Negotiated ambitions through the social dynamic of time organization

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This article addresses the personal negotiations that lead individuals to pursue adult education. Analysing this process points up the ambitions pursued and thus makes it possible to identify how the individuals involved perceive their desired future as an improvement. This study found that ambitions were negotiated in order to make them acceptable to the individuals themselves, but also to the significant others in their lives and to their "social self". This negotiation process draws on norms and rules related to the search for work-life balance. Three types of ambition were identified as three models for negotiating the social organization of time.

Negotiating is a social activity that brings parties together in order to resolve a conflict. While typical negotiation takes place between at least two people, the process may also occur at a personal level when an individual decides to change the common or current course of their action—what Christian Thuderoz (2010, translated here) calls "personal negotiation." This may be defined as reflecting about an issue, recognising that one needs to choose from a list of potential (different or diverging) scenarios, then make the decision itself. These stages of negotiation happen when each specific context and personal history intersect. Examining the options and making a decision creates a dialogue between individuals and themselves, as they assess their reasons for and the potential repercussions of their decisions. While extremely personal, this type of negotiation follows a set of rules—whose solidity is of course questionable (since the person negotiating is also the one who sets them), but which nevertheless point up the registers of agreement that people draw on when negotiating with themselves.

Thus, in what contexts do we negotiate with ourselves? We do so when the path we have chosen no longer seems to be taking us in an acceptable direction. Personal negotiation may be initiated when the present appears to be irretrievably headed towards an undesired future, if nothing is done to change its course. The process applies equally to micro-contexts that require a slight readjustment and to one's life history, when the course of life takes a turn (voluntarily or involuntary) that is no longer self-evident (Abbott 2001). Once an individual has realized that his or her personal or professional life is not moving in the desired direction, self-negotiation begins with the goal of addressing the problem and preventing its shift toward an intolerable situation. Similarly, learning about an opportunity may also trigger a round of personal negotiation and thus challenge a person's life course. Self-negotiation is as such part of a process of reconstructing the meaning we give to the means employed and ends pursued through our social commitments. To state this differently, self-negotiation is a process of aligning the multiple aspects of one's life and in so doing, reinforcing a person's belonging to the social world and the relational fabric that comprises it.

In self-negotiation, we negotiate the rules of action that enable this aligning, or the principles that have prevailed up to that point regarding the desired outcome of a person's commitments and the means employed to meet them. Personal negotiation is thus a potential opportunity to challenge the existing social order—i.e., the system of rules legitimated and applied by individuals who, through the process of adjusting their actions, formulate a (partial or total) critique of the demands of that same social order. Researching personal negotiation thus involves examining the dialogical process between the individual "I" and the "social self" (Mead 1925, Thuderoz 2010). In the eyes of the "I", the "social self" embodies the rules and norms at the root of the social order underpinning its actions and decisions.

This article seeks to further our understanding of the process involved in personal negotiation by examining a specific group and an original topic: people who have chosen to make a change in their professional lives. The life histories studied point up a series of stages connected by objective steps (e.g., earning a diploma, getting a promotion, etc.) or by events –whether desired or not. The view of these phases depends on the personal context of each individual (in terms of opportunities taken, for example). From one stage to the next, the direction of each individual's path may be reinforced (via a promotion in the same department, for example) or take a new turn (via a change in professional sector, after having seized an opportunity through one's personal network).

The starting point of this research was therefore to examine the decisions that substantially changed the course of people's lives. The negotiations that drive such changes occur following a succession of prior decisions; they concern a *desired* future. When compared, such negotiated decisions point up the *dynamic of ambitions*, i.e., the shift in meaning attached to a desired future based on the improvement such a future would bring.

This article argues that self-negotiation is the place where such ambitions are forged. The first section outlines the sociological approach to negotiated ambitions adopted here (1); then the survey and its methodology are presented (2). The third section presents and analyses the findings of three typical models of negotiated ambitions (3). Finally, the conclusion reviews the advantages of analysing ambitions through the lens of these personal negotiation processes.

1. Negotiated ambitions

Sociologically, there's a lack of conceptualization of the ambition. The term nevertheless has several uses and, given that no working definition exists, it is often confused with "aspiration"[1], which overlooks its normative dimension (Saccomanno, 2012). Pierre Bourdieu (1974) referred to it in the introduction to his study on habitus, which "delimits 'reasonable' ambitions." Many research followed this position, considering ambition as a non-negotiable consequence of the habitus. However Bourdieu's further work to fine-tune this theory emphasized how possible adjustments to the content and effects of habitus may affect practices and representations (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). This raises the question of the possible negotiations for determining what a "reasonable" ambition is.

Elchardus and Smits (2008) consider that people are ambitious when they intent to get promotions and realize a "nice career". By asking if people see themselves as ambitious ones, their approach rely the personal view of ambition and the career model our meaning of work trend to valorise. It appears that multiple ambitions coexist in social life. One of the main interest about ambitions studies is to enlight the relationship between life course, actual position and desirable future.

The most complete approach to ambitions comes from the field of American political science. Since Joseph Schlesinger (1966), it has been a key concept in analysing decisions related to political careers[2]. The most recent research has tempered the view of the relationship between means and ends, which, up until now, had been invariably framed through the lens of efficiency. Prior to this, the conception tended to standardize and reduce ambition to being a natural inclination toward the achievement of higher social status. More recently, a dynamic approach to political ambitions (Fox and Lawless 2005, 2011) has focused on variations in ambition over the course of people's lives. The present research examines ambitions based on the concrete steps taken to fulfil them and studies them at the crossroads of personal and professional dynamics.

Ambition is thus not an attribute hinged on the essence of individuals, but rather part of an *action dynamic* focused on change and which evolves with people's individual situation. Ambition is structured by context, experience and socializing events. It provides a goal (a position to achieve) and roadmap (a succession of concrete operations) for the desired and acceptable future that it seeks to create. The stabilization and qualification of such a future is achieved by personal negotiations during which individuals examine their own life course—which does not exclude the presence of different observers. Interaction with others may indeed influence the rules that underpin the relationship between the means and ends needed to fulfil one's ambitions. Family and close friends may as such inflect on whether or not an individual deems that an ambition is reasonable.

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[1] Aspirations refer to a target ("I aspire to become…"); ambition brings together the enunciation of a situation and the situation that would be made possible by achieving the targeted goal ("My ambition *is* to become…").

[2] The theory of political ambition examines how structural effects (political organization, size of a territory, amount of competition) affect the rational calculations made by candidates regarding the costs, personal benefit and likelihood of success in getting involved in an electoral campaign. Among the main references, see for example Black (1972); Rohde (1979).

One topic that has been broadly addressed is the influence of gender on the decision to undertake a political career (Fox and Lawless 2014, Fulton et al 2006, Fulton and Ondercin 2012). Brittany Stalsburg (2010, 2012) has shown that gender affects political ambition depending on the degree of importance placed on family considerations. The problem with this type of reflection is that it overlooks how ambition is elaborated and focuses solely on the end result—i.e., whether or not a person decides to run for election. Yet this end result may encompass various significations that are expressed in the way personal negotiation connects them with the resources and constraints present, including work-life balance. Family considerations cannot be reduced to a "cost" that affects professional ambitions; rather, they point up the *system of rules* that structure the relationship between resources, constraints and goals. Such considerations are a product of family experience and, intrinsically, of the interdependence between family life and other spheres of existence such as work. This research considers work-life balance as a social construction that implies how life domains and personal history interrelate (Lewis et al 2007, Prowse and Prowse 2015, Warren 2004). Our position is that ambition understanding reveals the meaning and the expectations of work-life balance for the people.

Close examination of these interdependencies highlights the process of conciliation that occurs between personal and professional life. Bringing to light the various models of interdependence is an effective way to identify models of ambition. This is one advantage of longitudinal approaches that underscore the multiple interdependence models that individuals rely on at different points in their lives (Moen and Sweet 2004).

2. Fieldwork and analytical method

This study focused on adults who voluntarily pursued full-time training on a year-long diploma-awarding course with the French *Association nationale pour la formation des adultes* (AFPA) organization[3]. Between the course load and additional work required (homework, studying, looking for a work placement opportunity), these courses were equivalent to full-time employment. To be accepted into a programme, the trainees had to research the courses available, put together an application portfolio, present their motivation and sometimes even convince career councillors, occupational psychologists, course trainers, as well as professionals or representatives from the funding bodies—e.g., in the case of individuals requesting grants—of the soundness of their plan (Saccomanno, 2011 ; 2015). Moreover, for some individuals, becoming a trainee meant being away from home during the week and living in accommodation at the training centre. The empirical approach of the study was based on individual educational projects[4] that involved a minimum amount of reasoning by the trainees and whose spatial-temporal requirements meant potentially reorganizing their personal lives to varying degrees.

These individuals deemed it realistic and acceptable to return to school. A multitude of individual situations, goals and constraints were nonetheless bound up in the shared decision to take classes and all of these factors influenced each person's negotiations prior to making their decision. What interests us here are the types of negotiation, their register and the priorities they point up. Revealing the diversity of these different types of negotiation offers insight into the diversity of

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[3] The corpus of 44 adults was constituted from June 2008 to September 2009. Forty-two were job seekers (equally divided between those who "strategically" became unemployed to receive funding for their training project; individuals who had alternated short-term contracts and unemployment; and those "forced" into unemployment) and 2 people received the *CIF*. The *CIF*, or *congés individual de formation*, is a scheme in France that provides funding for applicants who decide to go back to school or get full-time job training. It is financed by taxes on companies. Ten of the trainees were under 26 (including 3 women); 12 were between 26 and 30 years old (2 women); 11 were between 30 and 40 years old (1 woman); 8 were between 40 and 50 years old (2 women); 3 were between 50 and 60 years old (1 woman). Less than one-fifth of those interviewed did not have a secondary school diploma; roughly half had a secondary school diploma; and nearly one third had a post-secondary qualification.

[4] Defined here as a chain of voluntary and coordinated actions taken to fulfil an ambition.

ambitions they embody. As Claude Dubar has argued (2012:73, translated here), "*to give meaning is to connect, establish relations, take as a whole.*" It was in this sense that this study sought to analyse the *meaning* behind this decision to pursue adult education by connecting it to the trainees' professional situation and to the life course that it was meant to change. Following principles of life course analysis (Abbott 1995, Elder 1985, Hitlin and Elder 2007), This meaning was analysed through the connexions discourses made between experiences and biographical sequences : what changes did they hope to accomplish compared to their previous professional situation? What alternatives existed and how did they rule them out? Why was their previous professional situation no longer acceptable? This negotiation further took place following a series of decisions upon which people's career paths had been built. One part of the interviews as such sought to understand the break and/or continuity created by their current decisions compared to those taken previously. The life history of each individual was examined starting with their first choices in terms of school orientation. Then each stage in chronological order was deconstructed, questioning each transition from one stage to the next by going over the questions listed above. These interviews covered their choice of education programmes, employment history, and changes in employment industry, as well as the consequences of job loss or the transfer of a partner. This created a narrative of justifications, expectations and decisions that helped explain the meaning that each person gave to their life's course (Maynes et al 2008). Negotiating ambitions was at the core of this process of identification and adjustment to a potentially new life course, whose realization was deemed more advantageous than pursuing the status quo.

The negotiation of ambitions challenges the interdependencies between personal and professional life, as well as how to balance time between personal and professional activities needed to fulfil such ambitions. In order to allocate time to the various spheres on one's life, this "temporal conciliation" may be based on personal needs or reasons or be the product of a search for better work-life balance. Three ideal type models of negotiated ambitions were thus identified, which will be described below.

3. Three models for negotiating ambitions

3.1 .Personal negotiations based on professional

With this first model, the over-representation of certain socio-demographic variables provided the first clues for interpretation. The youngest participants in the study had a tendency to organize their personal time schedule around professional obligations. These individuals had the least job experience since the end of their initial education. There was a strong convergence between their prior education and the specialty studied at AFPA. There were two reasons for this continuity. The least qualified sought to make up for not having successfully passed their diploma or wished to refresh prior knowledge they had not yet been able to convert into relevant professional experience. The more qualified sought to acquire a specialization that had been identified by recruiters as lacking in their profile. In both cases, their future ambitions were jeopardized by gaps in the past. Repairing such gaps involved returning to the path of social normality that these young adults felt they were lacking. Thus, the concessions they made involved obtaining the required funding (at times quite significant)—such selling their personal belongings or taking out a bank loan.

The individuals in this situation had a shared sense that they did not comply with the legitimate social order. Their close age difference supports the argument about converging socializations regarding the place of work in people's lives (Voicu 2004), as well as, for the most qualified, that of a project-based culture to anticipate as early as secondary school the career they would build. Submission to a certain social order was detectible in the frequent references made by some individuals to stages in their life course:

"It's school, work, and then marriage and children...I'm already thirty, in two years I need to have a child. I already know my life goal, my very precise plan: next year I'll work, the year after that I'll have a baby and then I'll go back to Martinique in about five years. My boyfriend is aware of the plan: for me, that's how it is! (Rosa, 30 years old, studying design and development of electronic systems)."

The increased means that participants were willing to mobilize were often a response to concerns that they were drifting from their long-established goals. The power of the social order is that it provides a normative model of success legitimated by major social, political and educational institutions (Honneth 2015). The thrust of these young people's ambitions was as such revealed by the type of negotiation they adopted, and they chose to increase the time devoted to work in their lives. For the least qualified, this normative model was based on integration. Samy, for example, was nearing thirty and was worried about turning forty, which for him was the age of reference for distinguishing between those who had succeeded in life and "those who had failed." His benchmark was having a stable and skilled job. For him, like for the most qualified participants, conciliating the work-life balance was nothing more than a constraint to overcome in order to comply with the dictates of the institutions that generate the dominant social order. Within this model, self-negotiation was tied to a norm that was hinged on professional success:

"The downside was that I had to leave my girlfriend for almost a year. I admit that it's a problem, but I also said to myself that if I needed to make some sacrifices, it was best to do so now, because this is a commitment for our future. So I was prepared to come here without a problem (Paul, 30 years old, senior automation technician)."

As mentioned above, self-negotiation involves reassessing the course of one's action and potentially adapting the rules in place to correct its direction. For some participants, pursuing a training course could be seen as a sign of their failure to follow the basic rules of the dominant social order and, as such, meet the expectations of the life course models to which they had been socialized. Samy indeed frequently referred to the over-representation of "social welfare cases" at AFPA, whose mission, he felt, was to "give these kind of people a second chance, you know the guy who had bad luck, or the homeless person, or the one who has always done odd jobs, or the guy from North Africa." How was it possible then not to assimilate oneself with a category of people deemed to be in the majority and whose description matched part of the person's narrative of their own life course? How did another young man—Kevin—resolve himself to take a course that provided a lower qualification than his Master's degree, when the latter allowed him to see himself as equal (in terms of the number of years spent at university) to the group of engineers that he had aspired to join since adolescence? In both of these very different cases, this occurred precisely during the self-negotiation process when it became more important to meet the dictates of the social order recognized as legitimate. When setting their ambitions, these adults deferred to the demands of their social self, and complying with those demands was the only guarantee of their social and professional success. Samy boasted about his break away from years of bad habits to "finally do something"; Kevin came "to gain greater technical knowledge" and "add a string to [his] bow of skills in order to stand out" as recruiters told him to. The trend here was a search for the social conformity these adults want to be part of. Individuals placed priority on professional life in order to resolve the issue of their social integration. This reasoning resolved any potential internal conflict in advance, since the conformity sought supposed that the individuals in this group were not critical of such institutional programmes aimed at gaining professional success.

3.2 . Personal negotiations based on a desire to (re) adjust work-life balance

The second model involved personal negotiations that re-examined the rules of life management in an attempt to find a better work-life balance. This negotiation process involved re-examining professional expectations previously of understated importance, or readjusting (although rarer in professional education) the work-life balance in favour of personal life following the emergence of

new expectations. This was the pattern of negotiation followed by Arthur, a former priest who, after falling in love, decided to leave his religious duties. This decision forced him to shuffle the cards of his ambition, which could no longer draw on his vocational calling of the past fifteen years. The first model outlined above described an increase in means to reach an end that was "already there." With this second model of negotiated ambition, the self-negotiation undertaken brought into play relative compromises in terms of both the means and the end results. The compromise sought by this type of participant was a response to an actual loss—in this case of an identity marker—by encouraging the emergence of new identities that would attempt to offset what had been lost (Lichtenberger 2014). The compromise upon which these individuals settled indicated that they felt it was necessary to convert the means and/or end result of their ambition for it to continue its course in an acceptable or even improved direction. In the case of Arthur, this meant preserving the part of his job as a priest that was most important to him—advising and helping others. Following a period of introspection, he thus opted for a course to become an employment adviser.

Here, the dynamic of ambitions was indeed tied to the conversion of identity-based markers and the *reconfiguration* of elements that gave meaning to the individuals. The self-negotiation process was therefore focused on the form and expectations of this reconfiguration. Finding the right balance of time allocation was particularly important in this reconfiguration when a preliminary conciliation had taken place between the members of a household—i.e., when there was an established division of tasks and time, not necessarily equally, but that was satisfactory to all parties. The rule underpinning this second model of negotiation was based on agreement over the distribution of responsibilities within the household, which delimited the scope of ambitions. This distribution established the point to which the desired end result was deemed acceptable—its renegotiation might upset the atmosphere within a relationship, for example, and create a sense of domination for one partner. The desire to readjust the work-life balance did not imply renouncing the previous sources of agreement between the others concerned. On the contrary, the balance sought was actually in continuity with the (often longstanding) agreements already in place between members of a household.

Let us look at the case of women who wanted to pursue education with the goal of resuming careers that had been suspended for family life reasons. These women had agreed to put their professional goals on hold in favour of their husbands' projects, on condition that they would reciprocate when the family situation allowed it. Forty-three year old Yvana illustrates this initial agreement—what Armelle Testenoire (2001, translated here) has described as "going without saying"—in which primacy is placed on the man's career. From a poor Romanian background, she migrated with her husband (a rugby player recruited by a French team) and as such lost the advantage of her management qualification, which was not recognized in France. When her husband was forced to retire following an injury, he was the first to pursue adult education while she held part-time jobs in order to keep time for family obligations. She had envisaged returning to school several times in the past, but each time her decision was compromised by an opportunity afforded to her husband.

> "*I was going to begin a course in R., but two weeks before it started we moved to C. because my husband was transferred,*" she noted.

For the men and women in this second group, the new balance sought by their ambitions existed within the confines of the context of other family members. Whether to benefit their personal or professional life, the negotiations that took place in order to set their ambitions occurred within the long-term scale of their social relations. For these individuals to imagine an improvement of their situation, the dialectical process of self-negotiation limited their desires to the confines of a conventional context, constructed gradually through their shared experience with the significant others who would be affected by their decisions (Goffman 1974). It was this context that defined whether or not the adjustments were acceptable given the individuals' temporal and physical

interdependence with family members. Ambitions here were scaled in advance by a jointly elaborated norm that shaped the self-negotiation process. This norm established the fairness of the balance between the means used and the end result, with the goal of not favouring the ambitions of one member of the group over those of the other members, even if this meant postponing the readjustment until a later date. This conventional context was the equivalent of the institutional dictates found in the first model. The negotiated ambitions were different, however, due to the nature of the social self called on during the personal negotiation process.

3.3 . Personal negotiations and family strategies based on reticence towards work and family strategies

For this group, the desire to find the right work-life balance was primarily shaped by the private sphere. The personal negotiation processes prior to deciding whether to pursue adult education were therefore based on an increasingly distanced view of work. This view had been shaped by experiences that had resulted in a critical relationship not so much with work as an activity, but rather regarding its organizational forms. For many of the participants interviewed, negative experiences with superiors in the workplace were the leading reason they wanted to curb the influence of work on their personal lives. While the ideal type profile outlined below was not the only model of ambitions tied to the conciliation of work-life balance negotiated through personal reasoning, it did provide the most explicit configuration of meaning of this model type. The "living conditions" referred to by this person highlight the personal ends that adult education was meant to achieve:

> "*We have not been living together for very long, only two years. That was a big change in my life, too, and it allowed me to alter my goals in life and devote myself to some less personal projects, I mean life projects that involve two people or maybe even more …I'm going to begin by building the right living conditions by working where I can find a job in the place we want to build our project.…Right now, this training course is the means I chose to earn money and be able to build our projects together as a couple (Simon, 29 years old, IT designer and developer).*"

Within this third model, the series of decisions related to changing a person's life course occurred in a two-part process. First, the person disconnected from his/her relationship with work because of family history and/or driven by previous work experience. Second, this relationship to work was reconstructed within a new family structure. This group was comprised of individuals between twenty-eight and forty years old, who were in relationships and often of lower socio-economic status, and who had parental projects for intergenerational mobility based on education and access to skilled jobs. People's life experience led to an initial renegotiation of their initial plans:

> "*I never saw the point of being successful at work, actually. And there were examples of people, like my father, who at one time were pushed by their work into a results-based mindset. There was nothing good about this, my father was away most of the time, my parents ended up getting divorced and my father had trouble finding work again. Then there was my grandfather's industry, its demise, it basically broke up my family, and that's why I have a problem with industry (Sébastien, 28 years old, designer and developer of embedded systems).*"

Such negotiations resulted, at first, in the decision to remain on the periphery of the labour market, favouring short-term and seasonal contracts. Some individuals had a quite strategic attitude including, for example, the desire to focus on a particularly specialized niche market in an attempt to circumvent the effects of competition on working conditions. Others greatly lowered the limit of what they were willing to accept, like Sébastien who, after one bad experience too many, decided that he "no longer wanted to work, had had enough of company life."

Moving in with someone, beginning to think about raising a family, and the elaboration of projects outside of work led these individuals to change their view and envisage work as a vector for their projects. For some, this meant using work as a financial tool, as in the case of Simon who wanted to build his own home. For others, it was a technical leg-up that would provide them with the skills necessary to work from home to help them combine home life and work life, as was the case for Sébastien and his partner, who had an eco-tourism project. Like the first model presented, the personal negotiations in this model focused the rules of the game on the means, so that the end result would remain unchanged—here it was embodied by these life projects. Unlike the ambitions negotiated based on professional goals, however, these rules were not called on to meet institutional dictates but rather as a means to counter such obligations. The negotiation of ambitions clearly points up the different rules applied by individuals regarding the management of their lives. The dynamic of ambitions can indeed change the very meaning of work.

While the participants' projects in this model encouraged them to re-appropriate the end result of work, working conditions were nevertheless important. The training courses chosen thus underscored a desire to escape from organizational constraints—in aiming for the highest possible skill level, the goal was to have a job with the greatest autonomy, with the aim of limiting reliance on collaborators or superiors. The typical example was the entrepreneur. What was most important was to remain in control of work—i.e., to make sure to retain control over the meaning given to the work done.

> "*For me, it's simple, a good job means earning enough money to live and waking up in the morning feeling good. I want to connect two things: the idea of a business, being my own boss, and to combine that with motor biking, which has always been my true passion.… I'm not interested in something too big. I want to remain in control to ensure it remains enjoyable. For now, what I want is quite enough for one person, and that is enough for me (Sam, 29 years old, MM).*"

When I re-contacted him two years later, Sam explained that he had received an affiliate offer in order to grow his business, which he declined for the reasons outlined above. This meant that he was able to move his garage to another region when his partner moved and even to find another associate who "is exactly in the same mindset, to keep things on a small scale in order to enjoy ourselves," he said. When ambition is negotiated based on goals that are outside the professional sphere, the members of a household form a group that structures the ambitions, and it is within the confines of that group that the end results of work are defined. Compared to the first model, there is much less stress within this situation. This is probably due to the fact that people's ambitions are negotiated by taking into account the others with whom the rules of negotiation may be adjusted. The same is not true when the system of rules is borrowed from distant institutions whose recognition may be obtained only by aligning one's behaviour with its expectations.

Conclusion

When applied to ambitions, self-negotiation involves confronting one's own reality in an attempt to find the right mix between the resources and the ends needed for a project. As this study has shown, this reality may come in different shapes and sizes and acts like a social order, as Thuderoz (2010) has argued. Indeed, each of the situations addressed here showcases the presence of a "social self" that is in dialogue with the "I" who wishes to work towards improving his or her situation. Identifying the different forms of this "social self" sheds light on an array of social orders and ambitions fixed within its confines. Institutional dictates, conventional contexts elaborated with a family member, and shared projects to re-appropriate the goals of work are all different masks donned by "others than ourselves" (Mead 1925). These others are "collective beings who influence our lives" (Angeletti and Berlan 2015) to the extent that each represents a collective form

with which the individuals in this study hoped to strengthen their ties or be acknowledged by, following their negotiation process. The personal level of negotiations studied here does not negate the presence of significant others in the operations leading to a decision. Decisions are as such never totally individual.

The collective dimension therefore seems particularly central in negotiating ambitions, since ambitions are indeed contingent on social relations, as American political science has shown (the effect of networks and family structure on the decision to enter politics). The approaches to negotiation discussed here deepen our insight into the social understanding of ambitions, by pointing up the collective forms that frame the connection between the resources and ends necessary to fulfil ambitions. These connections shape the scope of ambitions, meaning in this study the degree to which adults are willing to commit to and, therefore, the temporal conciliation they feel is acceptable and appropriate. The fairness of work-life balance appears to be determined by these collective forms, since they provide the registers for determining whether the situation targeted by the ambitions will ultimately be improved.

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