

Global Careers, Local Values: Understanding Work Values Across Countries for Inclusive Career Development

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Abstract

As career development becomes increasingly global, practitioners must recognize that the values influencing career decisions are not universally shared. Work values play an important role in shaping educational, occupational, and life choices, but they are influenced by cultural, social, and economic contexts. This study examines work value patterns among approximately 13,000 secondary school students from China, the Philippines, and the United States who completed the Super Work Values Inventory–Revised between 2022 and 2025. The results revealed both shared and culturally distinct patterns in work values across countries. They also suggested that culture influences how individuals prioritize factors such as income, workplace environment, relationships, independence, and lifestyle. Implications for practice include adopting culturally responsive approaches to career advising, recognizing local contexts, and avoiding assumptions based on one's own cultural framework.

Introduction

Careers have become increasingly global, but the values that influence career decisions have remained largely local. Work values represent beliefs and preferences about what individuals seek from work and are closely linked to career satisfaction, motivation, and decision-making (Super, 1970). As career practitioners support clients across diverse cultural contexts, understanding how culture shapes work values becomes increasingly important.

Super's work values framework identifies twelve dimensions that influence career preferences, including achievement,

creativity, income, independence, lifestyle, prestige, security, supervision, variety, workplace environment, co-workers, and challenge. While these values are broadly applicable across cultures, their relative importance may differ substantially based on social norms, economic conditions, family expectations, and cultural traditions.

This study explores patterns in work values among students from China, the Philippines, and the United States to better understand how culture influences career priorities and how practitioners can provide inclusive career guidance.

Relationship Between Culture and Work Values

Work values do not develop in isolation. They are shaped by an interaction among cultural influences, personal experiences, and environmental factors (White, 2006). Culture helps define what is considered desirable, respectable, or meaningful work, while individual experiences and opportunities further refine personal priorities.

Research on cultural values provides useful frameworks for interpreting differences in work-related preferences. Hofstede (1980, 2010) identified dimensions such as individualism and collectivism that influence how people prioritize personal goals versus group obligations. Similarly, Schwartz (1992, 1994) demonstrated that cultural value systems influence individual motivations and decision-making.

Although cultural frameworks should not be used to stereotype individuals, they can help explain broader patterns that emerge across populations. Understanding these patterns enables career practitioners to interpret assessment results and career decisions within appropriate cultural contexts.

Method

Data from approximately 13,000 students who completed the Super Work Values Inventory–Revised through the Kuder career development platform between 2022 and 2025 were evaluated.

The sample included:

- China: approximately 5,000 students aged 15–19
- Philippines: approximately 4,300 students aged 15–19
- United States: approximately 3,396 students aged 15–19

The collected data were analyzed to identify trends in work value rankings over time and to compare patterns across countries. The analysis focused on identifying common themes and culturally distinct preferences rather than establishing causal relationships.

Findings

China: Stability, Sustainability, and Predictability

Among students in China, income consistently emerged as one of the highest-ranked work values throughout the study period. Workplace environment and lifestyle gained importance over time, whereas creativity showed a gradual decline.

These patterns may reflect a growing emphasis on stability and long-term security. Students appeared to place increasing importance on employment conditions that support both personal well-being and financial sustainability. The increasing association between workplace environment and lifestyle values suggests a desire for careers that provide safe working conditions and support healthy work–life boundaries.

Philippines: Relationships and Collective Well-Being

Students in the Philippines placed increasing emphasis on co-workers and interpersonal relationships throughout the study period. The importance of income also increased following the COVID-19 pandemic recovery period, suggesting heightened awareness of financial security and family stability.

The prominence of relationship-oriented values may reflect cultural traditions that emphasize social harmony, family interconnectedness, and collective well-being. The data suggest that career decisions may be influenced not only by individual

interests but also by considerations related to family and community.

United States: Workplace Environment and Individual Priorities

Among students in the United States, workplace environment showed a steady increase in importance. Recent research suggests that younger workers increasingly associate workplace quality with psychological safety, respect, inclusion, and overall well-being rather than physical safety alone (Jobs for the Future et al., 2025).

The data also revealed a divergence between creativity and income. This pattern may reflect tensions between pursuing innovation and personal fulfillment and seeking financial security in an uncertain economic environment.

Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Several similarities emerged across all three countries. Income remained a consistently important work value, suggesting that financial security continues to be an important concern for young people globally. However, the reasons underlying this emphasis appeared to differ across contexts.

Differences also emerged when examining work values through cultural frameworks. Prestige appeared among the highest-ranked values in the United States but was less prominent in China and the Philippines. This finding may reflect a stronger emphasis on individual achievement and personal recognition within individualistic cultural contexts.

Similarly, supervision was relatively prominent among Filipino students, potentially reflecting the importance of positive interpersonal relationships and harmonious social interactions within collectivist cultures.

When examining personal versus social drivers, lifestyle and independence displayed notable regional variation. Students in the United States demonstrated relatively stable preferences for independence, whereas Filipino students placed relatively strong emphasis on achievement. Independence was relatively prominent among the top-ranked values of Chinese and American students, suggesting different approaches to autonomy and decision-making.

These findings highlight the importance of understanding not only what individuals value but also the cultural context that gives meaning to those values.

Implications for Career Practice

The findings suggest several implications for career practitioners working in increasingly diverse and global contexts.

First, practitioners should avoid assuming that clients share the same motivations or definitions of career success. Work values that appear similar based on an assessment may reflect very different cultural meanings and priorities.

Second, career conversations should explore the cultural and social influences that shape career decisions. Family expectations, economic realities, community obligations, and cultural traditions may strongly influence choices and should be considered alongside interests and abilities.

Third, practitioners should interpret assessment results within the client's lived reality. Rather than directing clients toward culturally preferred notions of success, practitioners should support individuals in identifying pathways that align with their own values and circumstances.

Finally, collaboration with practitioners from different geographic regions can enhance cultural understanding and improve

the quality of career services. Exposure to diverse perspectives will help practitioners recognize their own assumptions and develop more culturally responsive approaches.

Conclusion

Work values are shaped partly by culture, and meaningful patterns emerge when examining work values across countries. While common themes such as financial security appear globally, important differences exist in how individuals prioritize relationships, independence, workplace conditions, prestige, and lifestyle.

As careers become increasingly global, effective career development practice requires local understanding. By recognizing cultural influences on work values and adapting guidance accordingly, practitioners can provide more inclusive, relevant, and effective support for individuals navigating career decisions in diverse cultural contexts.

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