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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an investigation into the moderating effect of measurement type on value ladders elicited, using undergraduate students in a psychology course. It attempts to verify the relation between stimuli type and the priority order observed in previous studies concerning Gottfredson's proposition, which states that the criteria used by adults in occupational choice are priority-specific. The study determined that the relative importance associated with criteria in occupational ratings was found to vary as a function of the presented stimuli type. The results confirmed the relation between measurement approaches and value ladders elicited, and did resolve the conflicting findings concerning Gottfredson's priority proposition to a certain extent. Because a better measure of the true value system is not available yet, a multi-method approach is recommended. (Contains 13 references.) (JDM)

Do Human Beings Know What They Value?

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Values serve as standards for goal setting and motivations for actions. Hence, value clarification has been viewed as central to career decision-making and planning. Brown has actually developed a career theory with value ladder at the core (Brown, 1996).

Various value laddering methods have been proposed and applied. "True reasoning" and rationality have been recommended as the best strategies for value clarification (Savickas, 1995). The substantial studies by Cochran (1983) and Sharf (1984), however, raised doubts about this traditional approach. Both studies pointed out the discrepancy between values derived from different methods. Such findings seriously threatened the instrumentality of all kinds of value clarification and brought out the fundamental issue: can human being truly know what they value?

This crucial issue obviously didn't secure much empirical attention as it desired. However, the contradictory findings of studies on Gottfredson's (1981) priority proposition inevitably pointed to the need of further research along this line (Liu, 1993).

According to Gottfredson (1981), the criteria used by adults in occupational choice are priority-specific. However, empirical evidence for her argument was conflicting. A close inspection revealed the pattern of the relative importance of Gottfredson's criteria was subject to the type of measurement. Three stimuli types have been utilized in related research: actual occupational titles, hypothesized occupations, and direct ratings. Studies using actual occupations tended to support or partially support Gottfredson's assertion; whereas studies using hypothesized occupations or direct ratings tended to support the opposite priority order (Liu, 1993).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the moderating effect of measurement type on value ladders elicited. In particular, this study attempted to verify the relation between stimuli type and the priority order observed in previous studies concerning Gottfredson's proposition.

Method

The research design was a four-set completely randomized 3x3x3x3 repeated measures factorial. The four sets were combinations of two two-level moderating variables, stimuli types (ST) and conditions (CD). Each set contained 27 treatment combinations, which were completely crossed combinations of three three-level independent variables, including compatibility with interest (COI), prestige level (PL), and gender-appropriateness (GA). The fourth independent variable (compatibility with ability, COA) was not completely crossed with others due to its confounded relationship with COI.

Subjects

The targeted population was college students. Subjects were undergraduates recruited from a psychology course. Of the 62 subjects providing complete and valid data, there were 23 males and 39 females, averaging 19.69 years old with a standard deviation of 2.03. Twenty-nine of them were freshmen, 19 sophomores, 11 juniors, and 5 seniors.

According to Holland's typology, 8 of them were Realistic, 13 Investigative, 4 Artistic, 27 Social, 7 Enterprising, and 3 Conventional.

Variable Definitions and Measures

ST and CD. The occupational rating (OR) was the dependent variable, indexed by a subject's reaction to the presented occupation on a 100-point Likert-type scale. Occupations were presented in two levels of ST. An actual occupation was presented as an occupational title in the real world, while a hypothesized occupation was described as a combination of specific occupational type, prestige level, and sex-type. Each occupation was rated in two levels of CD. One represented intention, the will or willingness for an individual to consider entering an occupation. The other represented attractiveness, the extent to which an individual liked an occupation regardless of his/her intention to attain it.

COI and COA. The interest and ability types were determined by the Self-Directed Search (SDS, Holland, 1985), and occupations were classified according to the Dictionary of Holland Occupational Codes (DHOC, Gottfredson & Holland, 1989). The levels of COI were defined as follows.

3: the occupational type = the highest interest type,
2: the occupational type = the third highest interest type, and
1: the occupational type = the fifth highest interest type.

COA was defined in a similar way. COI and COA could not be manipulated by occupation assignment simultaneously since the ability and interest types of each subject were fixed. Therefore, the COA was determined in a post hoc manner.

PL. Prestige level of an occupation was obtained from the Duncan Socioeconomic Index (SEI, Stevens & Cho, 1985). The levels of PL were defined as follows.

3: SEI > tolerable-effort boundary (maximum expected level),
2: SEI = expected prestige level, and
1: SEI < tolerable-level boundary (minimum expected level).

GA. Sex-type of an occupation was based on the Male Dominance Index (MDI, U.S. Department of Labor, 1986). Three levels of GA were defined as follows.

3: same-sex workers > the maximum expected number,
2: same-sex workers = the desired numbers, and
1: same-sex workers < the minimum expected number.

Procedure and Treatment

The experiment took place in a group format, with 10 to 15 subjects, for about 90 minutes. Subjects first took the SDS. After they finished scoring, the six personality and occupation types were introduced, followed by the concept of occupational prestige and worker sex ratio. The last task to complete was a computer program, CHOICE, which was an author-designed C interactive simulated occupational ratings program. It consisted of the following major parts.

Defining Social Space. Subjects first put in their interest and ability scores obtained from the SDS. They then specified their expectations in terms of occupational prestige and worker sex ratio.

Rating Hypothesized Occupations. According to the social space defined, 29 occupations were presented with two of them repeated.

Rating Actual Occupations. There were 29 actual occupations presented, with two of them repeated. Based on a subject's definition of social space, occupations were selected from the Occupations List developed by the author. There were 341 occupations adapted from the

Occupation List by Leung and Harmon (1990) and the DHOC (Gottfredson & Holland, 1982).

Data Analyses

Policy-capturing methodology (Kluth & Muchinsky, 1984) and a repeated measures ANOVA were applied. Based on policy-capturing, a simultaneous entry multiple regression was conducted for each of the four combinations of CD and ST, respectively. The COI, COA, PL, and GA served as predictors of OR. The obtained standardized regression coefficients were then subjected to a three-factor repeated measures ANOVA, with CD, ST, and criterion (CR, with COI, COA, PL, and GA as four levels) as three within-subject independent variables and importance as the dependent variable indexed by the coefficients. The Greenhouse-Geisser Epsilon was used to adjust the degree of freedom of the F test due to the corresponding significant Mauchly's W values.

Results and Discussion

The obtained F values for CRxST yielded 8.19 (df=2.06, 78.33, p=.04), indicating that ST has a moderating effect on the importance associated with the levels of CR. Simple effect analyses of the effect of CR at each level of ST revealed a F = 1.19 (df=2.73, 103.79, p=.20) for actual occupations and a F = 11.48 (df=1.96, 74.56, p=.00) for hypothesized occupations. It suggested that the relative importance associated with the levels of CR was different on ratings of hypothesized occupations but not actual occupations. For hypothesized occupations, the means of COI, COA, PL, and GA were .45, .40, .41, and .17, respectively. For actual occupations, those were .29, .26, .28, and .21, respectively. It was noteworthy that the coefficients for hypothesized occupations were consistently higher than corresponding ones for actual occupations. That is, the four criteria better predicted hypothesized occupations.

> The findings pointed to the fundamental issue about the measurement of human values. Both measurement approaches are not without problems. The use of hypothesized occupations is based on the assumption that people can clearly identify and weight the criteria they use. This assumption, however, is doubtable since individuals' expressed values have been found to be different from their values in actions (Cochran, 1983; Sharf, 1984). As to the use of actual occupations, possible problems are related to the influence of uncontrolled aspects and incorrectness of raters' occupational images. The confounded relationships among sex-type, prestige level, and field of work (Hesketh, Elmslie, & Kaldor, 1990) also seriously threaten the instrumentality of this approach. Obviously, it is hard to arrive at any conclusion concerning which method may better catch an individual's true value system.

Then, what did it mean that the higher predictive ability of the four criteria for hypothesized occupations? Gottfredson (1981) has argued that: "People may have trouble verbalizing the reasons for why they rate some occupations better or more similar than others, and they often differ considerably from each other in the reasons they do give. However, they have no trouble rating occupations" (1981, p. 557). It was also noticed that the reliability of hypothesized occupations were lower than that of actual occupations. On one hand, maybe people's responses to actual occupations are more spontaneous and valid. They just overweight what they think they value when responding to hypothesized occupations. On the other hand, maybe people's responses to actual occupations are less organized and systematic. Their value systems actually function better for hypothesized occupations. Again, it is hard to know when people are showing their true values.

Conclusion

The relative importance associated with criteria in occupational ratings was found to vary as a function of the presented stimuli type. Such a moderating effect confirmed the relation between measurement approaches and value ladders elicited. It did resolve the conflicting findings concerning Gottfredson's priority proposition to certain extent. Nevertheless, another fundamental issue concerning the possibility to truly identify human values was pointed to. Because a "better" measure of the "true" value system is not available yet, a multimethod approach is recommended. Clients may benefit from comparing and integrating their value ladders derived from various methods. In addition, the lack of evidence concerning the instrumentality of any value clarification method certainly leads to uncertainty. Clients should be encouraged to acknowledge uncertainty as a part of the nature in decision-making process, which may reduce irrational expectations as well as anxiety. When clarity is not available, the best strategy is to live with it.

As to the direction of future research, attempts should be made to explore the value issue. It may be impossible to find out which approach is more valid. However, efforts can be placed on finding how people feel about, react to, and evaluate different approaches under different circumstances. A qualitative approach may serve this purpose better.

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