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Work Values of Students and Their Success in Studying at the Study Centre for Social Work in Zagreb, Croatia

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Work values are relatively common and permanent goals that we want to achieve through our professional roles. According to a number of research studies, work values are acquired relatively early in the process of socialization, and they are relatively strong and unchangeable. In this article we investigate the question, whether among the students of social work there is any relation between such gained work values and success in studying. The results show that the value of altruism, which most characteristically distinguishes social work as a profession, is significantly correlated with success in studying. On the other hand, the correlation between utilitarian values and successful study is inverted.

Introduction

The study of social work at the University of Zagreb has a long tradition, much longer than in most of the former socialist countries. The Yugoslav Communists realized much earlier than those in other socialist countries that social problems were part of reality and would not be solved by the mere fact of socialistic development, as it was often insisted on in other countries of the socialist block. The first study of social work in Zagreb was founded in 1953. It was a two-year college. Experts from other countries (especially from the USA) who assisted in elaborating

the first courses of lectures for the social work study contributed greatly to establish the programme. And it was this solid relationship and co-operation with colleagues from abroad that also distinguished Croatia at that time from other countries of the socialist block.

In 1970 a four-year university study of interdisciplinary type was founded. It was called the Interfaculty study of social work so as to emphasize also with its name that several branches of learning were involved. In fact, the courses were organized in such a way that teachers came from various faculties of the University of Zagreb as required by each subject. So the social work students had the opportunity to study at different faculties and gain more comprehensive knowledge of other branches of learning. Unfortunately, at that time the University of Zagreb as a whole was still too conservative for this type of study, and after a few years this innovative approach ceased to be practised. The study was reorganized and became a four-year university study, but without any elements of interfaculty study. Today, the study is formally located within the University of Zagreb School of Law, but in view of its contents it is completely independent. This connection with the Faculty of Law proved to be favourable in many segments. In fact, the Faculty of Law as the oldest academic institution of the University of Zagreb is a solid framework for the development of a young discipline, as social work is.

The war in Croatia and Bosnia and Hercegovina imposed upon social work as a profession and upon social workers as carriers of social function duties they had not known before and problems they had not met with until then. However, earlier contacts established with professionals outside Croatia helped to set up new functional connections in a relatively short time. Numerous foreign humanitarian organizations brought their direct help, but also new knowledge, techniques and skills. And a fair number of our social workers learnt them very quickly. The social work study has changed in its contents as well. A series of new subjects of study was brought on as a result of this new knowledge and experience. What has changed significantly, according to our opinion, is the attitude towards the social work students, and the students themselves have also changed. The new subjects of social work, new techniques and skills have changed the traditional

attitude towards the students. There is less classical work "ex cathedra" and fewer lectures for a hundred students or more, and there are more study groups in which experience is gained. The training of students in real circumstances of social work has been improved. And the students themselves are different. The economic depression Croatia has been experiencing, and which is still deepening today, has brought about a social selection at the University. Students from distant places and from less fortunate economic environment cannot afford to study any more, which results in a slightly more positive selection of students. Our new incoming students completed their secondary school education with higher grades, which was not the case before the war. Therefore we have put ourselves the question, whether a relatively greater success in studying results from this selection or are there other reasons that could be found in a more favourable perception of this profession.

Work Values

"By work or professional values those common and relatively permanent goals are meant that individuals try to achieve through their work role" (Šverko, 1987). Therefore they are that field of our activity aimed at satisfying our needs that show which needs in relation to our work role we want to satisfy and in what way. When studying work values, Donald E. Super devised his own "developmental diagnostic model" to be used in career guidance, in which work values are essential. He believed that the guidance of an individual in the choice of a professional field should be preceded by a thorough examination of his or her work values (Super, 1983).

Some research studies have shown that the system of work values is formed relatively early in life and that it becomes the most important determinant in the choice of a profession (Ginzberg, 1951). To put his idea of a "diagnostic developmental model" into practice, Donald E. Super together with his colleagues started a large international project called Work Importance Study in which researchers from numerous countries all over the world were joined. Scientists from 12 countries worked together, but the most active were those from Australia, Italy, Canada, Poland,

Portugal, the USA, Spain and Croatia. On the basis of jointly set principles in all these countries national versions of the Values questionnaire were made. They consisted of two parts: one common or international, which was identical in all national versions, and a supplementary, specific national part.

The international part included the following 18 work values:

- (1) Ability utilisation—the possibility that one's abilities, skills and knowledge find full expression in an activity.
- (2) Achievement—noticeable results of work, a high level of efficiency, and one's satisfaction at having accomplished a task successfully.
- (3) Advancement—the possibility of making progress and earning promotion, that is of improving one's own position.
- (4) Aesthetics—the possibility of aesthetic designing and satisfaction at the beautiful of the surrounding.
- (5) Altruism—helping others so as to solve their problems and to contribute to common well being.
- (6) Authority—the power to affect the beliefs and behaviour of others.
- (7) Autonomy—being independent in action, solving problems on one's own initiative, and making one's own decisions.
- (8) Creativity—the possibility of thinking out and solving the atypical, of inventing and creating new objects, processes or ideas.
- (9) Economics—a satisfactory income and job security, a high and stable standard of living.
- (10) Life style—being free to live and behave according to one's own norms and values.
- (11) Personal development—the possibility of personal growth and self-fulfilment.
- (12) Physical activity—the possibility of physical activity and development.
- (13) Prestige—the possibility of establishing oneself in the society and enjoying a good reputation, appreciation of personal qualities and achievements.
- (14) Risk—the challenge of risking, the feeling of excitement at uncertain and bold undertakings of any kind.

- (15) Social interaction—contacts with people, enjoying the company of others.
- (16) Social relations—friendly relations and understanding with people with whom one works.
- (17) Variety—change and diversity in one's life and work.
- (18) Working conditions—good physical conditions of one's work and life (Šverko, 1987).

The Croatian team under the direction of Professor Branimir Šverko, a psychologist at the University of Zagreb, compiled the following two scales that were added into the national questionnaire:

- (1) Cultural identity—being attached to the people of one's own ethnic and/or religious affiliation.
- (2) Participation in decisions—the possibility of one's equal participation in making jointly important decisions.

The work within the Work Importance Study began in 1979, and the final version of the questionnaire in Croatia was finished in 1982, that is almost ten years before the tragic war on the Balkan Peninsula. It is interesting that at that time the Croatian team considered the importance of the problem of cultural identity, the problem that would lead to the tragic consequences in the former Yugoslavia almost 10 years after the Study was completed. The second item, participation in decision making as a part of the national questionnaire, was added under the influence of the system of self-management, which was at its height at the time the project was being carried out.

The later research studies of Kulenović, Jerneić, Šverko and Vlasta Vizek—Vidović have shown that individual values combine into "value orientations" according to the following model:

- (1) "Orientation toward self-actualisation." The main determinants of this factor are ability utilisation, achievement, personal development and aesthetics—the typical intrinsic values, characteristic of the person's tendency to assert him or herself by fulfilling his or her own possibilities. Therefore creativity and participation in decision making also affect significantly this factor.

- (2) "Individualistic orientation." This factor is determined by the life style and autonomy and to a smaller extent also by variety and aesthetics. It is also referred to as the "orientation toward self-expression."
- (3) "Social orientation." The main determinants of this factor are social interaction and social relations. These values are characterized by the tendency toward social recognition gained through adequate relations with other people. Other values of moderate importance for this factor are variety, working conditions, participation in decision-making, and altruism.
- (4) "Utilitarian orientation." The congruent determinants of this factor are extrinsic values related to material prosperity and social standing: economic security, advancement, authority and prestige, as well as working conditions. Cultural identity weights significantly with this factor, which shows that marked national and ethnic attachment has also a considerable utilitarian connotation.
- (5) "Adventurous orientation." This factor is determined primarily by risk and physical activity, but to a smaller extent also by altruism and authority (Kulenović et al., 1984).

So the overall result of this international research was a questionnaire comprising 20 scales of values. Each scale in the questionnaire was presented with 5 questions.

In our research study we decided to examine the work values of our social work students and correlate them with their success in studying. We wanted to find out which were those values that were related to successful studying to the highest degree. For the purpose of this research successful studying was defined as regular taking of examinations and achieving good grades on examinations. If Super's idea (Super, 1983; Nevill and Super, 1986) that work values are essential in choosing a profession is correct, then it is to be supposed that success in studying and preparing for such a specific profession as social work is should be determined by those values that are dominant for this profession.

Methods

To define success in studying, the most formal and common method was used: the cumulative grade point average achieved

on the examinations that our examinees had to pass in order to enrol in the courses of the following year of study. For students matriculated in 1995 the average of grades from three years of study was computed, and for those matriculated in 1996 from two years of study. Because dropouts are most critical at the end of the first and second year of study, we believe that our examinees may serve as a representative sample of our male and female students.

At the University of Zagreb students may ordinarily take each examination three times. For the fourth time the student must be examined in the presence of a special commission appointed by the dean of the Faculty. To make distinctions between the students who succeeded in their first attempt and those who passed an examination only after previous failures, we penalized each following attempt by subtracting 0.25 point from the original grade achieved on the examination. Consequently, the grade of a student who took an examination four times eventually was one point lower. However, such cases of three or four attempts were unusually rare among our examinees. (One exemption was the course of Statistics in the first year and Introduction to Law, also in the first year of study, in which cases of even four attempts were rather more frequent.) In fact, the differences between the "penalized" average grades and original ones were statistically negligible. This was to be expected if we take into account our decision that the investigation would cover only those students who regularly completed their registration for two or three subsequent academic years on time. In this way a certain positively selected group of our examinees was created. The relationship between the work values of our students and their success in studying was measured with Spearman's correlation coefficient p .

Instrument

The instrument used was a Value questionnaire for the assessment of work values (V-questionnaire). The questionnaire included 100 statements, each one preceded by, "It is or will be important to me." One of the statements that followed, for example, was, "that I will be able to make use of my knowledge and skills." A Likert's type scale comprised four grades from "It is very important to me" through "It is absolutely unimportant

to me." Each value was presented with five statements so that the highest possible score for each presented value was 20, and the lowest was 5. The grade points earned on examinations were taken from the education records of each student and entered into special protocols in our database.

Sample

Our sample comprised 111 examinees, three of who were male and 108 female students, which successfully completed their registration for the third or fourth year of study. Of 323 students who enrolled in the Faculty [first-time matriculates from 1995 and 1996] in the academic years 1995–1996 and 1996–1997 293 were women and only 30 men. Only 111 of them completed regularly all course requirements on time and were registered for their third or fourth year of study when the grading records of their examinations were being analysed.

In the time of survey the majority of examinees was 19 years old. Almost one half of our examinees were from families in which at least one of parents had a degree of a Croatian university. The share of fathers with higher education was 43.2 percent and of mothers 32.4 percent, which indicated that in these families university education was one of the habitual ways of their social advancement. This fact seemed to be important in the context of work values formation. As mentioned before, work values are formed relatively early in the process of socialization. Such climate was a permanent socialization factor at least in 36.9 percent of the families of our examinees, whose fathers worked as experts on the basis of their university education.

Results and Interpretation

The official grading system at the University of Zagreb is composed of numerical grades ranging from 1 to 5. The grade 1 is failing, and 5 indicates the greatest possible satisfaction of the examiner at the knowledge a student has shown in an examination. The students who enrolled in their first year of university study in 1995–1996 and are in their final year of study at the time this report is being written achieved a cumulative grade point average of 3.043 with the standard deviation of 0.574. The

other group of students enrolled in their first year of study in the academic year 1996–1997 and are now in their third year of study. Their cumulative grade point average was 2.576 with the standard deviation of 0.761. The lower cumulative average of the younger generation resulted primarily from the grade points earned in the first year, the average of which was considerably lower, whereas the older students had the opportunity to “improve” their average with grade points earned in the following years of study.

The first year of social work study is highly “saturated” with general courses, such as Statistics, Introduction to Law, Economics, Political Economy, and the like. Young people who have the aptitude for practical work in the field of helping others do not seem to be disposed for these general and theoretical courses. The following averages of grades are illustrative: the lowest average of earned grade points, that is 1.845, resulted from their examinations in Statistics. This average grade is below the grade 2.00, which is the first passing grade, because the students attempted to pass the examination more than once, and we “penalized” each following attempt. The highest average grade point was 3.653 and it was achieved on the course of Social Pedagogy, which better agrees with the profession and fits the goals and aptitudes of our students. However, this is the range of average grade points that the students have earned on examinations up to now.

Table 1 shows the arithmetic means and standard deviations for each of work values.

The first two columns of Table 1 display the arithmetic mean and standard deviation for each of the work values of our sample of 111 students who passed the examinations and completed all the requirements of their academic programme on time. The next three columns display the rank, the arithmetic mean and standard deviation of a certain work value of other students who enrolled in the first year contemporaneously with our sample, but failed to complete the course requirements on time. The majority of them are behind with their studies for at least one year.

The work values that in terms of their contents represent values of self-realization or “needs for growth”, as some authors suggested (Vizek-Vidović, 1984), hold the top three positions. This outcome is similar to that of international studies (Super, 1995).

Table 1

Hierarchy of Work Values

<i>Work value</i>	<i>Our sample</i>		<i>Other students</i>		
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Rank</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Personal development	18.37	2.26	1.	18.49	2.09
2. Ability utilisation	17.75	2.51	2.	18.10	1.67
3. Altruism	17.38	3.43	3.	17.59	2.50
4. Achievement	17.19	2.70	4.	17.51	2.33
5. Social relations	16.53	3.70	5.	17.35	2.08
6. Creativity	15.22	3.13	8.	15.57	2.61
7. Social Interaction	15.06	3.60	7.	15.67	2.59
8. Economics	15.05	3.28	6.	16.11	2.77
9. Aesthetics	14.96	3.16	10.	15.43	2.52
10. Life style	14.87	3.33	11.	15.37	2.58
11. Advancement	14.86	3.06	9.	15.52	3.03
12. Variety	14.61	3.21	12.	15.00	2.84
13. Working conditions	14.29	3.80	13.	14.94	3.07
14. Participation in decisions	14.26	3.49	15.	14.58	2.95
15. Autonomy	13.93	3.51	14.	14.58	2.64
16. Prestige	13.41	3.87	16.	14.06	3.49
17. Cultural identity	12.63	3.58	18.	12.68	3.19
18. Physical activity	12.33	3.35	17.	12.95	3.22
19. Risk	11.90	3.47	19.	12.41	3.73
20. Authority	11.21	2.96	20.	11.47	2.69

Moreover, we have found the same hierarchy of work values with a recent survey in Mostar in which we questioned students of two different and opposing ethnic communities (Knežević, 1998). Orientation towards self-realization appears to be immanent in the student population in its process of social affirmation. Even in very difficult conditions of refugee camps, painful war experiences, of risky living in a town exposed to war devastation these values continue to be at the top of the scale (Knežević, 1998). This outcome is a proof of the theory according to which work values are gained relatively early in the process of socialization in the primary social environments, and are relatively unchangeable and permanent (Super and Šverko, 1995).

The value that distinguishes the population of social work students more than other student populations at the University of Zagreb is the value of altruism. In a study on the student population carried out in 1995 the other students of the University of Zagreb put the value of altruism in the 14th place, while our students put it in the third place whether they advanced regularly or not (Knežević, 1999). This is probably self-evident because we suppose that the choice of such a study as social work is for a great part is defined by the intrinsic needs to help other people in trouble. The value in which our successful students differ from other students is Economics. Our students who advanced in their study regularly (our sample) put this value in the 8th place, whereas those who did not succeed to take their examinations regularly rank this value two positions higher, that is in the 6th place. So they came two positions closer to other students from the survey of 1995 (Knežević, 1999). In fact, it is the rank, and not the average values, that determine the structure of values (Šverko, 1987). Therefore we believe that this is the segment in which there is one of the more significant differences between the group that was investigated and their colleagues who were less successful in their study.

There are two other values in which the students who progress regularly in their study differ from those who do not. These are Advancement and Creativity. The regularly progressing students rank Advancement two positions lower than their less successful colleagues. On the other hand, the questioned group of students put the value Creativity two positions higher than the group that do not succeed to study regularly. The values Economics and Advancement are utilitarian values, while Creativity is a value of self-realization and we would say that it "supports" the intrinsic orientation in deciding for the profession. The goal of our research study has been to find out to what extent work values are related with progress in studying, which is with the basic "business" in which a student is "engaged" in this period of his or her personal and social formation.

The two highest values of correlation coefficients, as it is evident from Table 2, and at the same time the only two values that are statistically significant on the level of 1 percent, are the correlations of success in examinations and the values of risk and

Table 2

Work Values and Success in Studying Correlation Coefficient

<i>Work value</i>	<i>Correlation coefficient</i>
Personal development	— .007
Ability utilisation	.125
Achievement	— .043
Social relations	— .109
Altruism	.235*
Advancement	— .197*
Economics	— .218*
Working conditions	— .166
Participation in decisions	— .093
Creativity	— .009
Life style	— .087
Cultural identity	— .189*
Aesthetics	— .077
Autonomy	— .063
Physic activity	— .127
Prestige	— .141
Variety	— .273**
Social Interaction	— .030
Authority	— .152
Risk	— .277**

* Statistical significance at 5%

** Statistical significance at 1%

variety. Both correlations are negative in their direction, which indicates that the students who achieved better results on examinations do not tend to take risks and do not lean toward variety. The explanation seems to be logical. In fact, achieving good results on examinations does exclude taking risks, or in other words, the only way to earn better grades on examinations is studying and not risking the outcome. (For example, expecting the teacher to be in high spirits, or that when writing an examination paper he or she will be able to copy a part of the answer from previously prepared material.) It seems that this outcome, at least when speaking of students who fulfil the programme requirements

regularly, does not confirm the prejudices according to which "a grade earned on an examination does not reflect truly the student's knowledge."

The values of risk and physical activity belong under adventurous orientation. In our research study we have found a statistically significant correlation (on the level of 1 percent) between this orientation and the overall success, but negative in its direction (-0.255). Adventurousness, by its contents, of course does not fall under a value that would favour systematic progressing and achieving good results in learning, at least when the present model of progressing at our University is in question.

In our sample, a positive and statistically significant correlation has been observed between Altruism as a value and passing the examinations. From the educational standpoint this outcome pleases us. It speaks well for the intrinsic motivation for the profession the students have chosen. So those students who were progressing regularly in fulfilling the course requirements, made progress, in accordance with this outcome, because their orientation was directed primarily toward the essence of the chosen profession, and that is its altruism, and not because of the utilitarian values in the sense of advancement in the channels of the vertical social mobility and the like. When the overall result of the Utilitarian orientation is considered and correlated with general success, another statistically significant, but negative correlation (-0.231 , significant at the level of 5 percent) is obtained.

As the table shows, also the value Economics results above the 0.20 threshold value of correlation and is in negative correlation with success in study as well. Most probably the negative correlation of this variable with success in studying is determined not only by the intrinsic motivation for the social work study, but also by the reality the profession is facing with regard to other professions. In fact, who has decided for a people-helping career (and particularly if such a decision has been intrinsically determined) cannot expect a remarkable material situation. The truth is that at this stage of social development the greatest part of social work in Croatia is located in public institutions. And employment in such institutions provides at least security of employment and reduces the possibility of being dismissed, but remuneration is much smaller than in any form of the private sector.

There are two other values that are also statistically significant, although the correlation coefficients result below 0.20. These values are Cultural Identity and Advancement. Although the level of correlation does not permit us to speak of a relevant correlation, we are pleased that our students do not associate their cultural identity with their profession. It should be noted that in the questionnaire cultural identity is expressed through affiliation to the ethnic corps of the Croatian nation. In the situation of the accentuated need for affiliation to one's "own" ethnic corps, which still exists in the Republic of Croatia, we are pleased with the finding that evidently this value does not represent one of the most important values to our students. And those that, in the pursuit of a professional status, have been successfully progressing in their education in particular do not experience this value as significant.

Conclusions

Students who have been covered with our survey, in respect of the work values hierarchy, do not differ from other research studies on the student population in Croatia (Vizek-Vidović, 1964; Kulenović, 1984; Knežević, 1999). The highest-ranking values are those that are related to personal development, which in fact are characteristic of the student population. We have examined the correlation of the work values system with success in studying; that is with achieved grade points on examinations. The results show that the highest correlation of the system is with the value of altruism; that is with the value that is at the root of the social worker profession. This indicates that the most successful are those social work students who have chosen the profession following their intrinsic motivation. We believe that a follow-up research would enable us to develop an instrument that would have some predictive value in relation to successfulness of studying. And therefore it might help in the establishment of a system of studying for our students.

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