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## Work Values and Job Adjustment of Taiwanese workers

Luo Lu & Guo Ching Lin

### Abstract

**This study explored work values among Taiwanese workers, and reveals the relationships between work values and job adjustment (i.e. job satisfaction and turnover intention). Survey data came from 219 adults with full time jobs. Factor analysis revealed the “opportunities to use my personal abilities”, “material gratification”, and “interpersonal satisfaction” were the three most important facets of work values. The analysis showed work values correlated with job satisfaction and job turnover intentions, and that both demographic and job related variables correlated with job satisfaction and job turnover intentions.**

### Introduction

Why do we devote a third of our lives to work? In the past, we worked in order to survive, but with increased affluence, this is unlikely to still be the case. A British survey asked workers if they would carry on working if it were not financially necessary and found that 31 percent of men and 34 percent of women would stay in their present jobs, while 35 percent of men and 29 percent of women would work, but they would try to change their job (Warr, 1982).

Other surveys, which have investigated workers and their jobs, have made two points very clear. Firstly, working is much more than for mere survival. Money is important, but there are other things people want from their jobs. A number of surveys in different countries (e.g. USA, UK, Netherlands, Germany, Japan) have found that having interesting or challenging work and working in a good work environment, are more important than pay (Baron, 1986). It seems that in affluent societies, people come to see work more and more as a means of self-expression and self-actualisation. Work is becoming a means for individuals to realise personal goals and values.

Secondly, significant proportions of employees are not happy with their jobs and would like to change jobs. While the relationship between job dissatisfaction and turnover is often studied, less has been concluded about the relationships between personal values, job dissatisfaction and turnover. Personal values that are at the very foundation of our beliefs are often at the core of an individual. Thus, a mismatch between the individual and the environment in terms of organisational core values may result in psychological distress that in turn may have costly consequences for human resource management. Thus, work value adjustments should be a key concern to HRM practitioners.

People tend to gravitate towards jobs that fit their ‘wants’ and ‘needs’. The discrepancy between expected occupational values and the actual values experienced at the workplace determines job adjustment: the greater the discrepancy, the lower the job satisfaction. There is research evidence (Lin, 1990) to show that college graduates experienced discrepancies between ‘expected’ and ‘actual’ job values, and that these discrepancies affected their career exploration. In fact, some researchers (Mitra, Jenkins & Gupta, 1992) suggest that when an individual cannot use their work values in a particular job, this failed expectation will cause feelings of dissatisfaction that may cause them to withdraw 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 co-workers (Salovey & Rodin, 1991). Furthermore, large discrepancies between work values and the work environment are a major restriction on career development (Greenhaus, Hawkons & Brenner, 1983). This evidence suggests that a firm would consequently reap a less than optimal return on investments, especially in the area of corporate human resource development practices and procedures.

There are other reasons why work values are important to HRM practice. Firstly, work values are generally stable and enduring, and not easily changed by the organisation’s socialisation process (Revlin & Meglino, 1989). This inner driving force may help to explain job maladjustment, especially when there are discrepancies between

personal work values and work environments. Secondly, individuals choose jobs, and people do work. Hence, work values, the fulfilment of personal aspirations and subjective evaluations, may exert stronger effects than objective work characteristics such as pay (Tans & Feij, 2001).

What are values then? They are basic convictions about what are personally or socially preferred modes of conduct or goals (Rokeach, 1973). Values are judgmental in the sense that they convey an individual's ideas about what is right, good or desirable. Work values similarly reflect the expected rewards offered by a job (Kalleberg, 1977).

One of the most well known ways to classify work values was offered by Super (1970), which encompassed 15 distinct work values. Super conceptualised these work values as;

- Achievement
- Management
- Aesthetics
- Prestige
- Altruism
- Security
- Associates
- Supervisory relations
- Creativity
- Surroundings
- Economic returns
- Variety
- Independence
- Way of life
- Intellectual stimulation

Since this early research many studies have been conducted on work value preferences in more developed countries, but few studies have been done in East Asia. Given the cultural divide and the state of economic and social development, it is unlikely the Chinese Taiwanese workforce will share the same work values as their Western counterparts. To better understand these relationships, a study was conducted with a representative sample of Taiwanese employees.

## Methodology

This present study explored the important work values of Chinese workers in Taiwan. In addition to establishing work relevant values, assessment was undertaken to determine how these important work values relate to job adjustment, as measured by job satisfaction and turnover intention. A definition of job satisfaction, which associates the individual's cognitive, affective, and evaluative reactions towards their job, was used as provided by Greenberg and Baron (1997). The study controlled for other features such as personal, job and economic factors. The final sample comprised 219 adults, aged between 18 and 65 years old, from the metropolitan city of Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Trained interviewers, using structured questionnaires, interviewed all participants.

Work values were measured against 15 items (the item with highest factor loading from each of the 15 dimensions) from the Chinese version of Super's Work Value Inventory (Super, 1970), and later contributions to the scale, made by Guo (1982) and Hsia and You (1984). As the Taiwanese employees are increasingly concerned with 'Good company welfare schemes', this additional item was also included. Our final Work Value Scale thus had 16 items. Participants indicated how satisfied they were with a particular work value offered by the current job (actual work values), and expectancy of this work value in an ideal job (ideal work value). The difference between the actual work value and the ideal work value scores gives an index of the gap between expectancies and reality.

Two indices were used to measure the level of job adjustment. 'Job satisfaction' was rated by participants with reference to the current job as a whole using a 6 point scale - higher scores indicate greater satisfaction with the job. 'Turnover intention' was also reported on a similar 6 point scale.

Factor analysis with varimax rotation was used to summarise and categorise the 16 items of 'actual work' value. As shown in Table 1, there were three important factors, labelled 'use my personal abilities, material gratification and interpersonal satisfaction'. The factors were found to be reliable as indicated by the Cronbach (1951)  $\alpha$  coefficients. 'Use my personal abilities' is the most important dimension in this structure, accounting for 44.8 percent of the total explained variance (see Table 1). This result shows that for Taiwanese workers, being able to 'use one's personal abilities' is one of the most important actual occupational rewards and has the potential to supersede 'bread and butter' issues. Moreover the find illustrates the view that in an affluent society such as Taiwan, work is a means of self-expression and self-actualization. Job skill utility not only satisfies the inner psychological need of being useful, but also gives self identity through the kind of job one does.

Table 1  
Factors of actual work values.

Actual work values items	Factor Loadings		
	1	2	3
Eigenvalue	8.09	1.52	1.33
% of variance explained	44.8	9.8	8.3
Cumulative % of variance explained	44.8	54.6	62.9
Cronbach's $\alpha$	.87	.83	.78
Leadership Abilities	.85	.10	.02
Challenging	.80	.03	.05
Autonomy	.72	.11	.08
Planning & Management	.85	.40	.01
Sense of Achievement	.56	.12	.33
Doing Different Things	.48	.14	.10
Trying Out New Ways	.48	.02	.41
Enough Income	.07	.85	.03
Good Company Welfare	.15	.84	.02
Job Stability & Security	.16	.63	.45
Leading An Ideal Life	.06	.53	.34
Friendship Of Colleagues	-.20	.11	.76
Helping Others	.08	.06	.76
Desirable Work Environment	.32	.12	.57
Fulfilment Of Ideals	.45	.05	.43
Respected By Others	.35	.07	.42

Notes: Factor 1=use of my personal abilities, 2=Material gratification, 3=Interpersonal satisfaction

Data for the 16 'ideal work value' (see Table 2) item responses were factor analysed. Employing the varimax rotation option two factors were established. These two factors were determined as an expressive dimension, which includes having work setting features that are interesting and challenging, autonomy in decision-making, and the opportunity to achieve ideals while associating with colleagues. This set of items were termed the 'self expression' variable. A second factor that contained elements of pay, good company policies and job security was termed 'economic dimension'. Nevertheless, this second factor only contributed a further 6.8 percent to the variance explained, the eigen value was only slightly above one (1), and moreover the two factors were strongly correlated (0.57) at the  $p < 0.001$  level. Hence it was decided to treat the data for ideal work values as unidimensional.

Correlation analysis is reported in Table 3. The demographic relationships are somewhat expected. Specifically, employees with higher levels of formal education, longer seniority and higher income levels tended to perceive their current jobs more favourably in terms of material gratification. Also, more senior employees tended to perceive their current jobs more favourably as interpersonal satisfaction.

Table 2  
Factors of ideal work values.

Ideal work values items	Factor Loadings	
	1	2
Eigenvalue	10.91	1.12
% of variance explained	55.3	6.8
Cumulative % of variance explained	55.3	62.1
Fulfilment of ideals	.79	.32
Sense of achievement	.79	.31
Helping others	.77	.29
Trying out new ways	.74	.31
Desirable work environment	.70	.40
Challenging	.64	.37
Autonomy	.54	.37
Leadership abilities	.53	.55
Doing different things	.51	.47
Friendship of colleagues	.50	.50
Enough income	.30	.82
Leading an ideal life	.35	.81
Good company welfare	.21	.74
Planning & management	.24	.69
Respected by others	.47	.67

Ideal work values items	Factor Loadings	
	1	2
Eigenvalue	10.91	1.12
Job stability & security	.38	.59

Notes: Factor 1=Self Expression, Factor 2=Economic dimension

Nevertheless, the demographic variables were non-significantly associated with ideal work values. However, there were substantial linkages between actual work values and the organisational variables of job satisfaction and turnover intention. These data infer employees whose work values are being realised are more satisfied and are hence, unlikely to change jobs. The content of Table 3 also indicates that older employees with better job prospects were more satisfied with their jobs and are also unlikely to seek alternative work.

Table 3  
Correlations (N = 219)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Age	1.00												
2. Education (in years)	-.18**	1.00											
3. Seniority (in years)	.75***	-.16*	1.00										
4. Income	.40***	.30**	.41***	1.00									
5. Job prospects	.13	.15*	.12	.19**	1.00								
6. Job opportunities	-.21**	.06	-.20**	-.05	.08	1.00							
7. Ideal work values	-.10	.17*	.01	.11	.29**	.08	1.00						
8. Total discrepancies	-.09	.05	-.12	-.04	-.38**	-.14	.16*	1.00					
9. Use of my personal abilities	.07	.04	.10	.12	.51***	.16*	.32**	-.62**	1.00				
10. Material gratification	.09	.16*	.23**	.23**	.49***	.04	.27**	-.51***	.55***	1.00			
11. Interpersonal satisfaction	.11	.01	.21**	.04	.50***	.01	.35**	-.45**	.68***	.57***	1.00		
12. Job satisfaction	.25**	-.09	.30**	.11	.63***	-.01	.24**	-.31**	.43***	.51***	.58***	1.00	
13. Turnover intention	-.35**	.11	-.31**	-.19**	-.35**	.25**	-.12	.12	-.26**	-.23**	-.31**	-.44**	1.00

Note: \* = p < 0.05 \*\* = p < 0.01 \*\*\* = p < 0.001

## Summary

The findings of this study indicate that Taiwanese employees' work values are characterised by multiple facets, with 'use my personal abilities' the most important dimension. Evidence also suggests that simultaneous with the economic rise of Taiwan twenty years ago, employee attitudes towards work have also changed from meeting survival needs to self-actualisation needs. Jobs are no longer seen as just a means of survival, instead they are increasingly seen as means of self-expression, and passages to accomplish life goals and ideals.

What more then can management do to enhance the workers' job adjustment? On the one hand, job enrichment, job enlargement, job redesign, and performance management systems may be introduced that allow for challenge and self-actualisation at work. Counselling and guidance services may be provided to help employees to better understand their own needs and wants, and hence find better ways to realise these ideals in jobs. On the other hand, more varied and personalised company welfare packages may be discussed and introduced to accommodate diverse employees wishes, such as flexible work time, holiday arrangements, and childcare allowances. Money is no longer the only valued reward from work, although still an important one, especially in the current Taiwanese economic depression. Better and more effective performance management systems have the potential to enhance both employees' actual monetary returns and a psychological sense of equality and consequently to provide actual benefits in organisational performance.

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