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Dominant Personal Values of Lecturers and Medical Staffs – A Comparative Study in Vietnam

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Abstract:

We reviewed studies on personal values and found evidence supporting the association with people's careers and personal values. Research on employee behaviors found that personal values as an antecedent of employees' behavior at work and people's career choices. However, Schwartz introduced ten constructs of personal values in 1992, lack of studies on personal values and their consequences in Vietnam hitherto motivated to conduct this study to explore the dominant personal values of people working in a specific work setting: medical and educational sectors in Vietnam. We carried out the in-depth interviews with 41 lecturers and 53 medical staff and found five dominant personal value constructs – self-direction, stimulation, achievement, security, and conformity; however, they are different in dominance level. Vietnamese lecturers and medical staffs have the same two dominant personal value constructs: self-direction and stimulation. The findings may be useful for personal management in recruiting and motivating Vietnamese employees through creating an appropriate working environment and job design.

Keywords: dominant personal values, lecturers, medical staffs, Vietnam.

讲师和医务人员的主要个人价值观-越南的比较研究

摘要:

我们审查了有关个人价值观的研究，发现了支持与人们的职业和个人价值观相关联的证据。对员工行为的研究发现，个人价值观是员工在工作中的行为和人们职业选择的前因。然而，施瓦茨在 1992 年引入了 10 种个人价值观的构建，迄今为止缺乏对越南个人价值观及其后果的研究，因此有动力进行这项研究，以探索在特定工作环境中工作的人们的主要个人价值观：越南的医疗和教育部门。我们对 41 位讲师和 53 位医务人员进行了深入访谈，发现了五种主要的个人价值建构 - 自我指导，激励，成就，安全和顺从；但是，它们的支配水平不同。越南讲师和医务人员具有相同的两个主要的个人价值建构：自我指导和激励。这些发现对于通过创建适当的工作环境和设计来招募和激励越南雇员的个人管理很有用。

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关键词: 占主导地位的个人价值观, 讲师, 医务人员, 越南。

1. Introduction

Personal values are studied mainly in psychology, although other fields, including sociology, management, and political science, also study them. The construct of personal values was introduced into psychological research by Gordon Allport (Allport and Vernon, 1931). For the next 40 years, however, psychology paid relatively little attention to the study of values. Milton Rokeach gave new momentum to value research with his proposal that values serve as reference points that people use to formulate attitudes and behaviors. The last three decades have seen a growing body of psychological research on values. Researchers have studied the content, structure, origins, and consequences of values in many cultures (Hitlin and Piliavin, 2004; Maio, 2010; Rohan, 2000; Schwartz, 2015; Knafo et al., 2011). Personal values are a central content-aspect of the self, distinct from other aspects, such as traits, motives, goals, or attitudes (Hitlin, 2003; Roccas et al., 2002; 2014).

The work of Kohn and colleagues focused on the effects of environmental complexity on values. Environmental complexity, however, does not fully explain the value differences between people in different occupations because there are value differences even between people in occupations that are similar in their complexity. Moreover, there are value differences between people in different occupations, not only in self-direction and conformity values but also in self-enhancement and self-transcendence values. These value differences cannot be explained by work complexity.

Work is an important aspect of people's life. Most individuals heavily invest in their workplace physically, cognitively, and emotionally. Their occupation is an important aspect of their identity. Different value priorities characterize people with different occupations. Managers, bankers, and financial advisors emphasize power and achievement values more than individuals in other occupations, and secretaries and bookkeepers emphasize security, conformity, and tradition more than others (Knafo & Sagiv, 2004). People's occupations facilitate the attainment of their central goals. To our best knowledge, there is no study on personal value and its association with people's careers in Vietnam until now. This motivates us to conduct the study to explore dominant personal values of lecturers and medical staff, whose salary is very low in Vietnamese society, and know whether occupation choice is compatible with their values. Knowing their personal values, we can understand and explain their behaviors at work, especially in the setting of the COVID-19 pandemic. The rest of the paper consists of three main sections: a literature review on personal values, study approach, and findings discussion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Personal Values and Measurement

Personal values refer to what is good and worthy (William, 1970). They characterize both individuals and social collectives, such as nations, business organizations, and religious groups. Values of social collectives or cultural values represent the goals that members of the social collective are encouraged to pursue. They serve to justify actions taken by collective members and leaders in pursuit of these goals (Schwartz, 1999). Values of individuals (often termed personal values) are broad desirable goals that motivate people's actions and serve as guiding principles in their lives (Kluckhohn, 1951; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Personal values affect people's preferences and behavior over time and across situations.

The number of possible values is very large, contains hundreds of value terms. Rokeach's value survey (Rokeach, 1973) sampled 36 single values (18 instrumental and 18 terminal values). An important advance in research on personal values was introduced by Schwartz (1992), who theorized that multiple single values express the same broad and underlying motivation. For example, freedom, independence, and choosing one's own goals all share the motivation for the autonomy of thought and action. Thus, long lists of values can be organized into a much shorter list of meaningful types of values.

Schwartz (1992) proposed a theory of universals in the content and structure of personal values. After its presentation in 1992, this theory quickly became prominent in the field (Rohan, 2000; Knafo et al., 2011). Schwartz suggested that values can be organized according to the motivational goals they express. Analyzing the needs of individuals and the requirements for societal survival, Schwartz (1992) identified ten motivationally distinct types of values: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity, and security.

Some of these values are mutually compatible; they reflect goals that can be attained simultaneously through the same actions or attitudes. Other values conflict with each other; actions that promote the attainment of one value are likely to impede the attainment of the other. For example, seeking to challenge existing knowledge by developing a novel theory or research paradigm expresses self-direction values, which express the motivation for the autonomy of thought and action. Such behavior also expresses and is compatible with pursuing stimulation values, reflecting the motivation to experience change and novelty and be daring. However, such behavior conflicts with expressing and pursuing conformity values reflect the motivation to comply with prevailing norms and expectations and avoid action that could upset others. The conflicts and compatibilities among the various values determine their structure. Values are structured in a circular continuum, organized according to the

motivations they express. Adjacent values express compatible motivations, and opposing values express conflicting motivations. Table 1 presents the ten constructs of personal values with their definition and description suggested by Schwartz (1992).

Table 1. Schwartz value taxonomy

Construct	Definition and Description (Items)
Power	Social status and prestige, control, and dominance over people and resources. Individuals who value this believe in the importance of overseeing people and resources and having money (social power, wealth, authority).
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards. Individuals who value this believe in the importance of socially recognized successes (successful, capable, ambitious, influential).
Hedonism	Pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself. Individuals who value this believe in the importance of sensual pleasure (pleasure, enjoying life)
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life. Individuals who value this believe in the importance of having stimulating experiences (daring, a varied life, exciting life)
Self-direction	Independent thought and action-choosing, creating, exploring. Individuals who value this believe in the importance of the independence of thought and action (creativity, freedom, independence, curiosity, choosing own goals)
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and nature. Individuals who value this believe in the importance of promoting the welfare of all people and nature (broadminded, wisdom, equality, social justice, a world at peace, a world of beauty, unity with nature, protecting the environment)
Benevolence	Preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact. Individuals who value this believe in the importance of promoting the welfare of people you are close to (helpfulness, loyalty, honesty, forgiving, responsible)
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectation or norms. Individuals who value this believe in the importance of controlling impulses to fulfill others' expectations (politeness, self-discipline, obedience, honoring parents, and elders)
Tradition	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of customs and ideas that traditional culture or religion provides. Individuals who value this believe in the importance of maintaining traditions (humble, accepting my portion in life, moderation, respect for tradition, devout)
Security	Safety, harmony, and stability of society, relationships, and self. Individuals who value this believe in the importance of safety and security of self, family, and nation (family, security, national security, social order, clean, reciprocation of favors).

3. Research Approach

3.1. Data Collection

The study applied a qualitative research approach. The sample consists of 94 individuals working in two main areas: education, and healthcare, whose ages are from 18

to 60 years old, in which 41 interviewees are lecturers, and 53 are healthcare staff.

The in-depth interview method was applied to explore personal values. It took around 40 minutes for each interview section. First, the interviewer introduced the study's goal and explained the meaning of personal values "The goal of this study is to help you identify your own values at work. Values are the answer to the questions: What is important to you in your working life? What is your working life purpose? What do you enjoy doing? When you feel satisfied and fulfilled? Your personal values navigate your behavior at work in the job that you choose. Understanding your own core values helps guide you towards your passions and desires at work. Then, the questionnaire is distributed to the interviewee directly. The questionnaire consists of three main questions regarding personal values. The discussion is based on the questions below:

- Please brainstorm what your own values are?
- Now prioritize your values. What are five of your most important values?
- What does each value mean to you?
- Please generate a definition that resonates and makes sense to you".

3.2. Data Processing

The data collected includes the list of all the personal value items that interviewees consider as such. The data cleaning process was conducted to determine the dominant personal values of the two groups – lecturers and medical staff. Firstly, duplicate or irrelevant observations were removed. Secondly, misspelling and grammar were also tracked and fixed. The next step was getting rid of irrelevant data. Lastly, the clean dataset was inputted into Microsoft SQL Server. The data processing resulted in the dataset of 1,123 personal value items, of which 718 items were collected from 53 medical staff and the rest from 41 lecturers, categorized into ten personal values for two groups as in Table 2.

Table 2. Grouping value items according to personal value constructs

Personal value construct	Medical staffs	Lecturers	Total
Stimulation	128	81	209
Self-Direction	251	118	369
Achievement	91	33	124
Security	91	58	149
Power	4	5	9
Conformity	78	55	133
Hedonism	25	27	52
Universalism	29	4	33
Benevolence	17	19	36
Tradition	4	5	9
Total	718	405	1123

The number of people who chose each personal value item was counted; the frequency of each personal value item was then obtained by taking the number of people counted in each group who choose the same personal value item. In addition, which personal value was the most chosen in each group was also determined and ranked from the highest to the lowest. Based on the above

data processed, we came up with the results presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Grouping value items according to personal values of medical staffs

Personal value construct	The number of items considered as ... is	Percentage (%)	Cumulative percentage (%)
1. Self-Direction	251	34.96	34.96
2. Stimulation	128	17.83	52.79
3. Achievement	91	12.67	65.46
4. Security	91	12.67	78.13
5. Conformity	78	10.86	89.00
6. Universalism	29	4.04	93.04
7. Hedonism	25	3.48	96.52
8. Benevolence	17	2.37	98.89
9. Tradition	4	0.56	99.44
10. Power	4	0.56	100.00
Total	718	100,00	-

Table 3 shows 718 personal value items matching ten personal values, distributes 89% or 639 items of the total values items collected from 53 medical staff. Similarly, Table 4 presents 405 personal value items matching ten

personal values, distributes 85.19% or 345 items of the total items collected from 41 lecturers. As a result, it can be concluded that the first five values are their outstanding personal values.

Table 4. Grouping items according to personal values of lecturers

Personal value construct	The number of items considered as ... is	Percentage (%)	Cumulative percentage (%)
1. Self-Direction	118	29.14	29.14
2. Stimulation	81	20.00	49.14
3. Security	58	14.32	63.46
4. Conformity	55	13.58	77.04
5. Achievement	33	8.15	85.19
6. Hedonism	27	6.67	91.85
7. Benevolence	19	4.69	96.54
8. Tradition	5	1.23	97.78
9. Power	5	1.23	99.01
10. Universalism	4	0.99	100.00
Total	405	100.00	-

4. Research Findings and Discussion

Overall, we found that both medical staff and lecturers in the research sample have the same five outstanding personal values, however different in order of priority as presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Dominant personal values of medical staffs and lecturers

Medical staffs	Lecturers	
Self-Direction	Self-Direction	Similar
Stimulation	Stimulation	Similar
Achievement	Security	Different
Security	Conformity	Different
Conformity	Achievement	Different

They have the same dominant personal values: Self-Direction and Stimulation. The 53 medical staff interviewed mentioned 251 words related to Self-Direction (34.96%) and 128 words related to Stimulation (17.83%), resulting in more than fifty percent of total items belong to the two constructs. The 41 lecturers mentioned 118 items (29.14%) and 81 items (20%) related to Self-Direction and Stimulation, respectively, resulting in almost fifty percent of total items belong to the two constructs. As a result, it can be concluded that the dominant personal values of medical staff and lecturers in the research sample are Self-Direction and Stimulation. Therefore, our study has two findings: (1) dominant personal values of medical staff and lecturers,

and (2) the similarity of their outstanding and dominant personal values.

The theory of basic human values views work values are specific expressions of general values in the work setting. They assume that work values are beliefs pertaining to desirable end-states or behavior. The study of Schwartz et al. (1999) insisted that there is evidence supporting the existence of four general types of work values that correspond to the four higher-order types of basic values, each parallel to one of the four higher-order basic types of individual values. Based on the research results and the association between work values and personal values, we assert that the work values of medical staff and lecturers are the same. Our findings contribute empirical evidence supporting the value-based behavior theory.

5. Conclusion and Limitations

Applying the qualitative research approach with the main data collection method by interview, we attained two findings: (1) five outstanding personal values (Self-Direction, Stimulation, achievement, security, and conformity) and (2) two shared dominant personal values: Self-Direction and Stimulation of medical staffs and lecturers. These findings imply that people working in the same profession may share similar personal values, and they have priority values to preserve and achieve through their job. Therefore, the research findings could

be applied in job design and work setting to increase employee satisfaction and loyalty. Moreover, personal values items can be used to develop the measurement scales of personal value constructs of the Vietnamese.

Any research has its limitation. This research was conducted with a small sample size of medical staff and lecturers, limiting the generalization of the research findings. Therefore, further research should be conducted with a well-diversified identification of Vietnamese dominant personal values. The quantitative research should also be considered to study personal values' consequences at workplaces.

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