



# Understanding the professional ambition to develop it better: the example of WoldSkills competition

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**Title: Understanding the professional ambition to develop it better: the example of WorldSkills competition**

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**Abstract:**

Several so-called "manual" professions suffer from a negative image. "Underjobs", Unattractive, painful, poorly paid, ghettos of underprivileged students, "default" professional choice ... However, some young people who undertake these jobs, push their search for mastery, perfection and excellence until becoming national champions or Olympic champions (“WorldSkills competition”) in their profession. The origin of their motivation is of great interest for us. They have talent, will, or luck but that does not explain their motivation to succeed. We chose to study the origin of their ambition.

Ambition, often equated with motivation, has been little studied so far and remains largely unknown. We propose here to study the psychological and social factors of professional ambition by a study conducted with members of the French team engaged in the Olympics games of professions. For this, we used an autobiographical approach, involving the analysis of life stories and cognitive mapping. First of all, this method allowed us to examine to what extent the support offered by WorldSkills constitutes both a "path of excellence in learning" and a powerful tool of professionalization for these young people. In a second step, we analyzed the psychological dimensions of their professional ambition.

**Keywords:** *ambition, self accomplishment, meaning, motivation*

## **Introduction**

"I will be Olympic Champion!" This is the objective expressed by the members of the France team engaged in the Olympiad of trades. This desire for success, however, is characteristic of young professionals in the craft sector, a sector known as "in tension" which, despite renewed interest from the media and public authorities, is struggling to recruit. Little valued, these trades are often despised and judged as a social regression. These young professionals have seized their profession to push it to the pinnacle of excellence and make it a trampling of achievement and social enhancement by becoming champions of France and participating in an international competition of excellence, the "WorldSkills Competition" ([www.worldskills-france.org/](http://www.worldskills-france.org/)).

WorldSkills encourages them to achieve their goal by providing support that is a "learning excellence journey". However, neither the career nor the talent of these young professionals is enough to explain a success in international events. The research we have done aims to understand the nature and psychological processes on which their ambition is based.

This research is conducted as part of Catherine Valmorin's doctoral thesis "Professional ambition and self-realization throughout life", under the direction of Prof. E. Ioarer.

## **Objectives**

We propose in this paper to analyze the psychological and social behaviors and processes of the professional ambition of these young adults selected in the France team participating in the "WorldSkills" Olympiads. As a first step, we will show how the WorldSkills course, a real career guidance program with a double learning curve, plays an important role in facilitating the integration of these young people in a professional field where they can start their professional life with a level of recognized excellence. We will also see how this course has a significant impact on the construction of their professional and social identity. In a second step, we will study the role of professional ambition and how its components exert a determining influence on the trajectory of these young people. The last point concerns the modalities and measures to be implemented to enable other young people to mobilize this ambition and place them on the path of social, personal and professional success.

## **Theoretical basis**

To study this question, we have encountered three major difficulties. The first is the lack of publications available on professional ambition. The second relates to the moral value associated with ambition. The third is its multiform nature which is sometimes considered as a process and sometimes as a state. We have proposed a theoretical model, mainly based on the concepts of self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2012, Vallerand, 2002, 2007, Vallerand & Losier, 1999);

motivation for success (Nicholls, 1984, 1989, Atkinson, 1964); of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003); sense of life (George & Park (2016); grain (Duckworth, 2007, 2017).) We also borrowed from sociology notions such as: ethics of philosophy (mercury & Vultur, 2010), construction identity in communities (Bauman, 2010, 2013), the vision of desire among philosophers (Rabouin, 1997).

## **Methodology**

The study is conducted after 15 members of the team of France selected in 2015 (9 boys and 6 girls) aged 19 to 23 years.

In-depth interviews were conducted about the reasons, the values, the meaning, the goals that each one of them gives to his school, his professional career and his participation in WorldSkills. The content of these interviews gave rise to a content analysis whose synthesis was materialized by cognitive maps (Chaxel et al, 2014). These summaries were then submitted to the narrators for validation and collection of additional interview material.

## **Results**

The support offered by WorldSkills France can be defined as a race of excellence "Professional orientation". In addition to its international prestige, it is characterized by its duration (several years) and its progressiveness in the competition, ensuring a continuous improvement of the skills of the participants (even those who do not win an Olympic medal). The skills they develop in this framework build their self-confidence, influence their sense of self-efficacy, but also their motivation for success, helping them build their professional and social identity. In addition, this course develops a sense of belonging to the collective. They claim to be closely related to each other and aspire to the same goal. "We all want to be Olympic champions in our profession," says Pierre. They do not wish to be called what Bauman (2010, 2013) calls « underclass »: on the margins of society. "We are tired of being seen as troubled young people". They want to be recognized. They want the right to a legitimate place in society. This shared motivation unites them.

While ambition is often perceived negatively, we see that this is not the case here. On the contrary, the young people questioned are all scandalized by the bad image given to ambition. All recognize that they have "a strong desire to succeed". More than 50% described themselves as "ambitious". They distinguish between "being ambitious" and "having ambition". "To be ambitious" is perceived negatively, "to have ambition" is on the contrary valued.

The analysis of the interviews highlighted four main drivers of professional ambition: 1 / social recognition (need to "prove to the world its own value"); 2 / the perfection of the activity itself

(perfect control and exceeding the limits); 3 / self-recognition (need to prove oneself). 4 / the improvement of the state of the world and society (here referring to a need for transmission, "promotion" of crafts). These objectives are expressed alone or combined with more or less importance depending on the person. This configuration shows interindividual variability (is not the same for all) and interindividual (may vary over time).

Three components structure the ambition and give meaning to the lives of these young people.

**The goal:** everyone has set the goal of becoming an Olympic champion in his profession. For Julio (2017, p.82), "setting a goal is a natural way that an individual use to meet their needs, to respect their values, to adapt to their environment and to make behavioral changes in their lives. the desired direction ".

**The will:** to compare to the concept of "grid", composed of passion and perseverance, developed by Duckworth (2013, 2017)

**The passion:** everyone is passionate about his job. Vallerand et al. (2003) explain that the criteria of passion are a powerful attraction for an activity that a person likes, considers important, helping to define it as an individual and in which it invests time and energy.

## Conclusions

In summary, the results show that while the WorldSkills experience is a factor of integration into our society and of professional and social success, professional ambition is an important driver of career development. It appears as a spring of the dynamics of the quest for self-realization. The WorldSkills experience is at the very heart of the ambition that plays a major role in the responsibility that an individual can assume to become an entrepreneur of his life through new learning strategies. In this sense, the results show the internality of the control of the behaviors of the persons met: they are conscious that they build their own destiny and that they decide the shaping and the sense that their life can take. However, highlighting the impact of internal psychological factors on these young professionals leaves us with an important stake in the context of this Conference: how can we encourage the emergence and reinforcement of these factors in other individuals? including invisible or disadvantaged people? populations? The problem is obviously not to offer these populations such an elitist course, but rather to rely on what we can learn to encourage them to develop positive internal psychological factors, to develop motivation, the desire to grow and possibly a real social and professional ambition.

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