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## COMPARING THE WORK VALUES OF AUSTRALIAN AND SINGAPOREAN ADOLESCENTS

Esther Tan

### Definition of Work Values

In the context of this study, work values refer to the empirically measured tendency to react favourably or unfavourably to certain generalized conceptions about work and to the outcomes reached through work. Work values are usually categorized as extrinsic (security, high income), intrinsic (e.g. helping other, aesthetics) or concomitant (surrounding, co-workers, fair supervisor). The 16 work values assessed in this study were : -

#### 1.Helping Others

You value helping people and contributing to their welfare in your work.

#### 2.Co-workers

You value getting along well with fellow workers and being accepted by colleagues in your work.

#### 3.Creativity

You value discovering, or inventing new things or ideas and being original in your work.

#### 4.Recognition

You value others' noticing and respecting your work and giving recognition to it.

#### 5.High Income

You value work that pays very well to allow you to live comfortably.

#### 6.Variety

You value work that involves doing different tasks rather than doing the same thing day in day out.

#### 7.Independence

You value work that allows you to do things on your own and at your own pace.

#### 8.Aesthetics

You value work that allows you to make beautiful things and add beauty to the world.

### 9. Self-Development

You value work that provides opportunities for personal growth e.g. learning more skills & further training etc.

### 10. Management

You value work that allows you to plan and decide what work others should do, and being responsible for the quality of work done.

### 11. Life Style

You value work that doesn't interfere too much with your personal time and life style after office hours, allowing you leisure to do things

that you enjoy.

### 12. Surroundings

You value work that is carried out under pleasant conditions and environment.

### 13. Fair Supervisor

You value work where the one in charge is a fair person, considerate, and with whom you can get along.

### 14. Prestige

You value work which is respected by others and seen to be prestigious.

### 15. Security

You value work which won't go out of demand and where retrenchment is rare so that you are sure of a job even in hard times.

### 16. Achievement

You value work which gives you a feeling of accomplishment in a job well done.

## What the Research Says

Numerous studies have been conducted overseas on the development of work values over the adolescent years and the results of most of these studies generally support 3 main findings

#### 1. Gender differences -

There are mixed results about gender differences in work values. While many studies found that females generally preferred intrinsic work values as compared with the males, in most cases these gender differences were not statistically significant.

#### 2. Age differences -

Many studies support the observation that younger adolescents are more "idealistic" on their work values in that they seem to prefer intrinsic work values whilst older adolescents seem to be more "realistic" in preferring practical and materialistic work values.

This study, however, attempted to investigate if there are any differences in work values between two groups of adolescents brought up in two different cultures, namely, Australia and Singapore.

### The Sample

In this study, two surveys were conducted separately in Australia and Singapore using the same instrument. The Australian sample comprised 465 students from an Australian high school (Indooroopilly State High School) whereas the Singaporean sample comprised 286 junior colleges students from Singapore. The students in the Australian sample were all in Grade 12 although their age ranged from 16 to 20 years old with the majority in the 17 to 18 year old group. The older students were mainly new or recent immigrants to the country (from Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Malaysia, Algeria, China, India, Hong Kong, Philippines, Taiwan). Their length of stay in Australia varied from a few months to as long as 9 years. The majority of the students were either citizens or permanent citizens. Only a handful were "temporary residents in Australia " or "full fee paying students". The Singaporean sample comprised students from a mixed ethnic background (mainly Chinese, some Malays and

Indians). Almost all of them were in the age group 17 to 18 years.

Table 1 Distribution of Sample by Gender

Gender	Country		Total
	Australia	Singapore	
Male	211	114	325
Female	254	172	426
Total	465	286	751

### Methods of Data Collection

The students were given a questionnaire which solicited their biodata. They were also asked to rate on a 4-point scale how important they viewed the 16 work values listed with brief descriptions.

### The Findings

## Rating of Work Values

The adolescents in the two samples seemed to share similar views on the importance of the work values. Both groups rated high work values such as "Achievement", "co-workers", "Self-development" and having a "fair supervisor". For both groups the least important work values were "aesthetics", "management" and "prestige". An intrinsic work value "helping others", was rated quite low by the teenagers. Although the mean scores varied slightly, t-test showed significant differences only in two work values "co-workers" and "life style" (level of significance = 0.03) which the Singaporean adolescents seemed to value more than their Australian counterparts.

Table 2 Rating of Work Values: Comparison by Country

Value	Singn Samp N = 286	Aust Samp N = 465
Helping Others	3.0	3.1
*Co-workers	3.8	3.5
Creativity	3.2	3.3
Recognition	3.5	3.3
High Income	3.3	3.3
Variety	3.4	3.4
Independence	3.3	3.1
Aesthetics	2.5	2.6
Self Development	3.6	3.5
Management	2.9	2.9
*Life Style	3.5	3.1
Surrounding	3.4	3.4
Fair Supervisor	3.7	3.5
Prestige	2.9	3.0
Security	3.5	3.4
Achievement	3.7	3.7

\* significant difference  $p < 0.03$

Table 3 Ranking of Work Values: Comparison by Country

If one looks at the top five (most important work values) and the bottom five (least important work values) of the two samples, the similarities are quite obvious. The Singaporean adolescents value work

that does not interfere with their life style (such as leisure ) but not so the Australians. It is human nature to value something that you don't get easily. Singaporeans in junior colleges are always under academic stress and time pressure so to them leisure is a rare and valuable commodity. I suspect the Australian teenagers enjoy a more relaxed life style on the whole. Taking a more relaxed life style and leisure for granted, they looked for other things such as variety and security. While both groups of teenagers did not put much premium on helping others, they did not care much for high income either.

### A Closer Look at the Australian Sample

Table 4 Ranking of Work Values of Australian Adolescents : Comparison by Gender

Rank	Australian Males N = 211	Australian Females N = 254
1	Achievement 3.6	Achievement 3.7
2	Co-workers 3.4	Co-workers 3.6
3	Variety 3.4	Self-development 3.6
4	High Income 3.4	Fair Supervisor 3.5
5	Self-development 3.4	*Security 3.5
6	Surroundings 3.4	Surroundings 3.4
7	Fair Supervisor 3.3	Variety 3.4
8	Independence 3.2	Recognition 3.4
9	Recognition 3.2	Creativity 3.3
10	Creativity 3.2	High Income 3.3
11	*Security 3.2	Helping Others 3.2
12	Life Style 3.1	Life Style 3.1
13	Helping others 2.9	Prestige 3.1
14	Prestige 2.8	Independence 3.0
15	Management 2.8	Management 2.9
16	Aesthetics 2.6	Aesthetics 2.5

Comparing between the males and the females in the Australian sample, "achievement" and "co-workers" ranked top for both groups. While the males sought after "variety" and "high income", the females cared more for a "fair supervisor" and "security. The only work value that showed statistically significant differences was "security" which was valued much more by the females than the males.

Table 5a

The 5 Most Important Work Values of Australian Adolescents : Comparison by Citizenship Status

Table 5b The 5 Least Important Work Values of Australian Adolescents : Comparison by Citizenship Status

As mentioned earlier, the Australian sample comprised locals and recent immigrants coming from Asian countries. Since these adolescents had come from a different cultural background, they may have different work values compared to their Australian hosts. It is interesting to note that for the non-citizens who comprised mainly temporary residents or Asian full fee paying students, "helping others" ranked high in priority whereas for the locals and permanent residents it was listed amongst the least preferred work values. Being newcomers adjusting to the host country and a new way of life, these adolescents had come to appreciate the importance of mutual help, help given to others and help extended to others. Whilst the local Australian adolescents looked for variety, the permanent residents preferred high income, a different form of security. All three groups placed a high premium on achievement and did not care much for aesthetics.

#### A Closer Look At the Singaporean Sample

Table 6 Ranking of Work Values of Singaporean Adolescents : Gender Differences

Rank	Singaporean Male		Singaporean Female	
	N = 114	Mean Score	N = 154	Mean Score
1	Achievement	3.7	Fair Supervisor	3.8
2	Co-workers	3.7	Co-workers	3.8
3	Fair Supervisor	3.6	Achievement	3.8
4	Self-development	3.5	Life Style	3.7
5	Life style	3.4	Self-development	3.6
6	Surroundings	3.4	Surroundings	3.5
7	Creativity	3.4	Recognition	3.4
8	Variety	3.3	Variety	3.4
9	Independence	3.3	* Security	3.3
10	Helping Others	3.2	Independence	3.3

11	High Income	3.2	Helping Others	3.3
12	Recognition	3.2	Creativity	3.2
13	*Security	3.2	High Income	3.1
14	Management	3.1	Management	2.9
15	Prestige	2.8	Prestige	2.8
16	Aesthetics	2.5	Aesthetics	2.6

Comparing the work values of the boys and girls in the Singaporean sample, it is interesting to note that both groups placed emphasis on similar things, the only difference being in the order of priority and with the females scoring higher mean scores. "Security" in work meant a lot more for the girls than for the boys. This was the only work value that showed gender differences. Just like their Australian counterparts, these teenagers did not care for prestige and aesthetics. They were also not keen to lead or take up leadership positions.

#### Ranking of Work Values of Singaporean Adolescents : Comparison by Course Specialisation

Table 7a Five Most Preferred Work Values

Table 7b Five Least Preferred Values

Assuming that adolescents interested in different types of courses may differ in their work values, an attempt was made to compare the work values of students in the Science programme, the Arts programme and the Commerce programme. No significant differences could be found although the following observations could be made : -

\*All three groups placed much premium on team work (co-workers), having a fair boss (fair supervisor), achievement, and self-development, reflecting the work values of our achievement-oriented society.

\*Students from the Arts stream seemed to go for intrinsic values more than the other students. They rated "helping others " quite high with a mean of 3.4 (Science students mean = 3.1, Commerce students mean = 3.2).

\*All three groups paid little emphasis to work values such as "aesthetics", "prestige" and "management".

#### Relationship Between Work Values and Job Preference

As the choice of occupation is often influenced by one's work values, an attempt was made to compare the work values of the students who had expressed different job preferences. Four occupations were chosen to represent different occupational types according to Holland's classification e.g. Teacher (social), Business (enterprising), Engineer (realistic) and journalist (artistic).

Table 8a Work Values and Preferred Occupation

5 Most Preferred Work Values

Teacher N = 25	Business N = 35	Engineer N = 27	Journalist N = 10
Fair Supervisor	Co-workers	Achievement	Self-development
Co-workers	Achievement	Self-development	Achievement
Self-development	Management	Fair Supervisor	Fair Supervisor
Achievement	Self-development	Co-workers	Creativity
Helping Others	Variety	Creativity	Recognition

Table 8b Work Values and Preferred Occupation

5 Least Preferred Work Values

Teacher N = 25	Business N = 35	Engineer N = 27	Journalist N = 10
High Income	Recognition	Independence	High Income
Management	Creativity	Management	Security
Independence	Security	Helping Others	Management
Prestige	Prestige	Prestige	Aesthetics
Aesthetics	Aesthetics	Aesthetics	Prestige

Although the sample size of the occupational groups was rather small, one can still see some difference in the work values of the various groups. Teaching is considered a "social" job and it is interesting to note that those who wanted to become teachers rated "helping others" high and "high income" low. Those who aspired to be journalists too, did not expect high income but wanted to be creative.

Work Values of Singaporean Adolescents : a Ten Year Comparison

As a matter of curiosity, the data collected in this study were compared with data collected in another similar study conducted in Singapore ten years ago (1988) from a group of junior college students :

Table 9a Five Most Preferred Work Values

Rank	1986 Sample N = 200	1996 Sample N = 286
1	Co-workers	Co-workers
2	Fair Supervisor	Fair Supervisor
3	Way of Life	Achievement
4	Achievement	Self-development
5	Self-development	Way of Life

Table 9b Five Least Preferred Work Values

Ranking	1986 Sample N = 200	1996 Sample N = 286
12	Independence	Creativity
13	Variety	Helping others
14	Prestige	Management
15	Management	Prestige
16	Aesthetics	Aesthetics

As can be seen in Tables 9a and 9b, in a lapse of ten years, the work values of junior college students in Singapore have hardly changed in terms of the most important and least important work values. They are still as achievement-oriented as ever, if not more so. Altruism seems to have taken a back seat as "helping others", an intrinsic value rated 8th in position ten years ago, has now dropped to position 13th. "Creativity" is another work value that has further decreased in importance (from 9th position to the 12th position). The three least preferred work values remain the same for both groups.

### Conclusion

This exploratory study has revealed some interesting similarities and differences in the work values of Australian and Singaporean adolescents residing in the two countries. On the whole there are little gender difference in the work values of adolescents. In the case of adolescents in Singapore, their work values have hardly changed over the past ten years.

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