



# Work values system development during adolescence<sup>☆</sup>

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## Abstract

Work values stability, change, and development can be appreciably reduced to a living system model [Ford, D. H. (1994). *Humans as self-constructing living systems: A developmental perspective on behavior and personality* (2nd ed.). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates]. This theoretical model includes discrepancy-reducing and cohesion-amplifying mechanisms that interact to govern the change in standard- and goal-oriented work values over time [Boldero, J., & Francis, J. (2002). Goals, standards, and the self: reference values serving different functions. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 6(3), 232–241]. Employing longitudinal data from a sample of adolescents ( $n = 1010$ ) spanning the 9th through the 12th grades, the results demonstrate that the value system develops in a theoretically predictable fashion during the adolescent period. Discrepancy reduction and cohesion mechanisms interact to either maintain or increase the integrity of and harmony between standard-oriented values associated with high school part-time work experiences and goal-oriented work values related to anticipated career-oriented work during adulthood. Exploratory analyses suggest that adolescents' educational expectations influence the relative salience of standard- and goal-oriented work values and the discrepancy reduction process linking the two over time.

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## 1. Introduction

Although researchers have investigated the role of human values in vocational aspirations, choice, and development for more than 70 years (Dukes, 1955), our understanding concerning the development of work values has typically been limited to the use of cross-sectional data and by a small number of studies that have employed longitudinal data spanning more than two years of life (Cotton, Bynum, & Madhere, 1997; Johnson, 2001; Skorikov & Vondracek, 1997). Whereas Deci and Ryan (1985) and Eccles and colleagues (e.g., Eccles & Wigfield, 2002) have placed a great deal of emphasis on motivation in its intrinsic and extrinsic forms to understand, among other issues, academic performance during adolescence, this study seeks to examine a more durable and regulatory aspect of the motivation construct across the high school years, namely, the value system.

Within vocational psychology, Super (e.g., 1957; 1990; 1992; 1995) has developed theory and conducted an extensive program of empirical research (Super, 1962, 1973, 1995; Super & Mowry, 1962; Super & Sverko, 1995) to demonstrate that work values play a critical role in career choices and career development processes alongside interests, needs, and the self-concept. Likewise, Brown (1996) has asserted that the work value system changes and develops through transactions between the person and the environment and that these transactions variably reinforce or suppress particular values. Moreover, work values presumably govern experience, yet experiences may serve to modify the salience of values over time (e.g., Brown & Crace, 1996; Rokeach, 1973). Both, Super and Brown identified the development of an accessible and stable value system as a critical milestone during the course of vocational development that supports the development of career aspirations and assists in career choice making and the transition from school to work.

The present study combines theoretical work from the human values (Boldero & Francis, 2002; Kluckhohn, 1951; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987) and work values (Brown, 1995, 1996; Brown & Crace, 1996; Super, 1995), literatures with living systems (Ford & Lerner, 1992) and developmental systems theory (Ford & Lerner, 1992) to create and test a conceptual and propositional model of the work value system. The conceptual model suggests that work values act as durable (Hechter, 1993), yet changing and self-constructing (Ford, 1994), preferences that can be classified into standard- and goal-oriented work value analogues (Boldero & Francis, 2002). Standard-oriented work values serve as preferences engaged with immediate work opportunities and demands while goal-oriented values serve as preferences engaged with career-oriented behaviors and choices directed toward long-term career outcomes. The propositional model suggests that standard- and goal-oriented values are dynamically engaged with one another (Boldero & Francis, 2002) as parts of a human value system (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987), which is a self-constructing part of a larger living and self-constructing human organism (Ford, 1994) that is embedded within multiple contexts (Ford & Lerner, 1992). Combining the conceptual and propositional model yields a theoretical model of the work value system as being composed of two value subsystems defined on the basis of present- and future-oriented demands and opportunities and engaged with one another in a dynamic fashion such that present-oriented

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