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Does Money Matter? A Close Look At The Work Values Of Secondary School Pupils

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The nature of Work Values

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. When studying work values, vocational psychologists often use the bi-polar dimension of intrinsic/extrinsic values as the basis for investigation and measurement (Alvi, 1981; Jepsen, 1982).

People with an extrinsic value orientation view work principally in terms of its instrumental character. To them work supposedly possesses very little, if any, value in itself, but rather serves as a central means to certain ends. These ends usually include financial security, a comfortable material standard of living, access to leisure activity and social status both at the work place and within the community.

In contrast to an extrinsic work orientation, those who invest work primarily with intrinsic meaning do not regard it as a burden to be borne simply for its instrumental utility, but as a central integrating principle of one's individual and social being. As such, the job content is viewed as an important source of enrichment in which individuals may encounter challenge, assume responsibilities, make creative decisions, overcome obstacles and express a wide range of talents and aptitudes. Thus through work the individual achieves psychological growth and maturity in a process of self-fulfillment. These fundamental differences in meaning which individuals come to ascribe to work underlie individual differences in work preferences.

Development of Work Values in Adolescence

Research carried out overseas has revealed three common trends in the development of work values of adolescents:

- a) There are often gender differences in the work values of adolescents in that girls seem to be more people-oriented, choosing values such as interesting experiences, social services and working conditions while boys tend to be career or extrinsic-reward-oriented, preferring values such as good pay, security and prestige (Beutell, 1986).
- b) There is usually a shift from idealistic to realistic work values as students progress from early to late adolescence (Pryor, 1980. 1981).
- c) With the crystallization of a vocational self-concept, work values acquire considerable stability over the adolescent years, with strong values growing stronger and weak values growing weaker and finally remaining stable in late adolescence (Hurt & Holen, 1976; Kapes & Strickler, 1975; Krau, 1987).

The Study

In an attempt to study the work values of Singaporean adolescents, a survey was conducted amongst 1,380 secondary school pupils to find answers to these questions – what are the predominant work values among Singaporean students? Is there a shift in their work values as they proceed from early to late adolescence? Are there gender differences in their work values? The sample, selected from 14 secondary schools and three junior colleges had the following distribution:

Table 1. Distribution Of Sample By Grade And Gender

Grade	Male		Female	
	Population	Sample	Population	Sample
Sec. 1	11,697	120	11,701	120
Sec. 2	12,488	130	12,617	130
Sec. 3	11,175	110	11,641	120
Sec. 4	11,717	120	12,613	130
J.C. 1	5,332	84	5,748	116
J.C. 2	4,459	81	5,187	119
Total	56,868	645	60,507	735

Using Super's *Work Values Inventory* (1970), students in the sample were asked to rate the importance of 45 statements representing both intrinsic and extrinsic work values arranged in 15 clusters:

1. Altruism : helping others through work
2. Aesthetics : making beautiful things
3. Creativity : making or doing something original through work.
4. Intellectual Stimulation : opportunity for independent thinking and for learning how and why things work.
5. Achievement : getting a feeling of accomplishment in doing a job well
6. Independence : being free to work in a way as one wishes
7. Prestige : being respected by others

8. Management : opportunity to plan and lay out work for others to do
9. Economic Returns : being paid well enough to have the things one wants
10. Security : the certainty of having a job even in hard times
11. Surroundings : working in a pleasant environment
12. Supervisory Relations : having a boss who is fair and easy to get along
13. Associates : working with friendly and understanding people
14. Way of life : being able to lead the kind of life one chooses
15. Variety : opportunity to do different things at work.

Ranking of Work Values

Table 3 presents the rank ordering, mean scores and standard deviations of the 15 work values computed from the students' responses. Looking at the pattern that emerges, it is obvious that our teenaged students place great emphasis on interpersonal relationships at work. To them getting along with one's supervisor and colleagues is of utmost importance. Achievement as a work goal also ranks high in their preference, reflecting the value of our achievement-oriented society. Whether they are well-paid or not does not seem to be a crucial factor as this work value is only ranked ninth in position but being able to keep one's preferred life style and enjoying pleasant work environment are considered important. At the other end of the scale, Aesthetics as a work value is given the lowest priority by the majority of the students. To be in charge of people is something they do not look for in a job, neither do they care about obtaining prestige or being independent at work.

Table 2. Ranking of Work Values

Rank Order	Value	Mean	S.D.
1	Associates	12.98	2.44
2	Supervisory Relations	12.89	2.61
3	Achievement	12.65	2.27
4	Way of Life	12.34	2.46
5	Surroundings	11.96	2.33
6	Security	11.81	2.41
7	Creativity	11.73	2.52
8	Altruism	11.67	2.43
9	Economic Returns	11.51	2.57
10	Intellectual Stimulation	11.47	2.24
11	Independence	11.02	2.38
12	Prestige	10.45	2.42
13	Variety	10.09	2.38
14	Management	9.98	2.43
15	Esthetics	9.55	2.65

Age Differences in Work Values

A comparison of the work values of the six age groups also revealed some age differences in terms of a shift from "idealism" in the lower grades to "realism" in the upper grades. Table 4 shows that "Altruism", an idealistic value, decreases in importance with advancing age, having dropped from fourth position in secondary 1 to the eleventh position by the end of junior college. On the other hand, practical and materialistic work values such as "Way of Life" gradually increases in importance so much so that by the time the students reach junior college, this value replaces both "Associates" and "Supervisory Relations" as being number one in importance. Likewise "Economic Returns" increases in importance with advancing age, being upgraded from the tenth position in Secondary 1 to the fifth position by the end of junior college.

Table 3. Ranking Of Work Values : Comparison By Age

Ranking	Grade Level					
	Sec. 1	Sec. 2	Sec. 3	Sec. 4	JC. 1	JC. 2
1	SR	AS	AS	AS	AS	WL
2	AS	SR	SR	SR	SR	AC
3	AC	AC	AC	AC	WL	AS
4	AL	CR	WL	WL	AC	SR
5	WL	SU	SU	SU	SU	ER
6	SU	WL	SE	SE	SE	SU
7	SE	AL	CR	CR	ER	IN
8	CR	SE	AL	ER	AL	SE
9	IS	IS	ER	AL	CR	CR
10	ER	ER	IS	IS	IS	IS
11	IN	IN	IN	IN	IN	AL
12	PR	PR	PR	PR	VA	VA
13	ES	VA	MA	MA	PR	PR
14	MA	ES	VA	VA	MA	MA
15	VA	MA	ES	ES	ES	ES

Work Values: AS = Associates AC = Achievement
 AL = Altruism CR = Creativity
 ER = Economic Returns ES = Esthetics
 IS = Intellectual Stimulation IN = Independence
 MA = Management PR = Prestige
 SR = Supervisory Relations SE = Security
 SU = Surroundings VA = Variety
 WL = Way of Life

Gender Differences in Work Values

To investigate gender differences in the work value of the pupils, pairwise comparisons of the data were performed using t-test procedures. The results revealed significant differences in six of the fifteen work values.

Table 4. Significant Gender Differences In Work Values

Work Value	Mean Scores		t Value
	Boys	Girls	
Achievement	12.34	12.92	-4.75**
Management	10.17	9.81	2.75*
Surrounding	11.64	12.25	-4.84**
Supervisory Relations	12.68	13.07	-4.84*
Variety	9.88	10.27	-3.03*
Way of Life	12.13	13.52	-2.91*

* P < .01

* P < .001

It is interesting to note from the results presented in Table 5 that although American researchers have found that girls were more intrinsic-oriented in their work values, findings of the Singapore study have been inconclusive. On one hand, the girls place greater emphasis on "Achievement" than their male counterparts, on the other hand they also show a stronger preference for practical values such as "Surroundings", and "Way of Life". While more boys aspire to leadership positions (Management), girls prefer to be followers and look forward to having impartial and understanding bosses (Supervisory Relations). They also place much premium on variety at work.

Implications for Career Guidance in Schools

The study showed that regardless of age and gender, secondary school pupils in Singapore show a preoccupation with the importance of interpersonal relationships at work. To them having a good and understanding boss and getting along with colleagues are of utmost importance, followed by "achievement" at work. Such are sound and sensible work values reflecting the outlook of our pragmatic and achievement-oriented society. They are also in keeping with the developmental pattern of adolescence, a period when peers exert a strong influence on every aspect of their lives.

Contrary to expectations, only slight age differences can be observed in that the younger students place more emphasis on "Altruism", "Esthetics" "Supervisory Relations" and "Associates" while the older students are more concerned with practical values such as "Way of Life" and "Economic Returns". They also want more "Independence" and "Variety".

On the whole, results of this study do not bear out the observations made by American researchers that girls are more intrinsic-oriented or people-oriented while boys are more reward-oriented. In fact, the girls in the sample appear to be more achievement-oriented than the boys although they prefer to follow (Supervisory Relations) rather than to lead (Management).

However, it is sad to note the low priority given to intrinsic work values such as altruism, aesthetics, creativity and intellectual stimulation. The students are so engrossed with the practical and material aspects of work that they seem to have overlooked finer things in life. Teachers need to keep these findings in mind when planning career guidance programs in schools. It is important to stimulate group discussion on work values and to help the students appreciate both extrinsic and intrinsic values.

Research in work values has established that in career development, insight into vocational interests develops early in adolescence while insight into work values reaches a peak in late adolescence. Keeping this in mind, it would be best to highlight work values only at the upper secondary and junior college level when the students are intellectually and emotionally mature enough to appreciate and benefit from such discussions.

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