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# Professional Ethics as a Tool to Investigate the Professionalisation of Guidance and Occupational Integration Workers at University

## 1 • Introduction

Ethics, being the science of morality, is an omnipresent topic in society (bioethics, politics, environment, consumption, etc.). This contribution aims at examining ethics in both professional fields of career guidance and integration at University. To that end, we collected and analysed data in a focus group composed of 20 female workers in career guidance and integration. These professionals are driven by the same mission and operating in the similar academic context. However, their job titles differ: some of them are career guidance and professional integration officers, and others are national education psychologists. Our study is based on research-intervention (Broussal and al., 2015). The focus group sequence lasted one hour and began with the following question: "What do you think are the right postures to adopt as part of ethical support?".  
**Our research question:**

According to Jutras and Labbé (2014, p. 108) ethics is "reflexive, processual and located". All of these characteristics promote the debate. Consequently, ethics is an object of representation. Studying social representations ethics becomes possible in particular through two methods: the focus group and the "investigative restitution" (Bergier, 2001). These spaces reveal professional representations and thus, participate in the workers' professionalisation.

## 2 • Theoretical Frame

In this study ethics is regarded as an object of social representations by career guidance and integration professionals at University. Resorting to social representations as a theoretical focal point makes the professionalisation process intelligible. "It could be said that representations are developed in a collective entity but also through

a set of socially privileged but not totally determined experiences." (my translation of Labbé, Starck and Remoussenard, 2016, p. 2).

Moreover, the theory of social representations, by its reflective and critical character, can be a response to social change and socio-economic political crises (Moliner and Guimelli, 2015). This is the case of the context marked by the change currently operating in the career guidance and integration jobs in France.

The focus group allows:

- an in situ collection of representations in the contexts in which they develop and evolve;
- a confrontation of ideas, and therefore their evolution within a collective frame, which makes it a media favorable to changes in representations.

## 3 • Methodology and Provisional Results

After a transcription phase, we used the Iramuteq software in order to access the semantic organizations and themes addressed. This analysis in a descending hierarchical classification (DHC) followed by a correspondence factor analysis (CFA). This analysis was then submitted to all the participants during an investigative restitution period. This second step validated the relevance of our interpretation and shed light on the way the collective entity engages in a shared process of reconfiguring their jobs' professional identities. The first results reveal six speech categories on the CFA level (see figure 1 below) and allow access to important themes.

### The Descending Hierarchical Classification

Our data is in French, so we decided to leave it in the original language. A translation would have partially deformed the meaning.

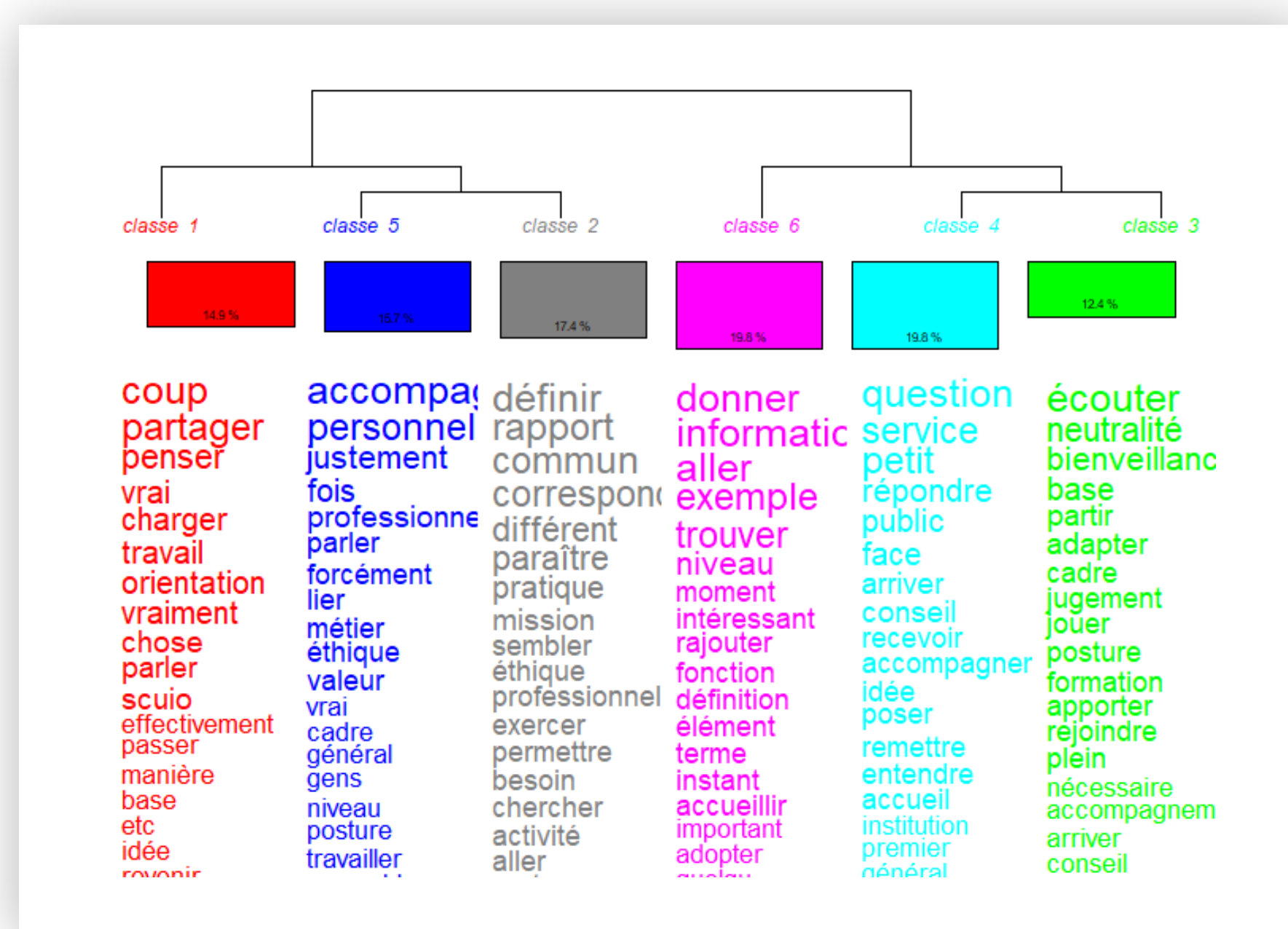


Figure 1: dendrogram of the 6 discourse clusters  
Ethics representations among of guidance and occupational integration workers at university

We propose to name the discourse clusters as follows:

### Class 1: Implicit sharing

The term « sharing » (partager) occupies the central space of this discourse cluster. It refers to the fact of taking part in several values, of making reference to the same professional culture. All those elements lead professionals to postulate that professional ethics, even if it is not explicitly mentioned, is a priori implicitly shared.

**Class 2: Necessity for a common definition of professional ethics**  
The term "ethics" is expressed together with "mission" and "practice" which both refer to professional contexts.

### Class 3: Importance of a sympathetic approach

Professionals outline the importance of defining the accompanying posture, to circumscribe it in some ways.

### Class 4: Professional ethics generates questioning

Ethics seems to raise questions among guidance and occupational integration workers regarding their practices as professionals but also regarding the institution.

### Class 5: Tension between personal and professional ethics

The debate concerns the space given to personal ethics in its practice. Indeed, the consensus is based on a professional ethics that distances from the personal one: "So, ethics is only professional framework".

### Class 6: Good information is tailored information

The term "information" is in the middle of the class thanks to the action verb "to provide" (donner). What is defended in this discourse class seems to be the adaptation to each individual, to the context, to the temporality.

### Correspondence Factor Analysis

The Correspondence Factor Analysis allows us to glimpse at the speech macrostructure and organization. Through the CFA we can discern that in the social representation of ethics of these professionals, there are two particularly significant areas of tension.

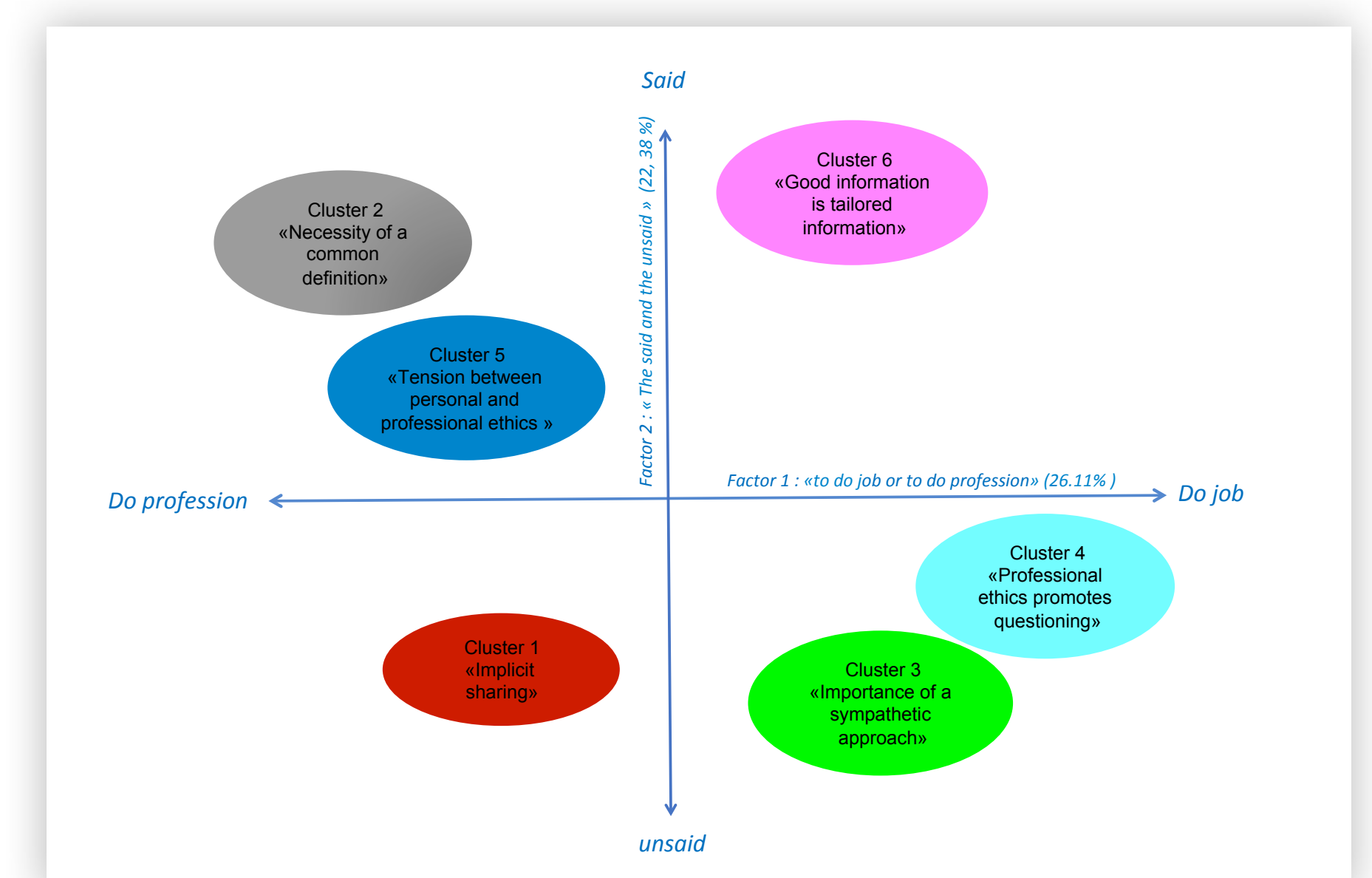


Figure 2: the synthesis of the DHC and the CFA

### Factor 1 (horizontal): "to do a Job and to do a Profession"

This factor opposes discourse clusters 1, 5 and 2 to discourse clusters 6, 4 and 3. It is located horizontally and it is positioned as an axis of semantic differentiation between "to do a job and to do a profession". On the one hand, we find operational concerns and on the other hand, we find more socio-cultural dimensions. When the question of ethics is asked on the side of "to do job", it is asked relating to the aims of activities and the methods of implementation. While on the side of "doing a job" it is asked relating to the common culture and socio-professional cohesion in the sense used by Florence Osty. In this factor, there is no hierarchy between "job" and "profession". Both contribute in the construction of the professional identity.

### Factor 2, (vertical): "The Said and the Unsaid".

This factor opposes discourse clusters 6, 5 and 2 to discourse clusters 1, 3 and 4. We can see tension between implicit elements in the lower part of the figure and explicit elements in the upper part of this figure. We find a parallel between the explicit and the implicit and the said and the unsaid. To name this factor, we propose "The said and the unsaid". Indeed, the unsaid cannot be explained because it escapes the normative character. This questions us about the nature of the unsaid because it can belong to different orders such as what is taboo, sacred, or obvious.

## 4 • First Conclusions

Firstly, we highlight that ethics is the main theme addressed by Guidance and Occupational Integration Workers at University. Then, according to these professionals, it is also the most important theme to focus on. Ethics is regarded as a guarantee of quality for professions. It tends to emancipate workers from the control of its practices by other professionals and/or by the institution (Monceau, 2006). Finally, we retain that in the speech of these professionals, there is a need to become one, a desire to create shared knowledge. Therefore, our study clearly demonstrates that ethics (as an object of representation), contributes to the professionalisation of the participants.

This research invites us to become aware of the importance of ethics beyond the field of our Study. Indeed ethics occupies a central place among professionals without distinction of profession, status or work environment.

## 5 • Acknowledgement

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