

On the importance of congruence between personal and work values – How value incongruence affects job satisfaction: A multiple mediation model

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Abstract: This study proposes a novel conceptualization of work values designed to quantify the degree of incongruity between personal values and workplace demands. We define work values as the priorities individuals wish to be recognized for in their workplace, while personal values are those the individual personally identifies with. By contrasting personal and work values, we provide evidence for value incongruence among employees and showed that this measurement of value incongruence effectively predicts key job-related metrics. Value incongruence directly reduces job satisfaction, but its primary impact is indirect. Our multiple mediation analysis reveals that it mainly affects job satisfaction through perceived job meaningfulness, relationships with supervisors, and opportunities for career advancement. We discuss the implications of our findings for various stakeholders and suggest potential improvements for individual and societal well-being linked to the future of work.

Keywords: value congruence; work values; personal values; job satisfaction

1. Introduction

Personal values are a vital part of a person's identity (Hansen & Wiernik, 2018). They serve as guiding principles that influence one's decision-making processes and are deeply ingrained in a person's attitudes, preferences, and behaviors (Schwartz et al., 2012). Ideally, everyone would select and be selected for work that aligns with their personal values. This alignment would make work more pleasant and enjoyable (Kern et al., 2019) and would foster an environment where employees can truly be themselves. However, if an individual's personal values do not align with their job, they may find themselves portraying values that deviate from their own. This paper aims to examine the effectiveness of this alignment in the real world. It will investigate whether employees at higher hierarchical levels experience more or less value incongruence and whether observed discrepancies in alignment negatively impact job satisfaction, either directly or indirectly through eight proposed mediators.

To evaluate the degree of discrepancy between personal values and work and the impact of this relationship on job satisfaction, we propose a novel conceptualization of work values. We define work values as the priorities individuals desire to be recognized for in their workplace. Our definition of work values serves as a proxy for the values upheld and promoted by an organization, which are often challenging to measure alongside employees' personal values for research purposes. The incongruity of values can be assessed by contrasting these work values with personal values. Personal values, a concept that has been extensively researched and

validated through Schwartz’s value theory, are those that individuals identify with. They typically remain consistent across various situations and over time. In contrast, work values can be perceived as the professional image that individuals aspire to project, which may fluctuate in response to changes in their work environment.

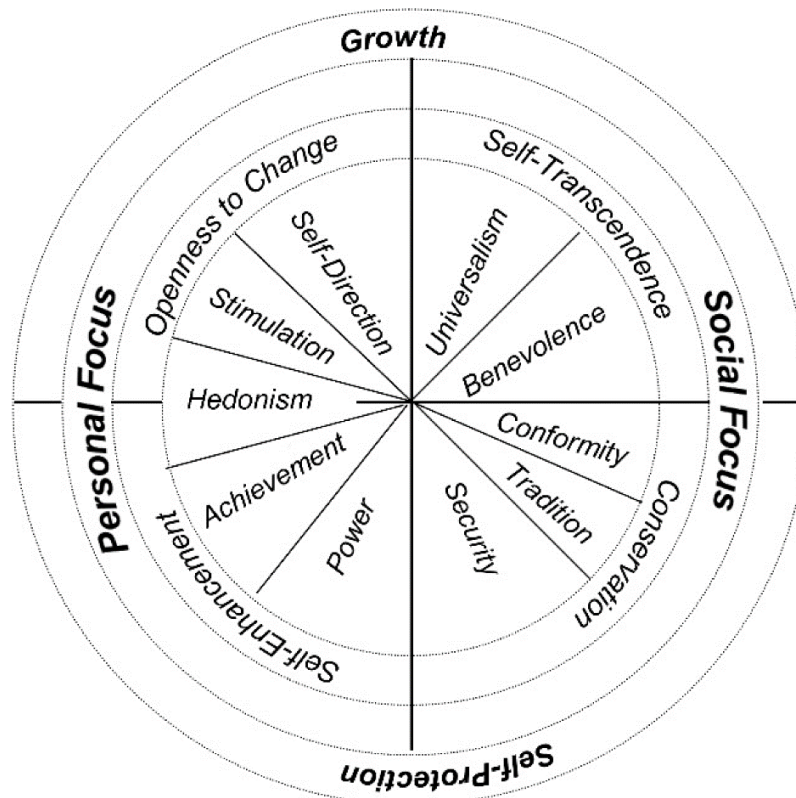
2. Theoretical background

This section defines personal values and reviews research on their relationship to work. We introduce a novel conceptualization of work values and the methodologies used to measure both personal and work values, as well as value incongruence.

2.1 Personal values

Personal values are abstract goals that guide people’s actions (Rokeach, 1973; Schmidt et al., 2007; Schwartz, 1992). They can be considered cognitive representations of the universal requirements of biological needs, social interaction, and institutional demands by society on individuals (Kropp et al., 2005; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). The effects of values on behavior such as consumer choices have been widely documented (e.g., Baker et al., 2004; Chryssohoidis & Krystallis, 2005; Doran, 2009; Ma & Lee, 2012; Tsakiridou et al., 2008). Throughout this paper, we employ the Schwartz value theory to gauge personal values, as no other value theory rivals Schwartz’s model in terms of its robust theoretical and empirical foundation (Jarden, 2010). Schwartz distinguishes between 10 primary values, each characterized by their own motivational goals: universalism, benevolence, conformity, tradition, security, power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, and self-direction. A detailed description of these 10 values is provided in Supplementary Material (1). The circular structure depicted in Figure 1 represents the relationships among the 10 values in the value theory.

Figure 1. Circular structure of Schwartz value types (Leite et al., 2021, adapted from Schwartz, 2012)



The proximity of values on the circle signifies similarity in their underlying motivations. Conversely, a greater distance indicates a higher level of conflict in their motivations. Neighboring values, such as power and achievement, complement each other. In contrast, opposing values, such as power and universalism, are in conflict. This suggests that adhering to both power (associated with dominance) and universalism (associated with equality) can be challenging. The values of tradition and conformity are often grouped together, as they share the common motivation of subordinating oneself to societal expectations. The 10 values are organized according to the importance individuals assign to them, which allows for the characterization of individuals based on their value priorities. Collectively, personal values act as guiding principles in an individual's life. Although they are generally consistent across situations, they may change with age (Schwartz, 1994).

2.2 Previous research on the relationship between personal values and work

Most individuals dedicate a significant portion of their daily time to work (Schlicht, 2004). Ideally, an individual's personal values would align with their profession and the specific organization they work for. Sagiv et al. (2017) raise the question of the source of such congruence. For instance, bankers or managers are typically distinguished by their focus on power and achievement, while social workers are recognized for their emphasis on benevolence and universalism. This suggests that individuals either select their occupation based on their personal values or modify their values over time to align with their work. Judge and Bretz (1992), and more recently, Hicklenton et al. (2021), assert that the personal values of job seekers influence their workplace choices. Judge and Bretz (1992) demonstrated that the impact of values on job choices generally surpasses that of salary and promotional opportunities. They identified four key values—achievement, altruism, honesty, and fairness—and experimented to ascertain whether participants were more inclined to accept a job offer that resonated with their values. In a subsequent study, Hicklenton et al. (2021) conducted a parallel experiment involving Australian job seekers, drawing on Schwartz's value theory. In contrast, Bowles (1998) contends that values may evolve over time as individuals adopt values learned from one context to another. Similarly, other studies have suggested that work can influence personal values (e.g., Kohn & Schooler, 1969; Slomczynski et al., 1981). Knafo and Sagiv (2004) argue that the relationship between occupation and values is not unidirectional. They propose applying a process of attraction, selection, attrition, and socialization to occupational development. Initially, individuals are drawn to occupations that align with their personal values. Once employed, individuals continuously assess their fit within the occupation, leading some to remain in the occupation and others to leave. Moreover, an employee's values are shaped by both formal and informal socialization processes. Consequently, individuals within a given occupation tend to share certain values.

This study focuses on a remaining possibility: individuals neither select a workplace that aligns with their values nor adapt their values to suit their work environment. Instead, they attempt to embody values at their workplace that differ from their own. To measure this incongruence between personal values and workplace demands and its impact on job satisfaction we propose a novel conceptualization of work values.

2.3 Our conceptualization of work values and their distinction from personal values

We conceptualize work values as the priorities individuals desire to be recognized for in their workplace. The distinction between personal values and work values is rooted in the individual's identification with the value in question, as opposed to their desired professional image. Personal

values, as described by Schwartz's theory, transcend specific situations and serve as enduring guiding principles; thus, they are stable. Conversely, work values and the desired professional image may vary if individuals transition to a different workplace.

If an individual's work environment aligns with their personal values, there is likely to be congruence between the desired professional image and personal values. In other words, individuals are incentivized to reflect their personal values in their professional lives. However, if there is a mismatch between personal values and work, individuals may feel compelled to portray values that diverge from their personal ones. In this case, the desired professional image and personal values diverge.

The conceptualization of work values that we propose enables us to gauge the presence and degree of such incongruity and its influence on job satisfaction. Schwartz's definition of personal values suggests that individuals prefer to adhere to the same guiding principles and behave in accordance with the same values in both private and professional situations. Consequently, the potential incongruity between personal values and the work environment prompts questions about its effect on job satisfaction and, subsequently, wellbeing. While some individuals may not be negatively impacted by sacrificing their personal values for professional advancement, others may accept this compromise to avoid the risk of job loss despite experiencing detrimental effects on job satisfaction.

Our conceptualization of work values is distinct from previous definitions, such as those of Berings et al. (2004), which considers work values as "broad tendencies to prefer general job characteristics," or Ros et al. (1999), which regards work values as "expressions of broad personal values in the organizational context." Work values, as conceptualized for this study, can serve as a proxy for organizational values. Organizational values represent the principles promoted and upheld by an organization; however, these values might not be clearly documented, and comparing them with personal values would require surveying a large number of employees along with their employers. Given the impracticality of this approach in many circumstances, assessing work values provides an effective alternative. Work values reflect the values perceived as important in one's professional life, thus indirectly indicating the values upheld by the organization. In that sense our conceptualization of work values relates to the construct of catering recently introduced by Gino et al. (2020). Catering is an impression-management technique that involves acting according to others' expectations and preferences to obtain benefits, even when the true expectations and preferences of others are uncertain. Catering behavior may or may not align with the caterer's own true preferences and, hence, may be experienced as more or less authentic. In contrast to the construct of catering, work values are not concerned with first-meeting situations (e.g., job interviews and entrepreneurial pitches to potential investors) but with the long-term work context in which many people spend a great part of daily life; thus, it is likely that individuals are better able to anticipate expectations and rewards for the representation of certain values.

2.4 Measurement of personal and work values and value incongruence

To assess personal values, we adhere to the Schwartz value theory and utilize the empirical approach of Schwartz, employing the Portrait Values Questionnaire, consisting of 21 items (Schwartz, 2012). Each value is measured through two to three items, encompassing descriptions of individuals' goals or motivations, thereby enabling implicit measurement of the values. Below are a few of the female versions of two illustrative examples of such items. The first item implicitly measures the value of self-direction: "It is important to her to make her own decisions about what she does. She likes to be free and not depend on others." The second pertains to the

value of conformity: “She believes that people should do what they are told. She thinks people should follow rules at all times, even when no one is watching.” Each item is presented individually, and participants are instructed to read each description carefully and to evaluate the degree to which the person described resembles them; essentially, participants must answer the question, “How much like you is this person?” The participants’ responses range from 1 (not like me at all) to 6 (very much like me).

To evaluate work values, we supplement each item with an additional question following the one that assesses personal values. Participants are asked, “How much do you want to be perceived as similar to this person while you are at work?” Their responses vary from 1 (not at all like her) to 6 (very much like her). This approach facilitates the evaluation of an individual’s desired professional image.

Value incongruence is calculated as the average absolute difference between personal and work values for all 10 Schwartz values. Thus, the participants’ value incongruence lies between 0 and 5, where 0 signifies no value incongruence at all. As we are interested in the difference between personal and work value scores, we use the raw value scores rather than the centered value scores for the calculation of value incongruence. Centered value scores are obtained by subtracting the mean score of all items from each item’s raw score (Schwartz et al., 2015). Centering scores around each person’s mean accounts for differences in how people use response scales, indicating each person’s unique value priorities. Consider two individuals who rate traditional values at four out of six. Despite their identical scores, tradition holds greater significance for someone who assigns lower ratings to other values compared to someone who assigns higher ratings to other values. However, our focus lies in determining whether an individual’s personal values scores, such as tradition and all other nine value scores, are higher or lower than their work values scores. Given the importance of centered value in the empirical use of the Schwartz value theory, we additionally provide estimates using the centered value scores.

3. Framework and hypotheses

This section presents our pre-study, which provided initial evidence of value incongruence and served as the foundation for our framework and hypotheses. We then introduce the framework and our three hypotheses.

3.1 Pre-study

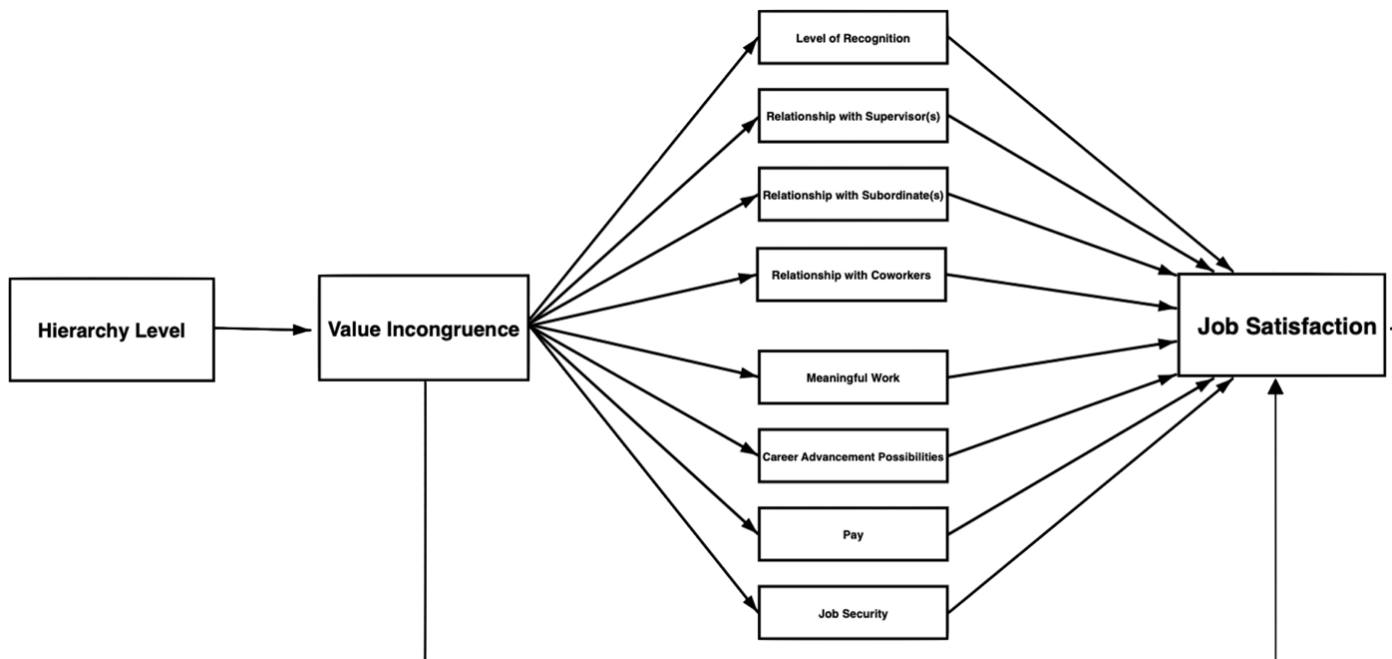
We initially conducted a pre-study to investigate the potential incongruence between personal and work values with 237 compensated participants from the United States on Amazon MTurk. To mitigate social desirability bias, we complemented our surveys with a choice experiment examining hotel choices in both private and workplace scenarios. Both methods provided evidence of value incongruence. As shown in Table 1 (below), surveys indicated significant incongruence (mean 0.62, 95% CI [.52, .68], $p < .001$). Scores for benevolence, hedonism, and self-direction were higher for personal values, while conformity was higher for work values ($p < .05$). The choice experiment revealed similar patterns: participants preferred hotels associated with stimulation, self-direction, and hedonism for private trips, and those associated with conformity and power for business trips. Further details are available in Supplementary Material (2).

3.2 Hypotheses

Figure 2 depicts our framework. We assume that the level of incongruence depends on one’s hierarchical position, distinguishing between individuals with and without supervisory roles. It is possible that individuals in supervisory positions place greater emphasis on their careers and must navigate various interest groups within an organization, such as subordinates, co-workers, their own supervisors, or the board of directors. These individuals may also aspire to further their careers, leading to more potential sources of value incongruence. Therefore, we propose the following:

H1: Value incongruence is, on average, higher for employees with a supervisory function than for those without.

Figure 2. Framework



Value incongruence involves the representation of values that are not genuinely one’s own, thus leading to inauthenticity. Gino et al. (2020) contend that inauthentic behavior increases anxiety and feels instrumental. Meanwhile, Cable and Kay (2012) argue that presenting one’s authentic self is associated with higher job satisfaction and performance, although their research did not specifically focus on the representation of values. Bojanowska et al. (2022) and Bojanowska and Kaczmarek (2021) discovered that acting in accordance with one’s values improves an individual’s wellbeing, although this was not directly related to job satisfaction. We expect that value incongruence affects general job satisfaction both directly and indirectly through drivers of job satisfaction. Based on the literature, we identify eight potential mediators that influence job satisfaction, which we expect to also be associated with value incongruence: level of recognition (e.g., Raab, 2020; Tessema et al., 2013); relationships with supervisor(s), subordinate(s), and co-worker(s) (e.g., Babalola, 2016; Charoensukmongkol et al., 2016; De Santis et al., 2021); meaningful work (e.g., Fairlie, 2011; Lavy & Bocker, 2018); career-advancement possibilities (e.g., Zingesser, 2004); pay (e.g., De Santis et al., 2021; Tessema, 2013); and job security (e.g., Wilczyńska et al., 2016). Based on these factors, we propose the following hypotheses:

H2: Value incongruence negatively affects job satisfaction directly.

H3: Value incongruence negatively affects job satisfaction indirectly through drivers of job satisfaction.

We further investigate whether our study confirms that job satisfaction is associated with both lower job performance and life satisfaction, as established in the literature, hence being of importance to individuals, society, and organizations.

4. Main study

Our main study was designed to confirm value incongruence and to test the three hypotheses. We examine whether value incongruence relates to the hierarchy level of an individual and whether it harms job satisfaction both directly and indirectly through drivers of job satisfaction.

4.1 Data collection

For the main study, we recruited 607 participants from a research panel provided by Qualtrics, a paid service that offers researchers access to samples from their desired population. In this particular study, we selected participants from the United States. We excluded 37 participants who failed at least one of the two attention checks. Given the importance of workplace relationships to our research questions, we further excluded any participants who indicated in the survey that they did not have a subordinate, a co-worker, or a supervisor. Our final dataset consisted of 489 participants, all of whom were compensated for their participation in the study. In the main study, 33% of the participants identified as male. As for education, 34% of the participants had completed high school, 45% had attended college, 20% had pursued graduate studies, and 1% reported having none of the above educational backgrounds. In terms of age, 28% of the participants were 18–34 years old, 37% were 35–54 years old, and 34% were 55 years old or older. According to the United States Census Bureau (2022), our sample does not accurately represent the US population in terms of sex (49% male and 51% female for the population aged over 18) and education level (26% completed high school; 50% attended some college or earned a bachelor's degree; 14% pursued a graduate or professional degree; 10% have less than a high school education for the population over 25). Hence, in our sample, males and individuals with less than a high school education are underrepresented. We account for sex and education level in all our analyses. The age distribution is similar to the overall age distribution of individuals in the US aged between 18 and 75, i.e., potential employees (18–34: 32%; 35–54: 36%; 55–74: 32%). Individuals aged 18–34 are slightly underrepresented, likely due to the fact that we only include individuals in the workforce, excluding students.

The dependent variable for our study is job satisfaction. We follow Fabry et al. (2022) and the Swiss Household Panel and measure job satisfaction using a single-item measure: We asked the participants, “On a scale from 0 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied), can you indicate your degree of general satisfaction with your job?”

Personal and work values are measured as outlined in the Theoretical Background section. We collected data on the important drivers of job satisfaction through which we believe value incongruence indirectly affects job satisfaction. Based on extensive research on the drivers of job satisfaction, we considered the following eight potential mediators: (1) the level of recognition for a job well done (e.g., Raab, 2020; Tessema et al., 2013), (2) relationship with supervisor(s), (3) relationship with subordinate(s), (4) relationship with coworker(s) (e.g., Babalola, 2016; Charoensukmongkol, et al., 2016; De Santis et al., 2021), (5) meaningfulness of ones' work (e.g., Fairlie, 2011; Lavy and Bocker, 2018), (6) career-advancement possibilities (e.g., Zingesser, 2004), (7) pay (e.g., De Santis et al., 2021; Tessema, 2013), and (8) job security (e.g., Wilczyńska et al.,

2016). All potential mediators were measured as single-item measures on a scale from 1 (not at all satisfied) to 7 (completely satisfied).

In addition to the variables that serve as controls (gender, household income, and education), we included measures of job performance and life satisfaction. To obtain a measure of job performance that lies between 1 (much lower) and 7 (much higher), we aggregated the responses to three questions: “How would you assess your job performance compared to that of your co-workers in similar positions?”, “How do you think that your superior(s) would assess your job performance compared to that of your co-workers in similar positions?”, and “How do you think that your co-workers in similar positions would assess your job performance relative to theirs?” To measure life satisfaction, we asked, “In general, how satisfied are you with your life from 0 (not at all satisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied)?”

The study was approved by the ethics board of the authors’ university.

4.2 Estimation strategy

We first determined whether we found evidence for value incongruence. More specifically, we calculated how different an individual’s personal values are from their work values. For each of the 10 values of an individual, we found the absolute difference between their personal and work value score for that specific value (see Equation 1).

$$IC_{vi} = |P_{vi} - W_{vi}| \quad \text{(Equation 1)}$$

Then, to find our main independent variable, the average value incongruence of an individual, we added up these incongruences for all 10 values and divided by 10 (see Equation 2)

$$IC_i = \frac{\sum_{v=1}^{10} IC_{vi}}{10} \quad \text{(Equation 2)}$$

In the above equations, IC_{vi} represents the value incongruence for Value v of Individual i . P_{vi} denotes the personal-value score for Value v of Individual i , while W_{vi} represent the work-value score for Value v of Individual i . Lastly, IC_i denotes the average value incongruence for Individual i

To estimate the impact of value incongruence on job satisfaction, we partially adopted the approach from the paper by Fabry et al. (2022), which addresses job satisfaction using a multiple mediation model. Initially, we employed an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model and regressed job satisfaction on the average value of incongruence. This was done while controlling for factors such as gender, household income, and education level (see Equation 3).

$$JobSat_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_0 IC_i + \gamma_0 X_i + \varepsilon_i \quad \text{(Equation 3)}$$

In the above equation, $JobSat_i$ represents Individual i ’s job satisfaction, IC_i measures Individual i ’s average value incongruence, and X_i is a vector of control variables, including gender (male = 1), household income, and education level (both measured as categorical variables).

To determine whether there are factors driving job satisfaction through which value incongruence influences job satisfaction, we integrated the eight potential mediators outlined above. We estimated a parallel multiple mediation model to separate the direct and indirect effects of value incongruence on job satisfaction. This was done while taking into account other factors such as gender, income, and education level (see Equations 4–12).

$$JobSat_i = \alpha_0 + \beta_0 IC_i + \gamma_0 X_i + \sum_{j=1}^8 \delta_{j0} M_{ji} + \varepsilon_{0i} \quad \text{(Equation 4)}$$

$$M_{1i} = \alpha_1 + \beta_1 IC_i + \gamma_1 X_i + \varepsilon_{1i} \quad \text{(Equation 5)}$$

...

$$M_{8i} = \alpha_8 + \beta_8 IC_i + \gamma_8 X_i + \varepsilon_{8i} \quad \text{(Equation 12)}$$

In the equations above, M_{ji} represents a vector of eight potential mediators. Based on the estimates from Equations 4–12, we calculated the specific indirect effects of value incongruence on job satisfaction via each mediator. This was done by multiplying the effect of value incongruence, β_j , on the relevant mediator (Equations 5–12) by the effect of the relevant mediator, δ_{j0} , on job satisfaction (Equation 4):

$$IE_j = \beta_j * \delta_{j0} \quad , \quad \text{(Equation 13)}$$

where IE_j denotes the specific indirect effect via mediator j ($j = 1, \dots, 8$). We calculated the total indirect effect, IE , by adding the specific indirect effects via all the mediators,

$$IE = \sum_{j=1}^8 IE_j \quad \text{(Equation 14)}$$

and the total effect, TE , by adding the total indirect and direct effects:

$$TE = IE + \beta_0 \quad \text{(Equation 15)}$$

We conducted the parallel multiple mediation analyses in SPSS using the PROCESS macro by Hayes (2022). The mediation procedure yields unstandardized regression coefficients, while the indirect effects are estimated using bootstrap confidence intervals. Our results are based on 5,000 bootstrap samples with a 95% confidence interval. If zero is not within the 95% confidence interval, the specific indirect effect is considered significant (Hayes, 2022).

Finally, we calculated the correlation between job satisfaction and job performance, and life satisfaction.

Table 1. Participants' average personal- and work-value scores and value incongruence

Value	Pre-Study				Main Study			
	Personal Values		Work Values		Personal Values		Work Values	
	Mean	95 % CI	Mean	95 % CI	Mean	95 % CI	Mean	95 % CI
Universalism	4.92 .57	4.81, 5.03 .47, .66	4.93 .62	4.82, 5.04 .52, .72	4.80** .56**	4.71, 4.88 .50, .63	4.52** .37**	4.44, 4.62 .31, .43
Benevolence	5.00** .65**	4.89, 5.10 .55, .75	4.46** .15**	4.33, 4.59 .05, .26	5.00** .73**	4.87, 5.05 .66, .79	4.68** .52**	4.58, 4.77 .43, .59
Conformity	4.19** -.16**	4.05, 4.33 -.27, -.04	4.64** .33**	4.51, 4.77 .22, .44	4.30** .06**	4.19, 4.40 -.02, .15	4.52** .37**	4.42, 4.62 .29, .45
Tradition	4.41 .06	4.28, 4.53 -.05, .18	4.43 .13	4.31, 4.56 .02, .23	4.32 .09	4.22, 4.41 .01, .16	4.33 .17	4.24, 4.42 .10, .24
Security	4.50 .15	4.36, 4.64 .04, .27	4.34 .03	4.20, 4.48 -.07, .13	4.29 .06	4.18, 4.39 -.02, .13	4.24 .08	4.14, 4.34 .01, .16
Power	3.64 -.71	3.48, 3.80 -.83, -.59	3.66 -.65	3.50, 3.81 -.77, -.53	3.37 -.81	3.27, 3.47 -.90, -.73	3.34 -.78	3.27, 3.47 -.86, -.71
Achievement	4.44 .10**	4.30, 4.59 .00, .17	4.60 .30**	4.47, 4.74 .19, .40	4.30 .07	4.19, 4.40 -.01, .14	4.24 .09	4.14, 4.35 .02, .16
Hedonism	3.62* -.72**	3.48, 3.77 -.84, -.61	3.38* -.93**	3.24, 3.53 -1.03, -.82	3.73 -.50	3.63, 3.84 -.58, -.42	3.65 -.51	3.54, 3.75 -.59, -.44
Stimulation	4.00 -.34	3.83, 4.17 -.48, -.21	4.03 -.27	3.89, 4.18 -.39, -.16	3.70 -.53	3.59, 3.81 -.62, -.45	3.74 -.42	3.64, 3.84 -.49, -.34
Self-Direction	4.75* .40	4.63, 4.87 .31, .50	4.61* .30	4.50, 4.71 .21, .38	4.51** .28**	4.42, 4.60 .21, .35	4.27** .11**	4.18, 4.36 .04, .18

Table 1. *Participants' average personal- and work-value scores and value incongruence (Cont.)*

	Pre-Study		Main Study	
	Value Incongruence			
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>95 % CI</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>95 % CI</i>
Average Value Incongruence	.62	.52, .68	.51	.47, .54
	<i>.60</i>	<i>.56, .65</i>	<i>.48</i>	<i>.44, .49</i>
Average Incongruence without Supervisory Function			.48	.44, .52
			.45	.42, .49
Average Incongruence with Supervisory Function			.55	.48, .62
			.49	.44, .54

Note. The values presented are uncentered scores on the first line and centered scores on the second line, displayed in italics. Differences (according to 2-tailed t-tests) between personal and work values are marked. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$ (Pre-Study: $N = 237$; Main Study: $N = 489$).

4.3 Results

The main study confirms the presence of value incongruence. As indicated in Table 1, the average value incongruence is 0.51 95% CI [.47, .54]), which is significantly different from zero ($t(488) = 26.74$, $p < .001$). The values of universalism, benevolence, and self-direction have significantly higher personal-value scores than work-value scores, while conformity has a significantly higher work-value score ($p < .01$).

In line with H1, Table 1 indicates that participants with supervisory roles exhibit significantly higher levels of value incongruence than those without such roles, $t(487) = 1.74$, $p = .04$.

In line with H2, Figure 3 (below) provides initial graphical evidence that higher value incongruence is associated with lower overall job satisfaction. The OLS regression in (Equation 3) further supports H2, showing that a one-point increase in value incongruence reduces job satisfaction by 1.02 ($p < .001$).

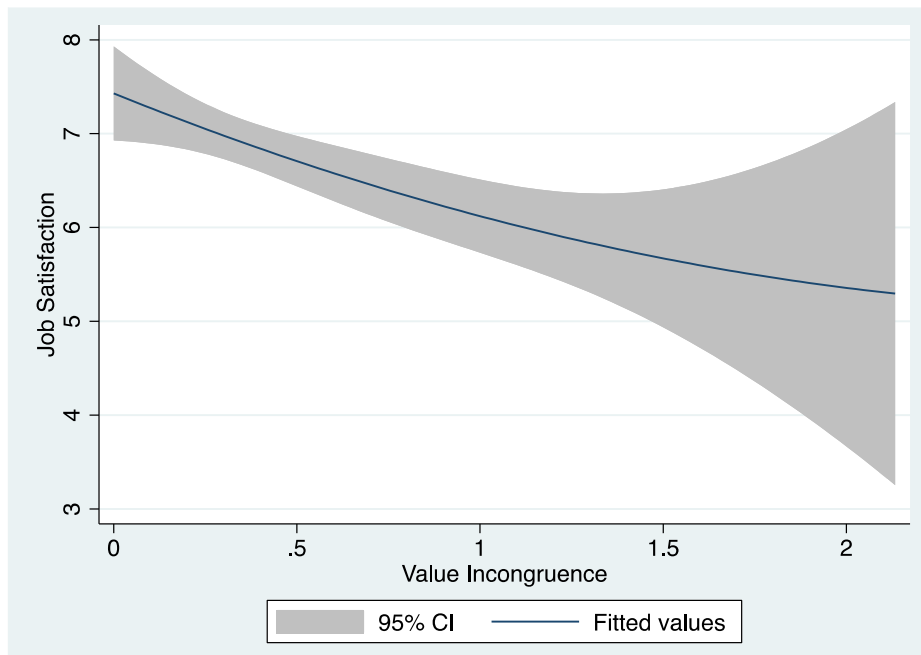
In line with H3, the results of the multiple mediation model suggest that value incongruence negatively affects job satisfaction indirectly through various drivers. Our findings presented in Table 2 indicate that the negative impact of value incongruence is primarily mediated through the meaningfulness of work, relationships with supervisors, and opportunities for career advancement. The 95% bootstrap confidence intervals for these specific indirect effects, based on 5,000 bootstrap samples, are entirely below zero. Other factors considered as potential mediators are insignificant. The indirect effect of value incongruence ($-.75$) on overall job satisfaction is considerably stronger than the direct effect ($-.27$), with 73% of the total effect mediated.

Figure 4 (below) shows more detailed regression results. Value incongruence is associated with significantly reduced satisfaction with all potential mediators except for pay (the effect on pay is marginally significant, $p = .08$). These mediators include the level of recognition for a job well done ($-.58$, $p = .002$); relationships with supervisors ($-.66$, $p < .001$), subordinates ($-.48$, $p = .003$), and coworkers ($-.30$, $p = .043$); meaningful work ($-.66$, $p < .001$); career advancement possibilities ($-.46$, $p = .020$); and job security ($-.34$, $p = .048$).

Several mediators are also significantly associated with higher job satisfaction, including meaningful work (.48, $p < .001$), career advancement possibilities (.28, $p < .001$), pay (.18, $p = .002$), job security (.17, $p = .007$), relationship with supervisors (.18, $p = .014$), and the level of recognition for a job well done (.16, $p = .034$). Only relationships with coworkers and subordinates do not seem to relate to job satisfaction.

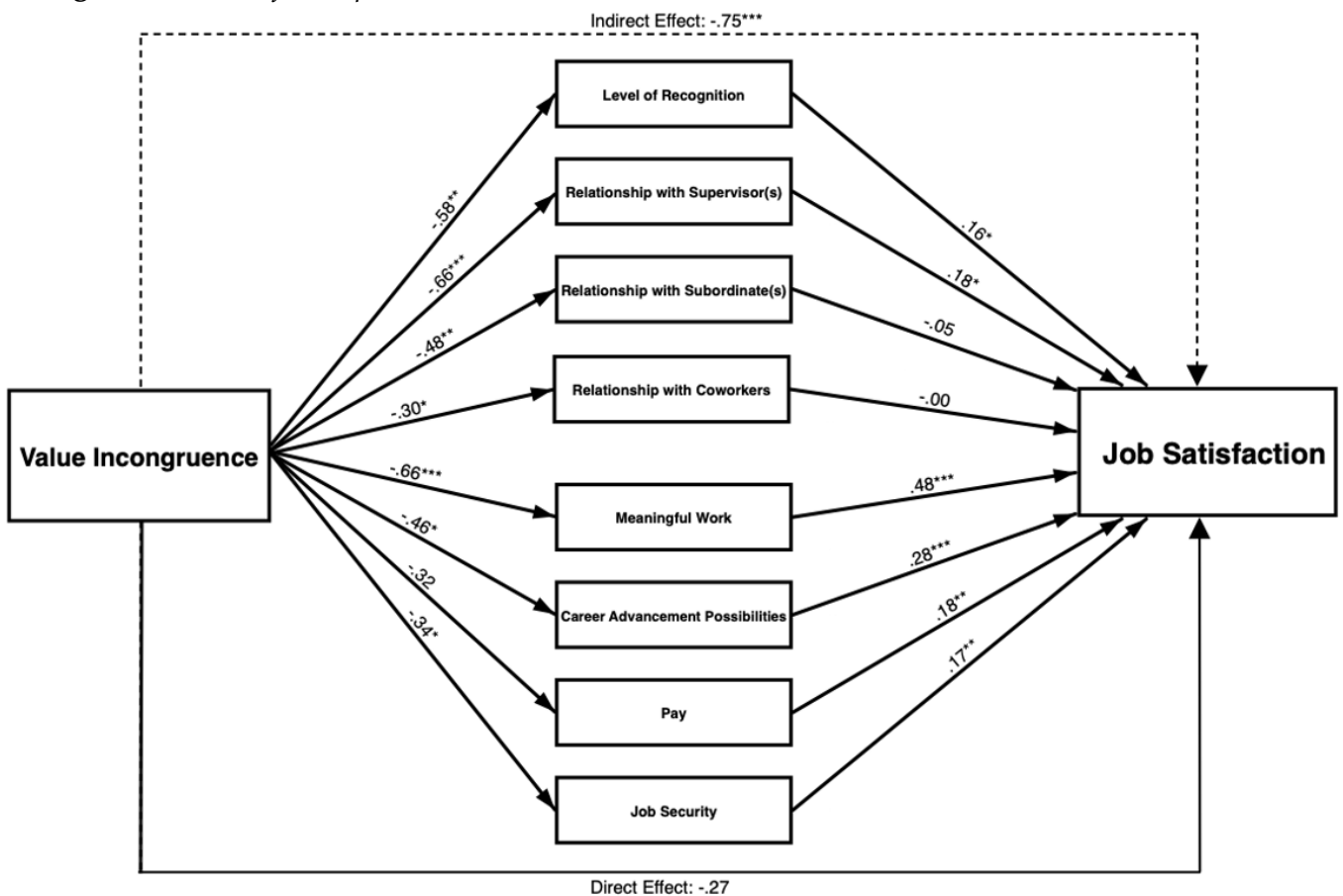
Job satisfaction, in turn, positively correlates with job performance ($r(487) = .16$, $p < .001$) and life satisfaction ($r(487) = .51$, $p < .001$).

Figure 3. Job satisfaction according to value incongruence



Note. Figure 3 shows job satisfaction (on a scale from 0 “not at all satisfied” to 10 “completely satisfied”) according to value incongruence. One outlier observation (0.2% of all observations) with a value incongruence larger than 2 is not shown in Figure 3. (N = 488).

Figure 4. Results of multiple mediation model



Note. We control for household income, gender, and education level. (N = 489). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, and *** $p < .001$.

Table 2. *Estimates for specific indirect effects and total indirect effect*

	Estimates	Bootstrapped Standard Error	95% bootstrapped CI
Level of recognition for a job well done	-.09	.07	-.265, .002
	<i>-.15</i>	<i>.10</i>	<i>-.376, .015</i>
Relationship with supervisor(s)	<i>-.12*</i>	.07	<i>-.276, -.002</i>
	<i>-.15*</i>	<i>.09</i>	<i>-.353, -.001</i>
Relationship with subordinate(s)	.03	.05	-.063, .138
	<i>.03</i>	<i>.06</i>	<i>-.083, 0.174</i>
Relationship with co- worker(s)	.00	.03	-.074, .067
	<i>.00</i>	<i>.08</i>	<i>-.205, .099</i>
Meaningful work	<i>-.31*</i>	.11	<i>-.563, -.139</i>
	<i>-.44*</i>	<i>.14</i>	<i>-.747, -.194</i>
Career-advancement possibilities	<i>-.13*</i>	.09	<i>-.345, -.003</i>
	<i>-.21*</i>	<i>.11</i>	<i>-.443, -.033</i>
Pay	-.06	.05	-.183, .018
	<i>-.11*</i>	<i>.07</i>	<i>-.265, -.007</i>
Job security	-.06	.04	-.157, .004
	<i>-.06</i>	<i>.05</i>	<i>-.172, .018</i>
Total indirect effect	<i>-.75*</i>	.28	<i>-1.349, -.278</i>
	<i>-1.08*</i>	<i>.32</i>	<i>-1.730, -.478</i>

Note. $N = 489$. The values presented are uncentered scores on the first line and centered scores on the second line, displayed in italics. Estimates with CIs that do not include zero are statistically significant and marked (*). Number of bootstrap samples: 5,000.

5. General discussion

This section summarizes the results, discusses their implications, suggests directions for future research, and concludes the study.

5.1 Summary

This study broadens the literature on the interplay between personal values and work and connects this relationship to job satisfaction. Firstly, we proposed a novel conceptualization of work values designed to quantify the degree of incongruity between personal values and workplace demands. Secondly, we showed that some employees display some level of value incongruence, and that our measurement of incongruence is meaningful in predicting important job-related metrics such as job satisfaction.

The value surveys in both the pre-study and main study provide evidence of an incongruence between personal and work values. This incongruence is also mirrored in our proposed indirect measurement approach, i.e., through the choice of hotels that are associated with different values, depending on whether the choice is for a private or business trip. The two studies suggest that conformity is evidently more important in the work context than personal values would imply, while benevolence and self-direction are significantly more important in the private context. Individuals in supervisory roles exhibit higher levels of value incongruence compared to those without such roles. Value incongruence negatively impacts job satisfaction, both directly and indirectly. The indirect effect is dominant, accounting for more than 70% of the total effect, primarily through three mediators: satisfaction with the meaningfulness of work, relationships with supervisors, and opportunities for career advancement. Job satisfaction, in turn, positively correlates with job performance. As widely established in the literature (e.g., Bialowolski &

Weziak-Bialowolska, 2021), we find a strong positive correlation between job satisfaction and life satisfaction. Overall, the results support our hypotheses.

5.2 Implications and directions for future research

In dynamic environments, where future work is likely to exist, personal values can serve as guiding principles. The ever-increasing work options such as working in a start-up, freelancing, participating in the gig economy, or working independently of location, along with regular job changes, enhance the likelihood of finding work that aligns with our personal identities and values. Meanwhile, it becomes increasingly important to be aware of our personal values and to be informed about those that are significant in various occupations, organizations, and hierarchical positions.

We find that enhancing value congruence could benefit multiple stakeholders by increasing job satisfaction, which positively correlates with job performance and life satisfaction. Individuals, particularly those seeking meaningful work, should adhere to their personal values when searching for a new job. Those who aspire to advance their careers should also meticulously assess their personal values and gain a comprehensive understanding of the significant values of various positions and organizations before stepping into the job market or contemplating career changes. Individuals with supervisory responsibilities, on average, exhibit a higher level of value incongruence. Higher value incongruence could hinder successful career advancement, as it is associated with lower satisfaction regarding career advancement opportunities and a poorer relationship with supervisor(s). Organizations also stand to benefit if they can attract individuals whose personal values align with those deemed important by the organization, as this enhances job performance and job satisfaction. We suggest that an organization should clearly communicate its important values, or those that are crucial for specific positions, to potential applicants. Furthermore, we recommend evaluating the fit between the job's or organization's significant values and the applicants' personal values during the hiring process.

Finally, society would benefit from employees' enhanced performance in an increasingly productive economy and from the population's higher general satisfaction. Therefore, society should encourage a careful matching of individuals and organizations based on values and provide a legal framework for new forms of work whenever feasible.

Due to technological and economic changes, new forms of work offer individuals ever-increasing options for making a living. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2019) states that "the future of work offers unparalleled opportunities;" however, these are associated with challenges. We assume that the future of work provides several possibilities to increase congruence between personal and work values.

First, new tools that utilize social media data and machine learning techniques (e.g., Kern et al., 2019) will facilitate the matching of individuals to their ideal occupations based on personal values. This can assist individuals and career counselors in identifying potential career opportunities. Social media campaigns enable organizations to clearly communicate their core values, both generally and for specific positions. The trend to flatten organizations (Billinger & Workiewicz, 2019) and expectations that the future of work is project-based and not role-based (Forbes, 2021) lead to fading hierarchies and, hence, fewer employees with supervisory functions. The rapid growth of platform work facilitates earning a living online or on-location as a freelancer. The COVID-19 pandemic has massively increased the experience and acceptance of remote work (Ng et al., 2021). Remote or even time-independent work is associated with more autonomy and flexibility and involves fewer workplace interactions, hence reducing the need to represent something one is not. Lastly, these interrelated new ways of working, as well as new

job profiles, are suited to individuals with values different those required for traditional work. For example, digital nomadism, an extreme form of flexible work, often involves location-independent self-employment as a digital worker (Hensellek & Puchala, 2021). This suits individuals who seek freedom, flexibility (Thompson, 2019), and self-determination (Cook, 2020), in other words, self-direction, but can cope with financial insecurity (Czarniawska, 2014).

The current study includes only American participants, raising the question of whether the results are applicable across countries and cultures. Individualist cultures, such as that of the US, value the pursuit of personal goals, while collectivist cultures value accommodating others' goals and the pursuit of harmony (Yates & de Oliveira, 2016). Savani et al. (2015) and Savani et al. (2008) showed, through an example of consumer choices, that the decisions of Indians were less influenced by personal values than those of US citizens. The question arises as to whether individuals from collectivistic societies are less likely to choose work based on personal values, are more likely to exhibit value incongruence, and whether the effect of value incongruence on job satisfaction differs.

The recognition of distinct work values suggests the possibility of similarly differentiated "family values" and "friends' values." Individuals may adapt their behavior to align with the expectations of different social contexts, potentially diverging from their personal values. Future research could evaluate whether there is also incongruence between family/friends' values and personal values and whether such incongruence affects life satisfaction and wellbeing. Arguably, family and friends are more stable than work and often influence the development of one's own personal values, leading to less incongruence. Conversely, when such incongruences exist, they might have a stronger negative impact, as individuals may tolerate workplace incongruences in exchange for compensation.

5.3 Conclusion

Expressing our personal values at work increases job satisfaction. This underscores the importance of finding a workplace that aligns with us as individuals, benefiting not only ourselves but also organizations and, by extension, society. Our findings reveal that employees exhibit value incongruence, with a higher level of incongruence observed among employees in supervisory roles. Individuals seeking meaningful work should carefully align their personal values with those of potential occupations and organizations when entering the job market or contemplating a career change. The future of work may present new and better-suited opportunities for individuals with specific value profiles, thereby facilitating a more effective match.

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