

Executive Summary

Establishing Circularity:

Development and Validation of the Circular
Work Value Scale (CWVS)

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Introduction

The significance of personal values in organizational contexts is widely acknowledged, attracting attention from both researchers and practitioners. Values influence factors such as job performance and turnover, and congruence between values and behavior is linked to well-being. Current measures of values often lack specificity to work contexts limiting their contextual and predictive validity. Thus, this study aimed to develop and validate a contextualized questionnaire using algorithm-based item selection (ABIS) to assess personal values relevant to work contexts.

Research Objectives

Previous efforts to develop work value questionnaires have often been hindered by a lack of strong theoretical foundation, leading to issues such as construct proliferation, redundancies, and inconsistencies. To address the reliance on mere lists of variables, the goal here is to create a questionnaire based on a theoretically and methodologically profound process for future work value research.

The primary goal of this research is to create a reliable and valid measure of work values that aligns with Schwartz's theory of basic human values. This gives future studies and practical applications of work values the opportunity to refer to the well-researched empirical and theoretical advancements of basic value literature. The key research questions addressed are:

1. How can Schwartz's theory of basic values be applied to the work context to create a comprehensive measure?
2. What are the specific work values that can be identified and validated through this measure?
3. How does the newly developed measure improve the prediction of work-related outcomes compared to basic value questionnaires in its nomological network?

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Schwartz's theory of basic human values, which clusters context-free, basic values based on underlying motivational goals. In a circumplex structure, where values are arranged according to their compatibility and conflict of underlying motivational goals, ten broader basic values can be considered. These values serve as a comprehensive cross-cultural framework for studying values in the workplace and help explain organizational behavior.

Work values are conceptualized as specific expressions of these basic values within work settings, correspondingly organized in a coherent circular structure reflecting compatibility or conflict among goals and motives. The constructs represent work-related motivational goals from the value dimensions of *Self-Transcendence/Social* vs. *Self-Enhancement/Prestige* and *Openness to Change/Intrinsic* vs. *Conservation/Extrinsic*.

Methodology

The development of the questionnaire began by back-translation of an English-language work value questionnaire and formulating items to foster construct representations. After expert interviews and cognitive interviews, the initial item pool consisted of 77 items. In line with best practices for online panel surveys to ensure high data quality, 1049 participants were recruited from a sample of working adults in Germany.

Computational advancements enable possibilities for tackling combinatorial problems of scale construction considering the structural validity of the measure and the underlying theoretical propositions. Using ABIS and a genetic algorithm we aimed at constructing an efficient questionnaire. These algorithms are used to solve the optimization problem of maximizing psychometric quality given the constraint of questionnaire length. Hence, ABIS approaches can be used to address the ongoing debates of scrutinized validity evidence for questionnaires in psychological science.

The quality of the final version, comprising 33 work value items, was validated through convergent, discriminant and congruent incremental analysis. Measurement invariance and Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) were additionally tested to support the structural validity and theoretical representations of the questionnaire.

Key Findings

The Circular Work Value Scale (CWVS) showed strong fit and strict measurement invariance across training and test data sets, and age and gender groups. The results supported the proposed circular structure in the MDS solution. Relations to work motives, environmental awareness and emotional stability support convergent and discriminant validity. The CWVS demonstrated greater explained variance in the Person-Organization Fit compared to context-free basic values, highlighting its incremental validity.

These initial validity evidence support the use of the CWVS in research and organizational contexts. Given the efficiency of the work value assessment with 33 items, low threshold applications are possible to assess employees main guiding principles and motivational goals, as outlined next.

Practical Relevance

The CWVS provides a robust tool for the assessment of employees' work values, enabling organizations to better align personal and organizational values. This can enhance job satisfaction, performance, and organizational commitment. For example, understanding the dominant work values in team settings can guide interventions to improve team dynamics and productivity. Through reflecting on one's work values and engage in open discussions about the prevalent work values in the team, the group may foster identification and cohesion.

Additionally, organizations can benefit from the knowledge of their employees' values in change processes. To address ongoing fundamental changes and challenges like digitalization, sustainability or artificial intelligence, existing work values and guiding principles can be reflected on and used to create change processes in line with employee perspectives.

The research contributes to HR practices by offering a validated measure that can inform recruitment and employee development processes, ultimately fostering a more harmonious and effective workplace. It does so by providing a comprehensive theoretical foundation for organizational practices, which can inform decision making on a well-researched empirical basis

Limitations

Despite its comprehensive design, the CWVS yielded different optimal ABIS-solutions for some work values, indicating a need for further refinement. Here, more specific constructs might deliver a more nuanced picture of employees' work values which in turn could enhance practical relevance through more precise motivational goals. Additionally, longitudinal studies are required to assess the stability of work values over time and across different cultural contexts. Thus, more comprehensive research designs could foster the cross-cultural validity of the proposed work value theory.

Conclusion

This research offers a significant advancement in work value assessment by integrating Schwartz's value theory into work contexts. The CWVS is a valuable tool for both researchers and practitioners, providing deeper insights into employee work values and their implications for organizational behavior. The innovative methodology and robust validation process underline the relevance and impact of this work, meriting recognition through the HR award.

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