience (i.e., not just members of the occupational community). Several posts on their website suggest their worth to the guests themselves, for example: "Les Clefs D'Or Concierges Stand at The Undisputed Pinnacle Of Service And Achievement" and "Why Les Clefs d'Or service is so

outstanding, and why it's even more important today.” These posts included short summaries of why the skills of a Les Clefs d’Or concierge could be most valuable to the guest, particularly because their recommendations remain “unbiased” – i.e., not motivated by other intentions than the guests’ best interests – and are adapted to every guest (Les Clefs D’Or, 2020):

Unlike outsourced tour desks, Les Clefs d’Or recommendations are never ad-based or incentive-driven. We always guide our guests, independently and impartially, to the choices that best meet their needs.

Our ever-expanding portfolio of ideas and knowledge is just one reason why, even in a Google-searched world, nothing can replace the creativity and relationships of an experienced concierge. [...] Fitting the guest in front of us to his or her magical moment is our special gift.

Another important way that Les Clefs d’Or Association tried to generate a collective sense of hope was by sharing “success stories” via its newsletter or other media (i.e., social media, newspapers, TV reports, etc.). These narratives reinforced the members’ pride in their identity as Les Clefs d’Or concierges and strengthened the meaning around what made this work worth doing. For example, prior to the Covid19 pandemic, several stories of Les Clefs d’Or members’ achievements were shared on the Facebook page of Les Clefs d’Or or email communications. Stories on promotions or appearances in news outlets were very common. During the pandemic, success stories became an important way for Les Clefs d’Or members to stay connected to the occupation. These stories included that of Emma, who was interviewed by a local TV station about the hotel industry. The announcement of when the interview would be broadcast and messages of support and pride showed the importance of remaining visible and optimistic about the future of the profession, as this statement shows:

CNN reached out to LCD [Les Clefs d’Or] USA for a story on how COVID has impacted the concierge profession. See who will be sitting in these chairs tomorrow at 7:50 a.m. & 10:40 a.m./EST!!!! (November 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/LesClefsdOrUSA>)

On their website and social media, they also shared the story of Nathaniel, who was highly regarded in the Les Clefs d'Or community. He was mentioned in an article in a nationally renowned newspaper, which stated:

Nathaniel, dressed in a black morning coat, stood with perfect posture at the concierge desk, behind a shield of plexiglass. If he found it depressing to look out at an empty lobby all day, he certainly did not show it. Even with a mask on, he managed to radiate charisma and warmth. "Are you enjoying the wonderful quiet of the [Hotel]?" he asked.

This represented an inspiring attitude of a Les Clefs d'Or member in the face of the pandemic.

Finally, during the pandemic, members informally shared the story of Lylou through word of mouth. Lylou had decided to move her whole family to another state so that she could take a new position as a concierge. Her story was held up as an example of how far members were willing to go to remain concierges and keep Les Clefs d'Or alive.

Consequently, collective occupational hope was central to how the Les Clefs d'Or community perceived the future of the occupation. The narratives that sustained their beliefs that their work is and will remain useful and valuable for their hotels (both Identity and Meaning-protecting narratives) led to the collective hope that "our occupation can survive."

### Summary

This look at the impact of OET on this occupation reveals that two conflicting sets of forces are at play at the macro level. First, there were negative, threatening forces: several environmental factors, and extra-occupational narratives more specifically, painted a desperate picture of the future of the Les Clefs d'Or concierges in the USA and fueled the OET – i.e., the belief and feeling that the occupation might disappear. Second, there were positive, optimistic forces bolstering LCD members: the occupation itself reacted to increase the chance of survival by providing occupational support to its members as well as generating occupational hope – i.e.,

the collective narrative that the occupation can survive. Being exposed to both forces causes occupational members to experience uncertainty and ambiguity as to what the outcome may be, which raises the question: how did occupational members cope with such ambiguity?

In the following chapter, I develop a model of how and why members of Les Clefs d'Or remained or left the occupation. I describe the role that hope played in leading members onto different paths and the consequences for their mental health and relationships with and within their occupation.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: HOPE AS A DOUBLE-EDGE SWORD FOR INDIVIDUALS DURING OET**

By facing OETs, Les Clefs d'Or concierges experience both the despair associated with the possible loss of their occupation and the collective hope that it may survive. However, such tension would be meaningless if occupational members were indifferent to the occupation's fate. In this part of my findings, I first show that Les Clefs d'Or members are not indifferent and are experiencing an Occupational Identity Existential Threat (OIET) – i.e., *the individual experience of a possible permanent loss of an individual's ability to claim, enact, or draw meaning from a valued occupational identity*. Second, I theorize the role of job hope (i.e., individual hope associated with one's job), self-efficacy and job status in the appraisal process that occupational members go through in order to cope with OIET. Finally, I detail the different paths that occupational members take depending on their appraisal, as well as the consequences of these paths for their mental health and relationships. Figure 5.1 illustrates the process individuals go through while experiencing Occupational Identity Existential Threats.

INSERT FIGURE 5.1

### ***Occupational Identity Existential Threat and Occupational Hope***

At the individual level, two conditions are necessary for someone to experience an occupational identity threat as an OIET: (1) an individual awareness of the collective threat and (2) a strong identification with the occupation. By occupational identification, I mean one's perceived "oneness with or belongingness to" the occupation (Ashforth & Mael, 1989: 21), when one's beliefs about one's occupation "become self-referential or self-defining" (Pratt, 1998: 172).

First, the OET was acknowledged at the individual level, as much as at the macro level, with members sharing their concerns about their collective situation. As Simon (LCDB, Summer 2019) expressed: "The Les Clefs d'Or concierges could be gone from hotels in the USA within the next two years." Similarly, Tim (Fall 2019) said:

I know that we are at a crossroad. I see my fellow concierges around the city and we talk a lot about what is going on. I love this job but the reality is that it's harder and harder to keep our positions or to hire new ones.

Charles (LCD, Fall 2019) further added:

We are fighting to remain relevant. Relevant to our guests who can now use smart devices for almost anything, and relevant to our hotel by showing that our work brings value [...] I am concerned that many hotels may not perceive the worth of what we do and decide to replace us with an iPad or an outsourced desk, as it has happened before and is increasingly happening in many cities throughout the country. [...] I don't know what I'd do if it happened to me but it is very worrisome.

This sentiment was heightened during the Covid19 pandemic. As several concerned members expressed:

The pandemic wasn't a wake-up call really because like many of us were already talking about how difficult it was to uphold the standards [of Les Clefs d'Or] and all... but it sure was like "*ok, we're not messing around anymore, this is happening now*" [...] and *all the problems that we had already were like 10 times higher*, staff was reduced, our role was changed when it wasn't eliminated and *we just weren't ready for that kind of impact*, that's for sure. (Lindsey LCD, Fall 2020, emphasis mine)



I was really shocked honestly. It seems like it's been like this forever when it's just been a few months, but I have never felt so... lost and this pandemic has really showed the true face of many hotels that will not keep their employees' and their concierges' back. (Monique LCD, Fall 2020)

Truthfully, I am worried as 95% of my members are unemployed. There are 6 hotel concierges working in the entire city! (Edmond LCD, Summer 2020)

Therefore, the OET is very much top of mind and a primary concern for the Les Clefs d'Or concierges. Their perceptions of their dire situation do not differ from those of the occupation's leadership.

Second, Les Clefs d'Or concierges have a strong identification with this occupational community. As Stan (Summer 2019) explained:

Being a Les Clefs d'Or is more than the keys, it's who I am, it's my way of life. When I get out of work and I get stopped on the street, I'm still a Les Clefs d'Or concierge and I always have that urge to help. And I get stopped a lot on the street, it almost feels like I have a "concierge" sign on my face (laughs).

Seeing being a Les Clefs d'Or concierge as "way of life" not only was very common among my informants but also was accompanied by a feeling of pride in what they do<sup>18</sup>:

I don't want to change how I work if it means giving our guests a crappy service. I am proud of what I do and of being part of such a wonderful community of people who value giving the best service to others [...] I am sure that the Clefs d'Or concierges that are working keep upholding our standards and that's something that makes me proud and confident that I have the best profession in the world. (William, Spring 2021)

All of my informants shared this strong identification with their occupation. Regardless of their ultimate reaction to their occupation disappearing, they all acknowledged that being a Les Clefs d'Or was part of them. Table 5.1 includes further quotes illustrating how individuals in each path held a strong identification with the occupation.

#### INSERT TABLE 5.1

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<sup>18</sup> This feeling of pride is often used as one measure of identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992).

Therefore, since the occupation is threatened (OET) and identification is strong (i.e., *I am the occupation*), the occupational threat was internalized as an individual one (i.e., *I am threatened*). As several of my informants expressed:

When I see other members being laid off, fantastic concierges that were so inspiring to me when I joined, it's like so insulting to me. [...] Replacing the desk with an iPad is an insult to what I see as good service to our guests... Even if I haven't been laid off myself, it's affecting me personally. (Antoine LCD, Spring 2020)

It's very hard because it touches something deep inside of me. [...] Being Les Clefs d'Or was like finally finding what I wanted to be in life, it is so important to me. Thinking it may be gone just like that is just... I prefer not to think about that. (Tiffany LCD, Fall 2021)

This Occupational Identity Existential Threat left people vulnerable and uncertain about their future. As Alice's statement illustrates:

I hope I'll be called back soon. But [...] I have been furloughed and I don't know how long I'll have to wait at this point. I haven't heard from my hotel and the management in weeks and it's all up to them so... (Fall 2021)

Ophélie further adds:

I'm currently unemployed and waiting to go back to a concierge position [...] I wish I could tell you when I'll be called back to the desk but it's like completely confusing, so much is going on and who knows what will come next [...] I'll wait for as long as it takes. (Spring 2021)

Therefore, Les Clefs d'Or members indeed experienced an Occupational Identity Existential Threat, as they acknowledged both that the threat is real and that matters to them. Interestingly, despite the uncertainty attached to OEIT – i.e., uncertainty about whether they can work within the occupation in the future – the Les Clefs d'Or members remain hopeful that the occupation as whole will survive. Indeed, all my informants, even during the pandemic, expressed a strong personal sense of hope that their occupation would survive – i.e., occupational hope – as the following quotes illustrate:

I am sure that our profession still has an incredible role to play as people start travelling again. I am confident that we will bounce back and that Les Clefs d'Or will remain strong. (Ellen LCD, Fall 2021)

I don't think we [Les Clefs d'Or concierges] will disappear yet. At least I hope not. We have so much to give to our guests. I cannot imagine my hotel without a concierge in it to take care of our guests. To me it's like... I hope we can prevent this... I know we can. (Lenny LCD, Fall 2021)

I don't think that I will be changing how I work in the future. This is only a temporary state but I am sure that we will prevail. People will need this "human touch" and concierges excel at this, this is our life and particularly for Les Clefs d'Or. (Sam, Fall 2021)

I have not given up and I know that being a Les Clefs d'Or member, I will always fight to get the best to our guests and keep trying to get concierges back into the lobby and providing the service that Les Clefs d'Or members provide [...] so I am optimistic even in this chaos that we will ultimately prevail. (Jamie, Winter 2020)

Such statements mirror the collective narrative of occupational hope that exacerbates the OEIT for individuals as it bolsters optimistic views for the future survival of their occupation. Indeed, there is a will to remain tied to the occupation. Even when informants are not working as Les Clefs d'Or members themselves, they see the occupation coming back as there are still prospective members are waiting to join Les Clefs d'Or. As Caroline (Fall 2021) observed: "I'm hoping that general managers will still see the value of Les Clefs d'Or concierges because I know that young concierges out there want to be Les Clefs d'Or members. *There are people still waiting... they're still looking for it*" (emphasis mine).

Therefore, Les Clefs d'Or concierges share (1) a common perspective on the threat to their cherished occupational identity, and (2) personal hope that the occupation will "prevail." This potential loss and hope leave occupational members uncertain about the future and raise the question: how do they cope with these conflicting forces?

### ***Appraisals of Occupational Identity Existential Threat***

Appraisal refers to the “two-part process by which people evaluate the significance of an experience for their well-being (primary appraisal) and determine what to do in response to it (secondary appraisal)” (Petriglieri, 2011: 644). The primary appraisal of Les Clefs d’Or members thus related to their acknowledgment of the OIET. When analyzing how Les Clefs d’Or members reacted to the OIET, I observed that three main factors came into play in their secondary appraisal: (1) job hope (individual hope about their job), (2) self-efficacy and (3) job status. These factors reflected three key questions for their appraisal process: Do I hope that I will keep working in the threatened occupation in the future? Do I believe I can do something about the situation? And finally, am I currently employed in my occupation?

First, there was an important distinction between the hope that individuals felt about the survival of their occupation as a whole and the hope that they themselves would remain within the occupation. I categorized the latter as job hope to distinguish it from occupational hope. Indeed, while all Les Clefs d’Or members clearly believed that their occupation might survive, some members lost hope that they could keep working as Les Clefs d’Or concierges. As those members reacted by leaving the occupation, they followed the first path that individuals may take when facing OIET: the *withdrawing* path.

A second key factor in distinguishing the different reactions between Les Clefs d’Or members was self-efficacy – i.e., one’s belief in one’s capability to perform a specific task (Bandura, 1977; Gist, 1987). Indeed, another group of Les Clefs d’Or members, while still hoping to stay within the occupation in the future, remained inactive and engaged in a *waiting* path.

Third, the job status of the Les Clefs d’Or members also determined which of two final paths they would follow: *searching* or *defending*. While members on the former path actively

tried to rejoin their occupation but were unemployed at the time of the interview, those on the latter path were actively trying to maintain their employment and kept working as Les Clefs d'Or concierges.

Depending on these factors, Les Clefs d'Or concierges had different secondary appraisals and followed different paths that I termed *withdrawing*, *waiting*, *searching*, and *defending*. Table 5.2 shows the number and percentages of my informants on each path.

#### INSERT TABLE 5.2

Their secondary appraisals established their “options for coping” (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986: 571) and put Les Clefs d'Or members on these four distinct paths. In turn, being on these paths had different and important consequences for their coping strategies – i.e., the cognitive and behavioral efforts a person employs to manage stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Their paths also affected their connection to the occupation, their psychological well-being (mental health), and their relationships. Figure 5.2 and Tables 5.3 and 5.4 summarize this process, including the mental health and relational outcomes. By mental health outcomes, I refer to the identifiable disorders acknowledged by the American Psychiatric Association (2000), such as depression and anxiety, that impact individual well-being. By relational outcomes, I mean how individual Les Clefs d'Or connected to other members, if at all, during an OEIT.

#### INSERT FIGURE 5.2, TABLE 5.3 AND TABLE 5.4

##### ***Withdrawing: “The Survival of the Occupation May Happen, but without Me”***

Perhaps least surprising is the number of Les Clefs d'Or members who decided to leave the occupation (both prior to and during the Covid19 pandemic) and therefore answered “no” to the first step of the appraisal – do I hope that I will keep working in the threatened occupation? – as illustrated in Figure 5.2. This decision was accompanied by a sense of guilt for abandoning

their colleagues, but it also allowed them to bounce back and find some relief and a sense of closure by grieving their former occupation and changing their relationship to it.

### Appraisal Process

As previously mentioned, the appraisal of the situation by the Les Clefs d'Or concierges on the withdrawing path resulted in a loss of job hope and drastically reduced their involvement in the occupation. Although these people expressed hope for the future survival of their occupation, they had given up hope that they would be part of this potential resurgence and decided to withdraw from this career before it affected them further. Most Les Clefs d'Or concierges who decide to “give up their keys” (i.e., renounce being an active Les Clefs d'Or member) still believed in the possible survival of the occupation and the association in the future – i.e., occupational hope. As Danielle (Fall 2021) suggested: “I can't imagine [luxury] hotels without concierges, it has to come back at some point like, it's not going to be that bad forever.” Caroline (Fall 2021) also added:

You know what, I see it all coming back, but I don't... I don't see it coming back until you know, next summer, when tourists start to really come into town when business starts to really pick up and people are comfortable traveling. So, I see it all coming back but I don't see it coming back until then.

However, “withdrawers” also felt a sense of hopelessness regarding their involvement and ultimately their continued presence in the occupation – i.e., a lack of job hope. As one of them stated:

I think it's going to have to do without me. I don't feel like I can do any good by trying to go back to this work that I love so much but I feel like I can't go back... it's done for me. I won't go back I don't think. (Julian, Fall 2021)

In short, withdrawers are usually characterized by the perspective that they cannot or will not try to re-enter the Les Clefs d'Or concierge world in the future. They focus on themselves as

individuals and their needs for survival as opposed to what the collective (the occupation) may need. Ultimately, these concierges withdrew from their jobs as Les Clefs d'Or concierges. Doing so either meant (1) getting a job in another occupation or (2) retiring.

First, and perhaps most obviously, some of the Les Clefs d'Or members who chose to withdraw from the occupation saw an opportunity to transition to a new job. These former concierges were concerned primarily with the possible financial and work-life balance issues associated with remaining a hotel concierge and a Les Clefs d'Or member. For example, although Patrick had been in the profession for more than 10 years, he did not want to continue being a concierge after the birth of his second child and because of the poor financial prospects:

I love being a Les Clefs d'Or and a concierge, don't get me wrong, but I am now in a position where I need to give up on my dreams and be realistic and make a living for my family. I'm truly, truly sad about this but I just don't see how the two... being with my family and help with their needs and being a concierge, can work together anymore. I know other colleagues who manage to make it work but it's not possible at my hotel. I don't see how my pay can be enough now, I'm not even sure I'll be able to keep this job in the next few years with all that's going on so I can't take the risk, I have to find something else, you understand?

Danielle (Fall 2021) expresses her concern around work-family issues as she experiences OET and sees it – i.e., her concern about work-family issues – as a reason to give up on her career as a Les Clefs d'Or concierge:

So yeah, so then, in November, I was laid off. So, then this last year, it's just kind of been like, figuring it out. I feel like compared to some of my colleagues and peers and friends in the hotels, I do have three children. So that has played a big role in it. I was... really feel very fortunate that I started at the [Hotel]. When I did, I opened it. And then when I joined the Les Clefs d'Or, they worked with me on a schedule to keep me there. So I was able to balance childcare. So I was off in the middle of the week. And then I worked the weekends, and my husband was home with the children. So, but I don't think that's going to be something that's going to happen again right now. And to find childcare, on a moving rotating schedule, is very challenging... I had originally thought, like, I always thought that I would go back to the [Hotel], but they're not... I mean to my understanding they're not bringing back the concierge team right now so the front desk is handling kind of everything I would say so and then for me I've talked to the other hotels, but as I said, it's just in a predicament for the family so...

However, she explained that she has focused on finding other areas where she would have the opportunity to “pivot and see where the skillset I have also could be applied.” At the time of the interview, she had several opportunities in different industries:

The conversation I had with the recruiter, their HR person, was a really great conversation, because he was like, “I see how valuable your skill set is. I can see, you’ve been at the [Hotel] for 12 years. So you might not know our specific procedures and our things, but I know, you know, the procedures.”

Another set of “withdrawers” are the retirees. Indeed, as these concierges considered the possible end of their role as a concierge, they chose to retire early from their careers. As Caroline described, the pandemic played a large role in precipitating such decision:

I don’t see the seasoned concierge, the older concierge, the people like myself that, you know, let’s just say even like 40 and older. I don’t see them waiting around for all of that. I think that I think because we’ve already seen our best days ever. You know, we saw the days of the nice lunches and the complimentary dinners and the theater tickets and you know all those relationships and you know, it’s tough we had that and we just... it’s just taking too long to come back. I think a lot of us have, you know, become, I don’t know, just sad over all that. I remember like being at the concierge just with three phones, you know, and a computer and a line of people and all that and now that I’ve gotten older (I’m over 60) I just don’t see myself as wanting to do that again. [...] I can remember many times in that time that I would be looking for help and looking for someone to help with this one line in front of me and there’s no help because everyone is stretched so thin now.

Caroline’s statement speaks both to the irrevocability of her decision (“I just don’t see myself as wanting to do that again”) and to the complex and important changes in how she perceives her work that allowed her to make the decision to retire and withdraw from a cherished occupation.

In the next section, I will develop the impact that such a transition had on the psychological well-being and relationships of those withdrawing from Les Clefs d’Or.

### Mental Health and Relationships Outcomes: Building Resilience through Anticipatory Grief



Withdrawing from a career that they considered to be core to their identity and constitutive of the meaning they attached to work was no easy process. Indeed, central to the withdrawers was the acknowledgment of the inevitable loss that came with choosing to step away from their work and renouncing their active membership in Les Clefs d'Or. Notably, all bases of identification with their work – roles, symbols and relationships (Cardador & Pratt, 2006) – were affected. Patrick explained:

It's so difficult for me. I'll have to *give up those keys* that I worked so, so hard to get and you know it was everything for me at the time... and to imagine and yet I have to get used to it but I won't be able to *pick up the phone and go down my list of reservations for the day* and see who we have coming and *talk with my colleagues and concierge friends* on a regular basis... all that is going to change and it feels terrible, like I'm losing a part of me.

Here, “giving up those keys” refers to renouncing the symbols of their identity as Les Clefs d'Or concierges; “pick up the phone and go down my list of reservations” is tied to the behavior and roles they have; and finally “talk with colleagues and concierge friends” reflects the relationship basis of identification (Cardador & Pratt, 2006).

Danielle also added that when she decided not to try to go back to being a Les Clefs d'Or concierge, “it felt like I'm losing a family member or a loved one... it's hard to describe but I was thinking all the time ‘oh you won't be able to do this anymore’ and ‘you probably won't see that and that person anymore’ and so on... so it was tough, very tough times.”

This decision was all the more difficult as it felt to these former members that it was a decision they were forced to make, instead of a voluntary decision to leave. As Caroline added:

I can honestly tell you and anybody else that if this did not happen, I would still be with my hotel. I would still be a concierge. I would still have been a concierge, you know, for the next several years. It was not my intent to make a change.

Therefore, these former Les Clefs d'Or members recognized the important stakes of their decision for how they perceived themselves as professionals and how they perceived their work.

As in other studies of people losing an identity or organization (e.g., Crosina & Pratt, 2019; Latack & Dozier, 1986; Obodaru, 2017; Shepherd & Williams, 2018), withdrawers engaged in grieving and mourning behaviors. Interestingly, these behaviors can be associated with anticipatory grief and mourning (Sweeting & Gilhooly, 1990), as the object of the loss (the occupation) has not effectively disappeared. Indeed, anticipatory grief is most common in uncertain contexts. Lindemann (1944) first noted this phenomenon during the Second World War, when families of soldiers had a hard time accepting the return of their relatives. Given their uncertainty about whether or not the soldiers were alive, family members had already grieved in anticipation of their loved one's death. For Les Clefs d'Or members, such grieving experiences came at a cost to their psychological well-being and their relationships with their occupation and other occupational members.

*Mental Health Outcomes.* Their mental health was particularly affected by experiencing two negative emotions: sadness and guilt. Sadness was reflected in all the withdrawers' accounts, as the statement of Marilyn (who chose to transition to another job) illustrates: "It's just sad, I'm sad. I've been so sad throughout the entire year that I'm almost numb now honestly" (Fall 2021). This sadness originated both from the situation of the Les Clefs d'Or concierges as a whole and from their own situations. As Danielle further explained:

It's not just that I've been just shocked by the whole situation and the pandemic as we all have but I've really... I mean, it's been something that I wrestle with, like I've had a long winter of like, because I realize like, like how much of my identity was like, wrapped in that work. And it was like, I was so involved in it. And so it's been like trying to work on separating things... and so there was a lot of like crying and feeling sorry for us all [Les Clefs d'Or concierges].

Meanwhile, guilt emerged as withdrawers felt personal responsibility for the decline of the occupation and for abandoning their fellow concierges. For example, Danielle felt let down by the hotel management and where the industry was going, which pushed her to question her

own responsibility for the survival of the occupation by asking: “And then I’m like, *was it me?*” (emphasis mine). Moreover, as Marilyn (LCD, Fall 2021) was describing her decision to leave the occupation, she stated:

For so long I was thinking ‘no, you can’t leave because there are other concierges out there trying to get us all back behind our desks’ and I was so afraid of letting people down. People that I care about. Why was I letting my hopes down when we all needed to keep an eye on each other? [...] I didn’t want to abandon anyone so it felt incredibly selfish to leave at that point... I just felt very guilty.

However, their decisions also came with a brighter side as their anticipatory grief opened a path to relief and resilience. Indeed, despite the difficult process of having to deal with the feeling of hopelessness about their future return to the occupation, the withdrawers also felt relieved and more resilient after their decisions. Patrick felt “relieved and satisfied” when asked about how he felt about his decision. Moreover, as Marilyn expressed:

It was such a big weight off my shoulder. I cannot deny that it was liberating in so many ways. I wake up in the morning now and I’ve slept more than just a few hours, I don’t have that knot in my stomach now.

Further, as with other professionals who had to change their career paths (Maitlis, 2009), these withdrawers managed to build stronger resilience and grow from their experience. Following from his earlier statement, Patrick felt, “more confident” in working in a new job. Caroline noted:

I was able to go through this whole disaster, you know. I survived in some ways and I feel blessed by that. I am definitely stronger now... even when you get older you can still get stronger!

*Relationships Outcomes.* Withdrawers’ decision to leave also had consequences for their relationships to their occupation and with other members. Most evidently, they needed to distance themselves from the “Les Clefs d’Or” part of themselves, as expressed by Nathalie (Fall 2021): “I have to think that it’s in the past now and focus on what I’m doing next that’s also

going to be exciting for me.” Laura (Fall 2021) also mentioned that “I’ll never forget what I’ve done as a Les Clefs d’Or and what it means to me [...] but I need to move away from this now, I am not there anymore.”

Thus, withdrawers claimed their willingness to move on from being Les Clefs d’Or members. By losing their keys and not working in hotels, they had to renounce to what constituted an important part of the roles, symbols and relationships attached to being a concierge (i.e., identification bases (Cardador & Pratt, 2006)). However, some of them still expressed the wish to stay connected to the occupation in other ways. They tried to maintain some form of connection to the Les Clefs d’Or Association by (1) applying the skills and knowledge of concierges in another job, (2) maintaining existing relationships informally, or (3) joining the Les Clefs d’Or’s affiliate group as non-key wearing members.

Because Les Clefs d’Or primarily value the excellence of service, withdrawers expanded their perspective on what “service” meant in order to salvage the meaningfulness attached to their old work (similarly to the “Repurposers” in Crosina & Pratt, 2019). They did so by taking on certain roles and tasks that can be translated to their new job. For example, Patrick said, “I know that I have developed many skills as a concierge that are valuable and I can help people in other places, not just in hotels” (see also the case of “Repurposers” in Crosina & Pratt, 2019).

Danielle similarly notes:

The [new job], like, it’s building relationships. So, the AC is broken, like, I know who I’m gonna call to fix their air conditioning, because I talk to ‘Charlie’ every day, or ‘Mary’ or whoever, every day, like or whenever that happens, and it’s building those relationships, I think is that skillset of the relationship building and listening and solving problems that I developed as a concierge that helps me now. [...] I can still be useful and like help in many ways like I did before when I was at the desk.

Maintaining their relationships to close concierge friends also appeared as an important way to stay connected to the occupation, as Danielle noted:

I'm friends with everyone. Like, I wouldn't say that those friendships would never go away like those were lifetime friendships. So I don't know, like, how that would play out. But those colleagues and peers and friends in [City] will never go away. [...] I won't like keep having as many relationships as before with the concierge world, though, and it's difficult to really accept right now.

Thus, some relationships seem to survive this disconnect from the occupation. That is, the relationships with those Les Clefs d'Or concierges with whom they felt closest either because of the geographical proximity (e.g., "colleagues and peers and friends in [City] will never go away") or because of personal preferences.

Finally, in Caroline's case, she would like to claim a more active role to stay connected to Les Clefs d'Or and possibly be involved in future changes via mentoring other members:

I'm going to be a professional affiliate. So I'm going to continue my membership. I'm going to love to go to the conferences and learn and fine craft my skill. And when I get up there and I'm seeing these people who teach us, I see myself you know. I see myself as a mentor to our members and teach our members. Some of our best teachers are our former members anyway, you know, so I think it will still be there, that relationship will be there. But if there's one thing I would ever ask the Les Clefs d'Or to change or to do anything about, it would be to look at us, our professional affiliates, which are a former hotel concierge, who are in the teaching and the training realm, and let us help to sponsor and mentor people.

Taken together, Les Clefs d'Or members on the withdrawing path seem to have tackled a very difficult challenge: to engage in grieving behavior while the future of their occupation was still uncertain. Although it came with negative feelings of sadness, guilt, and overall loss of a job and relationships that were core to who they were, they managed to find the light at the end of the tunnel and ended up on a rather positive path for their mental health. In contrast, members on the other paths kept their hope about remaining within the occupation, which led to radically different outcomes (see Figure 5.2).

***Waiting: Survival of the Occupation May Happen, If It Is Meant to Be***

To the second question of the appraisal process – do I believe that I can do something about the situation? – a second group of Les Clefs d’Or concierges answered “no.” This perspective has two main implications for how these individuals are dealing with the OIET: (1) members on this path took a passive stance towards the situation whereby hope is tied to the belief that the situation will solve itself over time; (2) their inactive stance greatly increased the negative emotions attached to the OIET, which in turn greatly affected their mental health (as indicated by symptoms of anxiety, depression and psychological distress) and resulted in feelings of isolation from the occupation. I refer to this path as *waiting*.

### Appraisal Process

These informants were not employed as a Les Clefs d’Or concierge (layoffs or furloughed) at the time of the interview but explicitly expressed their intentions to go back to being Les Clefs d’Or concierges as soon as possible, not knowing whether this was ever going to happen in the near future. They remained systematically hopeful and proud of their occupation. For example, Maria expressed a strong desire to go back to being a Les Clefs d’Or member: “It’s all I’ve ever wanted to be so I am determined to get back out there and welcome guests again.” Interestingly, their approach to the OIET was to be remain passive and simply be patient. As Alice (Fall 2021) explained:

Well, I’ve been asking myself that question more and more [i.e., what can I do since I’ve been laid-off?] and really the answer for me has been that I just need to wait and be patient. I know that it’s a difficult time but I hope... I hope that in time I’ll be called back and resume from where I left off. (Alice, Fall 2021)

Thus, these “waiting” concierges coped with the OIET by considering that what is meant to happen will happen and that opportunities will present themselves in time. Their appraisal of the OIET was also rooted in the belief that any action was useless and would not lead to productive

or positive results for them at this point, which reflected a lack of self-efficacy – the second step in their secondary appraisal of the OIET. As Edmond explained over the Fall of 2020:

I've been looking at other jobs and all. I mean we've received messages from Les Clefs d'Or to find temporary positions, but really what's the point? I'm a Les Clefs d'Or concierge and that's my career and the life I want so I don't want to do anything else, I want to go back to my desk and I'm confident that I will.

Ophélie described a similar experience:

All that I've done so far has not been successful, so... I'm used to insisting and trying again, it's a concierge job after all, but right now it's not possible, I just need to be mindful of who I talk to because I don't want to waste people's time and I'll just have to come back to them when the situation is better.

These Les Clefs d'Or members also described a loss of meaning in what they were doing or the belief that their actions could not be beneficial: "I want to go back at the [concierge] desk but I know it's not possible right now so I have to be patient and wait [...] I told one of my friends 'What's the point,' you know? What's the point of all this? I don't know" (Alice).

Hence, the solution that appeared as most beneficial for those informants was simply to wait without looking for other jobs, even temporarily.

### Mental Health and Relationships Outcomes: Declining Mental Health and Isolation

*Mental Health Outcomes.* The uncertainty and ambiguity that Les Clefs d'Or members had to deal with seemed to weigh heavily on these concierges. As Edmond described:

I wake up panicking and panting several times a week now. It's never happened to me like that before, I've always been able to deal with, you know, all the difficult requests we get from our guests and how it pushed me to my limits at times [...] but this is different, I just don't see a way out now.

Maria (Spring 2021) further explained:

There is so much uncertainty about being hired again that it's hard for me to know what... something that I spent most of my career and my life doing, being a concierge... what it's going to become. (Maria, Spring 2021)

Moreover, when going further into the interview with concierges on the waiting path, I realized that several showed important symptoms of declining mental health. I identified statements associated with depressive disorders. For example, Edmond said: “I don't know what to do, I feel stuck. I keep feeling like I'm useless at times...” Alice also expressed a similar view: “And then we got laid off, after 20, 25 years of service in the [hotel]. [...] I don't feel valued, I don't feel like I'm wanted or even useful at all. I've become worthless...” Feelings of worthlessness were common among informants on this path and were usually associated with depressive states, especially since they were often coupled with visible signs of distress or panic (i.e., trembling and shaking, heavy breathing) and sadness (i.e., crying and sobbing). As Alice's statement illustrates:

What will I do if I don't get called back? [breathing heavily] I don't... I can't even imagine not doing this you know? It's my life. [Crying] I'm sorry it's just so... it's important to me you know... It's driving me crazy at times how we can be in this situation now... I'm sorry [visibly shaking]. (Alice)

Ophélie (Spring 2021) also “teared up” when describing her state of mind:

This [interview] has been such a great opportunity to remind me of really why I got into concierge to begin with, because I... even this is something... I know you can't see [phone interview], but I even kind of like, teared up because I have loved this (sobbing)... I've loved this career for such a long time and I've garnered so many relationships that that it makes me a little you know, heartbroken to think that it won't be what it was.

Importantly, these Les Clefs d'Or members were aware of their declining mental health.<sup>19</sup>

As Edmond stated when asked how he was doing:

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<sup>19</sup> Even at the occupational level, the suicide of a Les Clefs d'Or member (who reportedly had been suffering from depression after being laid off from a hotel) alerted the entire community to the mental distress in some members were experiencing. It became obvious to other Les Clefs d'Or concierges that such distress was more common among “waiting” members than first assumed. As a former member (on the withdrawing path) stated: “I still had a very active roles in our profession. But a lot of other people kind of just sat around and said: ‘Well, I'm just gonna wait for the hotel to call me back’ and weren't really active and really became very sad and very depressed and then found out in the end that they kind of wasted some of their time.” (Caroline LCD)



Not well to be honest... and it hasn't been getting better over time, it's been worse and worse. Every day that I'm not employed as a concierge is like another slap to the face [...] there is no telling what tomorrow will be made of and that's good in a way because it's... I hope we've hit rock-bottom now because I sure could not feel worse than what I feel right now and I'm not sure how long I can stay like this.

*Relationship Outcomes.* Finally, waiting passively had important consequences for these members' relationships with their occupation and other members. More specifically, isolation and loneliness were particularly salient, as Ophélie (LCD) explained:

I feel isolated from others of course. I used to be surrounded by people all the time and now it's harder to stay connected and feel like you're on the same boat, but it's different now [...] in my city, there are people who have been able to remain in their hotel, others have retired, but it's not easy to keep track of who is doing what and I have to take care of myself... everyone is... is yes focused on themselves more at the moment and so... it's isolating.

Edmond also added: "It's isolating... to have all those people taken away because as I realized, everything revolved around my job at the hotel and the contacts I had with other concierges too."

Consequently, the members on the waiting path also felt a lack of support. As Alice's (LCD) quote illustrates:

It's not that I feel like the situation is hopeless because like I said, I'm hopeful that I'll be a concierge again, but I sure don't feel like I'm getting the help from the hotels or the Les Clefs d'Or right now... I feel supported by Les Clefs d'Or and my community because they checked on me but like, not to offer me help at this point because it's difficult for everyone.

To sum up, the "waiting" concierges are most strongly impacted by the OIET. Their reliance on patience has them longing to get back to work as Les Clefs d'Or concierges with no clear perspective on a positive outcome in the near future. As a result, this path comes with depressive states, anxiety and distress, and members also feel isolated from the occupation they are trying to rejoin. In contrast, another group of unemployed Les Clefs d'Or concierges took a different path by deciding to take matters into their own hands.

### ***Searching: “Survival Is Possible as Long as I Act”***

A third group of Les Clefs d’Or concierges took a different, more proactive, stance toward the collective OET. However, to the last appraisal question regarding whether these concierges were employed in their occupation, their answer was “no.” This last factor also had important consequences for how they reacted to and experienced the OIET. Notably, these concierges actively sought new ways to get back to their occupation, which kept their job hope high. However, these concierges were divided between negative feelings of anxiety, frustration and guilt, and positive feelings of anticipatory resilience. I refer to this path as *searching*.

#### Appraisal Process

Unlike those on the waiting path, the concierges on the searching path felt that they could do something about their situation and remained active in their quest to return to the Les Clefs d’Or membership. Indeed, in their struggle to face the OIET, the searching Les Clefs d’Or members held a strong belief that they could keep hope alive as long as they stayed active. Thus, these concierges looked for other positions, even outside of the concierge world, as David (LCD, Spring 2021) explained:

I think the community of Les Clefs d’Or, we’re here battling you know because I would say, we take this as a career, you know? Like, when we became members of Les Clefs d’Or we kind of like, we did it with a lot of passion. And I could have continued my education in art or in film or something, but this [being a hotel concierge] was something that was my passion. And I think that’s when I really was clear that I wanted to become a member of the Les Clefs d’Or. So now, with all this and a lot of our members out of work and doing other things, you know because unfortunately there’s not too many jobs to pick as before. You know, I started [working] again, I had to do a lot of things [i.e., other jobs] that were available... until I can get back to my true job you know?

However, the concierges on the searching path have not given up hope that they will be able to go back to being concierges, as Simon described:

I have found another position in the meantime [...] it's nothing close to being a concierge but it's something to keep my mind from going "what am I going to do?" you know? [...] I wake up every morning and I look for new concierge positions, I also very regularly try to connect with people in my hotel to see what's going on and if they may need me one way or another... I'm not going to give up you know, that's not what a Les Clefs d'Or concierge does, when we get a challenging request, we use everything in our toolbox to make it happen!

Consequently, these searching individuals kept their hopes high, as Noa (Spring 2021) concluded in our interview: "As long as there's life, there's hope, as they say. So I know I have it in me to keep looking until I get back behind a concierge desk, that's that simple!"

### Mental Health and Relationships Outcomes: Anticipatory Resilience, Frustrations, Guilt and Isolation

*Mental Health Outcomes.* On the bright side, while faced with the difficult trial that the OET imposed on them, the "searching" Les Clefs d'Or concierges hoped that this challenge would make them more resilient in the future. For instance, as David (LCD) further expressed:

Back in 2008, 2007/2008, we had the recession... a lot of the hotel business, you know they started calling people just like they're doing now...and we had to, you know, it was my job there and I had to show that I had value for the hotel. And I remember properly my position was going to be eliminated, as well as, like, three other people... but I'm still here and I was able to make it so this is not different. [...] You know, I think...I think I'm a better person now in the sense that I know I'm not going to starve. You know, I will find something to do, you know. But it's, it's I think I have changed in this past year. I have changed and I will be better when, I hope, I will be back to doing what I was meant to do and welcome our guests again.

Noa (LCD) also suggested:

I feel like this will all come together in the end, for you, for me, for all the people who are not staying on their couch all day. I know that when I go back out there, I'm going to become even better than before.

Nevertheless, the searching path was not without its own set of challenges; it had a darker side. Anxiety about the future and other negative emotions were still present, as David and Camille stated, respectively:

I would still say I'm sad and confused. I don't feel anger. I don't feel, you know. It's just kind of sad to see what, what is happening with all this, because we don't know what's going to happen. (David)

As I was telling you it's...not being able to work is taking its toll on me. It's nice that I can keep ties to my work, to who I am but you know, talking about it and staying active as much as I can to be back. But at some point, I want to be back, I don't want to stay like this forever. I can't say I feel well or that I'm satisfied with the situation I'm in right now. (Camille)

The lack of noticeable improvement in their situation also created increased levels of frustrations amongst Les Clefs d'Or members on the searching path. Claire simply said, "Yeah it's frustrating at times (laughs)." Winnie (LCD, Spring 2021) added:

What I am currently doing is not concierges-related. Sometimes it's not even related to service, like I help in the back-office with accounting stuff. [...] I want to be able to do what I was meant to do, I am a concierge, and a Les Clefs d'Or one... I'm good at what I do and I love it. I just can't help people right now, I can't do my job and it's gnawing at me. (Winnie, Spring 2021)

Finally, members on the searching path also felt guilt. As Simon (LCD) described:

In some ways it feels like I'm failing them. We talked about the emotions I feel and I think that I feel guilty that I can't do more. More for the concierges who are at their desk doing the work, and the ones like me who want to go back. I feel like my life is put on hold by force.

This quote suggests that this guilt emerged from being a bystander without the ability to have a meaningful impact through helping others. This guilt, which was based on their perception that they could not help, was stronger because they felt that helping others was part of being a Les Clefs d'Or concierge. As Winnie noted in the previous quote, "I just can't help people right now, I can't do my job and it's gnawing at me." Fabien (Spring 2021) also said: "In service through friendship, that means I should be there for my friends and right now I don't feel like I can...so it is difficult for me, this whole situation, I feel like I should be there ready to help, as a concierge."

*Relationship Outcomes.* As the previous quotes suggest, it was critical for the Les Clefs d'Or on the searching path to stay connected to the Les Clefs d'Or community. They did so by focusing on the “success stories” shared by the Les Clefs d'Or Association, as well as imagining themselves as working in the future<sup>20</sup>:

I know that Lylou [an actively working member] moved from [one state] to [another state] and managed to remain a concierge and so it's possible. I mean, she has her partner and her family and relationships and they're all in another state. So it's the kind of thing that makes me think like “Gosh, I wish I could do that” and maybe I will if nothing works out here, but I'm really impressed by what some concierges are doing and I know that... it makes me more confident that I'll be working as a concierge again too. (Camille LCD, Spring 2021)

I've heard of Xavier, who was a Chef Concierge at [Hotel], and he is now working like, doing all sorts of stuff and not concierge work but at a hotel still and he still has the title of concierge and all, so he is still a Les Clefs d'Or member, he fulfills the requirements technically so I want to do that too. (Fabien, LCD Fall 2021)

Interestingly, few Les Clefs d'Or members on the searching path mentioned other concierges on the same path as them. There was little discussion about “commiserating,” as might be expected in contexts of loss (e.g., Crosina & Pratt, 2019). Instead, they had to face two competing impulses: wanting to stay connected to other concierges but refraining from doing so for fear of being a hindrance. That ambivalence – i.e., the experience of both positive and negative feelings towards a goal (Ashforth et al., 2014) – around their relationships was very uncomfortable and frustrating for these concierges. The following quotes show this ambivalence and the frustration that resulted from it.

*Searching* Les Clefs d'Or concierges focused on trying to stay connected with members who were actively working as Les Clefs d'Or concierges (i.e., on the *defending* path that I will describe in the next section). As Camille and Fabien explained:

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<sup>20</sup> Such processes relate to the vicarious and imaginary enactment that should help them sustain their threatened identity (Obodaru, 2017).

It's not that I have less relationships with my other concierge friends, but right now I want to be hired back. [...] I don't think we're necessarily competing no, we do want to help each other, but we can best help when we're back at the hotel, so I guess I do tend to prioritize my interactions with colleagues who are still employed for now... It makes me sound like a very selfish person I realize... I really do care for every [one] of my friends, I truly do... and I want to be mindful of people's time as well as I know it's tough on everyone. (Camille LCD)

I've been trying to sort of stay connected to people in the community who I know may have a position soon. It's a hard, it's hard to balance it all as I'm not working as a concierge, but I think I want to speak to people who know what's going on and see how, if I can find a way to go back as well. (Fabien LCD)

By contrast, they also felt that their efforts to connect with working Les Clefs d'Or members were difficult and sometimes impossible. Simon stated that calling members who are working "has become more and more difficult." In addition, the searching members do not want to become a hindrance to others:

I understand that she [a working Les Clefs d'Or member] is busy and that they all have a thousand things to think about and deal with. I get that but it's difficult because I used to be in touch with them so much like, you have the feeling that you're going to bother them now so it's different. [...] I want to be mindful of what they are doing, I don't want to add more to their plates with my situation... it's become almost impossible to reach out to them [working members] at the moment. (Camille LCD)

Consequently, the concierges on the searching path were experiencing emotional ambivalence. They wanted and tried to stay in touch with concierges who were currently employed, but their interactions made them feel intrusive and like they shouldn't bother them. As Ryan's (LCD, Fall 2021) statement reflects: "[...] it's hard to know what's worse or best, calling them [working concierges] and risking to call at a bad time and feeling bad for that, or not calling my friends and feel kinda stupid and clueless about what's going on."

In turn, this led to increased feelings of isolation. As Clair (LCD) stated:

*I can't help but feel like I'm put on the side at the moment.* Like yes I'm not working as a concierge but I'm still a Les Clefs d'Or and I know in my heart and soul that that's what I've always wanted to do and what I'll always want to be. So I'm like annoyed that we

cannot be more united in that way, but I know it's hard for everyone so I try to remain understanding, of course. It's just hard to shake the feeling... *I don't want to be on the side and nobody wants to be alone in this.* (Claire LCD, emphasis mine)

Ultimately, the searching path remains truly uncomfortable for the Les Clefs d'Or members on it. Sustaining their sense of hope requires facing the ambivalent feelings of possible future resilience while suffering from frustration, depression, and guilt, in addition to the push and pull regarding connecting with employed LCD members. Therefore, in the face of OET, the "searching" concierges' path is only a temporary mechanism that keeps them waiting for the opportunity to be rehired as a hotel concierge and to fully align "who they are" with "what they do" again. Their actions seem to leave them in a better place (psychologically and emotionally) than the concierges on the waiting path. However, this may change if their feelings of frustration and isolation increase over time.

### ***Defending: "Survival is Possible as Long as I Can Hold On"***

Only the Les Clefs d'Or concierges that were actively working could respond "yes" to all of the questions in the appraisal process. Remaining within the occupation during an OET also came with an important burden: being the carrier of hope for the occupation. This path also had an important impact on the concierges' psychological well-being and relationships. Most importantly, while these concierges maintained a sense of purpose and duty towards the survival of their occupation, they also suffered from overwork, anxiety and guilt. Furthermore, this path came with constrained their relationships within the occupation by narrowing them to other working members. I refer to this path as *defending*, as they see themselves as the last line of defense for their occupation's survival.

### Appraisal Process

This defending group chose to remain true to their identities as Les Clefs d'Or concierges and will do so to the bitter end. A common metaphor used was that of "war." As Lenny (LCD, Fall 2021) puts it: "We went to war. We had casualties. We honor them, but they're casualties. So eventually we'll have to move forward." Ilan (LCD, Fall 2021) further argued:

There is a reality that we have been facing for quite some time now, and that's way before the pandemic, and that is that we need to fight, we need to resist and to fight for the quality of service that we want to defend. We have to fight for our guests so that they are taken care of the way a Les Clefs d'Or concierge does it and not like an iPad would. [...] so the pandemic is really just another battle that we need to win for us concierges but also for our guests.

As Ilan's statement suggests, they justified their commitment by expressing a sense of responsibility for the survival of the craft and the quality of service. They also expressed the feeling that, ultimately, other members' hope and the occupation's fate relied on their performance:

I want the keys [Les Clefs d'Or] to shine once more. I know that a lot of people think like me and that every morning when I put these on, I do it because I want our profession to be recognized as the most valuable and important thing in our hotels. When I wear my keys it's not just me, Nikole, it's me and all the other people who wear them. I want everyone to be back at their desk and to help everyone. So many of us have dedicated their entire careers and lives to being concierges, so I think about it a lot, even more now that I am working and others are counting on me. (Nikole LCD, Fall 2021)

I feel lucky because I'm working and I'm employed now, but my colleagues and friends are not. I feel I'm doing this for them too. [...] it is a lot to think that I can't mess up because others are expecting you to be the best so that they can also have a chance to go back... but it's so powerful to feel like I'm doing this for the Les Clefs d'Or and all the friends and colleagues who have been laid off and others who are working like me and staying strong. (Sandra LCD, Spring 2021)

At the same time, the concierges on the defending path also expressed that they struggled to maintain the Les Clefs d'Or standards at work during the OET, especially during the pandemic, as resources were limited. As Hanna (LCD, Spring 2021) explained:

Since I've been back I would say that I have helped in almost every department. I am the only one who's been called back in my [resort] Hotel, so I can be the only go-to person



for guests and *I don't have time or the help to really take care of them as I normally would* and it is... frustrating, to put it mildly. (emphasis mine)

Maintaining standards was also difficult because, for many LCD members, the scope of their jobs increased. Tim (LCD, Fall 2021) noted that the extra tasks they were required to perform were outside of the usual spectrum of a Les Clefs d'Or concierge's duties: "I've helped with every department: one day I'm at the front desk making reservations. The next I'm helping with room service [...] this is not what 'concierges' do but what can we do now, we are trying to survive."

Having to compromise on the level of service they give as Les Clefs d'Or concierges, which is core to who they are, was therefore seen as big sacrifice. As Brianna (LCD, Spring 2021) added:

I think a lot of them [concierges waiting to get a job] don't realize truly what is happening and what it's like: we have to do the job of 10 people and most of us [working concierges] are on our own. I barely have time to rest and I'm constantly looking for ways to improve things and I hope every day that I'll see the end of this nightmare. So even if I wanted to, I couldn't do more.

As Hanna, Brianna and Tim expressed, the OET (which strengthened during the pandemic) forced Les Clefs d'Or members to accept not only a heavier workload, but also tasks that were previously outside of the concierge's responsibility.

### Mental Health and Relationships Outcomes: Burnout, Anxiety and Survivor's Guilt

*Mental Health Outcomes.* These constant efforts to keep maintaining the Les Clefs d'Or standards in a context where they felt it wasn't possible to do so, combined with their feeling of duty and responsibility towards the survival of the occupation, had important effects on their mental states. First, the increased amount of work and limited resources to fulfill their tasks led to concierges to feel overworked and close to burning out. As Sylvia (LCD, Spring 2021) said:

“I’m sorry, I’m just so tired. I haven’t had a good sleep in months.” Lenny expressed similar feelings:

I’m exhausted. If I sit down for more than 10 or 15 minutes, I’m falling asleep. So I have to stay up and everything is not gonna get any better. For the next four or five months at least. And not seeing any light at the end of the tunnel until March, April...

In addition to feeling burned out, the Les Clefs d’Or members on the defending path also had lingering anxiety that they might still lose their jobs and be replaced. As Lenny continued:

The winter is going to be harsh. December, January, February, business will go down in occupancy. So positions will be reviewed or more hours will be cut. [...] unfortunately, there is always people that are willing to do the same job as you do, so they think, for less money. If I say ‘I can’t,’ somebody else will say ‘Oh, I can do it.’ [...] I have to stay sharp, always and keep up... it’s very stressful.

Karl (LCD, Spring 2021) also expressed anxiety about the uncertain future of the profession as a whole:

We are at a crossroad, either we can do it or we can’t. Either way I don’t know what is going to happen tomorrow. I’m worried that the situation could become worse even if I keep praying that we will see the end of this soon.

Furthermore, stemming from their sense of duty and responsibility towards the survival of the occupation, the Les Clefs d’Or members on the defending path felt a survivor’s guilt that kept dragging their morale down. As Kim (LCD, Fall 2020) recalled:

When I was called back, I was so conflicted because I was of course thrilled to be able to go back to work for the Hotel even if it wasn’t to do pure concierge work, but I could not stop thinking about all of my colleagues waiting to be called back and I kept feeling sad and guilty that I could not help them [...] I wish that I could have brought my whole team back with me.

Lenny also stated: “We can’t save everyone, but that doesn’t mean that they’re not my friends out there and that I don’t feel for them.”

*Relationship Outcomes.* Finally, the relationships within the occupation also changed for the Les Clefs d’Or members on the defending path. As their situation constrained them in the

time and interactions they could have at work, these concierges struggled with remaining connected to all the concierges in their former network and confined their interactions to other working Les Clefs d'Or members on the *defending* path. As Briana (LCD, Spring 2021) explained:

I can't interact with my Les Clefs d'Or friends as I used to, I only have time to check with concierges who are working in my city when we need to help each other out as we always do, but even that's difficult now.

Similarly, Lenny (LCD, Spring 2021) also said:

I'm talking with those who are working all the time. Still, we need to keep each other updated on what is going on in the city and to help each other out as usual. [...] I don't have time for much else, though, when I go home it goes in a flash before I have to start again."

While we could have expected that this group was the most likely to benefit from sustaining hope in the occupation's survival, they were also at risk psychologically, emotionally, and relationally. Their undeniable commitment and dedication to their job and occupation that they value above all else may come at the price of their health. Two members on the defending path with whom I followed up in the Spring of 2022 reported being on medical leave for burnout. Therefore, and perhaps paradoxically, sustaining hope could precipitate the downfall of the occupation. As a Board member of Les Clefs d'Or who is also on the defending path (i.e., actively working) expressed:

There is no saying when we will see the end of this. Maybe we will never do. So I think of the members, all my friends who are out of a job right now, spending all their time and days... days, worrying about what to do and how to go back. And I see how employed concierges, including myself, are barely able to keep things going for our guests but also, it's taking its toll on me physically: I'm tired and my colleagues are too. I don't know how long we can stand like this but not too long I'm afraid. [...] I don't know how things will change, but they will have to, for sure, and I'll give it my all to make it happen, that's a certainty. (Oscar)

Because they are overworked and consequently providing poorer service (i.e., service that is not up to Les Clefs d'Or standards in their eyes), members are unable to fulfill their “purpose” as Les Clefs d'Or members. This may have an important implications: if they provide poorer service, it may deter guests and managers from requiring their service (which would hurt their reputation and give the perception that they are of limited value).

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONTRIBUTIONS TO THEORY AND PRACTICE**

In this chapter, I outline the contributions of this work from both a theoretical and practical standpoint. Theoretically, my dissertation primarily contributes to research on identity threats, as well as research on occupational decline. Practically, I look to help occupational members make sense of the impact the possible death of their occupation may have on them and how to deal with its consequences. My work can also benefit occupational associations and managers who employ their members by showing how individuals react to the OET and what actions may be taken. Finally, in this chapter, I also describe the limitations of this study and suggest opportunities for future research that builds on this work.

### **Theoretical Contributions: Identity Threats and Occupational Decline**

At the broadest level, my dissertation contributes to a better understanding of how individuals deal with the possible loss of their occupation, and what outcomes it may have on their mental health and relationships. I introduce the role that hope plays in how individuals react to OIETs. I induced four distinct paths – *withdrawing*, *waiting*, *searching* and *defending* – that show the possible individual reactions to this threat when it is seen as an existential one. In doing so, I contribute to the literatures on identity threats and occupational declines.

#### ***Contributions to the Literature on Identity Threats***

Drawing on the experience of an occupational community threatened with disappearance, I developed a model of how individuals deal with OIET. Theoretically, my theorizing extends our understanding of individual identity threats by bringing to light the impact of deep existential concern resulting from the possible loss of a cherished occupation.

First, my dissertation introduces existential concerns to the literature on identity threats. This addition is critical to improving our understanding of how people deal with identity threats, as existential concerns have some unique characteristics and outcomes. Petriglieri (2011) argues that the strength of the threat (in the absence of social support) should push individuals to engage in identity-restructuring activities (i.e., changing aspects of the threatened identity like its importance or its meaning). My findings both affirm and extend this argument, as individuals have to choose between the “life” and “death” of their occupational identity.

Individuals on the *withdrawing* path behaved according to existing identity threat theories. That is, they were able to distance themselves from the occupation and adopted a form of “identity exit” response – i.e., “when an individual abandons the threatened identity and physically disengages from any role or social groups associated with it” (Ashforth, 2001; Ebaugh, 1988)” (Petriglieri, 2011: 648). They acknowledged the loss of relationships, symbols and behaviors attached to their decision, but this path also allowed them to effectively “move on” and engage in anticipatory grief and mourning – i.e., treating their job in the occupation as if it were effectively gone for them. Moreover, in choosing “death,” they were able to retain some elements of their former identity. For example, they applied their concierge skills in other settings or stayed connected to former Les Clefs d’Or members. This finding echoes similar examples in management studies: for example, Crosina and Pratt (2019) found that following Lehman Brothers’ bankruptcy, some former employees, labelled “Repurposers,” applied the

skills they had learned from their dead organization in their new job. Obodaru (2017: 530) also described how individuals could maintain their ties to a professional identity through “real enactment” – i.e., “crafting one’s job to include activities and interactions that enact the forgone professional identity.”

However, unlike what identity threat theories would predict, at the time of the interviews, most Les Clefs d’Or members seemed to want to protect their identity as Les Clefs d’Or concierges, maintain the meaning they attached to this specific occupation, and follow this path until the end. Despite the strengthening of the threat with the Covid19 pandemic, and despite the harm done to their social support system (i.e., regular meetings and contact between members), the Les Clefs d’Or members on the waiting, searching, and defending paths did not express any wishes to fundamentally change the meaning of being a Les Clefs d’Or concierge, or to lessen their identification with the occupation. On the contrary, they seem convinced that their salvation lay in remaining in or getting back to their occupation. This is because these members perceived this threat as so overwhelming and all-encompassing that they felt as if their lives were at stake and were ready to take a stand for their occupation, regardless of the cost to their physical and mental health. Thus, the existential element of the threat was crucial in explaining why some members decided to keep adopting self-protecting behavior in spite of the strength of the threat.

This study’s second contribution to the identity threat literature is to underscore the role of hope in how individuals deal with ambiguous loss of work. Studies looking at identity threats in clear losses (i.e., job loss, organizational death, etc.) have showed that individuals may be able to recover and even grow from such traumatic experiences (e.g., Maitlis, 2009). Yet the ambiguity inherent in OEIT puts the Les Clefs d’Or members in a different situation: hoping for the survival of their craft.

Hope can therefore be seen as a possible “cure” to address their existential concern. Indeed, research has often portrayed hope as a primarily positive emotion for individuals (see Ludema, Wilmot, & Srivastva, 1997). For example, studies in the medical fields highlight the critical role of hope as a “life-affirming” means in terminally ill patients (Chi, 2007; Elliott & Olver, 2009). Nevertheless, this dissertation uncovers a darker side to hope. My data shows that certain patterns of hope may prevent individuals from such positive outcomes and thus put their mental health and relationships at even greater risk.

All members of the Les Clefs d’Or hoped for the survival of their craft, regardless of the path they chose. Thus, occupational hope allowed for the different paths to flourish, with job hope being nested within it. Taken together, occupation hope and job hope help people maintain a strong identification with their work or organization, which recent research has suggested can make people particularly vulnerable (see Caprar et al., 2022 for a review). Therefore, keeping both was particularly dangerous for people’s mental health and relationships. For example, for informants on the defending path, who were still engaged in keeping their job and occupation alive, this struggle came with important feelings of burnout and anxiety about their potential failure. Similarly, those on the searching path assumed that their endeavor (i.e., returning to work as a concierge) would ultimately succeed despite their persistent feelings of frustration and isolation. Finally, the concierges on the waiting path seemed to rely entirely on the hope that the conditions would once again become favorable for their survival, given some time. Again, this hope had important costs for people’s well-being and relationships, such as depressive states and isolation that sometimes put an individual’s life at risk.

By contrast, members who chose to abandon job hope (i.e., those on the *withdrawing* path) and accept the death of their occupational identity were able to find a path to move

forward. Indeed, members on this path decided to start grieving their job in anticipation of its possible death. They effectively brought clarity to their ambiguous situation and were therefore able to adopt a grieving posture and express resilience. This phenomenon provides an opportunity to begin theorizing the interesting ties between ambiguous and clear losses. The experience of those on the *withdrawing* path suggests that an ambiguous loss can be made “clear” by anticipating the ultimate worse outcome (i.e., I cannot remain within the occupation).

Ultimately, this research posits that in existential and ambiguous threats, hope may be a curse rather than a blessing for individuals’ well-being and relationships.<sup>21</sup> If they are to stay alive and well, their best solution may be to simply “kill” their hope for their occupation’s survival.

### ***Contributions to the Literature on Occupational Decline***

My dissertation also contributes to the body of literature looking at occupational decline. First, most studies of threatened occupations have focused on showing the macro mechanism that allows an occupation or occupational community to be revived (e.g., Howard-Grenville et al., 2013) and, more specifically, enables it to adapt to the challenge of new technology (e.g., Bechky, 2020; Nelson & Irwin, 2013; Raffaelli, 2019) or internal changes (e.g., Howard-Grenville, Nelson, Earle, Haack, & Young, 2017). These studies give an impression of homogeneity in how the occupational members react to the threat, which several scholars looking at occupations have called out (Howard-Grenville et al., 2017; Nelson & Irwin, 2013). However, among the Les Clefs d’Or members, even those wanting to remain within the

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<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, studies of the myth of Pandora’s box had already brought these two faces of hope to light. As the myth goes, when the box was opened and all evils were set free, only hope remained. Why was hope there? The first interpretation posits that hope would guard humans against evils and serve as a guide for humanity’s greater good. The second, darker, interpretation is that hope was another evil that would keep people alive to endure more suffering.



occupation and see that it survives, there were important disparities in their reactions and in the impacts on their psychological well-being and relationships. Two paths in particular, *waiting* and *searching*, may have been overlooked by prior studies. Yet they play a key part in keeping the possibility of the occupation's survival alive.

To my knowledge, no studies have looked at the role of hope in this context. Yet it is critical to study hope because it is an important factor in why individuals may remain within a dying occupation. This allows us to extend or reinterpret the findings of some prior studies. For example, my theorizing would suggest that the successful revival of Swiss watchmakers may also be due to the occupation's capacity to manage occupational and job hope and provide support to its community.

Relatedly, these findings allow for a better understanding of the role of emotions when occupations are threatened. By highlighting hope, a positive anticipatory emotion, as a key mechanism that can explain why individuals may remain within a threatened occupation, I further call attention to the importance of emotional mechanisms when occupational identities are threatened. Indeed, since Howard-Grenville and colleagues' (2013) work showing that emotions were key in resurrecting an occupational identity, little work has been done to uncover which emotions may impact identity processes, and under what conditions. My theorizing would suggest that occupational hope is necessary for an occupation's survival (or resurrection, although future research is needed to confirm this point). However, my findings also show that the feelings attached to job hope have such negative consequences for the individuals that they may ultimately call into question whether the occupational leadership is providing the right support for its members. Particularly, members on the defending path may ultimately burn out, which could place an increasing level of responsibility for the survival of their craft on fewer and

fewer people, which in turn would increase the likelihood that they will become even more overworked, anxious, and burned out. This vicious circle could mean that the Les Clefs d'Or, as an occupation, may not be able to sustain themselves.

## **Practical Implications**

Reflecting on the possible loss of occupational identity can have important practical implications. More specifically, I believe this work can be beneficial for (1) members of an occupation experiencing OIET, (2) occupational associations dealing with OET, and (3) managers and practitioners employing people facing OIET.

First, I believe this work this work may help members of endangered occupations to better prepare themselves for coping with OIET. Indeed, my dissertation shows that people can take different paths when facing the possible end of their occupations. Drawing from this work, individuals may understand better which path they could be on and also recognize the potential cost of each path. By doing so, occupational members may prevent unnecessary suffering and be more inclined to seek help. This is especially important if they find themselves on the *waiting* path, which had the most negative outcomes in terms of psychological well-being and feelings of isolation.

Second, this dissertation may be of use to occupational associations facing an OET, and particularly their leadership, in that it brings a better understanding of how their members may differ in their experience of the threat. In response, occupational associations may better tailor their response by providing resources and support that may be adapted to each path. For instance, people on the *withdrawing* path may need to receive more help to be guided out of the occupation. Members on the *defending* path may need to feel less burdened by the sense of responsibility to save the occupation by themselves. For example, if the rules for joining or

remaining in Les Clefs d'Or were relaxed, *defenders* might find alternative related jobs (e.g., jobs outside of hotels) that would allow them to remain within the occupation without having to put their health on the line by remaining within their hotels. Finally, *waiters* and *searchers* may require more social support to avoid feelings of isolation and frustration. The mental states of *waiters* merit particular attention, and *waiters* might benefit from being offered a “way out” (e.g., a way of staying connected to the Association even if they are doing another job). Overall, staying connected to the occupation through hope may be more detrimental to their members’ mental health than leaving it. Thus, associations may also consider whether providing opportunities to stay connected (e.g., through mentorship in the Les Clefs d'Or case) would be in their members’ best interest over time, or if they should be focusing their efforts on those who *can* stay rather than everyone who *wants* to stay.

Lastly, I believe this dissertation may be informative for managers of organizations employing people experiencing OIET. Indeed, to avoid losing important expertise and skills that may be valuable to the organization, managers could use this work to better understand how to best support and reintegrate those individuals within the organization. For example, by acknowledging the threat and its impact on individuals, organizations could provide further resources for monitoring and improving their employees’ mental health. Furthermore, organizations could become another source of social support for people going through OIET. Indeed, my dissertation shows that the concierges’ hotels were more often a source of “rejection” (i.e., layoffs) or “devaluation” (i.e., replacing concierges with iPads) than a source of help in difficult times.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

I hope that my dissertation can open a path for future research on the implications of Occupational Existential Threats and Occupational Identity Existential Threats. However, this work has some important limitations that I acknowledge here before speaking more specifically about how my model can be expanded.

First, as my dissertation uses a qualitative approach, an important shortcoming of this work concerns the generalizability of my findings (McGrath, 1981). My research should generalize to those in other occupations at risk of disappearing through naturalistic generalizability (Stake, 1995) – e.g., journalists, radiologists, subway drivers, travel agents. However, it is still unclear whether and to what extent my findings apply to other settings where the threat is not perceived as existential or ambiguous.

Moreover, further research is needed to test the boundary of my theorizing. Most notably, an important boundary condition and assumption of my theorizing is that Les Clefs d'Or members have a strong identification (Caprar et al., 2022) with their occupation. Indeed, OIET could emerge only because occupational members believed the threat was so strong that it became existential to them (i.e., my *occupation* is threatened; therefore *I* am threatened). However, in other occupations, members may not identify as strongly and thus will not necessarily feel OIET. Future work could compare this case with other occupations where people may vary more strongly on their identification with the occupation and see how, if at all, that affects the paths they take.

Additionally, although I did not observe significant differences between the experiences and practices of concierges in terms of their age, gender, race, or socio-economic background, future research should examine whether and how these differences affect how individuals deal

with OEITs. Such research would provide additional depth to the theoretical framework I induced in my dissertation.

Another important limitation of my research is the ties between collective and individual hope. While my data does suggest that they are intrinsically linked – i.e., Les Clefs d’Or members referred to specific narratives emerging from the Board of the occupation to reinforce their own sense of hope – additional research is needed to understand how closely related they are to each other. For example, what would happen if members have job hope even if they know their occupation will die? Although such a case may be unlikely, there could be other paths and other psychological issue that my dissertation did not capture. Additionally, what if the leadership of the occupational association decided to abandon “hope” narratives and instead reinforce the OET narratives?

Furthermore, while my data was collected over an extended period of time and does include some longitudinal elements (e.g., follow-up interviews with individuals), more research is needed to examine the changes over time. At the individual level, it would be interesting to see whether—and if so, how—members change paths over time, or whether they remain stuck in one path. For example, what happens when an individual on the defending path loses his or her job and joins the waiting, searching or withdrawing path? Quantitative research could also quantify the probability of moving to other paths and uncover the conditions under which that may occur (e.g., individual differences). At the collective level, my data suggested a possible contradiction: that the hope and strong commitment that Les Clefs d’Or members for the survival of their occupation may actually precipitate its downfall. For example, if individuals on the *defending* path keep hoping for the occupation’s survival and have to step away from their jobs due to burnout, hope alone may cause the occupation to lose its members and fall into further decline.

Thus, future research could investigate whether a threatened occupation indeed manages to survive, and if so, what role (if any) hope plays in that outcome.

Finally, my data was collected during a particularly impactful event: the Covid19 pandemic, which has accelerated the decline of the occupation as well as the perceived threat of its extinction for occupational members. My findings therefore shed light on the impact of such events on an already fragile occupation as well as its members. However, future research may further unpack how, if at all, such impactful events may have different effects than other forms of external threats (i.e., technology replacement, inter-occupational competition, etc.).

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

This dissertation was eye-opening on a professional level as well as an individual level. There are three main concluding thoughts I would like to reflect upon.

First, beyond the theoretical and practical contributions of this research, my experience as a field worker may spark some interesting reflections on methods, specifically data collection, which involved interviewing and observing informants in highly emotional contexts. Indeed, this research was quite troubling and did impact me as a researcher and as an individual.

In the last wave of data collection over the fall 2021, I had several experiences of interviewing over Zoom where my informants showed clear signs of psychological distress (discussed in the Chapter Five about the waiting path). Although I have been trained in interviewing and gave my informants space by remaining silent, allowing them to express their thoughts and feelings freely even if they were difficult to express, I clearly felt the limitations of such strategies. Indeed, remaining silent when my informant looked in need of help seemed impossible to me, yet I did not feel qualified to intervene (not having been trained in clinical psychology). The resulting tension was extremely emotionally taxing for me as an individual. It

also made me question my own interviewing ability and search for possible tools that would help me address this challenge should I encounter it again.

After I discussed the situation with my advisor, Michael G. Pratt, and other scholars who have encountered similar issues (e.g., Kimberly Rocheville), it became clear that I should not insist on collecting more data from individuals who could be impacted by the interview itself; it would be unethical to put them at risk. Nevertheless, I had discussions with trained clinical psychologists (i.e., T. G-P, F. P.) and learned enough to have an “emergency toolkit” that I could use if I encountered similar situations in the future. I believe that such training could be beneficial for future field workers interested in studying individuals in distressing situations. Thus, the first area where I might extend this work is advocating for further training in interviewing in highly emotional contexts (e.g., using the skills of clinical psychology and psychiatry).

Second, another interesting extension of my research would be to further investigate the role of meaningfulness, and particularly individuals’ work orientation (e.g., a calling orientation (Cardador, Dane, & Pratt, 2011)). While I did not develop this theme in my dissertation, most Les Clefs d’Or members were primarily concerned with the quality of their service, which is a characteristic of a “craftmanship orientation” (Pratt, Pradies, & Lepisto, 2013). It would be interesting (1) to dive deeper into whether and how those orientations may impact how individuals may go through an OIET, and (2) to compare the case of Les Clefs d’Or with another occupation going through an OET where the shared orientation may be different (e.g., a career orientation).

Finally, I could expand on this research by investigating the dark side of selflessness. Indeed, while the Les Clefs d’Or’s motto is to “make the impossible possible,” this seems to

apply mostly to others, and less to themselves or their occupation. Indeed, a question that still lingers in my mind is that these concierges are known for being able to reach out to influential people to make their guests' wishes come true. Yet when their own survival was in question, they did not show the same behavior. Meanwhile, other types of emerging "concierge" services seemed to be more business oriented (e.g., outsourced desks) and more individualist. Fazio and Malice's (2011) work illustrates how concierges can monetize their network and skills for their own profit – e.g., by receiving commissions from vendors (which would be a violation of the Les Clefs d'Or Code of Ethics (Les Clefs D'Or, 2020)) or by maximizing tips. Therefore, it would be interesting to dig deeper into how, if at all, this selflessness may be detrimental not only to the individuals themselves but also to their occupations and/or organizations.



## TABLES, FIGURES & CHARTS

**Table 2.1: Clear and Ambiguous Losses a Work**

Loss	Individual	Collective
<b>Job</b>	<p><u>Job Loss</u> Job loss is defined as a life event (Holmes &amp; Rahe, 1967) that “removes paid employment from an individual involuntarily” (Latack, Kinicki, &amp; Prussia, 1995: 313). Layoffs (due to the individual or contextual factors) in particular have been described as an important source of threat to individuals identities (Ashforth, 2001; Ibarra &amp; Petriglieri, 2010). For instance, Jahoda’s (1982) work argued that following a job loss, people may lose the “raw material” – i.e., their roles and social groups – used to form their identities and may thus feel disoriented and unsecure about their future.</p>	<p><u>Organizational death</u> Job loss can also occur when an entire organization goes out of existence – also referred to as organizational death. As defined in Sutton’s (1987: 543) foundational piece, organizational deaths are “those in which former participants agree that the organization is defunct, and the set of activities comprised by the dying organization are no longer accomplished (i.e., all activities have halted or been dispersed among two or more other organizations).” Thus organizational death results in a significant number of people losing their jobs but also the social groups and support attached to their organization (e.g., Buzzanell &amp; Turner, 2003; Crosina &amp; Pratt, 2019; Latack et al., 1995; Shepherd &amp; Williams, 2018).</p>
<i>Outcomes</i>	<p>This literature has highlighted that job loss can undermine individuals’ social networks and sense of worth, and affect people’s identities (Bolton &amp; Oatley, 1987; Friedland &amp; Price, 2003; Hayes &amp; Nutman, 1981). As a consequence, numerous scholars have explored the experiences and coping mechanisms that individual may put in place when suffering a such loss (see Kates et al., 1990; Kübler-Ross &amp; Kessler, 2005; Latack et al., 1995 for a review). Kübler-Ross &amp; Kessler (2005) showed that following job loss, individuals engaged in grief and mourning – i.e., denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.</p>	<p>At the collective level, Crosina and Pratt (2019) showed that, following the loss of their organization, former employees of Lehman Brothers engaged in “organizational mourning” to maintain a bond with the “dead” organization and former colleagues. This work brings the collective experience forward as an important factor to understand the magnitude of the event (i.e., it impacts a large group of individuals) as well as its specific relational impact as people commiserate or mourn the loss of their organization (i.e., how relationships and practices are impacted).</p>

<b>Career</b>	<p><u>Career-ending injury</u> Occur following an incapacitating accident which would prevent people from doing their jobs. In such instances, not only people's job but also people's career may be at play. For example, scholars looking at highly-trained performers have focused on this phenomenon. In the sports industry, Kleiber and Brock's (1992) study of elite college athletes showed that those injuries significantly impacted the students who has made an investment in making their sport a career. Similarly, in the management literature, Maitlis (2009) described the period of trauma and loss experienced by musicians who had been suffering from an injury, such as a disabling car accident, that made them unable to play their instrument.</p>	<p><u>Occupational Death?</u> Needs to be further investigated (Kahl et al., 2016)</p>
<i>Outcomes</i>	<p>Students athletes reported lower self-esteem and life satisfaction up to 10 years after their injuries (Kleiber &amp; Brock, 1992). Musicians went through post-traumatic growth, defined as a "transformational positive change" (2009: 48) and construct new, positive identities following such trauma (Maitlis, 2009).</p>	-

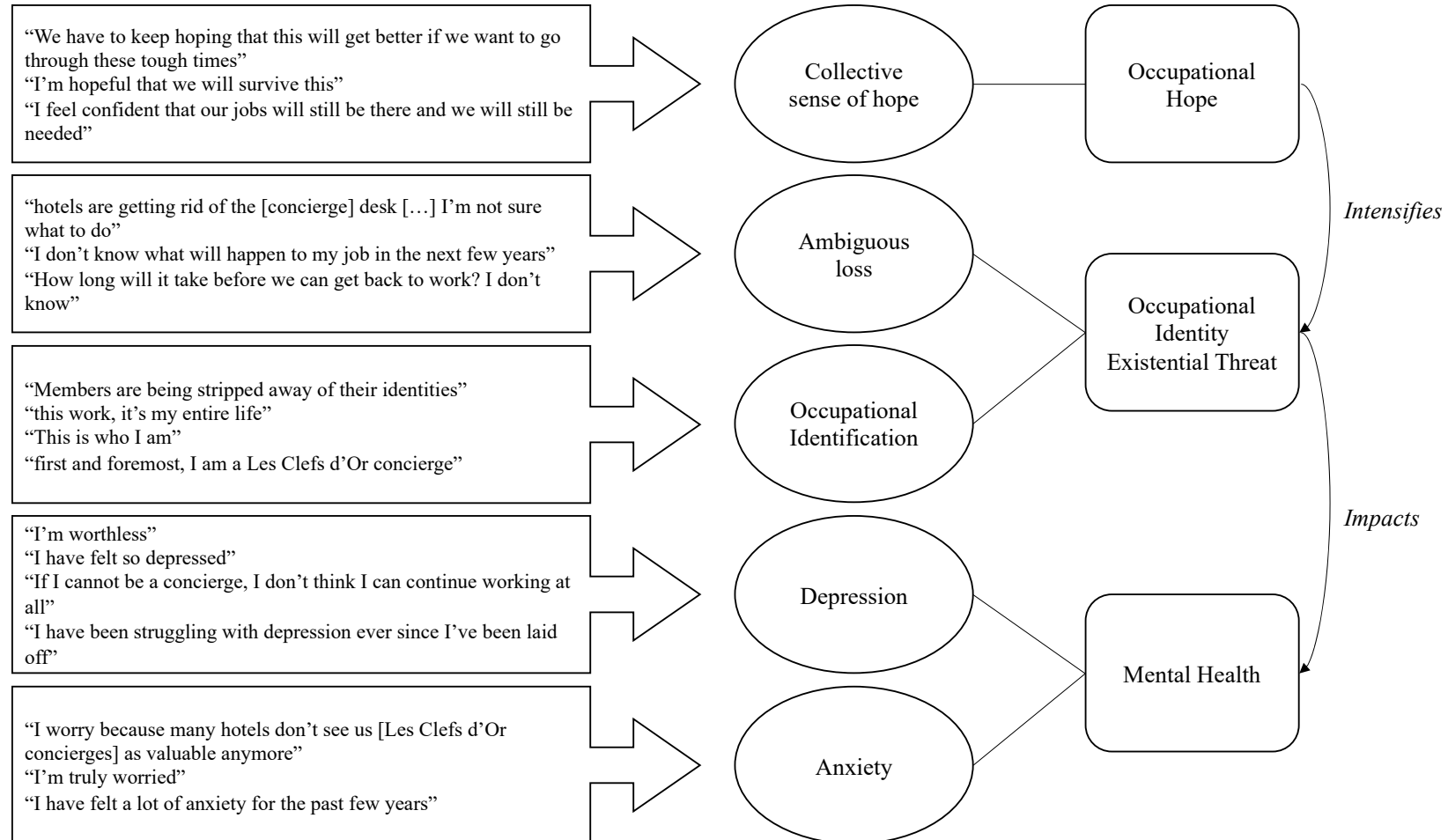
**Table 3.1: Sample Distribution**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Boston</b>	<b>New York</b>	<b>Chicago</b>	<b>Florida</b>	<b>Las Vegas</b>	<b>California</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Informants</b>	10	12	17	9	8	14	15	<b>85</b>
<b>%</b>	12%	14%	20%	11%	9%		18%	<b>100%</b>
<b>Women</b>	4	8	10	6	4	10	7	<b>49</b>
<b>%</b>								<b>58%</b>
<b>Men</b>	6	4	7	3	4	4	8	<b>36</b>
<b>%</b>								<b>42%</b>
<b>Hotels</b>	8	8	13	9	7	12	14	<b>71</b>
<b>5-star</b>	3	5	2	2	1	4	4	<b>21</b>
<b>%</b>								<b>30%</b>
<b>4-star and below</b>	5	3	11	7	6	8	10	<b>50</b>
<b>%</b>								<b>70%</b>
<b>Private</b>	3	2	2	2	0	5	5	<b>19</b>
<b>%</b>								<b>27%</b>
<b>Chain</b>	5	6	11	7	7	7	9	<b>52</b>
<b>%</b>								<b>73%</b>

**Table 3.2: Data Collection**

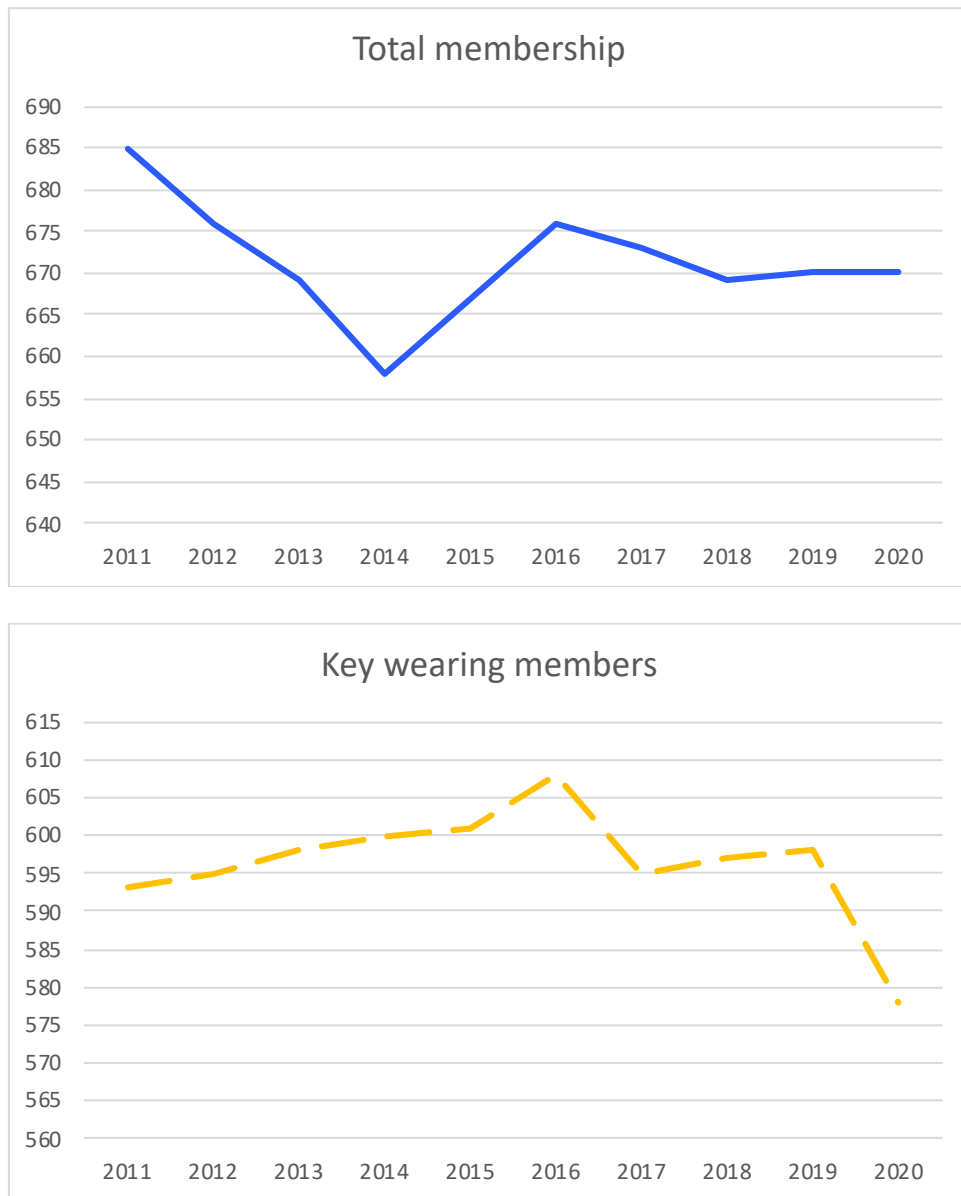
<b>Informants</b>	<b>Data Collection</b>	<b>Number</b>
Occupational Level (Les Clefs d'Or Association Board)	Semi-structured Interviews  Archival material	5 Board members (out of 6) 73 interviews with 2 key informants collected over 31 months Les Clefs d'Or archives and website, social media (Facebook, Twitter etc.), newsletters (emails), conference presentations (notes and PowerPoints used at National/International Les Clefs d'Or Concierge conferences)
Extra-occupational Stakeholders (General Managers and Hotel Rating Agencies)	Semi-structured Interviews  Archival material	5 interviews collected (3 General Managers and 2 Hotel Rating Agencies employees) Articles from hotels.com, publications in specialized magazines in the hotel industry as well as the accreditations agencies websites, recorded interviews, and social media posts
Les Clefs d'Or members	Semi-structured Interviews  Archival material  Observation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hotel lobby</li> <li>• Local concierge association events</li> <li>• Les Clefs d'Or concierge meeting (informal)</li> </ul>	85 interviews 16 follow-up interviews Social media posts, newspaper articles 130+ hours

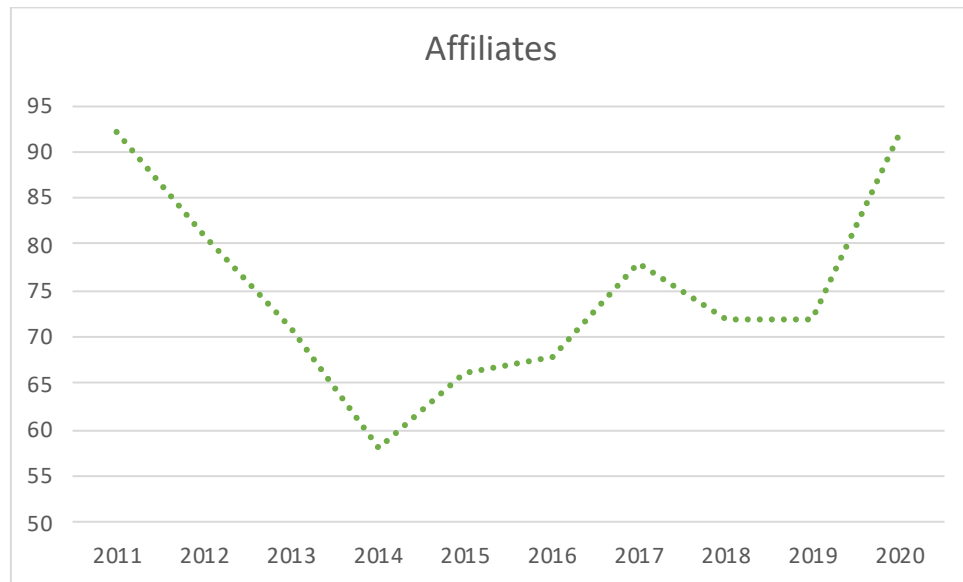
**Figure 3.1: Simplified Data Structure<sup>22</sup>**



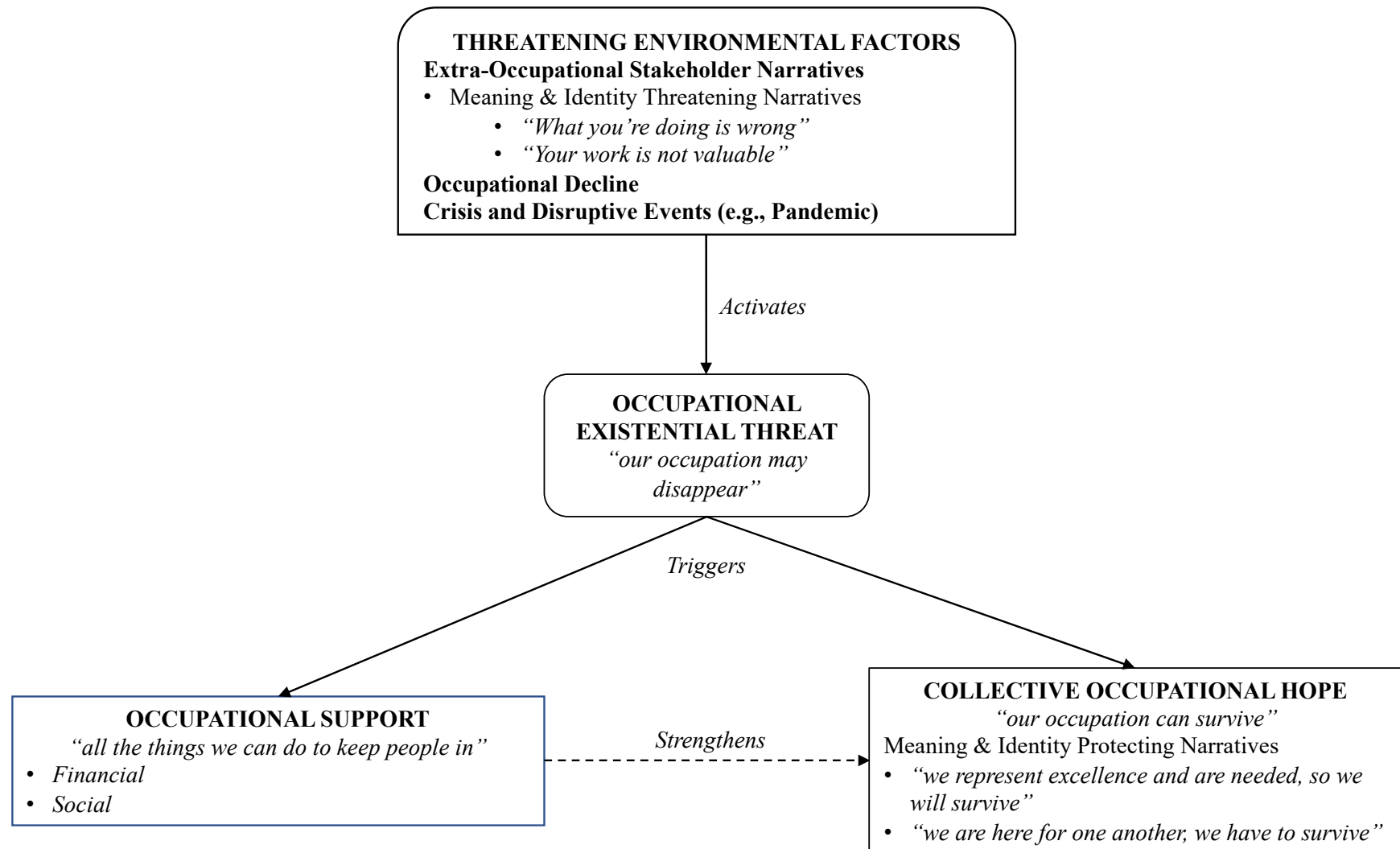
<sup>22</sup> This data structure only partially reflects the analytical process and does not include all the open, axial and theoretical codes analyzed in the dissertation.

**Charts 3.1: Evolution of Les Clefs d'Or membership**





**Figure 4.1: Occupational Existential Threat (Macro Dynamics)**





**Table 5.1: Identification in the Four Paths**

<b>Paths</b>	<b>Identification</b>
<b><i>Withdrawing</i></b>	<p>When I got my keys, it was one of the best days of my life because I had worked so hard to get this. It's what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. (Wendy LCD)</p> <p>[Being a Les Clefs d'Or concierge] is a very big part of my life. I go to conferences, I am always in touch with people in the city, I discover new places thanks... I am always a concierge wherever I go. (Lyndsay LCD)</p> <p>So for me being a concierge for me is tied to being a Les Clefs d'Or member because that's basically being part of a community that share this passion for concierge work. (Laura LCD)</p>
<b><i>Waiting</i></b>	<p>There is no difference between me as you see me now and me as a Les Clefs d'Or concierge. Whether I'm here or at home, I am always a concierge, even with my friends or my family (laughs). (Kevin LCD)</p> <p>So this is not just the work for me it is what carries me through life. It is everything, from how I dress to where I go, it's my life. (Ophélie LCD)</p> <p>Before becoming a concierge I had no idea what "Les Clefs d'Or" was. I was trained by one of the most amazing concierges at [Hotel] and he introduced me to what Les Clefs d'Or was and how to apply and it felt like the most exciting thing because I was like "oh I can get paid for doing that?" [...] that's how I found myself and I could finally see myself committing completely to this career. (Barbara LCD)</p>
<b><i>Searching</i></b>	<p>This job is my career and my life. I am always there for my guests and always on duty going about the city. (Beatrice LCD)</p> <p>If I lost my keys, it would be devastating for me. [...] It's not just making reservations, it's the connections I have with my guest and that I know I have a group of friends that I can rely on to give the best service. We are all connected through this friendship and I'm very proud to be among them. (Ben LCD)</p> <p>I see myself doing [being a Les Clefs d'Or concierge] this for as long as I work. I love being a concierge. (Hanna LCD)</p>
<b><i>Defending</i></b>	<p>When I wear those keys, that means that I represent Les Clefs d'Or [...] that means that I have the responsibility for myself but also for Les Clefs d'Or and (Karl LCD)</p>

	<p>I would say that my circle overlaps completely with being a Les Clefs d'Or concierge. [from interview protocol, identification question] (Sylvia LCD)</p> <p>I've been doing this for more than 14 years now and I want to continue for the next 14 years if I can. So I think that shows you pretty much that I don't want to do anything, that was it for me when I became a concierge, I became a concierge for life. (Nick LCD)</p>
--	--

**Table 5.2: Paths and Distribution**

	<b>Defending</b>	<b>Searching</b>	<b>Waiting</b>	<b>Withdrawing</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Pre-covid</b>	36	0	0	0	5	41
<b>%</b>	88%	0%	0%	0%	12%	100%
<b>Covid</b>	23	18	10	9	N/A	60
<b>%</b>	38%	30%	17%	15%	N/A	100%

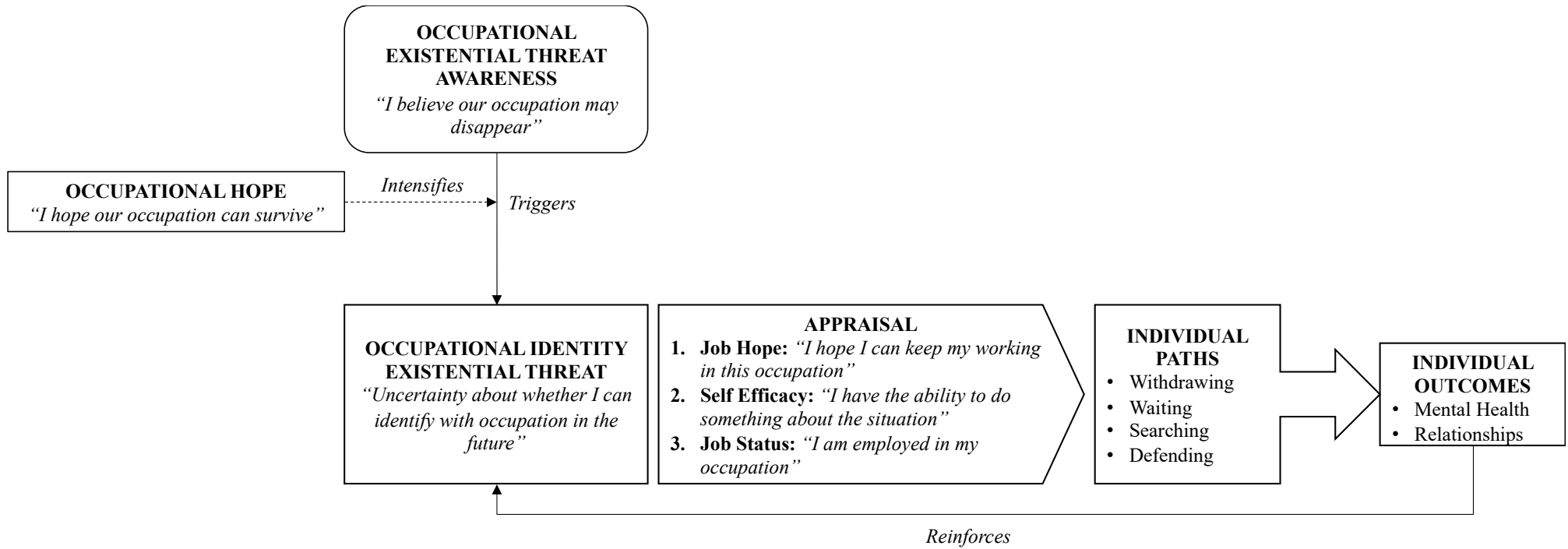
**Table 5.3: Appraisals and Outcomes**

Path	Job Hope	Self-efficacy	Job Status	Mental Health	Relational
Withdrawing	X	N/A	Voluntary or Involuntary job-loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anticipatory Grief/ Mourning (-)</li> <li>• Guilt (Abandoning) (-)</li> <li>• Relief</li> <li>• Resilience (+)</li> </ul>	• Distancing
Waiting	✓	X	Involuntary job-loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychological distress (-)</li> <li>• Depression (-)</li> <li>• Anxiety (-)</li> </ul>	• Isolation
Searching	✓	✓	Involuntary job-loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anticipatory resilience</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Bystander's guilt</li> </ul>	• Isolation
Defending	✓	✓	Actively Working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Burnout/Overworked</li> <li>• Anxiety</li> <li>• Survivor's guilt</li> <li>• Sense of duty</li> </ul>	• Distancing

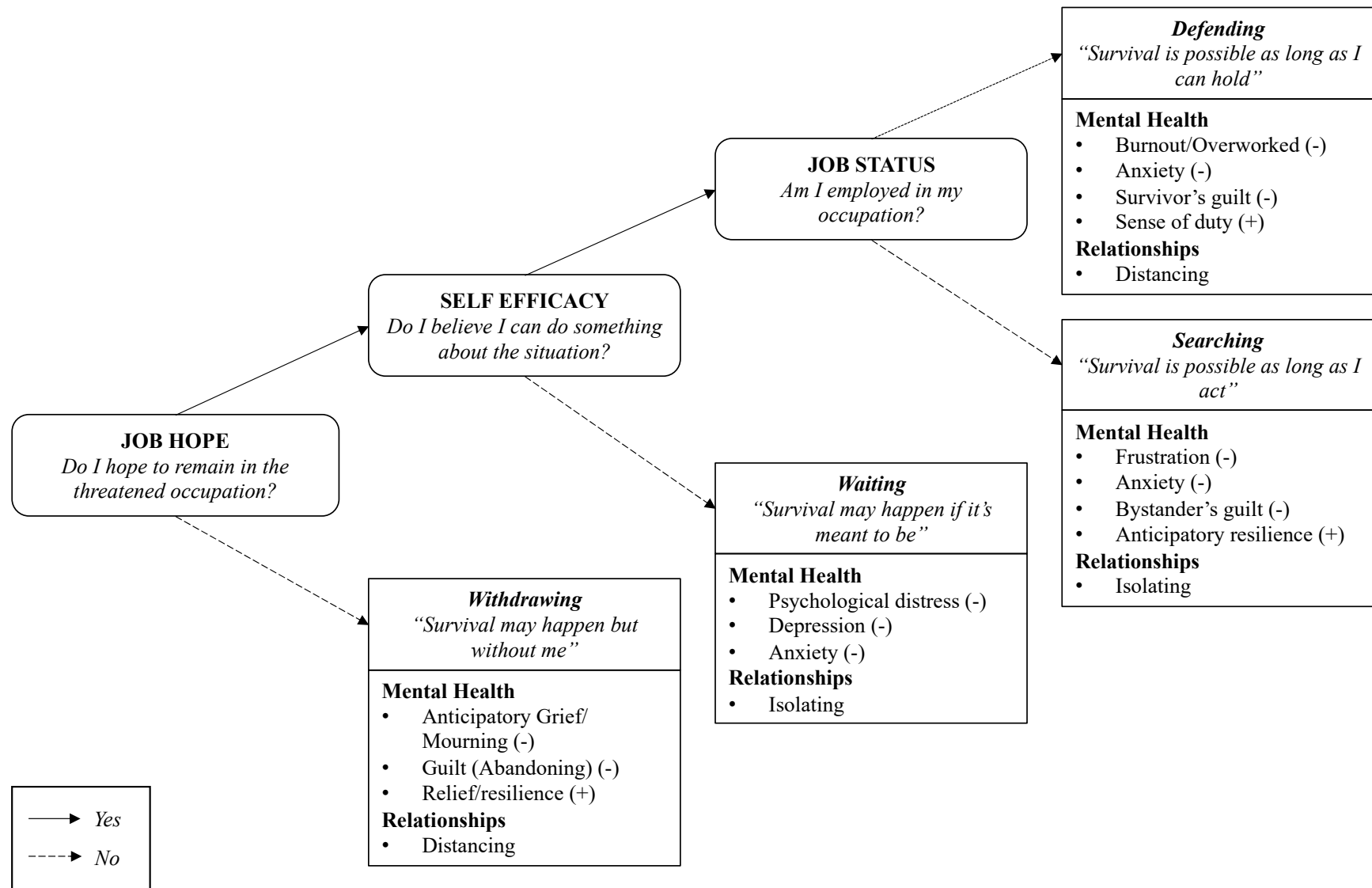
**Table 5.4: Reaction to OIET and Mental Health**

<b>Mental Health</b>	<b>Relief</b>	<b>Resilience</b>	<b>Grief</b>	<b>Guilt</b>	<b>Anxiety</b>	<b>Distress</b>	<b>Burnout</b>	<b>Sense of Duty</b>	<b>Frustration</b>	<b>Overall</b>
<b>Withdraw</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	+/-
<b>Waiting</b>	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	X	X	- -
<b>Searching</b>	X	✓	X	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓	+/-
<b>Defend</b>	X	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X	-

**Figure 5.1: Experiencing Occupational Identity Existential Threat during OET (micro)**



**Figure 5.2: Appraisals and Outcomes**



## APPENDIX

### Appendix 3.1

#### **Combined Interview Protocols Pre-Pandemic: Concierges & Les Clefs D'or (Wave 1 & 2<sup>23</sup>)**

Thanks for taking time to talk with me today. We are conducting a study of concierges. Right now we are examining the process by which concierges view their occupation and relate to one another. Before I can begin, I need to get your permission to participate in the study (give consent form). Any study done at Boston College needs to have this. The purpose of the form, among other things, is to guarantee to you that your responses will be kept strictly confidential. Do you have any questions about the study? I am/ we are interviewing you because you are the expert here. There aren't any right or wrong answers. Also, some of the questions sound a lot alike. We sometimes ask questions in slightly different ways to get different insights. (After consent form is signed). Are you ready to begin?

#### **Introduction (Warm up and Background)**

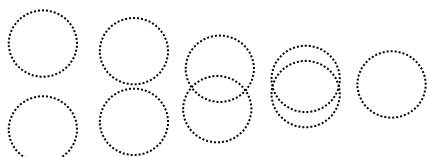
1. If you had to tell an outsider what a Concierge does, how would you describe it? ... a Clef d'Or?
2. Tell me about when and how you became a concierge? Tell me about what led you to do this?
3. Tell me about when and how you became a Clef d'Or?
4. (*When applicable*) What is your role in the board of Les Clefs d'Or?
5. What, if anything, is unique about your work?
6. What does it take to be an excellent concierge?
7. Can you tell me a little bit about how you came to work for this hotel?

#### **Situations/ Events**

8. Please, tell me a story about an event or accomplishment you're most proud of or that was most meaningful to you at work?
9. Please, tell me a story about when you made the "impossible" possible?
10. How do you get people interested in your services? That is, how do people know to look for the services of a Clefs d'Or?
11. How do you go about going above and beyond what people request of you?
12. What, if anything, would you *\*not\** do for a client? Why?

#### **Identity**

13. How would you define who you are professionally? What is important to you?
14. What overlap do you see between  
YOU



<sup>23</sup> \*\*indicates questions that were added in the second wave of interviews

15. Why do you see it this way?
16. Has your opinion changed over time? If so, how and why?
17. If you had to rank the following proposition, which represents you the most?
  - a. I am an employee of the hotel
  - b. I am a concierge
  - c. I am a member of Les Clefs d'Or
18. Why do you see it this way?
19. Has your opinion changed over time? If so, how and why?

### **Scenarios\*\***

I am going to describe you a situation. Each time walk me through how you would deal with it.

20. A VIP guest asks to have a party in her/his suite. The party should start around 9PM and end around 3AM the next day. Your hotel's policy is not to have any noise after 11PM.
21. A new private night club has opened its doors in Boston and is very selective about the clientele they invite in. As this place is new to you, you don't personally know the owner. A guest would like to join a private event held there.
22. A guest asks for a private walking tour of Boston that would involve a picnic lunch in the Boston Public Garden. The guest notes that it is their dream to drink Champaign while being transported lazily around the pond on a Swan Boat. However, Boston has an open container law which would make such a request illegal.

### **Occupation & Challenges**

23. What, in your opinion, are the challenges that Clefs d'Or concierges are facing more broadly?
24. What role, if any, do travel guides (e.g. Forbes or AAA) play in influencing the way you work?\*\*
25. In what way if any do you get support from your hotel (i.e. General Manager to face those challenges)?\*\*
26. In what way if any do you get support from Les Clefs d'Or (and/or other concierges) to face those challenges?\*\*
27. How, if at all, is technology affecting the work that you do as a Clefs d'Or concierge?\*\*
  - a. How do your services differ from the recommendation we can find online?
  - b. Please give me an example of a guest that you've convinced to trust you and not the Internet?
  - c. What do you think about concierge desk being outsourced? Do you think the hotel you're in would outsource their desk? Why, why not?

### **Relationships and interactions at work\*\***

Now, I am going to ask similar questions but about different groups. From the list below:

- Guests
- Vendors
- Manager(s) and coworkers
- Concierges & Clefs d'Or

Can you tell me in your opinion:

28. Which ones you believe takes most of your time to the least amount of time?



29. Which ones are the most important to the least important to you? Why?

30. How do you organize and prioritize between these relationships?

**A. Guests**

31. How important is the relationship with guests to you?

32. What is important in this relationship?

33. How do you establish relationships with guests?

34. How, if at all, do you maintain relationships with guests over time?

35. How do you get them to trust you?

36. How, if at all, do you manage to make the guests come back to see you? Come back to the Hotel?

37. Can you give me an example of how you prioritize the requests that you get?

38. Can you walk me through an example of how you assess the needs of a guest? Is it a first come first serve basis or something else?

39. Are there unexpected requests? If so, can you give me an example and how you dealt with it?

40. Do you have to create the unexpected in your work? If so, can you give me an example of how you did it?

41. Have you ever had one of your guests become a friend? If not, is it a common situation for other concierges?

a. How do you manage this type of relationship?

b. Can you tell me about a time it became an issue in your work, if at all?

**B. Vendors**

42. How do concierges establish relationships with vendors?

43. What makes them trustworthy/not trustworthy to you?

44. Have you ever lost trust in a vendor? If so, can you give me an example? Could this person regain your trust after losing it? How?

**C. Manager(s)**

45. How would you describe your relationship with your manager (i.e. the person who decides what resources you can/cannot have)? What is important?

46. Has there been a time where you felt that Top management didn't understand what you do? How did you react to it?

47. How do you convey information about what you do to other members of the staff and top management?

a. How do you get them to trust you?

b. How, if at all, do you get them to value/secure your work?

Could you tell me about a time when you had a conflict or a misunderstanding with your managers? How did you solve that situation?

**D. Concierges & Clefs d'Or**

48. What, if anything, differs in your relationships with Clefs d'or vs. non-Clefs d'or concierges?

49. What does the keys mean to you?

50. What does "In service through friendship" means to you?

51. How can you "repay" a member, if at all, that has helped you with a request?

**Closing:** Anything you think I should have asked that I did not?

## Combined Interview Protocols During the Pandemic (Wave 3 & 4)

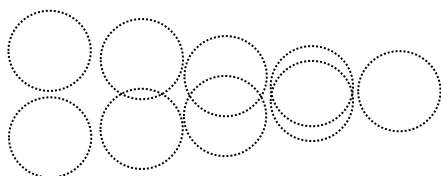
### Introduction (Warm up and Background)

1. Can you briefly tell me about when and how you became a concierge, and a Les Clefs d'Or member? Why did you want to become a concierge and a Les Clefs d'Or member? What is your current working status?
2. *(if not discussed in #1) Can you tell me a little bit about what led you to work(ed) for the hotel you work for now?*
3. What do you like about this job? What do you find the most challenging?
4. What does it take to be an excellent concierge?

### Identity

5. Tell me a story that you think best represents what it means to be a Les Clefs D'Or concierge.
  - a. How does being a member of Les Clefs D'Or differ from being a concierge?
  - b. To what degree do you see yourself fitting this description? Do you see yourself as representing what the Clefs d'Or represent or do you view yourself differently?
6. How do you see yourself in the future professionally?
  - a. How do you feel about this?\*
7. How important to you is being a
  - c. Hotel employee at [HOTEL]
  - d. Concierge
  - e. Les Clefs d'Or member
8. Could you rank them in order of importance?
9. What overlap do you see between

YOU



- d) ORGANIZATION (Hotel)
- e) PROFESSION (Concierge)
- f) PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION (Les Clefs d'OR)

10. Why do you see it this way?
11. Has your opinion changed over time? If so, how and why?

### Occupation & Challenges

12. What are the challenges that you are facing now at work?
  - a. *If not addressed in (12): How, if at all, have these challenges changed?*

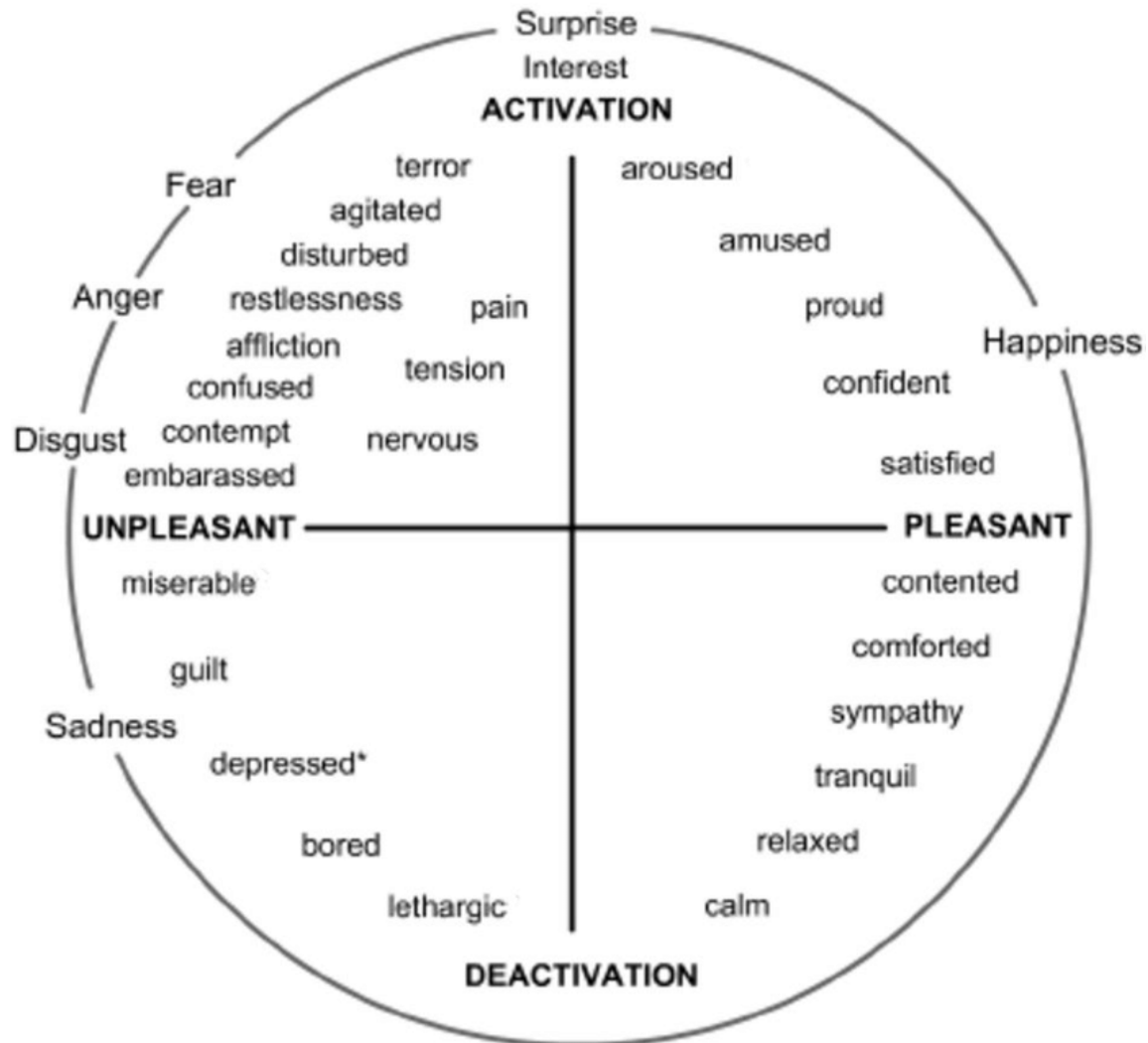
13. What, in your opinion, are the challenges that Clefs d'Or concierges are facing more broadly?
14. In your opinion, how do you see the future/trajectory of:
  - b. The hotel industry
  - c. The concierge profession
  - d. The Les Clefs d'Or Association
15. How do you feel about this?\*
16. To face your current challenges, how important are the following in terms of providing you support? Or as a source of conflict?:
  - a. your hotel (i.e. General Manager)?
  - b. Your local concierge Association?
  - c. Les Clefs d'Or Association?
  - d. Other groups or individuals?
17. *Show Circumplex of emotions*: Please pick the emotion(s) that best describe how you feel now about your work\*\*?
- a. Please explain why did you picked this/these emotions?
  - b. Has it changed over the past year? If so, how?

### **Pandemic Effects**

18. How has the pandemic changed your work?
19. Since the beginning of the pandemic, who have you been interacting with professionally?
  - a. *Ask them to draw their network a year ago VS now*
20. *Based on previous question*: How would you currently describe your relation with:
  - b. Other concierges
  - c. Other Les Clefs d'Or concierges
  - d. Vendors
  - e. Hotel staff
  - f. Guests
21. How has these relations changed, if at all, since the beginning of the pandemic?
  - a. How, if at all, did these changes affect you and your work?
22. What communication have you been getting from the Les Clefs d'Or since the start of the pandemic?
  - a. How would you describe their frequency? ... their content (what do they say)?
  - b. What has been your reaction to these communications? How, if at all, did it affect you?

**Closing:** Anything you think I should have asked that I did not?

Circumplex model of emotion (based on Russell, 1980)



## Follow-Up Interview Protocol (Final wave of Interviews)

### Introduction

- 1) What have you been doing since we talked last?
- 2) What is your current working status?
- 3) How do you feel about your job and work?
- 4) How has the pandemic affected your work?

### Emerging Themes

- 5) Last time we talked you told me you considered the overlap between how you see yourself and Les Clefs d'Or/Concierges/Hotel to be [say level of overlap]. Has that changed today? If so, why/why not?
- 6) Also, in our previous conversation you described your relationship with Guest/Vendors/Hotel staff/Concierges to be [describe]. How have these relationships evolved in light of the pandemic?
  - a. *Ask them to draw their network a year ago VS now*
- 7) How do you now see the future of:
  - a. The hotel industry
  - b. The concierge profession
- 8) How do you feel about it?
- 9) To face your current challenges, how important are the following in terms of providing you support:
  - a. your hotel (i.e. General Manager)?
  - b. Your local concierge Association?
  - c. Les Clefs d'Or Association?
  - d. Other groups or individuals?
- 10) What communication have you been getting from the Les Clefs d'Or since the start of the pandemic?
  - a. How would you describe their frequency? ... their content (what do they say)?
  - b. What has been your reaction to these communications?
  - c. The Les Clefs d'Or Association
23. *If not addressed in previous answers, show Circumplex of emotions:* Please pick the emotion(s) that best describe how you feel now about your work?
  - c. Please explain why did you picked this/these emotions?
  - d. Has it changed over the past year? If so, how?

**Closing:** Anything you think I should have asked that I did not? Or anything I should know to better understand how you have experienced and been impacted by the past events (i.e., pandemic, job loss, occupational decline)?

## **Appendix 3.2**

### **Recurring Interviews: Board Of Les Clefs D'Or USA**

1. Tell me how you've been recently?
  2. What has changed in your work?
  3. In light of the recent event (Coronavirus), what do you the role of Les Clefs d'Or is?
  4. What were the latest decisions that the board took for the Association? Why?
  5. How would you like the Association to evolve? What is your vision?
  6. What do you hope to accomplish as member of the board?
  7. What role, if any, do Clef d'Or concierges have to play in the future of the hospitality industry? Why?
- 

## **Appendix 3.3**

### **Interviews: General Managers and Rating Agencies**

1. How would you describe what a Rating Agency does to someone who has
  - a. Can you briefly tell me how you came to work for [Rating Agency]

OR

2. Can you briefly tell me how you became a General Manager at [Hotel]
3. How would you define what a concierge is? A Les Clefs d'Or concierge ?
4. What, if anything, do you know about Les Clefs d'Or Association?
5. In your opinion, how do you see the future/trajectory of:
  - e. The hotel industry
  - f. The concierge profession
  - g. The Les Clefs d'Or Association
6. In light of the recent event (Coronavirus), what do you the role of Les Clefs d'Or is?
7. What role, if any, do Clef d'Or concierges have to play in the future of the hospitality industry? Why?

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