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BEHAVIOR OF ENTREPRENEURS AND VOLITION

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Abstract

Volition is an important characteristic in the field of training and vocational guidance. Literature on entrepreneurship has focused on this concept to better understand the behavior of the entrepreneur (Achtziger & Gollwitzer, 2008). This study analyzes the personal characteristics involved in the process of transformation of intentions into actions in the field of entrepreneurship. Three categories of people were included in this study, which allowed us to circumvent the methodological problems associated with the implementation of a longitudinal study. Thus, our sample consisted of university and business school students, potential entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurs. We conducted a variance analysis after confirming the homogeneity of each group, thus allowing intergroup comparisons. We found that volitional capacities are mobilized in a successive order, one after the other. In addition, this order is determined by the individual's progress on the process of creation.

Keywords: Intention, Action, Volition, Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneur, Behavior, Student

1. INTRODUCTION

Last decade, management researchers were more interested in understanding the process of entrepreneurship (Krueger, 1993), mainly considering the models of intent, such as, the behavioral theory proposed by Ajzen (2002). In light of these results, we know the predictors of the emergence of an entrepreneurial project. However, other questions ought to be asked: How does a virtual entrepreneurial project turn into an effective project? What are the psychological mechanisms that come into play? These questions have a particular importance in France because the GEM 2013 Global Report reveals that the gap between intentions and actual creations (TEA) is one of the highest in the world after Singapore.

In business, it is common to see highly motivated people with a strong intention to perform an action, being unable to perform the necessary actions to realize this intention. For psychologists such as Gollwitzer & Heckhausen (1987) and Oettingen et al. (2000), the inherent difficulties in achieving such a goal, despite a challenging environment and a high level of motivation, evokes a lack of individual characteristics, which has long been considered as a "skill", the volition. More recently, it has been emphasized by Broonen (2010) for whom volition is the process that determines the transition from intention to action.

The overall objective of our study is to identify a set of cognitive variables that may contribute to the prediction of entrepreneurial intention, which will explain the transformation of intentions into entrepreneurial actions. Our approach is to demonstrate that entrepreneurship is a goal pursued by the individual's will, and is therefore affected much more by personal dispositions than economic and environmental constraints. In particular, we wish to highlight the personal dynamics in the structure, maturation and production of a range of entrepreneurial careers, to extract the volitional characteristics of this career choice.

Our hypotheses on volition were tested using data from interviews conducted with French students and present and potential entrepreneurs, in order to identify the volition skills of each population and explore how they mobilize these skills during the entrepreneurial process.

The present paper is structured as follows. We first present the corpus of literature to which this study contributes. We then present our hypotheses and methodology, followed by our empirical analysis. Finally, we discuss our findings and their implications for different stakeholders.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

According to the theory of planned behavior—TCP—intention is predicted by attitudes towards the behavior, perceived behavioral control, and the subjective norm (Ajzen & Madden, 1986). This indicates that the individual will only adopt a certain behavior over which he has some level of control, that which he believes he is able to complete successfully, and that which gives him real pleasure. This ability to control behavior was also suggested by Kuhl (1985) as the notion of action control. Action control is the self-regulatory mechanism that mediates the link between intention and action. Kuhl (1982) hypothesized that individuals differ in not only their willingness to control their actions, i.e., oriented state versus orientation towards action, but also in terms of the proportion of intentions turned into behavior. In addition, those with an orientation towards action generally tend to approach things proactively, while "state-oriented" persons exhibit inertia action. Studies on the control action theory have been relatively successful in predicting action in various fields. For instance, a study by Bagozzi et al. (1992) examined the participants' intention to use coupons and to use them effectively in a supermarket. It was found that orientation towards action increases the relative importance of attitudes but lessens the impact of subjective norms on

intention. Thus, attitudes towards behavior are more important in the formation of intentions in action-oriented people than in "oriented state" individuals. Although Kuhl (1982, 1985), and Bagozzi et al. (1992) have used the theory of reasoned action and not the TCP, it appears necessary to integrate volitional skills of self-regulation in the TCP, because behavioral control structure is an important aspect of volitional models (Hale et al., 2003).

Volition, long neglected in psychology, together with the advent of behaviorism, is an important characteristic with reference to training and vocational guidance. Motivational processes account for the decision to act; however, they do not optimally explain how the individual protects his intention from potential distracters and implements actions to execute this intention. The construct of volition is important in this context, especially for activities such as entrepreneurship, because the time between the formulation of the objective and its implementation can be long. Defined as the sum of mental events or activities through which an agent consciously and actively exercises its agentivity to voluntarily direct his thoughts and action (Zhu, 2004), volition is possible because of constructed representations, knowledge, and inferences about the professional project.

It is important to note that the distinction between motivation and volition is still vague, because the literature on motivation includes volition, and vice versa (Forstmeier & Rüddel, 2008). A close examination of Gollwitzer's (1996) Rubicon model reveals a distinction between volition and motivation, which can be expressed in terms of degree. According to this model, motivation emerges first, which helps people to choose and set a goal to pursue. Then volition is triggered, which pushes the individual to progress towards his or her goal. Therefore, intention can be found in the interaction between motivation and volition. According to Corno (2004), volition controls intentions and impulses so that the intended action is achieved regardless of the difficulties and obstacles. Volitional processes protect the intention from actions in competition with other potential distractions. Thus, our point of view is identical to the one of Kuhl (1985) and Corno (2004) that indicates that motivation may lead individuals to initiate actions, while volition leads them to continue the action they seek to achieve, while simultaneously protecting it from distracters.

In the present study, we referred to volition as the expression of volitional capacity. We postulated that when the student or budding entrepreneur is in a volitional state of mind, he or she begins by focusing on how to proceed to achieve the desired goal. In line with the work of Corno & Kanfer (1993), Kuhl (1985), and Gollwitzer (1993), we conceptualized motivation and volition as distinct but interacting concepts.

3. HYPOTHESES AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research hypotheses

Our research is based on the theoretical models of planned behavior and reasoned action, which explain entrepreneurial behavior through an intention to perform the behavior. Among these models, those who integrate, even partially, volitional and motivational factors seem most likely to account for the determinants of intention, depending on its implementation (Hale et al., 2003). Indeed, one cannot simply consider the background of intention in terms of motivation because an individual, being discomforted by the pursuit of his or her purpose or professional project, must use his/her volitional resources to achieve it.

The literature on intention (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Ajzen, 2002) reveals that it is determined by one's attitude towards the behavior, the subjective norm, and the behavioral control. In addition, further research on entrepreneurial intention has shown that the construction of entrepreneurship seems to originate from the opinions on entrepreneurship and from entrepreneurs' motivation (Battistelli, 2001), self-efficiency (Boyd & Vozikis, 1994), and expectations (Battistelli et al., 2003). Thus, though there is no evidence of a direct relationship

between intentions and certain career choices, we can assume that the choice of an occupation depends on the behavioral intention. This intention can be acquired from both personal and social characteristics.

The realization of an entrepreneurial project is a long process that requires an individual's commitment and persistence in pursuit of the goals despite obstacles, and the mobilization of volitional skills. We hypothesized that the volitional capacity is mobilized successively in an order determined by the progression of the individual on the path of creation. This would imply that the self-motivation of the students who formulated entrepreneurship intentions would be better than that of the other students (H1).

Other volitional skills such as self-regulation, and in particular, self-determination and resistance to uncertainty, would be more mobilized by entrepreneurs who realize their projects as well as the potential entrepreneurs, than by the persons who remained in pre-sentence stage (H2).

Skills of action development (action orientation, concentration, and proactivity) occur more for entrepreneurs in activity than for the potential entrepreneurs and other students (H3).

To explore these hypotheses, a quantitative approach (using a structured questionnaire and multiple tools) based on a plan to compare the attraction towards an entrepreneurial career and the appeal of a wage career, was adopted.

3.2. Data

Three categories of people were interviewed in the present study, using a questionnaire. This allowed us to circumvent the methodological problems related to the implementation of a longitudinal study. Thus, our sample consisted of 2,780 French College and high school students, 492 potential entrepreneurs and 488 active entrepreneurs. Among the 3760 participants 59% were female and 41% were male. Observe that girls have particularly benefited from the democratization of access to post-baccalaureate education that France has been known for since the middle of the twentieth century. Since the 1970s, they have overtaken boys in terms of academic achievement (European Commission, 2012). This trend naturally translates into a higher participation rate of females than males in the sample of students in the present study. The age of participants was between 17 and 57 years, with a mean age of 38 years for active entrepreneurs (EA), 36 years for potential entrepreneurs (EP), and 20 years for students. For this study, the students were recruited based on their knowledge of the business environment. Therefore, 22.69% had at least one contractor among the members of their family and 18.40% had the same among the friends of their family members. Only 400 of the 2780 students surveyed in the present study were willing to provide information about their parents' entrepreneurial activity. Further, 75% of the students reported having professional experience especially in food and beverage, hospitality or tourism industry, accumulated mainly during the summer holidays (40%).

4. RESULTS

4.1. The choice of career

Career choice refers to the career-related intentions of students, which can be entrepreneurial or wage-based jobs. Based on the identification of the projects, we defined four sub-groups of students in our analysis. It was found that 17% of the students wanted to become an entrepreneur (EN), 21% expressed a desire to secure an employment (S), and 37% planned to continue their studies up to the master's or doctorate level (ET). We found that 25% were still undecided (IN). Despite the unequal gender distribution of the sample, the number of boys (240) wishing to pursue a profession in entrepreneurship was not significantly different from that of girls interested in pursuing the same (231). Finally, the Pearson's chi-squared test

revealed that three variables, sex, maturation of the project, and choice of career were related to a risk threshold of 5%.
We also interviewed active entrepreneurs (EA) and potential entrepreneurs (EP), to compare their volitional characteristics to the students. As our sample comprised a similar number of male and female students wishing to become an entrepreneur, we selected respondents belonging to both the categories, EA and EP, and ensured a uniform gender distribution in these groups (Table n°0b). Thus, we avoided a gender bias in our comparisons in accordance with the literature in this area (Loza de Siles, 2011). In terms of size, the three categories EP, EA, and EN are also similar.

Table 0b: Distribution of the entire sample by status and gender

	STATUS - EP	STATUS - EA	STATUS - EN	STATUS - IN	STATUS - ET	STATUS - S	Total
Female	244	237	231	479	768	362	2321
%	6.44%	6.26%	6.10%	12.65%	20.27%	9.56%	61.27%
Male	258	264	249	218	255	223	1467
%	6.81%	6.97%	6.57%	5.76%	6.73%	5.89%	38.73%
Total	502	501	480	697	1023	585	3788
%	13.25%	13.23%	12.67%	18.40%	27.01%	15.44%	100.00%

4. 2. Mobilization of volitional abilities

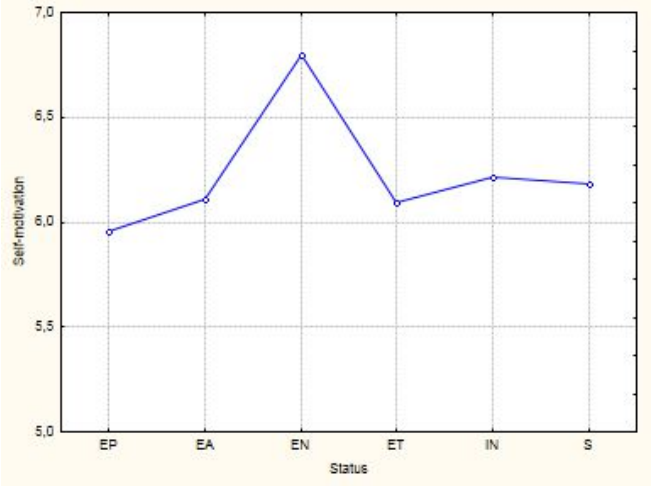
We conducted an analysis of covariance, and ensured homogeneity of each group, which allowed for group comparisons. The results have been organized in three stages. As a first step, we analyzed the volitional skills associated with the construction of the professional project. The objective here was to understand the difference between students who are oriented towards entrepreneurship and others. Only self-motivation proved to be relevant to account for our observations in the decision stage. We then analyzed the dimensions involved in the development of an entrepreneurial approach. This was done to explain the difference between merely formulating a plan and actually beginning the realization of this intention through the implementation of the first steps that lead to the creation of an autonomous activity. Self-determination, resistance to uncertainty, and control of the action were considered for this purpose. Finally, we explored the elements related to the exercise of an autonomous activity. In this context, we discussed the notions of action orientation, concentration, and proactivity.

4.2.1. The ability volitional associated with the formulation of future intentions: self-motivation

Students wishing to embark on an entrepreneurial (EN) career exhibited the highest scores on this dimension (Figure 1). Their average score was 6.79 on a scale of 1 to 10. They were followed by those who were undecided (6.21) and those who wanted employment (6.18), respectively. Students wishing to pursue higher studies (ET) obtained a score of 6.09 that was similar to those of active entrepreneurs (EA), with an average score of 6.10, higher than the scores of potential entrepreneurs (5.95).
Duncan's test of multiple comparison revealed that the score of the students with entrepreneurial projects (EN) was statistically different from the other groups of students. In other words, this consciousness of being on the way to achieving what we always dreamed motivated those who wished to undertake the same. These observations are consistent with our hypothesis, H1. Self-motivation proved to be relevant to account for our observations in the decision stage. We found that, with reference to this dimension, students who were moving towards the business of entrepreneurship differed the most from others. The comparison with active entrepreneurs (EA) and potential entrepreneurs (EP) was not pertinent

at this stage because they were in a different stage of the entrepreneurial process and had already mobilized their volitional capacities.

Figure 1: Difference in level of self-motivation based on the status

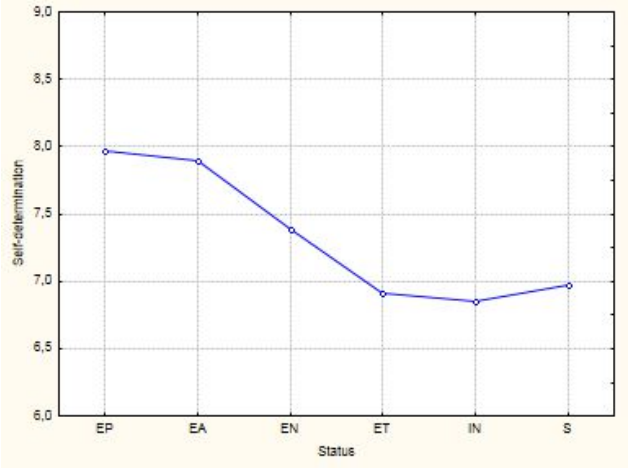


EA = Entrepreneur in activity, EP = Potential entrepreneur, EN = Students considering an entrepreneurial career, ET = Students who wish to pursue further studies in higher education, S = Students who prefer a paid professional career, IN = Undecided students.

4.2.2. Skills volitional mobilized at the stage of preparation for action

For self-determination, which refers to the ability to present goals and ambitions confidently, and the ability to implement them successfully, our results showed that entrepreneurs, potential (EP) and active (EA), exhibited better results. Their scores, though identical, differed significantly from the scores obtained by all the groups of students, where there is no significant difference between them (except between groups EN and IN) as shown in Figure 2. Thus, there is a clear separation between these two groups for this dimension. Self-determination allows distinguishing the formulation of intent and the implementation thereof, through action planning.

Figure 2: Difference in level of self-determination based on the status

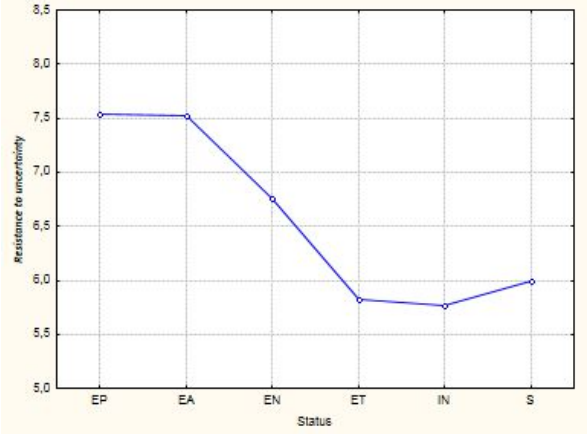


EA = Entrepreneur in activity, EP = Potential entrepreneur, EN = Students considering an entrepreneurial career, ET = Students who wish to pursue further studies in higher education, S = Students who prefer a paid professional career, IN = Undecided students.

For the dimensions of resistance to uncertainty, we observed that entrepreneurs (active and potential) differed significantly from all groups of students. We also noted that students considering an entrepreneurial career (EN) differed significantly from the other groups of students. These data confirm our hypothesis, H2. The socio-economic context and

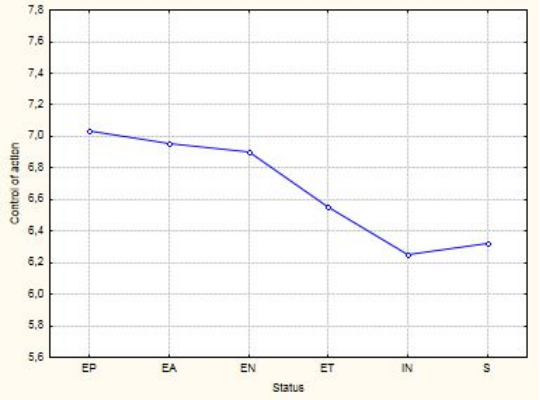
uncertainties apply to all entrepreneurs, and in a lesser extent, students who wish to become entrepreneur used their determination in order to move forward. Then, the individual participates in a planning activity that mobilizes the knowledge, motivation, and opinions that he/she has in relation to the proposed activity. Thus, it entails feeling free to undertake the project and the knowledge that he/she will be able to go beyond the obstacles that may stand in the way of his/her projects. There was also a significant difference between students seeking an entrepreneurial career and other students. In other words, students who wished to become entrepreneurs saw their future with greater confidence than did other students. With reference to the ability to control the action, the results were similar, except for students who wished to pursue studies, who were more similar to the group of entrepreneurs in a broad sense (EP, EA and EN). Their decision to continue their education seemed to give the impression that they wished to control and improve their future.

Figure 3: Difference in level of resistance to uncertainty based on the status



EA = Entrepreneur in activity, EP = Potential entrepreneur, EN = Students considering an entrepreneurial career, ET = Students who wish to pursue further studies in higher education, S = Students who prefer a paid professional career, IN = Undecided students.

Figure 4: Difference in level of the control of action based on the status



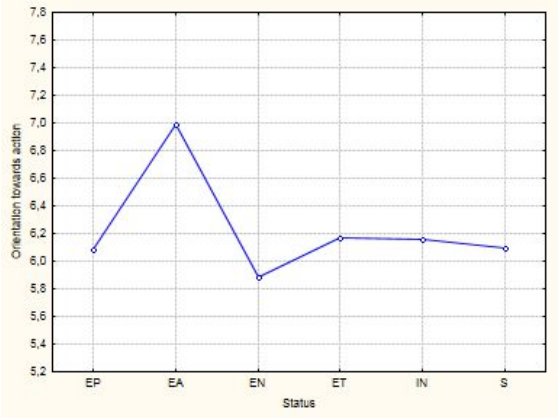
EA = Entrepreneur in activity, EP = Potential entrepreneur, EN = Students considering an entrepreneurial career, ET = Students who wish to pursue further studies in higher education, S = Students who prefer a paid professional career, IN = Undecided students.

4.2.3 The skills involved in the implementation of the action

It refers to the ability of the individual to engage in achieving his/her objectives without hesitation and justifies the gap between action planning and its realization. This dimension is particularly developed when individuals realize that their skill level allows them to perform their duties and that such activity will enable them to achieve the desired results. It is therefore not surprising that, as the graph below shows (figure 5), there was a significant difference between active entrepreneurs and potential entrepreneurs, and that the latter group was at the same level as the student groups, since the activity remains latent at this stage. This

phase is the psychological aspect of action, which indicates that the construction of the operative image is the mental realization of the entrepreneurial project. In addition, the operative image is followed by a sequence of steps in the realization of the action and such individuals guide the action a priori, based on their plans.

Figure 5: Difference in level of the orientation towards action based on the status

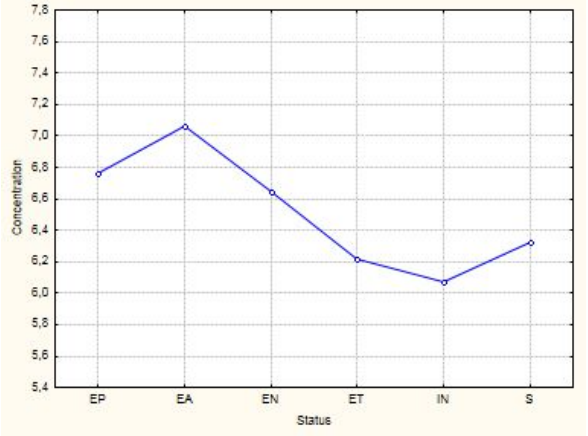


EA = Entrepreneur in activity, EP = Potential entrepreneur, EN = Students considering an entrepreneurial career, ET = Students who wish to pursue further studies in higher education, S = Students who prefer a paid professional career, IN = Undecided students.

4.2.4 Concentration

It is the ability to ignore disturbing thoughts, negative emotions, and impulses in order to focus attention exclusively on the goal. Specifically exhibited by active entrepreneurs, concentration is a characteristic of the state of flow, which one would feel while acting with a sense of control over the actions. In the present study, the active entrepreneurs (EA) scored higher on this dimension, as compared to potential entrepreneurs. Such individuals are likely to follow their actions as it is now with her body. Blur at times he feels is the result of everything he does and small successes that accumulates. Thus, entrepreneurs (EP, EA, and EN) formed a homogeneous group (no statistically significant differences were exhibited by the Duncan test). However, students wishing to pursue their studies and those who were undecided were more likely to be distracted from their goal. This finding seems logical for people in the last category, given their inability to define a professional project.

Figure 6: Difference in level of concentration based on the status



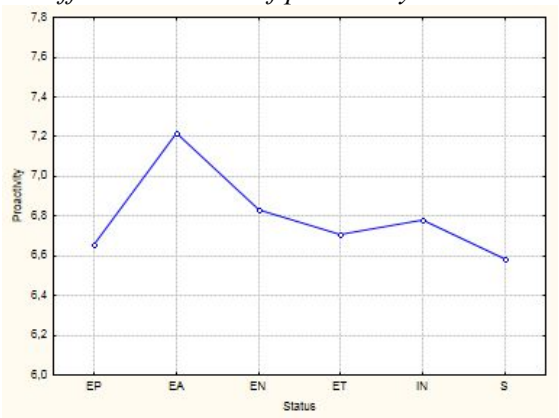
EA = Entrepreneur in activity, EP = Potential entrepreneur, EN = Students considering an entrepreneurial career, ET = Students who wish to pursue further studies in higher education, S = Students who prefer a paid professional career, IN = Undecided students.

4.2.5 Proactivity

The individual must have a vision of his goal in the long term and be able to anticipate the course of events, plan strategies and specific solutions, and predict his/her actions. Active entrepreneurs (EA) had a significantly higher score as compared to the other groups in the present sample. This characterizes their behavior in managing their business.

They take initiatives to cope with unforeseen situations and turn challenges into opportunities for improvement. They identify useful resources, know how to mobilize them, and implement a profit. This means that they are concerned with not just the allocation of static resources, but also the constant search for improvement of the process. In this context, they differed from potential entrepreneurs and students, as evident from Figure 7. This superiority of active entrepreneurs in all the three dimensions of volition confirms our hypothesis, H3.

Figure 7: Difference in level of proactivity based on the status



EA = Entrepreneur in activity, EP = Potential entrepreneur, EN = Students considering an entrepreneurial career, ET = Students who wish to pursue further studies in higher education, S = Students who prefer a paid professional career, IN = Undecided students.

6. CONCLUSION

We studied the personal characteristics involved in the cognitive process of the transformation of intentions into actions, specifically associated with the entrepreneurial process. Three categories of people participated in this study, French students from a university and high schools, potential entrepreneurs, and active entrepreneurs.

This allowed us to circumvent the methodological problems related to the implementation of a longitudinal observation. We ensured that the groups were homogenous to allow intergroup comparisons. Our results showed that the volitional capacity was successively mobilized in an order determined by the progression of the individual on the path of creation.

The present study is original because it explained entrepreneurial intention based on volitional skills. That is, if the entrepreneurial choice is a goal pursued by will, related personal dispositions had a greater impact on the process than economic and environmental constraints. This is a first step in this direction and opens doors to a variety of perspectives for future research. In particular, the relationship between the process of defining a career and skills of an individual deserves further exploration. It is no longer a question of know-how, know-be, or know at all, as a necessary and sufficient condition for career choice, but rather the association between these structures of meaning and volitional skills. Thus, professionals involved in vocational guidance need to consider the psychological processes involved in making career decisions in order to prepare better strategies leading to the goal.

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