

The Influence of Social Focus Values on Performance and Competency: A Study on Select Organizations in Telangana State

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Abstract

Human values held by an individual in the context of work that are (a) concerned with fellow human beings and (b) those concerned with perpetuity of organizations have to be studied for their impact on job performance and employee competency. Schwartz's 10 basic values - self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence, and universalism- which are very general and relate primarily to a larger societal context, are not employee- or organization- focused. The last five values, namely, security, conformity, tradition, benevolence, and universalism - have little focus on human beings and are less encountered during work. The human values which are particular to the context of work (social focus values) are assumed to impact job performance and competency of employees. In view of scanty research into this aspect of employees and work in this part of the world, a research was undertaken with 144 employee respondents working in different organizations in and around Hyderabad. Path analysis was performed to unearth and measure the relationships between values and employee outcomes and the mediating role of competency. The model was also tested with AMOS software. The research shows that social focus values and organization perpetuity pursuit values impact performance only with the complete mediating role of competency. Contrary to popular view, these two values under examination have little direct effect on job performance, and competency alone predicts performance, and not social focus and perpetuity pursuit values.

Keywords : social focus values, human values, job performance, competency, Schwartz's values, employee management

JEL Classification : J8, J81, J810, M12, M120

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This paper sets out to investigate the relationship between workplace-related human values and their impact on employee competency and job performance. An employee's performance, which is a function of the cooperation of peers, superiors, subordinates, vendors, and customers, depends very much on the 'social focus' values held by an employee. Social focus refers to the warm interpersonal behaviors shown by an employee towards other organizational members. Similar to social focus values, an employee holds another set of values, which relates to pursuing perpetuity of the organization which employs him/her (Rao, Vani, & Meesala, 2014). Employees seeking job security and avoidance of downsizing and closure of the organizations

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hold these values which seek to perpetuate the existence of an organization. The present paper examines how these values predict job performance and the mediating role of competency on performance.

Values

What is important (security, benevolence, power, achievement, etc.) to us in life as individuals reflects our values. Values held by an individual vary in their importance. That apart, what a person holds fondly as a value may not be as much important to another person. However, values are essential since they facilitate biological and personal well-being or self-interest, coordinated social interaction, and demands of group functioning (Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995).

✍ **Values as Defined by Scholars :** Human values have been defined as desirable goals and guiding principles in life (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995). Rokeach (1973) defined a value as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (p.5). A belief about a desirable mode of conduct is an instrumental value, and a belief concerning a desirable end-state of existence is a terminal value.

Super (1980) defined a value as "an objective, either a psychological state, a relationship, or material condition, that one seeks to attain" (p.130). It is a goal state. Hofstede (1984) defined values as "a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others" (p.18). A more elaborate definition was given by Schwartz (1992), who defined values as "desirable states, objects, goals, or behaviors, transcending specific situations and applied as normative standards to judge and to choose among alternative modes of behavior" (p.2). Schwartz insisted that values transcend specific actions and situations. However, the items used in Schwartz Value Survey do not relate to work context and employees pursuing continued existence of an organization. Values are "abstract ideals, positive or negative, not tied to any specific object or situation, representing a person's beliefs about modes of conduct and ideal terminal modes" (Rokeach, 1968, p.124). Personal values or individual values are the values to which an individual is committed and which influence his behavior (Theodorson & Achilles, 1969).

A few more definitions presented below give more clarity on the concept of values :

Values are trans-situational goals that serve as guiding principles in people's lives (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Individuals use their personal values as criteria to select and justify actions and to evaluate people and events (Schwartz, 1992).

An Overview of Values

Self-transcendence and conservation are two broad motivational goals that are highly relevant to the organizational life where team spirit, empathy, cordial interpersonal relations, and cooperation with others are essential. Certain organizational situations where these interpersonal behaviors are highly important include :

- (1) Understanding the customers' needs and helping them to solve their problems,
- (2) Coordinating with colleagues,
- (3) Securing the cooperation of the superiors in pursuing goals,
- (4) Securing the cooperation of vendors,
- (5) Securing the cooperation of the media and the general public.

Positive outcomes in the aforementioned situations require 'sweet' interpersonal relations- alternatively called 'social focus'. For a success in this 'positive social focus situation pentagon,' a member of the organization has to be driven by his two mental states postulated by Schwartz: (a) self-transcendence and (b) conservation. These two broad mental states result from pursuit of five motivational goals (values) : (a) universalism, (b) benevolence, (c)

tradition, (d) conformity, and (e) security. A brief discussion on each of these five motivational goals and values is as follows:

Universalism is about caring for others and the environment; this goal arises from the realization about resource inadequacy of self and small groups. The items used in Schwartz's value survey (SVS) relate to equality, tolerance, care for nature, world peace, social justice, and unity with nature. Among them, world peace and unity with nature are not at all related to the workplace, which is our research setting. Social justice, care for nature, and equality are distantly related. Coming to the organizational context, after a review of the items used, it was felt that a different set of items are required for measuring universalism. In a broad sense, an employee's performance depends heavily on the other individualism in addition to his/her own efficiency and the help that comes from outside his/her small groups.

Benevolence is about taking care of all those around him/her. This goal arises from the need of being connected with (being saved from not being isolated) and accepted by the people around. The items in Schwartz's value survey relate to helping, loyalty, supporting others, and forgiveness. Benevolence, in fact, is highly relevant to a person at the workplace. As an employee, one's entrepreneurial behaviors, and quiet and relaxed states of mind result from this sense of belonging, which, in turn, depends on his/her benevolence. However, workplace lingo is different from that used in SVS. Hence, items with a different wording had to be made.

Tradition is about respecting the culture and religion to which a person belongs. The items used in SVS relate to satisfaction with fate, religion, preference for traditional ways, and humbleness. This apparently relates more to the non-organizational context. The new era workplace is arguably neutral about religion and culture. Hence, the items different from those used in SVS have to be used in the research instrument. Taken in a broader sense, it should mean respecting what has gone before - customary practices and preservation of the world order. From the workplace viewpoint, an employee should not rock the boat and should accept what others respect - all customary practices and current systems. When the customs are accepted by an employee without questioning them, people around him/her will not feel threatened, and moreover, will cooperate with him/her in all his/her pursuits.

Conformity is about restraining oneself from upsetting or harming others, and meeting social expectations; obedience, self-discipline, politeness, and honoring elders. The items used in SVS relate to obedience, good behavior, respect for parents, and politeness. Respect for parents is not at all relevant at the workplace. Politeness and good behavior are identical as far as workplace is concerned and so, one is redundant. Hence, a set of different items had to be made. From the workplace point of view, these conformity behaviors are shown to elicit cooperation from others, which is essential for an employee's display of optimum performance.

Security is about ensuring, to a greater degree, the health and safety of self and stability of the society in respect of relationships, livelihoods, and resources required for living. Security means absence of threat to one's current comfortable existence. The items used in SVS relate to safe environment, national security, tidiness, health, and social order. Among them, national security is not all relevant to the workplace. Safe environment, health, and social order are distantly related to the workplace. Hence, a different scale had to be made. In the workplace context, security relates to stable employment and safety from physical harm.

The social focus values discussed above are general, and so, not exclusively applicable to the workplace. There was a need to separate workplace-related values which, of course, share certain common ground with the aforementioned five Schwartz values. This gap had to be bridged. There is no denying the fact that these five values are trans-situational and so cover the work context too. However, since the purpose of the present research is to understand the impact of work-related human values on competency and performance, a new value measurement scale had to be designed.

Impact of Values on Workplace Outcomes

Values held by individuals might either constrain or enhance the employees' performance in the organization (Rowley & Benson, 2002). This assumption is crying for empirical proof. However, most studies have investigated the prevalence of values per se rather than examining the role of values on social behaviors,

particularly workplace behaviors like competency development and performance (Roe & Ester, 1999). Most value researchers seem to have adopted a narrow focus. A brief overview of such studies is presented next.

In their study with teachers and education students, Ros, Schwartz, and Surkiss (1999) found a direct relationship between basic human values and approaches to work. According to Kerr (1983), deep-rooted normative beliefs of individuals underlie choice of certain best practices and, that way, their final performance. Fry, Vitucci, and Cedillo (2005) and Fry, Hannah, Noel, and Walumbwa (2011) found a positive relationship between spiritual leadership (as reflected by benevolence, universalism, tradition, and conformity) and productivity in military units. However, the impact of values on workplace outcomes is yet to be established.

The study of Koivula (2008) on 1314 employees of a steel company investigated the influence of values on attitude towards organizational change and knowledge sharing; the study investigated if the values prevailed in manual workers also. It was found that value structures were similar in both university students and manual workers. The study showed that, for low conformity employees, universalism and benevolence were positively associated with attitudes towards change. Workplaces high on self-transcendence and conformity and low on self-enhancement showed higher levels of learning. However, this study did not touch on competency and performance.

Roe and Ester (1999), having realized the need for classifying values, suggested an integrative model which covered three elements- general values (life's goals), work values (work outcomes), and work activities (occupational choice, role acceptance, etc.) - and three levels - country (society in general), groups (occupational or organizational), and individuals (personal). However, based on this model, work-related values were neither measured nor their relationship with work outcomes was investigated. Notwithstanding the foregoing, instruments like work values inventory were developed to understand the linkage between occupation choice and work values among the youth in United States of America.

The study of Vijayakumar (2007), using work values as a mediating variable, investigated the relationship of management style on perceptions of organizational climate. The study found a relationship between them with work values as a mediating variable. It did not touch upon the relationship between work-related values and organizational outcomes like competency development and performance.

The empirical study of Kaushal and Janjhua (2007) showed a relation between personal values and work values. Work values studied included dutifulness, timeliness, teamwork, self-efficacy, emotional stability, responsibility, ethical orientation, and quality of work. However, the study did not investigate the relationship between values and work outcomes.

Diskiėne and Goštautas (2010), in their study on employees in an IT and communications company in Lithuania, found that there existed a significant positive relationship between individual and organizational values and job satisfaction. However, this study did not go into work-related values and organizational outcomes.

Social Focus Values

Social focus values are workplace-related human values. They encompass universalism, benevolence, security, tradition, and conformity. However, they lack the specificity to work context. Schwartz's 10 values do not take into consideration helping the people in the work context, particularly, vendors, customers, peers, superiors, and subordinates. Hence, a new scale for measuring social focus values held by an employee was constructed and used in this research.

Organization Perpetuity Pursuit Value

Another workplace value which was not segregated from general values contained by value theories is 'organization perpetuity pursuit value,' this too is an organizationally beneficial behavior, which is close in meaning to organizational citizenship behavior, with certain distinct dimensions. Organization citizenship

behavior is characterized by (a) altruism, (b) civic virtue, (c) conscientiousness, (d) courtesy, and (e) sportsmanship. There are certain other extra-role behaviors like safeguarding and improving organizational systems, suggesting improvements, collaborating with other well-meaning employees in safeguarding the continued existence of the organization, and being wary of persons taking undue advantage of an organization in certain situations. These behaviors are desirable in and relevant to sick organizations, organizations facing closure or downsizing, and countries where corruption is rampant (like India).

A question that pops up in mind is: If good employees think and do more about others like the public relations executives do, will they give less than desirable priority to competence? Do employees holding social focus values depend more on interpersonal relations to the utter neglect of acquiring competencies? This paper will clear this question too.

Competency's Connection with Job Performance

Competency predicts job performance (McClelland, 1973). A competency is the capability of applying or using knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and personal characteristics to successfully perform critical work tasks, specific functions, or operate in a given role or position. Personal characteristics may be mental/intellectual/cognitive, social/emotional/attitudinal, and physical/psychomotor attributes necessary to perform the job (Dubois, 1993; Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999).

Since competencies are the significant predictors of job performance, their role cannot be ignored in this research conducted for understanding the role of social focus and perpetuity pursuit values in increased job performance; hence, this research investigates if competency mediates the relationship of social focus values and organization perpetuity pursuit values with job performance.

Research Question

Do workplace social focus values and organization perpetuity pursuit values impact job performance either directly or indirectly through competency?

Hypotheses

↪ **Hypothesis 1:** Workplace social focus values impact job performance with direct effect and with indirect effect through competency.

↪ **Hypotheses 2:** Organization perpetuity pursuit values impact job performance with direct effect and with indirect effect through competency.

Methodology

An instrument consisting of measures on workplace Social Focus Values, Organization Perpetuity Pursuit Values, and Competency was circulated to 250 middle and lower level managers and non-managers working in different organizations in the city of Hyderabad in Telangana state of India. We received 144 duly filled questionnaires, and hence, the response ratio is 57.6%. The responses cover a cross-section of ages, gender, levels, salaries, and service lengths.

The 'Workplace Social Focus Value' scale consists of the following items. Its Cronbach's alpha is 0.859.

- (1) I love all human beings that I happen to meet in my daily work life.
- (2) I love the people who are around me while at work.

- (3) I would voluntarily seek to help others.
- (4) I am polite to everyone.
- (5) I believe my willingness to help others will help my organization.
- (6) I always guide others towards their long-term welfare.

Organization Perpetuity Pursuit Value (Cronbach's alpha: 0.840).

- (1) I always respect the systems of my organization.
- (2) I always suggest improvements in the work processes.
- (3) I always work for the long-term good of my organization.
- (4) I am always on the side of persons working for the long-term good of the organization.
- (5) I am wary of forces conspiring to take undue advantage of the organization.

Other measures used and their respective Cronbach's alphas are:

- (1) Job Performance (Cronbach's alpha: 0.792).
- (2) Competency (Cronbach's alpha: 0.825).

Analysis and Results

The study was conducted in October 2014. The data was subjected to path analysis by use of AMOS structural equation modeling software. Workplace Social Focus Values Scale and Organization Perpetuity Pursuit Value are used as predictor variables and Job Performance is used as the criterion variable. Competency is used as a mediating variable (Figure 1). The regression weight of Social Focus Values to Competency as the criterion variable is 0.44 and that of Perpetuity Pursuit Value is 0.363 (Tables 1 and 2). The regression weight of Competency to Job Performance is 0.903. All the values are significant. The squared multiple correlation coefficients of Competency and Job Performance are 0.529 and 0.477, respectively (Table 3). They are significant and hence, the variables in the model are apparently valid.

Table 1. Regression Weights: (Group Number 1 - Default Model)

			Estimate	SE	CR	P	Label
Competency	<---	Social Focus Values	.230	.037	6.249	***	
Competency	<---	Perpetuity Pursuit Values	.222	.043	5.192	***	
Job Performance	<---	Competency	1.457	.134	10.861	***	

Table 2. Standardized Regression Weights: (Group Number 1 - Default Model)

			Estimate
Competency	<---	Social Focus Values	.440
Competency	<---	Perpetuity Pursuit Values	.363
Job Performance	<---	Competency	.903

Table 3. Squared Multiple Correlations: (Group Number 1 - Default Model)

	Estimate
Competency	.529
Job Performance	.477

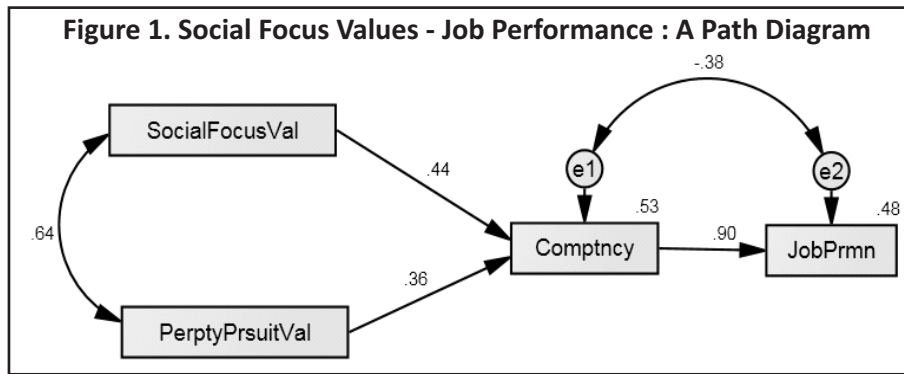


Table 4. Standardized Total Effect (Group Number 1 - Default Model)

	Perpetuity Pursuit Values	Social Focus Values	Competency
Competency	.363	.440	.000
Job Performance	.328	.397	.903

Table 5. Standardized Direct Effect (Group Number 1 - Default Model)

	Perpetuity Pursuit Values	Social Focus Values	Competency
Competency	.363	.440	.000
Job Performance	.000	.000	.903

Table 6. Standardized Indirect Effect (Group Number 1 - Default Model)

	Perpetuity Pursuit Values	Social Focus Values	Competency
Competency	.000	.000	.000
Job Performance	.328	.397	.000

Table 7. Model Fitness Indicators

RMR, GFI				
Model	RMR	GFI	AGFI	PGFI
Default model	.275	.985	.854	.099
Saturated model	.000	1.000		
Independence model	6.821	.445	.075	.267

➤ **Direct and Indirect Effects of Social Focus Values and Perpetuity Pursuit Values :** The total effect of Social Focus, Perpetuity Pursuit Values, and Competency on Performance is 0.328, 0.397, and 0.903, respectively. The direct effect of the said two values on Competency is 0.363 and 0.440 (Table 4). The direct effect of Social Focus and Perpetuity Pursuit Values on Performance is little and insignificant, but the direct effect of the said two values on Competency is 0.363 and 0.440 (Table 5). The indirect effect of Social Focus and Perpetuity Pursuit Values on Performance is significant, indicating the effects are mediated by Competency alone (Table 6).

➤ **Model Fitness :** The model fitness indicators are furnished in the Tables 7 and 8. The *GFI* at 0.985, *NFI* at 0.986, *TLI* at 0.933, and *CFI* at 0.989 show that the model (consisting of Social Focus Values and Organization Perpetuity Values as exogenous variables, Competency as a mediating endogenous variable, and Job Performance as an endogenous variable) fits the data well.

Table 8. Baseline Comparisons

Model	NFI Delta1	RFI rho1	IFI Delta2	TLI rho2	CFI
Default model	.986	.915	.989	.933	.989
Saturated model	1.000		1.000		1.000
Independence model	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Examination of the Hypotheses in the Light of the Research Results

➤ **Hypothesis 1 :** Workplace Social Focus Values impact Job Performance with direct effect and with indirect effect through Competency.

The direct effect of Social Focus Values on Performance is insignificant. The total effect of Social Focus Values on Performance is significant, but it is due to the significant mediating role (indirect effect) of Competency on Performance (refer to Tables 4,5, and 6). Hence, the hypothesis 1 is partially true.

➤ **Hypothesis 2:** Organization Perpetuity Pursuit Values impact Job Performance with direct effect and with indirect effect through Competency.

The direct effect of Organization Perpetuity Pursuit Values on Performance is insignificant. The total effect of Organization Perpetuity Pursuit Values on performance is significant, but it is due to the significant mediating role (indirect effect) of Competency on Performance (refer to Tables 4,5, and 6). Hence, the hypothesis 2 is also partially true.

Conclusion

Path analysis performed to unearth and measure the relationships between Social Focus and Organization Perpetuity Pursuit Values, Employee Performance, and the mediating role of Competency on Job Performance throws up interesting results. The model was also tested with AMOS software. The research shows that Social Focus Values and Organization Perpetuity Pursuit Values impact Performance with the complete mediating role of Competency. It is shocking to note that these two values under examination had little direct effect on Job Performance. Performance is an outcome of competency, but not values. Hence, it is needless to say that values predict competency.

Managerial Implications

Since competency has a stronger influence on performance rather than perpetuity value and social focus value, organizations striving to improve productivity should focus on competency. However, it should be noted that competency is influenced by social focus and perpetuity values. The research findings would help organizations in choosing between competency efforts, social focus, and perpetuity values.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

This study was conducted in the Telangana state of India; and hence, the results cannot be generalized. The sample size too is quite small, which is another limitation of the study.

The research should be conducted on a larger sample covering several states of India. The study should be replicated over different points of time in the future to check if the findings would be valid in the future, which will witness the prevalence of different forms of work and culture .

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