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Counselors' Work Values: the Role of Age, Gender, and Work Setting

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Abstract

This study described the work value profile and determined the differences in the work value priorities of practicing counselors in the Philippines. Super's (1970) Work Values Inventory was administered to 130 (N=130) counselors practicing in school, community and industrial/organizational settings. The participants had high agreement on the work values they endorsed. The work value profile of counselors in general implied a shared professional culture with a humanistic orientation characterized by emphasis on altruism, personal development, self-actualization, and interpersonal relatedness. Counselors of different age, gender and work setting differ significantly in the work values they endorsed. Implications of these findings were discussed.

French writer Albert Camus wrote, 'when work is soulless, life stifles and dies.' Values, which give work a soul, never seem to lose its relevance in the world of work. Following the groundbreaking work on values by Kluckhohn and Rokeach, Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) summarized five common features of most definitions on values: "values are (a) concepts or beliefs, (b) about desirable end states or behaviors, (c) that transcend specific situations, (d) guide selection or evaluation of behavior and events, and (e) are ordered by relative importance." Work values can be operationally defined as beliefs

about the desirability of certain attributes of work, which are personal values expressed in the context of work (Lyons, Duxbury & Higgins, 2006). Work

values are considered subsets of values, which are expressed in the context of work.

Counselors as helping professionals are particularly sensitive to concepts such as values. Most theorists agree that counseling is a value-laden enterprise because 1) counseling is an exercise of persuasion in which change in the client's attitude and values is expected (Strong, 1968); 2) such change in the client's attitude and values is associated with positive treatment outcomes (Atkinson & Schein 1986). 3) values are integrated in the theories of counseling and psychotherapies (Ellis, 1980). Counselors' values and counseling practice cannot be separated, although counselors generally feel reluctant to infuse their own values in the counseling process but are more readily to accept client's attitudinal and value change as contributed to the beneficial treatment results if those values are theory-related or based (Beutler & Bergan, 1991).

A number of studies in the United States have displayed a common value profile of mental health practitioners, implying a shared professional culture (Consoli & Williams 1999, Kelly 1995). Based on these studies, the values consistently endorsed by mental health professionals are Benevolence, Interpersonal sensitivity, Interpersonal Relatedness, Openness, Responsibility, Autonomy, Self-expression, Self-fulfillment and Growth while Tradition and Power generally got lowest ratings. These results indicated "a strong core value of holistic-humanistic empowerment for personal development and interpersonal concern" (Kelly 1995, p. 652) characterized a common value system among American counselors.

Despite a common value profile shared by American counselors, subtle differences were found on values endorsed by counselors from different demographic groups varied by age, gender, and work setting. Specifically,

Age and counselor values: The sociocultural perspective identifies at different life stages demands of family life are different (Riley, Johnson & Foner, 1972). For instance, in early adulthood work values involving establishing oneself in the world of work and family are of primary concern other than in middle adulthood when most people have established their family, social relations and work and are thus committed to preserve them. Thus the younger workers are expected to pursue self-expression, openness, and self-enhancement values more than the older ones whereas the older workers to value tradition and conformity values more than the younger group (Schwartz, 1992). In Kelly's (1995) research on counselor values it showed that the older counselors (over 60) valued Power, conformity, Universalism, Traditional religiousness, Material self-advancement and Collectivism significantly higher than younger counselors.

Gender and counselor values: Gender is an important aspect from which work values can be understood. The gender role and socialization theories attribute gender differences to different socialization experience for boys and girls in a given culture or society. In different gender theories women are hypothesized to be more relational, expressive, and communal whereas men more autonomous and instrumental in their value priorities (Schwartz, 1992). But gender differences are small in usual research involving psychological variables. Cross-cultural studies generally confirmed such gender difference patterns but the size of difference vary from culture to culture, which leaves a challenge to future researchers. A study of personal and interpersonal values

among office-based and home-based rural mental health professionals indicated that male participants in this study endorsed more frequently than female participants values of Achievement and Practical mindfulness (McCain & Day, 1999).

Work settings and counselor values: In Brown's (1996) value-based career development theory, worker's work setting is one of the external factors that influences one's career choice and development of work-related values. Congruence between work values and occupational choice is believed to be associated with job adaptation and satisfaction (Dawis & Lofquist 1984). McCain and Day (1999) studied the values endorsed by rural therapists and a common value profile emerged from the results where Achievement and Benevolence are generally highly valued by the rural mental health therapists. But therapists in home-based practice and office-based practice did not show significant difference in Independence and Conservativeness as hypothesized.

Given the important role values play in counseling and psychotherapy, Kelly and Strupp (1992) suggested that clinical training programs should include values awareness in the curriculum so that trainees could become more sensitive to their own values and those of their clients. Values clarification is believed to contribute to the development of a counselor's personal counseling philosophy (Halbur & Halbur, 2006).

Conceptual Framework

The study is based on the proposition that values are beliefs and conceptions that guide and motivate behaviors of individuals. Work values are beliefs about the desirability of certain aspects of work. The Values Theories (Schwartz, 1992) posit that life circumstances determined by variables such as age, gender, and occupational socialization influence the people's value priorities. Counseling is a value-laden enterprise and counselors' values have

great implication to the counseling process and outcomes. Prior to studying counselor-client values positions and treatment outcomes, background information on the value patterns counselors endorsed as one group and subgroups is needed because 'it may represent the values taught in counseling and psychotherapy' (Beutler & Bergan, 1991, p20). The conceptual framework of the study is presented in Figure 1.

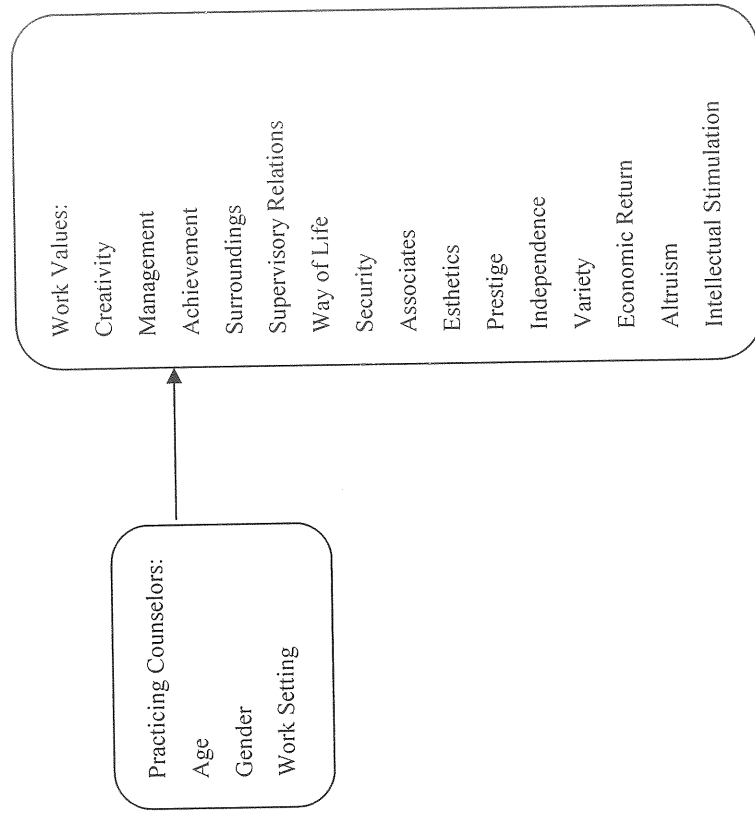


Figure 1: Work Values of Counselors according to Their Demographic Characteristics

Statement of the Problems

The study aimed to answer two questions:

1. What is the work values profile of the Filipino counselors across demographic groups?
2. Are there significant differences between the work values of counselors according to their age, gender and work setting?

Method

Research Design

The study used a descriptive research design to describe the work values of practicing counselors in the Philippines. A survey using a standardized instrument was administered to participants to measure their work values endorsement.

Participants

One hundred and thirty counselors ($N=130$) employed in guidance and counseling centers at different settings in the National Capital Region participated in the study. Table 1 presents the distribution of the participants according to their demographic features. They were categorized into 2 age groups, with 77 (59%) participants from the first group (counselors from 21 to 35 years old) and 49 (38%) from the second group (36 years old and above). Such classification was based on assumptions that individuals in different life stages have different value priorities (Schwartz, 1992). Four (3%) did not indicate their age. There were 43 (33%) male counselors and 87 (67%) female counselors participated in the study. Out of the 130 counselors who participated in the study 81 (62%) were school guidance counselors, 28 (22%) practicing in community settings and 21 (16%) in industrial/organizational settings.

Table 1 Distribution of Participants

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percent
<i>Age</i>		
21-35 years old	77	59%
36 year old and above	49	38%
Unclassified	4	3%
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	43	33%
Female	87	67%
<i>Work Setting</i>		
School setting	81	62%
Community setting	28	22%
I/O Setting	21	16%

Instrument

To assess the practicing counselors' work values and difference according to their age, gender and work setting, Super's (1970) Work Values Inventory (WVI) was used. The 45-item WVI measures 15 values, namely, Surroundings, Intellectual stimulation, Achievement, Associates, Supervisory Relations, Altruism, Independence, Management, Prestige, Security, Economic returns, Variety, Way of life, Creativity and Esthetic by having participants rate statements on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 5. very important, 4. important, 3. moderately important, 2. of little importance, 1. unimportant. The median correlation of .83 was observed from reliability testing.

Data Gathering Procedure and Analysis

The survey packet (a cover letter, an information sheet, and the instrument) was administered to participants at their convenient time and

place. Descriptive statistics were used for describing the work values profile of the general counselors. Non-parametric tests were employed to determine significant difference between groups on the work values they endorsed. Such choice was based on the observed violations of assumptions of parametric tests, which because most of the samples were not normally distributed in this study. The Manny-Whitney test is the non-parametric counterpart of t-test, thus it is most appropriate in the said situation.

Results

This section presents the results obtained from the Work Values Inventory in the order of problem statements in the study: 1) the general work values profile of the practicing counselors 2) whether there is a significant difference between work values of counselors according to age, gender, and work setting.

The Work Values Profile of the Practicing Counselors

Table 2 displays the mean and standard deviation score of counselor work values from the Work Values Inventory (Super, 1970). Based on the WVI, the work values most frequently endorsed by all the practicing counselors ($N=130$) were Altruism ($M=14.05$), Achievement ($M=13.75$), and Way of Life ($M=13.68$). The work values attached least importance by the counselors were Management ($M=10.55$), Esthetics ($M=10.92$), and Associates ($M=11.57$).

Table 2. Work Values of Practicing Counselors measured by the WVI

	Work Values	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Altruism	14.05	1.334
2	Achievement	13.75	1.302
3	Way of Life	13.68	1.364
4	Supervisory Relations	12.86	1.760
5	Creativity	12.86	1.747
6	Security	12.55	2.343
7	Surroundings	12.53	1.771
8	Economic Return	12.45	2.245
9	Intellectual Stimulation	12.35	1.646
10	Independence	12.13	1.810
11	Variety	11.72	2.012
12	Prestige	11.58	2.195
13	Associates	11.57	1.830
14	Esthetics	10.92	2.224
15	Management	10.55	1.957
N		130	

Differences of work values among counselors according to demographic groups

Table 3 displays the results on counselor work value differences obtained from the WVI. The data were treated with Mann-Whitney test to detect any significant differences of counselor work values according to their age, gender, and work setting.

Age. The test results showed that the younger counselors (21 to 35 years old, $N=77$) considered Prestige ($U=1400.50$, $p<.05$), Management ($U=1407.50$, $p<.05$), Variety ($U=1418.50$, $p<.05$), Economic Return ($U=1482.50$, $p<.05$) and Security ($U=1492.50$, $p<.05$) as more important than how the older counselors (36 years old and above, $N=49$) perceived them.

Gender. The results indicated that the female counselors ($N=87$) endorsed Achievement significantly higher than the male counselors ($N=43$), $U=1488.50, p<.05$.

Work Setting. The Mann-Whitney tests were performed to tell not only whether there was a significant difference between groups, but also where exactly the difference lied. The Mann-Whitney test was thus performed three times between groups (Test 1: school setting compared to community setting; Test 2: school setting compared to industrial/organizational setting; Test 3: community setting compared to industrial/organizational setting). To control the Type I error rate, the .05 critical level of significance had to be adjusted. It was divided by the number of Mann-Whitney tests to be performed. Therefore in this study .0167 (.05/3) was used as the critical level of significance instead of .05 to determine if the difference between the two groups compared was significant.

The Mann-Whitney test results showed that counselors practicing in the community setting attached more importance on work values such as Independence ($U=724.50, p<.0167$) and Way of Life ($U=773.00, p<.0167$) than school counselors. The test also showed that the community counselors endorsed Creativity ($U=810.50, ns, .0167<p<.05$) relatively more than school counselors, though the difference was not statistically significant. For counselors practicing in school setting and industrial/organizational setting, Altruism ($U=563.50, p<.0167$) was given more importance by school counselors than those practicing in the industrial settings. But the later tended to value Management ($U=615.00, ns, .0167<p<.05$) relatively more than the former, even the difference was not statistically significant. Based on the test results the community counselors and industrial counselors didn't differ significantly on work values they endorsed. But those practicing in industrial

settings seemed to attach more importance to Management ($U=179.00, ns, .0167<p<.05$), Prestige ($U=191.00, ns, .0167<p<.05$), Economic Return ($U=191.50, ns, .0167<p<.05$) and Variety ($U=198.00, ns, .0167<p<.05$) than community counselors. However the community counselors valued Altruism ($U=196.00, ns, .0167<p<.05$) relatively more than those from the I/O settings.

Discussion

The study found a high agreement on work value priorities among Filipino practicing counselors across demographic and professional groups. Altruism, which represents social service values and interest, was highly valued by all participants no matter their age, gender, and work setting. Although the scores of this value might have been inflated by social desirability (Super, 1970), but the consistent endorsement of Altruism as the top work value is congruent with the benevolent nature of the counseling profession. High ranks of Achievement and Way of Life indicated a self-enhancing, self-actualizing tendency which is unique to the counseling professionals who are well-informed about the humanistic orientation of the profession.

The score of the Associates subscale on the Work Values Inventory was believed to be much deflated perhaps due to some different comprehension and maybe feeling attached to a statement that measures this scale, as observed by the researcher. One statement that measures this work value was 'work in which you are one of the gang.' It seemed most participants gave much lower rating to this statement (mostly 1, or 2 on a 5-point Likert-scale) but much higher rating (mostly 5) to the other two statements that measure the same work value. When re-examined with this observation in mind, the adjusted ranking for Associates, together with counselors' high regard to Supervisory Relations implied the relatively high valuing of interpersonal sensitivity and relatedness. The collectivist cultural aspect of the Philippine society which emphasized interpersonal relations was reflected in the findings.

Generally the practicing counselors showed moderate interests in work values that promote independence, stimulation, and materialistic reward from work (Schwartz, 1992). Such value patterns seemed to imply a fairly balanced attitude towards stability and change, preservation and innovation, conformity and self-direction.

Least endorsement of the Management reflected the average counselors' reluctance to exercise authority over others and to direct others. The result might have been deflated due to social desirability, as might be the case with other work values like Prestige and Independence (Super, 1970). Pursuit of some self-direction values might conflict with one's expression of interpersonal and altruistic values in reality (Schwartz, 1992), therefore the low endorsement of values on the self-direction theme was consistent with the collectivist orientation of Filipino culture that the counselors. Little importance attached to Esthetics by counselors in general was consistent with

Table 3 Mean Score Differences between Counselors' Work Values according to Their Age, Gender, Training Level and Work Setting

Work Values	Age		Gender		Work Setting		Work Setting		U Values	U Values
	Mean Difference	U Values	Mean Difference	U Values	Mean Difference	U Values	Mean Difference	U Values		
Creativity	-.249	1739.00	-.036	1835.00	-.824	810.50*	-.490	726.00	.333	259.00
Management	.928	1407.50*	.111	1847.50	.759	955.00	-.848	615.00*	-1.607	179.00*
Achievement	.050	1806.00	-.524	1488.50*	-.056	1094.00	.194	779.00	.250	261.50
Surroundings	-.032	1859.50	-.029	1858.00	-.076	1122.50	.102	840.50	.179	283.00
Supervisory Relations	.466	1670.00	-.419	1646.50	.331	1023.00	.034	834.00	-.298	263.50
Way of Life	.046	1802.50	-.224	1693.00	-.815	773.00**	-.018	833.00	.798	209.50
Security	.950	1492.50*	-.260	1812.50	1.088	896.50	.136	831.00	-.952	240.00
Associates	-.028	1820.50	.227	1762.50	-.411	990.00	.005	819.50	.417	252.00
Esthetics	.020	1833.00	-.395	1733.50	-.666	935.50	-.499	763.00	.167	276.50
Prestige	1.074	1400.50*	-.098	1793.50	.880	952.00	-.847	635.00	-1.726	191.00*
Independence	-.273	1774.50	-.230	1707.50	-1.079	724.50**	-.746	669.50	.333	259.00
Variety	.894	1418.50*	.217	1740.50	.694	939.00	-.616	688.00	-1.310	198.00
Economic Return	.954	1482.50*	.399	1712.00	.996	965.50	-.623	689.00	-1.619	191.50*
Altruism	.065	1884.50	.209	1701.50	.031	1132.00	.972	563.50**	.940	196.00*
Intellectual Stimulation	.284	1728.50	-.448	1564.50	.082	1130.50	-.418	751.00	-.500	261.00

** $p < .05$
* $p < .0167$

findings by other researchers (Super 1970, Kelly 1995). It seemed to reflect a lack of need to express artistic abilities in the daily work as a counselor.

The work value profile of Filipino counselors in general was very similar to that of the American counselors (Kelly 1995, Consolli & Williams 1999). Both counselors highly valued helping others, self-enhancement and actualization, and interpersonal closeness and disvalued having authority over others. However it seemed that the Filipino counselors gave less priority to self-direction values than their Western counterparts. The collectivist orientation in the local culture may have affected the endorsement of values along the self-direction theme.

Differences on Counselors' Work Values

The results indicated significant difference in work values of counselors varying in age, gender and work setting.

Age The counselors in their early adulthood valued gaining recognition and approval from others, exercising control at work, experiencing new things and change in life, gaining materialistic reward from work significantly higher than counselors in their middle adulthood. The younger counselors are currently in a life stage where they start establishing their family and career, which promotes the expression of the work values related to the work context rather than the work content. The value patterns of the younger counselors reflected their developmental needs in early adulthood.

Gender Generally speaking men and women counselors seemed to share a very similar value profile, which is consistent with most research findings under the same topic (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005). Only small gender difference on counselor work values was observed in the results. Both gender groups highly valued Achievement, but the female counselors' endorsement of this value was significantly higher. Such findings were opposite to most previous Western-based research results (Super 1970, McCain & Day 1999). On one hand, the self-actualizing orientation of the counseling profession, the educational and occupational development of the female counselors may have promoted the pursuit of self-enhancement by female Filipino counselors; on the other hand, the Filipino women's culturally-distinctive gender socialization experience, which resulted in the empowerment of women, may have contributed to their high endorsement of self-actualizing, self-improving values.

Work setting The community counselors seemed to attach more importance to self-direction values and showed more openness to change than school counselors. Compared to school counselors' work environment, which is characterized by highly organized structure and mostly available resources, community counselors often have to handle more complicated situations, more diverse clientele with more scarce resources. To adapt to the conditions and requirements in community counseling, counselors practicing in community centers expressed an independent, innovative, and flexible orientation towards their work tasks.

The participants from industrial/organizational settings in this study consisted mostly of Human Resource practitioners. Their main job responsibility involves effective management of personnel and other resources in a company in order to maximize the profit made from human capital. Counseling is considered only a small fraction in their job tasks and responsibilities. Compared with school counselors and community counselors, I/O counselors placed relatively more importance on planning work and exercising authority over others and demonstrated less altruistic orientation toward their work. The differences between work value patterns of counselors practicing in various settings clearly reflected the nature of their distinctive work requirements and tasks.

Implications to the counseling practice and counselor training

The consensus in value patterns and value priorities of the Filipino practicing counselors implied a shared professional culture. Increased awareness and understanding in such a professional culture can help form counselors' professional identity. Their work values profile can also provide some background information to practitioners and researchers regarding to what values might be communicated in the counseling treatment (Beutler & Bergan, 1991).

Increased awareness of the value priorities of oneself and that of the work environment can also enhance counselors' adaptation and success in their job (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). When preparing oneself to enter the counseling profession or planning for professional development the counselor trainees can reflect on their needs for values expression and their values compatibility with the general and specific professional groups.

The findings in work value difference of counselors from various demographic groups have much implication to the counselor educators and supervisors. Counselor educators can design training programs accordingly to assist the holistic development of counseling trainees and the development of their personal counseling philosophy (Halbur & Halbur, 2006). Supervisors can also prepare their programs according to the value characteristics of their supervisees to provide more effective supervision.

Conclusion

A humanistic tendency characterized by emphasis on altruism, self-actualization, and interpersonal relatedness observed in practicing counselors' work values implied a professional culture shared by all Filipino counselors. The differences found in work value priorities endorsed by counselors varying in age, gender and work setting reflected the counselors' distinctive developmental needs, socialization experience, and adaptation to the their work environment. However it is difficult to determine whether it is the occupational experience that shapes the counselors' work values, or it is individuals with such value patterns are drawn to the counseling profession. That may require further investigation.

Recommendation

In view of the limited number of value items measured by the instrument in this study, researchers in the future are recommended to employ more comprehensive, culturally-sensitive value instruments to provide a more complete picture on Filipino counselors' value system. To promote the holistic development of counselor trainees, it would also be helpful for counselor educators to place more importance in the counselor education programs on values clarification and orientation to the professional culture regarding the value patterns of practicing counselors in general and in specific context.

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