

Research Articles

Most Important Work Values in Bulgarian University Students

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Abstract

This article aims to identify the most important work values of university students. For this purpose, data from an empirical study among students (N = 208), from different study programmes, are presented. Results obtained with the Bulgarian version of the questionnaire WIS/SVP (OS Bulgaria, 2007) revealed that in 2013 there were some gender significant differences in the respondents' values. The students' important values were Economic Security, Personal Development, Ability Utilization, Achievement and Advancement. The data could be used for vocational guidance.

Keywords: gender, university students, work values

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Introduction

Working persons perform tasks with the expectation of receiving important rewards in return for their efforts. The majority of working persons desire higher wages, respected positions, good relationships with coworkers and supervisors, and comfortable work environments. However, each individual places a different emphasis on the values they might receive from work. People aim for different rewards based on their divergent work values. In general, work values can be defined as each worker's desired outcomes from his/her work. For example, some working persons might believe that monetary rewards are the most important outcomes of work. Other workers might emphasize intrinsic rewards, such as self-growth, attainment, and recognition from others, rather than monetary or extrinsic rewards (Ueda & Ohzono, 2013).

What are values? They are underlying directives to behavior; assumption on which constitutions, laws, and social mores are based; the "goods" for which humans strive or to which they owe allegiance. What are "goods"? Motivating forces that are intrinsic to human nature or to humanity's place in existence (Reichley, 2001).

Those who want to understand what people's need will lead them to seek should study values. In practice most important is that if researchers seek to know how people are likely to try to achieve a goal or goals, they should

know in which activities people are likely to seek them – that is, researchers must know their subjects' interests (Super, 1995).

In both action and thought, people are affected by their past experience, cultural and social norms, and values. They shape attitudes and behaviour over the course of people's lives. Values have been shown to influence political persuasions; willingness to participate in political action; career choices; ecological footprints; the amount of resources people use, and for what purpose; and the feelings of personal wellbeing. Different values, and the psychological relationships between them, have important effects on people's behaviors and attitudes (Schwartz, 2011).

The changes in values have been observed across the world. Their shift has been attributed to several factors: younger people attending university courses; the increased use of new technologies, the political discourse of universalism, the benevolence values, including social justice, equality, peace, environmentalism, honesty, and forgiveness (Danis, Liu, & Vacek, 2011).

Values are organized sets of general beliefs, opinions and attitudes about what is preferable, right or simply good in life. The dynamic approach to values assumes that they form a certain organization of a person's needs, desires and goals hierarchically structured according to their relative importance and priorities. Values are hypothetical constructs, helpful in the analysis of human behavior, but they cannot be observed directly. They become recognizable only by analyzing the goals that a person considers important and strives to attain in life. Therefore, we operationally define values as general and relatively stable goals that an individual tries to attain. And we use the term work values to describe the general and relatively stable goals that people try to reach through work (Sverko & Vidovic, 1995).

Clarifying values is important because values are indications of the qualities people desire and seek in "the activities in which they engage, in the situations in which they live, and in the objects which they make or acquire" (Super, 1970, p. 4).

Values are a concept boasting a variety of definitions. For our purposes, the most cited and credited one is used: "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (Rokeach, 1973, p. 5); "objectives that people seek in order to satisfy their needs" (Super, 1995, p. 54); "desirable states, objects, goals, or behaviours, transcending specific situations and applied as normative standards to judge and to choose among alternative modes of behavior" (Schwartz, 1992, p. 2). According to Roe and Ester (1999, p. 4): work values "... have a more specific meaning than general values" and are related to working activity and general values.

Under the international coordination of Super's colleagues, a large international project called Work Importance Study (WIS) was initiated in which researchers from numerous countries all over the world were joined. The project's aim was to investigate the importance of work in comparison with other activities and the rewards that youth and adults seek in their major life roles, especially the role of worker. From the beginning, WIS teams paid particular attention to theoretical models and empirical methods pertaining to the assessment of values and work salience (Ferreira-Marcues & Miranda, 1995).

Scientists from 12 countries worked together, but the most active were those from Australia, Italy, Canada, Poland, Portugal, the USA, Spain and Croatia (Knežević & Ovsenik, 2001).

The origin of the Work Importance Study (WIS) was developed as a network of national projects. While WIS was under way, several psychologists (Descombes, 1980; Super, Kidd, & Knasel, 1980) conducted parallel preliminary studies that built upon an earlier formulation (Super, 1949; Super, 1973; Super & Bohn, 1970) of needs as wants (Maslow, 1954), manifestations of physiological conditions such as hunger, and related to survival. They are the result of interactions between the person and the environment (Super, 1995).

Values (Allport & Vernon, 1931; Allport, Vernon, & Lindzey, 1960; Rokeach, 1973) are the result of further refinement through interaction with the environment, both natural and human.

The result of socialization is the establishment of the types of objectives that people seek in order to satisfy their needs. The need for help thus becomes love, and the need to help becomes altruism (Super, 1995).

Interests (Fryer, 1931; Sagiv, 2002; Strong, 1943; Wach & Gosling, 2004) are the activities within which people expect to attain their values and satisfy their needs.

Valuing the well-being of others (altruism) leads a person to choose a social service profession (social work, teaching), some aspects of personnel work, or even business or industrial enterprise (Super, 1995).

According to this theoretical formulation, interests are closer to actual behavior than are needs and values. Needing (lacking, wanting) leads to valuing something that seems likely to meet that need. Somewhat at this point rather abstract, as are the labels attached to values, for instance, "material," "altruistic," "power," and "beauty." Valuing material things may lead to seeking wealth; power, to seeking position of authority; beauty, to painting, gardening or just having an attractive home or workplace. People generally seek wealth through managerial, investment, and other presumably remunerative occupation, or perhaps in marriage; they may hope to achieve power in the ownership or management of an enterprise or in politics. People who seek beauty may be interior decorators, or sculptors. Valuing leads to action, and action involves occupation with an activity, which may be paid employment or voluntary participation (Super, 1995).

Earlier studies conducted on values do not distinguish between interests and values. The assumption based on Spranger's (1928) study is that people develop interests and values, and can be classified broadly in categories, and expected to behave in ways determined by these motives.

Theories of values have been well known in philosophy for many years, and values have been the subject of psychological research for decades. Several values inventories are available. The oldest values inventory is the Allport - Vernon *Study of Values* (Allport & Vernon, 1931; Allport, Vernon, & Lindzey, 1960). It was developed to measure the relative prominence of six basic interests or motives in personality and assesses primarily the intrinsic values.

The Work Values Inventory (Super, 1970) combines the advantages of tapping both intrinsic and extrinsic values and was developed to assess the wide range of values that affect the motivation to work.

The most typical classification of work values is a two-category system used to describe intrinsic and extrinsic work values (Gahan & Abeysekera, 2009; Hegney, Plank, & Parker, 2006; Hirschi, 2010; Vansteenkiste et al., 2007).

Extrinsic and intrinsic values are not opposite ends of a continuum, but rather two dimensions of work values that are usually somewhat positively correlated in empirical studies (Johnson, 2005).

Other researchers have adopted more complicated classifications that differentiate between three and over ten kinds of work values (Busacca, Beebe, & Torman, 2010; Elizur, 1984; Hagström & Kjellberg, 2007; Hattrup, Mueller, & Aguirre, 2007; Van Ness, Melinsky, Buff, & Seifert, 2010; Wang, Chen, Hyde, & Hsieh, 2010; Warr, 2008; Zhang, Wang, Yang, & Teng, 2007).

According to Super (1970), values derive from needs and are more general than interests, work values are goals that one seeks to attain to satisfy a need; they may be satisfied by more than one kind of activity or occupation (Liu & Lei, 2012).

Work values are a reflection of the value that a person ascribes to work, the meaning that a person attributes to that work, and a person's humanistic values. Work values are thus concerned with how an individual will demonstrate interest in the work at hand at the level of values (Tutar & Yilmazer, 2012).

Work values, which can be considered one of several sub-dimensions of each person's general values, remain relatively stable for long periods. However, this does not imply that work values never change (Ueda & Ohzono, 2013).

The tradition of studies about values in the vocational domain has examined values through their expression in activities and roles that individuals play in professional life (Super, 1995).

University is a time in life when students are clarifying not only what they value in their lives, but also what they value in work. Duffy and Sedlacek found that university students' most important work values in their long term career choice were intrinsic interests (i.e., job itself, autonomy), high anticipated earnings, contributions to society, and prestige. In addition, university students (men) were more likely to support extrinsic work values (i.e., high anticipated earnings, availability of job openings) whereas university students (women) were more likely to support social values (i.e., contributions to society, working with people) (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007).

University students are in the developmental stage of emerging adulthood — between adolescence and adult life. This period is characterized by the formation of personal identity, and career decision-making (Hunter, Dik, & Banning, 2010). The work values are closely related to the career choices, so the study of work values in university students becomes important (Duffy, 2010; Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Pascual, 2009; Ryckman & Houston, 2003; Shaw & Duys, 2005), especially for human resources personnel.

Because each subculture defines what appropriate behavior is for its members, individual behavior rests upon the value system. Variables such as sex, age, socioeconomic status are expected to be major determinants of the value a person holds (Nevill, 1995). The more important a value, the more pronounced should be the influence on satisfaction of its perceived attainment possibilities - this is in full agreement with the theory (Sverko, Jerneic, Kulenovic, & Vidovic, 1995).

Students are among the exponents of the new liberal-democratic ideas on both individual and cultural level (Baytchinska, 2011; Garvanova, 2013).

On the one hand, youth is associated with importance for ability, independence, achievement and self-assertion, and on the other hand students express importance to the economic status, achieving professional success and personal development. In this context, the most important and least important values in the process of the students' professional and personal development in the Bulgarian university as measured by the WIS/SVP (OS Bulgaria, 2007) will be the focus of the current research interest.

Well-focused research of work values provides necessary information about career services and career choices — in particular, data on students' interests, motivation, attitude toward work, etc. For this reason, the construct of 'work values' should be investigated further in the Bulgarian context.

According to the gender roles traditionally established in the Slavic culture, we might expect that women would value more highly such qualities as Altruism, Social Interaction, Personal Development and Aesthetics, whereas men would give greater weight to Physical Activity, Authority and Autonomy (Sverko, Jerneic, Kulenovic, & Vidovic, 1995).

The aim of the study was to identify work values of university students (males and females), in 2013. A more specific task of the study is related to the comparison and interpretation of work values of both genders.

Method

The Work Importance Study processed the data in the eight national samples of university students (Belgian Flanders, Canada, Croatia, Italy, Japan, Poland, Portugal and United States) with the initial version of the Values Scale (VS) and Salience Inventory (SI) (Trentini & Muzio, 1995). The Work Importance Study is based on an interdisciplinary approach that integrates the lines of cultural anthropology, psychology, sociology, pedagogics, political science and organizational science (Trentini, 1995).

The Bulgarian version of the WIS/SVP examines the hierarchy and structure of work values, based on a model of 21 scales of values, of three items each (OS Bulgaria, 2007).

The instrument determines the basic values, important for the individual in his job. This information could be used in career development, formation of business teams, creation of motivational programs or in recruitment and selection (OS Bulgaria, 2014).

The WIS/SVP scale includes twenty-one values: Ability Utilization, Achievement, Advancement, Aesthetics, Altruism, Authority, Autonomy, Creativity, Economic Rewards, Life-Style, Personal Development, Physical Activity, Prestige, Risk, Social Interaction, Social Relations, Variety, Working Conditions, Cultural Identity, Physical Prowess and Economic Security. The instrument contains sixty-three items. The items are sentence completions introduced by the incomplete sentence "It is now or will be important for me to ___." Responses are on 4-point Likert scale of 1 = no importance; 2 = some importance; 3 = important; 4 = very important. The WIS/SVP can be administered to people of secondary school age, university students and employed adults. Administration time is from thirty to forty-five minutes (OS Bulgaria, 2007).

The study determined the reliability of the WIS/SVP by using Cronbach's α coefficients. The α s (see Table 1), that were obtained from the three-item scales on the overall sample, range from $\alpha = 0.33$ (Working Conditions) to $\alpha = 0.69$ (Economic Rewards). While Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.7$ is the typically recommended standard, with scales

containing less than 10 items a Cronbach's $\alpha \geq 0.6$ is considered as an acceptable indicator of good internal consistency (Loewenthal, 1996).

Compared to these recommendations the reliability coefficients obtained within the current study were relatively low. Only for four scales Cronbach's α exceeded a value of 0.6: Risk ($\alpha = 0.63$), Physical Activity ($\alpha = 0.64$), Altruism ($\alpha = 0.66$) and Economic Rewards ($\alpha = 0.69$). However, the coefficients are proportionate to the length of the scales. Higher values can hardly be expected for three-item scales. Moreover, the scales are intended for group comparisons in cross-national and other analyses, not for individual assessment properties. For research purposes their reliability is satisfactory (Sverko, Jerneic, Kulenovic, & Vidovic, 1995).

In another study with a sample of Bulgarian workers (OS Bulgaria, 2007) Cronbach's α s for WIS/SVP subscales were generally higher (see Table 1), thus indicating the possibility to use the questionnaire within a Bulgarian sample. Some questions remain concerning the value scales when used with Bulgarian students.

The study was carried out in 2013. The total number of participating students was 208; men ($n = 64$; 30.8%) and women ($n = 144$; 69.2%). They were enrolled in different study programmes of SWU "Neofit Rilski" Blagoevgrad. The study programmes were Psychology ($n = 68$; 32.7%), Pedagogy ($n = 52$; 25.0%), Mathematic ($n = 41$; 19.7%) and Economic ($n = 47$; 22.6%).

15 students were married (7.2%) and 193 of them (92.8%) were single. Thirty-eight percent of participants ($n = 79$) were living in a small town, 23.1% ($n = 48$) in a village and 38.9% ($n = 81$) in a major town. The participants were currently unemployed (18 to 30 years old) university students ($M = 21.24$; $SD = 2.56$).

Data were statistically processed by means of SPSS.

The information regarding the statistical analysis of the WIS/SVP includes means, standard deviations of the 21 work values scales, t-test and Cronbach's α for every scale.

Results

The mean scores and standard deviation of the WIS/SVP scale (see Table 1) showed the most important work values endorsed by the study: Economic Security, Personal Development, Ability Utilization, Achievement, and Advancement. The work value that was endorsed the least by the study was Physical Prowess, Risk and Authority.

The most important value for university students was Economic Security. Living standards and financial situation in Bulgaria are low compared to most EU (European Union) countries.

Moreover, Personal Development, Ability Utilization and Achievement were important values for students. Also, Authority, Prestige and Risk were in the lower part of the hierarchy of work values.

Table 1

Mean scores (*M*), Standard Deviation (*SD*) and Cronbach's α for the WIS/SVP Scales

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Cronbach's α	
			Bulgarian students (current study)	Bulgarian workers (OS Bulgaria, 2007)
Ability Utilization	8.46	1.33	.56	.67
Achievement	8.22	1.30	.55	.53
Advancement	8.19	1.40	.48	.74
Aesthetics	7.95	1.51	.42	.58
Altruism	7.12	1.74	.66	.73
Authority	4.82	1.92	.57	.70
Autonomy	6.52	1.61	.43	.56
Creativity	6.92	1.57	.48	.74
Economic Rewards	7.60	1.87	.69	.71
Life-Style	8.11	1.37	.37	.53
Personal Development	8.57	1.33	.56	.63
Physical Activity	6.56	2.02	.64	.73
Prestige	6.60	1.82	.59	.68
Risk	4.22	2.02	.63	.52
Social Interaction	5.65	1.70	.51	.75
Social Relations	7.56	1.49	.40	.57
Variety	5.90	1.67	.44	.54
Working Conditions	7.08	1.56	.33	.53
Cultural Identity	6.34	1.96	.55	.60
Physical Prowess	3.06	1.78	.14	.67
Economic Security	8.73	1.49	.53	.71

Table 2 shows the result of a *t*-test performed to discover differences that occurred between the value scale WIS/SVP by gender.

The results indicated that there were statistically significant differences between men and women. First, women scored higher on work values than men did. However, the group of male students valued Physical Prowess, Risk and Authority more than women. For male students, it was important to be active in their work as in sport or other physical activity. This seems to fit a cultural stereotype of gender differences.

The position of top values (Economic Security, Personal Development, Ability Utilization, Achievement, and Advancement) was the same for both genders, as were the values in the three last places (Physical Prowess, Risk, Authority). In fact, males had higher levels for Authority, Physical Activity, Risk and Physical Prowess.

However, some significant differences between genders did appear. In particular, the scale Advancement was scored higher by female university students than male students.

In particular, men placed a higher value on the social and extrinsic aspects of work (for example living according to their ideas).

Table 2

Independent Samples t-Test Related to Gender Differences in WIS/SVP Scales

	Gender	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Advancement	men	64	7.77	1.50	2.95	206	.01
	women	144	8.38	1.32			
Aesthetics	men	63	7.57	1.66	2.43	205	.02
	women	144	8.12	1.41			
Altruism	men	64	6.67	1.84	2.52	206	.01
	women	144	7.32	1.66			
Autonomy	men	64	6.11	1.48	2.48	206	.01
	women	144	6.70	1.63			
Social Relations	men	64	7.23	1.54	2.14	206	.03
	women	144	7.71	1.44			
Variety	men	64	5.44	1.65	2.69	205	.01
	women	143	6.10	1.65			
Physical Prowess	men	64	3.47	1.85	2.21	206	.03
	women	144	2.88	1.73			

In most of the values women scored higher than men on Advancement, Variety, Autonomy, Altruism, whereas men scored higher than women on Physical Prowess and Authority. It is easy to assume that both Physical Prowess and Authority work values would be higher for males than for their female counterparts.

The low standing of Physical Prowess suggested idealistic rather than realistic attitudes toward work (Hornowska & Paluchowski, 1995).

There was a tendency, however, for women to score higher than man. In this study, women ($M = 7.32$) also placed greater importance than men ($M = 6.67$) on helping people and spending time with family (Altruism).

However, Fletcher and Major (2004) discovered that both males and females achieved similar levels of altruism motives or work values.

Vacha-Haase et al. (1994) discovered that male had higher levels of altruism than females. Therefore, these results appeared contradictory to past findings.

Moreover, Aesthetics, Variety and Social Relations work values might be more closely associated with female students.

Discussion

Work values are regarded as one of the most important influences on career development, choice, and satisfaction, yet are largely an understudied field within vocational psychology compared to vocational interests (Brown, 1996; Super, 1995).

It should be pointed out that in this study on university students, the instrument WIS/SVP (Bulgarian version) was used for the first time. The reliability coefficients of most of the value scales were relatively low. This is a serious limitation that could be related to some peculiarities of the sample of university students from different study pro-

grammes. The representative sample in Italy was heterogeneous, consisting of high-school students, university students and workers (OS Bulgaria, 2007; Trentini, 1995). Further studies need a larger and heterogeneous sample from undergraduate students to be added to both Bulgarian samples of university students and workers.

The study revealed that young people acted and lived, according to their ideas. They develop as a person or design new things. Prevalence of intrinsic values (Personal Development, Ability Utilization, Achievement, and Advancement) and the low valuation of extrinsic values (Risk, Authority) may suggest a society in which material problems are considered unsolved and social conflicts absent or unworthy of attention.

The most important value for students was Economic Security ($M = 8.73$). Young people not only emphasize the life of the spirit, but they also pay greater attention to material life and the quality of life. This is an important finding in that it demonstrates that income and permanent job was an important value for young people.

Researchers regarding the work values of university students are warranted to confirm these findings. The national Italian study administered in 1995 with WIS/SVP (OS Bulgaria, 2007), shows the scores of university students lay in the following top values: Personal Development, Ability Utilization, Life-Style, Social Relations and Aesthetics. The least values that were endorsed by the study were Physical Prowess, Risk and Authority.

Based on the results and considering each national sample (Trentini & Muzio, 1995) of Work Importance Study (WIS), the following characteristics of university students stand out: the Canadians are characterized by the great importance they attach to Authority, Prestige, Advancement and Economics (Economic Security and Economic Rewards in international use are combined as the Economic scale), whereas they rate Aesthetics, Life-Style, Social Interaction and Risk as less important.

The Italians have a higher score for Physical Activity and Social Interaction and lower score for Aesthetics, Economics, Advancement and Prestige. The Portuguese respondents attach particular importance to Advancement, Creativity and Working Conditions, whereas they attach limited importance to Prestige and Risk.

The Croatian sample is characterized by the particular attention respondents pay to Working Conditions, whereas they obtain lower scores for Authority, Autonomy and Life-style.

The Americans attach considerable importance to Advancement, Authority, Social Interaction and Prestige and feel Creativity and Life-style are less important.

The Belgian sample attaches considerable importance to Social Interaction and a limited one to Working Conditions.

The Japanese students attach particular importance to Aesthetics, Risk and Creativity and limited importance to Advancement and Social Interaction. Last, the Poles consider Life-style, Economics, Variety and Risk to be more important, whereas they attach less importance to Advancement, Authority, Social Interaction and Physical Activity.

In summary, career counselors and student personnel providing career services to university students need to understand what they value, which includes the importance of 1) having experiences that provide long-term financial security, 2) self-improving through setting goals and outlining a path to reach that goal, and 3) an environment that encourages accomplishment.

Furthermore, it shows significant differences between genders among Bulgarian university students that led the related to comparison and interpretation of work values of both genders.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it could be said that young people, particularly students, are the great hope of Bulgarian society to implement cultural transformation and socio-economic progress.

Bulgarian university students consider having a high standard of living, use all skill and knowledge in order to develop as a person to be more important, whereas they attach less importance to risky things, tell others what to do and physical prowess.

This study demonstrated that work values may be universal in nature but depending on other factor such as gender, thus, the importance of values may be different.

An interesting finding from this study was that students as a whole reported more intrinsic work values and less extrinsic values. The prevalence of intrinsic values and the low valuation of extrinsic values may suggest a society in which material problems are considered largely solved and social conflict absent or unworthy of attention (Trentini, 1995).

In contrast our value hierarchy could be an expression of nonfulfillment of the values people feel are important. It could be that because the conditions for their fulfillment are not good and people stress their importance. In this case values could be interpreted not as generally positive objectives that an individual aims to attain but rather as expressions of aims that are not likely to be fulfilled.

The shifting of gender roles has happened quickly. Men and women are still experimenting their new roles and rules related to them. These changes in the gender roles are influenced also by university teachers and administrators as they pass along cultural information and expectations.

Finally, the one objective of the Work Importance Study as originally proposed was to “yield instruments useful in psychological assessment for programme evaluation” (Knasel, Super, & Kidd, 1981, p. 1).

Future research should investigate the effect of many other factors on work values. The instrument WIS/SVP might be used in guidance, counseling and assessment with particular reference to career decision making and be used together with other instruments for diagnosis of organizational climates and cultures.

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Competing Interests

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