Professional choices and personal values: Similarities and differences between Schein's career anchors and Schwartz basic values

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1. Introduction

Values, beliefs and motivations lead every personal choice, including professional decisions. Consistency between personal values and career choices is essential to achieve job satisfaction and to attain positive career outcomes and self-realization.

Schwartz and Bilsky (1987) propose a framework of ten basic values, measured through the Portrait Value Questionnaire, related to the universal needs of existence. In their theory, the pursuit of some of these values may conflict, while others are consistent. Aiming to clarify the mutual relationships among the ten basic values, these are represented in a circular shape, according to their similarities and dissimilarities (Figure 1), with a contraposition between openness to change (values of stimulation and self-direction) and conservation (security, conformity, and tradition), and between self-enhancement (hedonism, achievement, power) and self-transcendence (universalism, benevolence). Some authors have proposed specific work values scales obtained by adapting Schwartz's basic values to the work environment (see, e.g., Pike, 1996; Porto and Tamayo, 2003; Avallone, 2009).
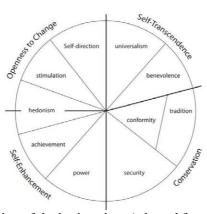

Figure 1. Circular representation of the basic values (adapted from Schwartz, 2012).

Focusing on professional goals and aspirations, Schein's Career Orientation Inventory (1990) identifies eight anchors that drive employees' career paths and orientations: general managerial competence, technical/functional competence, autonomy/independence, security/stability, entrepreneurial creativity, dedication to a cause, pure challenge, life-style. Schein affirms that a career anchor is "that one element in a person self-concept, which he or she will not give up even in the face of difficult choices" (1990). Conversely, Feldman and Bolino (1996) hypothesize that some career orientation are quite similar and complementary, while others are counterpoised and incompatible; e.g., they posit that technical competence and challenge anchors are complementary, while security and entrepreneurial creativity are mutually inconsistent (Figure 2).

However, there is no general agreement on the structure underlying career anchors (Barclay et al., 2013).

Figure 2. Feldman and Bolino (1996) factor structure of career anchors.

Although these two paradigms have been developed and applied in different contexts, and have rarely been compared in the scientific literature (see Abessolo et al., 2017 for an exception), they seem to share a common ground, which is worth analysing. In this paper, we aim at understanding the mutual relationship between the paradigms proposed by Schwartz and Schein, in order to enlighten how personal motivations inform career preferences and choices. Section 2 presents the survey and the preliminary analyses carried out on the two scales. Section 3 illustrates the similarities and differences between Schwartz's and Schein's theoretical frameworks that can be deduced from the data. Finally, in Section 4 we draw some conclusions and a few sparks for future research.

2. Data and methods

We administered the Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ) and the Career Orientation Inventory (COI) scales to a sample of 253 respondents through an online survey questionnaire. The respondents were a heterogeneous sample of Italians working in a wide range of fields and positions, aged between 22 and 67 (mean = 36.15; SD = 12.46); the majority are females (58%), and they are distributed in all the Italian regions (47.9% North, 13.2% Centre, 37.9% South, 2.0% abroad).

The COI consisted of eight career anchors, each measured by a set of five items, for a total of 40 items on a 7-point scale; the PVQ includes ten dimensions, measured through a number of items ranging from three to six, totalling 40 more items on a 7-point scales. We assessed each dimension of the two scales through Cronbach's α, and we evaluated the structural validity of the two measurement models by means of Lisrel 8.7 (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 2004). The measurement models appeared to fit well for the COI (RMSEA = 0,028) and acceptably for the PVQ (RMSEA = 0,060) (Hu and Bentler, 1999).

If we analyse the scores[1] of males and females for each dimension (Table 1), and the correlations between each dimension and the age, we can see gender differences mostly affect the career anchors, while basic values are more likely to change with the age. Women score higher than men on universalism, i.e. the value of understanding, tolerance and protection, while men are more oriented to power, defined as the value of prestige, social status, and control over people and resources. Older people are more aimed at security, conformity, tradition and universalism, while

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[1] We computed factor scores and average scores for each dimension, which give results completely comparable; in Table 1 we report average score for the sake of readability.

power, achievement, stimulation and hedonism score higher on younger respondents.

Looking at the career anchors, there are no age differences except for technical competences: younger people are more excited by the content of the work itself, and appreciate the feeling of being experts in their field. As for the gender differences, women value more service/dedication, and then love the idea of doing a job which in some way improves the world and helps the society; they also appreciate slightly more security, therefore they show more long-term attachment to the organization, and tend to dislike travel and relocation. On the other side, men are more led by the anchors of creative entrepreneurship and management, which implies they are attracted by the idea of leading people, creating and realising new projects, and they feel stimulated by crises. The male scores are slightly higher also for the challenge and autonomy anchors, indicating a motivation to solve difficult problems and overcome major obstacles, and a need to set own schedule.

Table 1. Average score of males and females, and correlation between score and age, for each dimension of PVQ and COI.

	Male average score	Female average score	Score-age correlation
Portrait Value Questionnaire			
Self-direction	5.70	5.69	-0.107
Power	3.95*	3.57*	-0.137*
Universalism	5.84°	6.01°	0.147*
Achievement	4.97	4.91	-0.326**
Security	5.29	5.39	0.131*
Stimulation	4.73	4.75	-0.295**
Conformity	5.38	5.47	0.230**
Tradition	4.04	4.12	0.294**
Hedonism	4.88	4.83	-0.285**
Benevolence	5.65	5.72	-0.032
Career Orientation Inventory			
Autonomy	5.29°	5.06°	0.012
Creative entrepreneurship	4.33*	3.95*	0.040
General management	4.11*	3.77*	-0.027
Service/Dedication	5.05*	5.35*	0.054
Challenge	5.02°	4.81°	-0.003
Security	5.19°	5.37°	-0.005
Lifestyle	5.54	5.47	-0.018
Technical competence	5.22	5.22	-0.172**

*Significance level: ** 0.01, *0.05, °0.10*

3. The structure of values and career anchors

First, we aim at obtaining graphical representations of the mutual relationships among the 8 anchors and among the 10 basic values, and we perform multidimensional scaling analyses, with ordinal proximity transformations and Euclidean distance measures. As for the analysis carried out on the correlations between Schwartz's basic values, we obtain an acceptable value of 0.06 for the stress-1 measure (Schwartz and Sagiv, 1995); this solution accounts for 99.6% of the dispersion. The perceptual map is reported in Figure 3: closer points indicate higher positive correlations, while counterpoised points indicate negative correlations. The graphical representation of the basic values is perfectly consistent with the theoretical structure in Figure 1: we can recognise the openness to change area on the lower left part of the plot, the self-

transcendence on the lower right, the conservation dimension on the upper right, and the self-enhancement on the upper left.
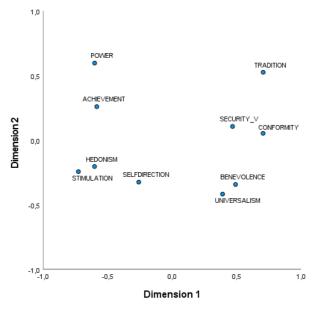

Figure 3. Bi-dimensional plot of basic values.

Focusing on the representation of the career anchors, the stress measure is slightly worse but still acceptable (0.13), and the dispersion accounted for is 98.2%. In the multidimensional scaling plot of Figure 4, we can see that the structure resembles the theoretical correlation structure proposed by Feldman and Bolino (1996) and reported in Figure 2: lifestyle and service/dedication are opposed to challenge and managerial competence, while autonomy and entrepreneurial creativity are counterpoised to security.
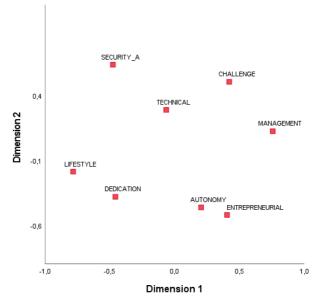

Figure 4. Bi-dimensional plot of career anchors.

If, instead of two separate matrices, we analyse the 18×18 matrix of similarities among all the eight anchor items and all the ten values items, besides the relationships among values and the relationships among career anchors we can also explore the mutual interconnection between the set of basic values and the set of career anchors. We can then report the whole system of correlations in a unique plot (Figure 5), and we observe that Schwartz's and Schein's theoretical frames show a high level of consistency. We can divide the scatterplot into four sections, corresponding to the poles of Schwartz's main dimensions:

- those who are more oriented to the "openness to change" dimension, who appreciate independence, novelty and exploration, tend to favor careers of autonomy and entrepreneurial creativity;
- a conservative motivation leads to more safe and stable careers, through a search for commitment, respect and acceptance of social expectations and norms;
- personal values of self-enhancement, i.e. the tendency to pursue personal success, prestige and social status, support challenging careers and managerial responsibilities;
- self-transcendence pushes for dedication to a cause and work-life balance, because it values protection, understanding, and enhancing the welfare of family, friends and personal contacts in general.

The only point which do not find a clear collocation in this segmentation is the anchor of technical competences; in fact, among the career anchors this is the only one which can hardly be associated with both beliefs and motivations.
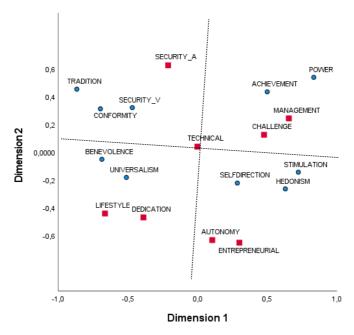

Figure 5. Bi-dimensional plot of career anchors (red squares) and basic values (blue circles).

4. Conclusions

In this paper, we investigated the relationship between two theoretical frameworks: the Schwartz's basic values and the Schein's career anchors. Our study showed a clear overlap of the two schemes, and confirmed the consistency and correlation of these dimensions, as shown in Abessolo et al. (2017). This suggests that career choices are based on universal needs and beliefs, and that personal basic values should be taken into account to orientate aware professional choices, to promote a fruitful working climate, and to offer to each worker a personalised and

suitable career path, which makes the most of the individual characteristics of everyone.

We also observed some differences in the dominant anchors and in the priority values of males and females, older and younger people. Young males tend to pursue individualistic goals and materialistic recognitions, while older females are oriented toward finding their place in the society and being appreciated for their values more than for their skills.

These differences suggest that in the future it will be interesting to investigate subgroups of workers, and to assess if the underlying structure and the relationships between values and anchors are stable across age, gender and/or other characteristics. Moreover, age differences suggest that priority values are not completely stable over time, and then a longitudinal design would help finding evidence of what changes in individual values over a lifespan, and which life events or professional steps affect the change.

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