

A Structured and Comparative Analysis of Personal Values Theories

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ABSTRACT. The present synthesis of current personal values theories is a way to structure the relevant models and their validation studies, if they have any. The aim of the paper is to identify the stage of validation of these theories. Each one is described, their validation studies for the scales are presented, where applicable and prudent interpretation of differences is made. The present synthesis of current personal values theories is a way to structure the relevant models and their validation studies, if they have any.

The aim of the paper is to identify the stage of validation of these theories. Each one is described, their validation studies for the scales are presented, where applicable and prudent interpretation of differences is made. The review presents the different frameworks used mainly for research and those used for therapy. When it comes to analysing human behaviour, decision-making, and social interaction, having a clear and correct understanding of personal values is completely essential. The purpose is to investigate important theories of personal values, with a particular emphasis on the differences between them.

The research illustrates the main characteristics of these frameworks across a variety of situations by conducting a comparative analysis of these frameworks' comparative analysis. The aim of this review is to evaluate the validity and criticism of these theories by analysing empirical research. We also provide insights into potential future research paths and practical ramifications in the areas of social policy and human development.

Keywords: review, personal values, theory, value theory, identity

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INTRODUCTION

We educate ourselves not only by reading and learning from other great minds, but also by understanding our own mind. As the basis of any sustained lifestyle, personal identity and life decision, the personal values are a specific concept, yet so general in essence, that it can be measured as a cognition. The definitions of the concept will be presented in the literature review part of the article. The behavioral correlation of the personal values can be so diverse, there is not yet a definitive list that could suit any person that holds and appreciates a personal value. There are trends in the preferred systems of values categorization that are used mainly for research and the ones used with priority in therapy. The first documented largely accepted personal value system was the one refined by Rokeach (1973)^[1]. Starting from using the personal values in counselling, the concept was accepted by more and more theorists, practitioners and researchers as a possibly valid concept, measurable and useful in understanding human functioning. (Rokeach, 1973)^[1].

The underlying factors that guide human behaviour, shape attitudes, and influence decision-making across a variety of life domains are referred to as personal values. In spite of the fact that they are abstract, values function as motivating structures that represent what is significant to individuals. Throughout the history of psychology, several ideas have been created to explain the existence, structure, and influence of personal values on human behaviour. These theories range from early psychological models to modern frameworks that have been experimentally confirmed. The objective of this article is to examine the most important theories of personal values and to assess the significance of these ideas in terms of comprehending human behaviour in a variety of social and cultural settings.

According to Rokeach (1973)^[1], personal values may be defined as long-lasting beliefs that some actions or aims are more desirable than others. Rokeach's definition of personal values can be found here. In contrast to attitudes or norms, values are differentiated by the fact that they are deeply ingrained and often serve as guiding principles for the length of an individual's life. This is a unique quality that sets them apart from the other two categories. Although the study of values has its roots in philosophy, it has seen significant growth in the social sciences, notably in the departments of psychology and sociology, where it is becoming more crucial for understanding the dynamics of society as well as the actions of people.

PRESENT RESEARCH

The aim of the present article is to identify, describe and present the degree of validation for personal values theories. These concepts are important in many therapy approaches in psychology and in general, in human psychological functioning understanding. They are also used to evaluate political ideology, predict attitudes and understand motives. Personal values are a factor of forming attitudes and preferences, as well as forming a pattern for deciding for a particular option (Schwartz, 1992)^[5].

The theories presented in the article are as follows:

1. Rokeach's Value Theory

One of the earliest systematic theories of human values was presented by Milton Rokeach. In this theory, he differentiated between terminal values, which are desirable end-states such as happiness or freedom, and instrumental values, which are preferred ways of behaving such as honesty or responsibility. According to Rokeach's concept, personal values are the most important factors that determine behaviour, and they are arranged in a hierarchical structure. (Rokeach 1973, Rokeach 1979)^{[1][2]}.

His research placed an emphasis on the consistency of values across time, and following research has investigated the ways in which these values differ to varying degrees across different cultures and social groups. On the other hand, Rokeach's theory has been criticised for its inflexible categorisation and limited degree of applicability across cultural fields. (Rokeach, 1973; Rokeach, 1979)^{[1][2]}.

Rokeach argued that the total number of values of primary interest to people was relatively limited. Consequently, human values can be arranged into a value system which is "an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end states of existence along a continuum of relative importance" (Zhao & Lovrich, 1998)^[3].

2. Schwartz's Theory of Basic Human Values

Using Rokeach's work as a foundation, Shalom Schwartz established the Theory of Basic Human Values. This theory defines ten universal values that are organised into two dimensions: openness to change versus conservatism, and self-enhancement vs self-transcendence. Achievement, power, security, and charity are only some of the values that are included in this category (Schwartz, 1992)^[5].

In addition to being validated in more than 80 countries, Schwartz's model is circular, which can be interpreted as a reflection of the dynamic and sometimes contradictory nature of values. This theory has been particularly influential because of the fact that it is empirically grounded and can be applied across cultures. However, there are opponents who suggest that it oversimplifies the complexity of individual value systems (Schwartz et al., 2012)^[6].

The revised model that Schwartz developed is an extension of his earlier work. It incorporates a more comprehensive and nuanced framework, which identifies 19 fundamental human values that are arranged along the same continuum of openness to change, conservation, self-enhancement, and self-transcendence. Through its application, the revised theory is increasingly being utilized in research that spans across cultures and in the study of how values evolve over time (Schwartz et al., 2012)^[6].

Regardless of the subject matter, there are certain individuals who have a tendency to assign relatively high or low ratings to all values. Because of this, the observed intercorrelations between values are skewed upward. It is possible to eliminate this prejudice by standardizing the responses of each participant; however, doing so also raises additional issues (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004)^[7].

Using the standardized data, eight freely calculated correlations among the latent components for the ten values provide a rough assessment of the genuine degree of opposition. According to the theory, the correlations between pairs of values that are described as antagonistic ranged from .49 to .81, with a mean of .72. Consequently, the notion of opposition between values that are against one another, which is at the core of the value theory, is supported by these facts (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004)^[7].

It is important to note that before Schwartz's famous 1992 model, he co-authored with Wolfgang Bilsky to propose that all human values can be understood in matters of their value system (1987)^[13].

3. Inglehart's World Values Survey

Ronald Inglehart's research of values was motivated by societal changes, namely the transition from materialist to post-materialist ideals as civilizations achieve more economic development. Inglehart maintains that materialist values prioritize economic and physical security, whereas post-materialist values highlight self-expression and quality of life. The World Values Survey monitors these global trends, offering significant insights into the impact of economic development on value systems. Critics contend that Inglehart's dichotomy may fail to encapsulate the complexities of value transformations in less economically developed areas (Inglehart, 1981)^[8].

The World Values survey is administered in most of the world countries, it explores the hypothesis that mass belief systems are fluctuating, varying in historical periods with a variety of social, economic, political and ideological consequences. It does not make any assumptions for what causes this change. Data does prove that the relationships values have with politics, culture and economy are reciprocal (Inglehart et al., 2000)^[9].

4. Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000)

Richard Ryan and Edward Deci's **Self-Determination Theory** examines the intrinsic and extrinsic values that drive human motivation. In SDT, intrinsic values (e.g., personal growth, community involvement) lead to higher well-being, while extrinsic values (e.g., wealth, status) are associated with lower life satisfaction. The theory posits that the pursuit of intrinsic goals is essential for psychological health, while extrinsic goals often lead to dissatisfaction. SDT has been widely supported in the context of education, health, and workplace motivation, though it has been critiqued for underestimating the role of external societal pressures on value formation (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Howard, & al., 2020)^{[12][26]}.

5. Allport, Vernon, and Lindzey's Value Classification (1960)

Gordon Allport, Philip Vernon, and Gardner Lindzey developed one of the earliest classifications of personal values. They categorized values into six broad types:

- **Theoretical:** Value placed on truth, knowledge, and rationality.
- **Economic:** Focus on utility, practicality, and wealth.
- **Aesthetic:** Appreciation for beauty, form, and harmony.
- **Social:** Concern for love, people, and relationships.
- **Political:** Interest in power, influence, and leadership.
- **Religious:** Value placed on unity, understanding the universe, and spirituality.

The classification was influential in early studies of personality and value systems but has since been overshadowed by more empirically grounded theories like Schwartz's. This early model categorizes personal values into six types: theoretical, economic, aesthetic, social, political, and religious. Each individual tends to prioritize these categories differently, shaping their worldview and behavior. The system is primarily used in personality assessments and vocational guidance (Allport, 1993)^[22].

6. Feather's Expectancy-Value Theory (1975)

Norman Feather proposed a theory linking values to decision-making through a combination of expectations and values. According to this theory, the choices people make are determined by the value they place on outcomes and their expectations of success (Feather, 1992)^[21].

This theory is widely used in psychology and behavioral economics to explain individual differences in motivation and decision-making, especially in achievement settings like education and career choices. It suggests that individuals' behaviors are driven by the expectation that certain behaviors will lead to desired outcomes and the value they place on those outcomes. People are more likely to engage in behaviors they believe will achieve goals that they value highly. It is being used in educational and organizational settings to predict how personal values influence achievement, motivation, and decision-making (Feather, 1988)^[24].

7. Kluckhohn's Value Orientations Theory (1951)

Clyde Kluckhohn developed a framework focusing on how different cultures prioritize values. He proposed that all human groups must address five basic orientations:

- **Human nature orientation:** Views on whether humans are inherently good, evil, or a mix.
- **Man-nature orientation:** How people view their relationship with nature (subjugation, harmony, or mastery).
- **Time orientation:** Emphasis on the past, present, or future.
- **Activity orientation:** Value placed on being (spiritual focus), doing (achievements), or becoming (personal growth).
- **Relational orientation:** Preferred social structures, such as individualism or collectivism.

Kluckhohn's theory has been used in cross-cultural psychology and anthropology to understand how different societies prioritize various values and norms (Hills, 2002)^[23].

8. Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Graham, 2004)

Jonathan Haidt and his colleagues developed **Moral Foundations Theory (MFT)** to explain the role of values in moral reasoning. They argue that morality is built on five to six core foundations, each reflecting different value orientations:

- **Care/harm:** Concern for others' well-being.
- **Fairness/cheating:** Justice and equality.
- **Loyalty/betrayal:** Allegiance to group and community.
- **Authority/subversion:** Respect for tradition and authority.
- **Sanctity/degradation:** Purity and the avoidance of contamination (physical or moral).
- **Liberty/oppression** (added later): Valuing freedom and resistance to tyranny.

MFT has been influential in understanding political ideology, cultural differences, and social conflicts, with applications in political psychology, ethics, and marketing (Haidt & Joseph, 2004)^[16].

9. Bardi and Schwartz's Dynamic Value Systems (2003)

In addition to Schwartz's basic values theory, Bardi and Schwartz proposed a **dynamic** view of values, focusing on how values shift in response to changing circumstances and needs. They suggest that values are fluid and may change as individuals adapt to social or environmental challenges. This theory is particularly useful in explaining how external factors (e.g., economic hardship, social upheaval) can lead to shifts in values over time. It expands on Schwartz's static model by emphasizing the adaptive nature of value systems (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003)^[14].

10. Raths, Harmin, and Simon's Value Clarification Theory (1966)

This theory was developed as a practical approach for helping individuals clarify their values through reflection and decision-making. **Value Clarification Theory** focuses on helping people identify, reflect on, and act consistently with their values. The process involves asking individuals to define their values, test them in real-life scenarios, and reflect on their behavior to ensure alignment with their stated values. The model has been widely used in educational settings and counseling to help individuals develop self-awareness and ethical decision-making skills. It is less focused on categorizing values and more on how individuals discover and live by their personal values (Kirschenbaum, Harmin, Howe & Simon, 1977)^[15].

Table 1. Theories main focus points

Theory	Scales	Conceptualizing the values	Practical applications	Critics
Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values (1931)	Allport religious scale	Theoretical, Economic, Aesthetic, Political, Religious	understanding ones value system	not comprehensive enough, although it contains most of the accepted and validated values used in the present research
Kluckhohn's Value Orientations Theory (1951)	no official validated scale	in categories of orientations, for example human orientation, nature, time orientations	understanding ones value system	-
Raths, Harmin, and Simon's Value Clarification Theory (1966)	The main list of values	by using real life scenarios to conceptualize values	understanding ones value system, clarifying the hierarchy of personal values	-
Graves' Spiral Dynamics (1970s)	the guide of all the factors can be used to assess their presence in a person's system	Experience, Experiencing Communion, Existence Accepting, Existence Affiliation, Sociocentricity, Community, Independence, Scientism, Materialism, Security, Sacrifice, Salvation, Survival, Exploitation Power, Assurance, Traditionalism, Safety	the individual and organization in the work place	-
Rokeach's Value Theory (1973)	Mode Values Inventory (1973), Rokeach Value Survey (1973), Goal and Social Values Inventory (1973) ^[4]	distinguishing between terminal values (desirable end-states, such as happiness or freedom) and instrumental values (preferred ways of behaving, like honesty or responsibility). ^{[1][2]}	the measures were used multiple times for political preferences ^[4]	the self-ipsatising nature of the scales ^[4]

Theory	Scales	Conceptualizing the values	Practical applications	Critics
Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (1980)	some variations used to test tourist behavior and values	dimensions such as individualism and power distance	cultural values can be measured	none
Inglehart's World Values Survey (1981)	the scales from the globally used World Values Survey	research on values was driven by societal changes, particularly the shift from materialist to post-materialist values as societies become more economically developed. According to Inglehart, materialist values prioritize economic and physical security, while post-materialist values emphasize self-expression and quality of life	the World Values Survey , which is used globally to identify the orientation preferred by local residents the Postmaterialism Index, the self-expression survival, and the secular-traditional measures—obfuscate the complexity of the value space at the individual level	critics argue that Inglehart's dichotomy may not capture the nuances of value shifts in less economically developed regions
Schwartz's Theory of Basic Human Values (1992)	Schwartz values survey, Portrait value questionnaire	identifies ten universal values grouped into two dimensions: openness to change vs. conservatism and self-enhancement vs. self-transcendence . The values include achievement, power, security, and benevolence, among others	the theory has been particularly influential due to its empirical grounding and cross-cultural applicability, is used in international panel survey, like European value Survey	critics argue that it oversimplifies the complexity of individual value systems
Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000)	different motivation scoring methods, Aspirations Index	types of aspirations	general population	-

Theory	Scales	Conceptualizing the values	Practical applications	Critics
Bardi and Schwartz's Dynamic Value Systems (2003)	no scale	they describe the processes and factors that can change the importance of values, such as social, economic, personal, cultural factors	used to hypothesize the mechanism of value change	some categories may be overlapping
Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Graham, 2004)	Foundation Tradeoff Task, Neuroimaging vignettes, Moral Foundations Sacredness Scale, Moral Foundations Questionnaire	Care/harm, Fairness/cheating: Loyalty/betrayal: Authority/subversion: Sanctity/degradation: Liberty/oppression	used for moral integrity and values evaluation	-
Schwartz's Refined Theory of Values (2012)	Schwartz values survey, Portrait value questionnaire	identifies ten universal values grouped into two dimensions: openness to change vs. conservatism and self-enhancement vs. self-transcendence . The values include achievement, power, security, and benevolence, among others	the theory has been particularly influential due to its empirical grounding and cross-cultural applicability, is used in international panel survey, like European value Survey	-

11. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (1980)

While primarily a theory of cultural values, Hofstede's model explores how values shape behaviors in different national contexts. The six dimensions (individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, etc.) reflect broader societal values rather than individual ones. This theory is extensively applied in cross-cultural psychology, business, and global management (Hofstede, 1983; Nickerson, 2023)^{[19][20]}.

12. Graves' Spiral Dynamics (1970s)

This describes how personal values evolve in a dynamic process of development. Individuals and societies move through stages, or "value memes," which range from basic survival needs to higher-order concerns like self-actualization and global consciousness (Butters, 2015)^[18]. It is used in leadership, organizational development, and societal change initiatives to understand value systems at different stages of human development. The model contains motivational systems, values regarding means of doing actions and values regarding general principles. The use of all types of motivational factors is aimed at understanding the details about a person and their motivation in the workplace (Beck, 2002)^[17].

DISCUSSION

The theories that have been proposed by Rokeach, Schwartz, Inglehart, and Deci and Ryan offer significant frameworks for comprehending personal values; nevertheless, these theories differ in the assumptions that they make and the ways in which they are applied. Rokeach's theory places an emphasis on a fixed hierarchy of values, whereas Schwartz's theory places more of an emphasis on a dynamic and cyclical structure. Rokeach's pioneering work laid the foundation for later theories like Schwartz's universal values model and Inglehart's societal values framework.

Inglehart's workplaces values within the framework of social development, whereas SDT places more of an emphasis on the internal as opposed to the external sources of motivation on individuals. The models developed by Schwartz and Inglehart have been particularly prominent in global research due to their

cross-cultural validity. On the other hand, the Social Determinants Theory (SDT) offers insights into the role that values play in psychological well-being.

With its emphasis on the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic values, the Self-Determination Theory provides a psychological viewpoint on the function of values in the individual's sense of well-being. Although every theory has its own set of advantages and disadvantages, when taken as a whole, they contribute to a more complete understanding of the complexities of personal values.

Theories of personal values have a wide range of applications, notably in the fields of self-understanding, self-development, education, organizational behavior, and social policy. It is possible to better focus treatments in areas such as workplace motivation, mental health, and social governance if one has a greater understanding of the value systems that people and communities hold. For instance, organizations may increase employee happiness by matching job duties with the intrinsic values of their employees. By gaining an awareness of the value orientations of various demographic groups, policymakers may better create efforts that connect with the general public, increasing the likelihood that policies will be accepted and effective.

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