

Work Values in an Iranian Context

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Abstract

Humans are not the same and have various values and norms which is dependent on culture. In order to increase the efficiency, human resource managers need to maximize the efficiency of organizations' most valuable resource which is its humans. To this end, special attention should be made to work values of the employees and the issues which affect them. Although a relatively large body of literature exists about the demographic differences of work values, most of the previous research has focused on a single demographic variable. The objective of the paper is to explore the relationship of five demographic variables, namely age, gender, education, position, and working experience, with work values in an Iranian governmental organization. In the lack of any significant research on work values in the Iranian context, this paper fills the gap by shedding light on the issue and adding to the literature. Findings of the paper show that among all the five main hypotheses, education has the strongest effect on work values, by having a significant relationship with all the 5 sub-categories of work values. Besides, gender and working experience similarly have a significant relationship with all sub-categories of work value except work-life balance.

Keywords: Work value, governmental organization, Iran

Introduction

The heightened awareness and appreciation of differences in values and cultures from a personal and organizational perspective has rendered an

increased attention to their influence (Soontiens and De Jager, 2008). As almost everyone belong to a number of different groups and categories of people at the same time, people unavoidably carry several layers of values within themselves (Iguisi, 2009, p. 144). People with different background and culture behave differently in the workplace, which can be caused by people's different goals, expectations and work values. This has led to a growing interest among human resource managers and scholars from around the globe in ways of managing and working with people with various background and cultures. Although various explanations have been given by culturalists (Ram and Jones, 1998; Barrett *et al.*, 1996; Wilson and Portes, 1980), as Knocke (2000) mentions, most of the time the underlying source of these differences is unknown. This is especially true considering the differences of the culture, therefore the factors which affect the work values of employees in western context, should not necessarily remain important in the Asian context. Therefore further studies on work values in different societies, especially in developing countries can still be of interest and add to the body of literature. As discussed by Li *et al.* (2008), in order to maintain organizational leadership, organizations need to take into consideration the interaction of diverse population and age groups (Goldberg, 2000) and an awareness of generational differences and representative values adopted by each group (Izzo and Withers, 2001; Meredith *et al.*, 2002).

As shown by previous studies, understanding the employee's demographic differences on work values helps in creating a win-win outcome for all concerned (Sullivan *et al.*, 2002). Although there is a relatively large body of literature about the demo-

graphic differences of work values, most of the previous research has focused on a single demographic variable, such as age (Itzhak, 1999; Joyner, 2000; Rhodes, 1983); gender (Boatwright and Slate, 2000; Hill, 1997); education (Pastor, 1982; Rowley, 1996; Sekaran, 2000) and other variables like tenure (Mowday *et al.*, 1979). Only recently, a research by Li *et al.* (2008) used various demographic factors collectively and overcame this deficiency. This paper, in line with the efforts of Li *et al.* seeks to follow this new trend and examine the effect of five demographic variables, namely age, gender, education, position, and working experience on work values. Since, to the best of the authors, no significant similar research in Iranian society has been conducted and published, this research helps to fill the gap, grow the body of literature and give insights on the Iranian society.

Work Values

There are a wide range of discussions on human values in the literature (Rokeach, 1973; Hofstede, 1980; Schwartz, 1994). Rokeach (1973) defines value as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposition or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence.” Schwartz *et al.* (1999: 24–5) state that values represent the concepts of what is really desirable and guide social actors in their selection of behaviors, and are used to assess other people and explain people’s responses in general.

As argued by Rokeach (1973), a value system is “an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance”. Hofstede (1980) defines a value as “a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others.” Schwartz (1994, cited by Song and Gale, 2008) argues that there is widespread agreement in the literature regarding five features of the conceptual definition of values: a value is a belief, pertaining desirable end states or modes of conduct, that transcends specific situations, guides selection or evaluation of behavior, people, and events and is ordered by importance relative to other values to form a system of value priorities.

On the other hand, work values can be defined as the importance individuals give to outcomes arising in work context (Elizur, 1984). From the viewpoint of the theory of basic human values, work values are specific expressions of general values in the work setting (Ros *et al.*, 1999).

Research on work values can be divided into three main categories, namely structure, correlation to other personal, social, or organizational variables, and cultural factors (Sagie *et al.* 1996). A study by Ralston *et al.* (1993) which compared the values of managers from the USA, Hong Kong and the People’s Republic of China, indicates that often both culture and the business environment interact to create a unique set of managerial values in a country.

Among the various definitions of work values, Super’s Work Values Inventory (WVI; Super, 1970) is arguably the best-known instrument for assessing values in terms of vocational behavior (Jennifer and Gareth, 1997). Super (1970) defined work values as the part of individuals’ values that work can satisfy. According to Super (1973), values derive from needs 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.

Besides, Connor and Becker (1975) have proposed that values have implications for conflict, communication, organizational performance, and managerial actions, such as emphasis on goals and types of control. Furthermore, some researchers (Mitra *et al.*, 1992) suggest that when individuals cannot use their work values in a particular job, it may cause feelings of dissatisfaction. This, as a result, may lead to withdrawal from work through absenteeism, tardiness or intentions to leave (Locke, 1976) and they may experience negative emotions such as jealousy and envy that may in turn affect the performance of coworkers (Salovey and Rodin, 1991).

Hypotheses Development

Age and Work Value

As indicated by Rabinowitz and Hall (1977), age is positively associated with job involvement, for the older workers could have more successful

experience and this may add to their job involvement. Therefore, work values may be correlated with age and influence work outcomes. Table 1, summarizes the findings of some of related studies on the effect of age on work values.

Table 1. Summary of some related studies on effects of age on work value

Study	Findings
Rabinowitz and Hall, 1977	Positively associated with job involvement
Mowday <i>et al.</i> , 1979	More tenured employees are less likely to leave than are younger employees
Rhodes, 1983	Older workers may have a different work values than younger workers
Sullivan <i>et al.</i> , 2002	The younger generations pay significant attention to how their individual values might be fulfilled when looking at career options and potential employers

Therefore, the following hypothesis is defined:

- H1: There is significant relationship between age and work value.

The sub-hypotheses, on the other hand, consider the relationship between the demographic variables (age, gender, education, position and working experience) with the five categories of work value namely making contributions, interpersonal harmony, work–life balance, self-development, and job satisfaction. Therefore the following sub-hypotheses are defined:

- H1a: There is significant relationship between age and making contributions.
- H1b: There is significant relationship between age and interpersonal harmony.
- H1c: There is significant relationship between age and work–life balance.
- H1d: There is significant relationship between age and self-development.
- H1e: There is significant relationship between age and job satisfaction.

Gender and work values

Under traditional culture, men have a different identification to women. Normally women’s social role of gender may lead to their lower job involvement than man and their double-role workload may also cause a lower job involvement. But there are also a number of studies in the past 20 years which state that females are more likely to exhibit better work attitudes than their male counterparts (Furnham and Muhiudeen, 1984; Hill, 1997; Petty and Hill, 1994).

To test this relationship, the following hypothesis and sub-hypotheses are defined:

- H2: There is significant relationship between gender and work value.
- H2a: There is significant relationship between gender and making contributions.
- H2b: There is significant relationship between gender and interpersonal harmony.
- H2c: There is significant relationship between gender and work–life balance.
- H2d: There is significant relationship between gender and self-development.
- H2e: There is significant relationship between gender and job satisfaction.

Education and work values

As shown by research, the people who have a higher level of education tend to be more individualistic and have high self-esteem and prefer job autonomy (Rowley, 1996; Sekaran, 2000). Research finding by Fuchs (1971) and Manheim (1988) shows that the employees’ education level positively relates to their job involvement.

To test and verify this relationship, the following hypotheses were defined:

- H3: There is significant relationship between education and work value.
- H3a: There is significant relationship between education and making contributions.
- H3b: There is significant relationship between education and interpersonal harmony.
- H3c: There is significant relationship between education and work–life balance.

- H3d: There is significant relationship between education and self-development.
- H3e: There is significant relationship between education and job satisfaction.

Position and Work Values

As motioned by Li *et al.* (2008), according to Herzberg's (1966) Two Factor Theory, responsibility is one of the important motivating factors for employees' work satisfaction, and so it could be inferred that the higher one holds the position in an organization, the more responsibility he or she will take, the higher work values he or she will perceive. To test this, the following hypotheses are defined:

- H4: There is significant relationship between position and work value.
- H4a: There is significant relationship between position and making contributions.
- H4b: There is significant relationship between position and interpersonal harmony.
- H4c: There is significant relationship between position and work–life balance.
- H4d: There is significant relationship between position and self-development.
- H4e: There is significant relationship between position and job satisfaction.

Working Experience and Work Values

A variety of research demonstrated that the relationship between an employee and his or her supervisor is an important influence on employee reactions (Abdel-Halim, 1982; Repetti and Cosmas, 1991). Normally, employees with more working experience are better recognized and trusted by supervisors. Besides, they also form internal networks with their peers that differentiate them with the new comers or less experiences employees. To test if the working experience has any effect on work values, the following hypotheses are formed:

- H5: There is significant relationship between working experience and work value.
- H5a: There is significant relationship

between working experience and making contributions.

- H5b: There is significant relationship between working experience and interpersonal harmony.
- H5c: There is significant relationship between working experience and work–life balance.
- H5d: There is significant relationship between working experience and self-development.
- H5e: There is significant relationship between working experience and job satisfaction.

Methodology

Procedure and Sample

For the purpose of the study, a questionnaire composed of 27 work value behaviors was developed based on the study of Li *et al.* (2008) which itself used Super's Work Values Inventory (WVI; Super, 1970). The 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (completely agree) to 7 (completely disagree) was used for this research.

Iran's Ministry of Health has been chosen for this study. At the date of the survey, ministry of health in Iran had different deputies. One of the most important and effective deputies was deputy of management development and resources. This deputy itself consists of five deputies including deputy of Budgeting, deputy of physical resources and development plans, deputy of human resource management, deputy of legal issues and deputy of management development and official reform.

Out of 150 questionnaires distributed, 109 completed questionnaires were returned giving a response rate of 72.6%.

Demographics

Five demographic variables describing the subjects of the sample were included in this study and were used as independent variables. Gender was coded with 1 for men and 2 for women; Age was measured by age levels coded with 1 for below 25 years old, 2 for 26 to 35 years old, 3 for 36 to

45 years old, and 4 for over 46 years old; Position was coded with 1 for employees, 2 for managers and 3 for other staffs. Working experience was measured by six levels coded with 1 for less than 5 years, 2 for 6 to 10 years, 3 for 11 to 15 years, 4 for 16 to 20 years, 5 for 21 to 25 years, and 6 for over 26 years. Education was measured by five levels, with larger values corresponding to higher levels of educational attainment. Tables 2, summarizes the demographic characteristics of the study sample.

Findings

Findings of the paper show that among all the five main hypotheses, education has the strongest effect on work values, by having a significant relationship with all the 5 sub-categories of work values. Besides, gender and working experience similarly have a significant relationship with all sub-categories of work value except work–life balance. Table 3 summarizes the test results for all the hypotheses.

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample

	Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age	Less than 25	3	2.8	2.8
	26-35 years old	72	66.1	68.8
	36-45 years old	31	28.4	97.2
	More than 45	3	2.8	100.0
	Total	109	100.0	
Gender	Male	67	61.5	61.5
	Female	42	38.5	100.0
	Total	109	100.0	
Position	Employee	73	67.0	67.0
	Manager	24	22.0	89.0
	Other	12	11.0	100.0
	Total	109	100.0	
Education	Diploma	3	2.8	2.8
	Higher Diploma	9	8.3	11.0
	Bachelor	55	50.5	61.5
	Post Graduate	42	38.5	100.0
	Total	109	100.0	
Work Experience	Less than 5 years	42	38.5	38.5
	6 to 10 years	41	37.6	76.1
	11 to 15 years	12	11.0	87.2
	16 to 20 years	10	9.2	96.3
	21 to 25 years	4	3.7	100.0
	More than 25	0	0	100.0
	Total	109	100.0	

Table 3. Tests results of hypotheses

Hypotheses	Test Result
Age & Making Contributions	Rejected
Age & Interpersonal Harmony	Rejected
Age & Work-life Balance	Accepted
Age & Self-development	Rejected
Age & Job Satisfaction	Accepted
Gender & Making Contributions	Accepted
Gender & Interpersonal Harmony	Accepted
Gender & Work-life Balance	Rejected
Gender & Self-development	Accepted
Gender & Job Satisfaction	Accepted
Education & Making Contributions	Accepted
Education & Interpersonal Harmony	Accepted
Education & Work-life Balance	Accepted
Education & Self-development	Accepted
Education & Job Satisfaction	Accepted
Position & Making Contributions	Accepted
Position & Interpersonal Harmony	Rejected
Position & Work-life Balance	Rejected
Position & Self-development	Accepted
Position & Job Satisfaction	Accepted
Working Experience & Making Contributions	Accepted
Working Experience & Interpersonal Harmony	Accepted
Working Experience & Work-life Balance	Rejected
Working Experience & Self-development	Accepted
Working Experience & Job Satisfaction	Accepted

Below, the test results related to each sub-hypothesis are illustrated in the tables following each hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1: There is significant relationship between age and work value.

H1a: There is significant relationship between age and making contributions.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.731 ^a	12	0.204
Likelihood Ratio	17.927	12	0.118
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.783	1	0.182
N of Valid Cases	109		

H1b: There is significant relationship between age and interpersonal harmony.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.635 ^a	12	0.209
Likelihood Ratio	18.494	12	0.101
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.369	1	0.544
N of Valid Cases	109		

H1c: There is significant relationship between age and work-life balance.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	34.288 ^a	12	0.001
Likelihood Ratio	36.057	12	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.467	1	0.494
N of Valid Cases	109		

H1d: There is significant relationship between age and self-development.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.083 ^a	15	0.445
Likelihood Ratio	18.492	15	0.238
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.044	1	0.833
N of Valid Cases	109		

H1e: There is significant relationship between age and job satisfaction.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.520 ^a	15	0.033
Likelihood Ratio	30.105	15	0.012
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.028	1	0.867
N of Valid Cases	109		

Hypothesis 2: There is significant relationship between gender and work value.

H2a: There is significant relationship between gender and making contributions.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	23.378 ^a	4	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	27.409	4	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	14.612	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	109		

H2b: There is significant relationship between gender and interpersonal harmony.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.107 ^a	4	0.025
Likelihood Ratio	13.033	4	0.011
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.104	1	0.004
N of Valid Cases	109		

H2c: There is significant relationship between gender and work-life balance.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.818 ^a	4	0.431
Likelihood Ratio	3.870	4	0.424
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.007	1	0.935
N of Valid Cases	109		

H2d: There is significant relationship between gender and self-development.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.449 ^a	5	0.013
Likelihood Ratio	17.017	5	0.004
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.855	1	0.005
N of Valid Cases	109		

H2e: There is significant relationship between gender and job satisfaction.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.916 ^a	5	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	23.529	5	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.003	1	0.956
N of Valid Cases	109		

Hypothesis 3: There is significant relationship between education and work value.

H3a: There is significant relationship between education and making contributions.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.210 ^a	12	0.035
Likelihood Ratio	28.353	12	0.005
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.003	1	0.955
N of Valid Cases	109		

H3b: There is significant relationship between education and interpersonal harmony.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	43.716 ^a	12	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	48.931	12	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.711	1	0.054
N of Valid Cases	109		

H3c: There is significant relationship between education and work-life balance.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	26.877 ^a	12	0.008
Likelihood Ratio	26.974	12	0.008
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.499	1	0.480
N of Valid Cases	109		

H3d: There is significant relationship between education and self-development.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	41.799 ^a	15	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	42.611	15	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.442	1	0.506
N of Valid Cases	109		

H3e: There is significant relationship between education and job satisfaction.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	63.080 ^a	15	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	46.613	15	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.162	1	0.687
N of Valid Cases	109		

Hypothesis 4: There is significant relationship between position and work value.

H4a: There is significant relationship between position and making contributions.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	32.433 ^a	8	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	37.433	8	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.050	1	0.305
N of Valid Cases	109		

H4b: There is significant relationship between position and interpersonal harmony.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.110 ^a	8	0.196
Likelihood Ratio	15.868	8	0.044
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.374	1	0.541
N of Valid Cases	109		

H4c: There is significant relationship between position and work–life balance.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.411 ^a	8	0.179
Likelihood Ratio	14.160	8	0.078
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.968	1	0.325
N of Valid Cases	109		

H4d: There is significant relationship between position and self-development.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18.968 ^a	10	0.041
Likelihood Ratio	21.152	10	0.020
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.864	1	0.091
N of Valid Cases	109		

H4e: There is significant relationship between position and job satisfaction.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	37.571 ^a	10	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	45.236	10	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.334	1	0.000
N of Valid Cases	109		

Hypothesis 5: There is significant relationship between working experience and work value.

H5a: There is significant relationship between working experience and making contributions.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	34.863 ^a	16	0.004
Likelihood Ratio	36.695	16	0.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.537	1	0.215
N of Valid Cases	109		

H5b: There is significant relationship between working experience and interpersonal harmony.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	37.745 ^a	16	0.002
Likelihood Ratio	43.129	16	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.576	1	0.448
N of Valid Cases	109		

H5c: There is significant relationship between working experience and work–life balance.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	20.263 ^a	16	0.209
Likelihood Ratio	24.461	16	0.080
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.777	1	0.378
N of Valid Cases	109		

H5d: There is significant relationship between working experience and self-development.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	43.472 ^a	20	0.002
Likelihood Ratio	52.174	20	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.126	1	0.723
N of Valid Cases	109		

H5e: There is significant relationship between working experience and job satisfaction.

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	49.781 ^a	20	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	52.025	20	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.341	1	0.559
N of Valid Cases	109		

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite our initial perception in this research, we found that age has a significant relationship with only two dimensions of work value, out of the five available dimensions, and these two dimensions are work-life balance and job satisfaction. The age factor has the least effect on work value in our study. Therefore, managers can pay more attention to the other more important factors and decisions based on age differences are less important compared to the others.

Findings of the paper also showed that there is significant relationship between gender and four dimensions of work value including making contributions, interpersonal harmony, self development and job satisfaction. As a result, we identify that gender is one of the three most important factors in our study. Position, on the other hand, by having a significant relationship with 3 dimen-

sions of work value (making contributions and self development and job satisfaction), has a moderate value in our study.

There was also a significant relationship between education and all the 5 dimensions of work value. Therefore, education is the most important factor in our study and managers should pay most attention to this factor.

The work experience factor is one of 3 most important factors on work value and it has a significant relationship with four dimensions of work value (making contributions, interpersonal harmony, self development and job satisfaction).

Managerial decisions in organizations can lead to higher level of work value among employees, if managers and decision makers know the most influencing factors in this regard. The findings of this research showed that in our Iranian case, the most important factors influencing work value were education, work experience and gender. The

findings of this research can be of help to managers and policy makers within the organization to consider these influencing factors and enable them to manage their organization more efficiently. In the lack of any significant similar research in the Iranian context, this research can help fill the gap and expand the body of literature.

Acknowledgement

The first author would like to thank Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) for its support by proving financial support through Vice-Chancellor Award which made this research possible.

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