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GUIDANCE SOURCES AT WORK: LET'S LOOK INSIDE US?ANDRÉ LUIZ MENDES ATHAYDE¹ AND CLAUDIO VAZ TORRES²**ABSTRACT**

The present article aims at proposing a new theoretical model of the internal antecedents of the use of guidance sources at work by employees while dealing with different events. The in-depth theoretical review enabled the proposition of a model according to which personality traits and personal values influence each other, and both might influence the employees' use of guidance sources at work. A future test of the theoretical model may show administrators which personal characteristics are significantly related to which guidance sources used at work. The novel contribution of the model, in comparison to relevant prior studies, is to consider personal values and personality traits simultaneously as predictors of the use of sources of guidance at work. Moreover, it is the first research to study the possible internal antecedents of the use of guidance sources at work.

Key Words: Organizational behavior, Personality psychology, Social psychology.

INTRODUCING THE THEORETICAL GAP

Organization members seek information from different sources in order to interpret and respond to the sequence of events they experience at work. The sources of information on which organization members rely to handle different events at work are known in the literature as 'Sources of Guidance (SOGs)' (Peterson *et al.*, 1990). However, what are those work events handled by the organization member? Work events include anything that triggers an organization member's conscious attention (Smith *et al.*, 2002). The idea of event is frequently found in organization theories, which view social processes as episodes that can be given many meanings (Whitehead, 1929; Russel, 1961; Kahn *et al.*, 1964; Mintzberg, 1973; March and Olsen, 1976; Martinko and Gardner, 1984). So, organizations provide many SOGs that members can use to interpret the events they experience and to select their actions (Smircich and Morgan, 1982; Smith and Peterson, 1988).

Classical contingency leadership models (e.g., House, 1971; Sheridan *et al.*, 1984) consider that some work tasks and work settings are more structured than others, which means that leaders will act according to how structured a task or setting is. Peterson *et al.* (1990), however, proposes something different. According to their alternative hypothesis, the organization member's work varies *over time*, according to the event he/she is handling. So, this means that his behavior must change over the course of a day or week to correspond with changes in the events. Peterson *et al.* (1990) highlight that such variability in behavior in response to changing situations/events is precisely what is found in work organizations. This hypothesis came to be known as the 'event-based contingency hypothesis', the background of this article.

Many notions similar to the idea of event management by Peterson *et al.* (1990) have been identified in the organizational literature. Galbraith (1973), for instance, proposed that organizations differing in the complexity and uncertainty of work will place different degrees of emphasis on rules and procedures, hierarchy, and goal setting. However, his proposal assumed absolute uniformity in particular events or circumstances that occur within structures.

¹ Ph.D. Student, School of Economy, Administration, and Accounting (FACE), University of Brasília (UnB), Brazil, andreluizathayde@outlook.com

² Professor, School of Economy, Administration, and Accounting (FACE), University of Brasília (UnB), Brazil, claudio.v.torres@gmail.com

Even though there is strong evidence in the literature that an individual's psychological profile might influence the use of SOGs to handle work events, its possible internal antecedents have never been deeply investigated. Although previous studies have been conducted to investigate the influence of personality on values (Bilsky and Schwartz, 1994; Furnham, 1984), the study of the simultaneous effect of both on the use of guidance sources at work still constitutes a theoretical gap. So, in this scenario, the present article aims at proposing a theoretical model of the internal antecedents of the use of guidance sources at work by employees while dealing with different events.

Besides the theoretical gap highlighted above, what else makes it worth studying the internal antecedents of the use of guidance sources at work? In practice, why does this subject deserve to be more deeply investigated? Since the use of guidance sources at work constitutes a behavior and might influence the ultimate performance of the employee, this has implications for organizational administrators, decision-makers, and psychologists. The development of human resources policies could benefit from knowledge about the influence of personal values and personality traits on the use of guidance sources, especially when it comes to recruiting and selecting processes.

The objective of investigating the internal antecedents of the use of guidance sources at work naturally leads us to one specific field: Personality Psychology. Personality Psychology is the area of Psychology that has most profoundly and broadly influenced Organizational Behavior, which is defined as the field concerned with attitudes (e.g., satisfaction and commitment), decision-making, interpersonal processes, and individual and group behavior in work settings (e.g., SOGs) (Judge *et al.*, 2008). Personality traits and other personal differences, of course, have a long history in Organizational Behavior. Barrick and Mount (2005, p. 361) state: "Personality traits do matter at work," and indeed, the data from scientific research seem to support their conclusion (Hogan, 2004).

The relationship between personality traits and personal values represents an important topic at the intersection of Personality and Social Psychology. Both personal values and personality traits are broad categories of individual differences relevant to the study of persons and are, by definition, assumed to be cross-situationally and cross-temporally consistent (Dollinger *et al.*, 1996). Roccas *et al.* (2002) postulates that personal values and personality traits mutually influence each other. However, the causal direction remains unclear (Silfver *et al.*, 2008; Pohling *et al.*, 2016).

So, the novel contribution of the theoretical model proposed in this study, therefore, in comparison to relevant prior studies, is to consider personal values and personality traits simultaneously as predictors of the use of guidance sources at work, something that has never been done before. Besides, it is essential to highlight that this theoretical discussion is fundamental, so that it can be used in future primary empirical research.

RATIONALE OF THE PROPOSED THEORETICAL MODEL

The present section will explore six different reasons that comprise the foundation upon which we proposed the theoretical model.

The importance of studying sources of guidance

First, it is possible to identify the relevance of the present study based on its professional and academic relevance regarding the dependent variable (SOGs). From a professional perspective, the future test of the proposed theoretical model may show managers and organizational psychologists which individual characteristics are related to which guidance sources used at work. This relation between individual characteristics and SOGs could be strategic information when it comes to recruitment and selection processes, since the future results will show

organizational decision-makers the role of personal values and personality traits on the use of desired guidance sources.

Moreover, from an academic perspective, this paper proposes a model that may contribute to deepen the study on SOGs and to better understand employees' behavior at work, and how the predictor variables complement each other.

Theoretical gap

The study of personal values has already been applied to many contexts and levels, such as cultural values (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis *et al.*, 1988), work values (Tamayo and Porto, 2005), and organizational values (Borges and Tamayo, 2001). Both constructs (personal values and personality traits) have already been researched together, predicting many different attitudes and behaviors, but they have never been considered together to explain the use of guidance sources at work.

Through a literature review of the most important empirical studies involving sources of guidance in the last 30 years, it was possible to identify two gaps: 1) the lack of a significant amount of research about SOGs, as we identified only six relevant empirical studies about this variable. One of them discussed the use of SOGs isolatedly (Peterson *et al.*, 1990), and the other ones its relationship with other variables (Smith *et al.*, 1994, Smith *et al.*, 2002, Smith and Peterson, 2005; Peterson *et al.*, 2010; Smith *et al.*, 2011). It is important to highlight that the study of Peterson *et al.* (2016), a more recent one, only updated the data collection instrument, Managerial Decisions Questionnaire Global (Mdq-GL), revising the number of frequent organizational events from eight to six, omitting two events that had shown some method problems. The last published empirical study about SOGs was performed more than seven years ago (Smith *et al.*, 2011). Besides, it was possible to identify 2) the absence of research that evaluates specifically the individual antecedents of the use of SOGs at work, such as personal values and personality traits. So, in order to help fill these gaps, the present article analyses the individual antecedents of the use of SOGs at work.

Both personal values and personality traits might influence attitudes and behavior

Rokeach (1968) affirms that beliefs, attitudes, and values are interconnected, comprising an integrated cognitive system. This interconnection means that a change in any part of this system will affect its other parts, which will eventually change behavior. This is one of the reasons why this article considers that there is a relationship between personal values and the use of SOGs (behavior) at work. They have not been chosen randomly.

This article hypothesizes that the inclination for some personal values or the prevalence of a particular personality trait can determine which of the guidance sources the employee will privilege when dealing with work events. People can explain their choices, attitudes, and behavior by referring to their traits ('I helped her because I am an agreeable person') and/or their values ('I think it is important to help') (Roccas and Sagiv, 2009). Literature has extensively demonstrated the connection between values and emotions, preferences, attitudes, and beliefs (Roccas and Sagiv, 2009; Feather, 1999). Many authors have highlighted that individuals often seek out, create, evoke, or are selected into experiences that are compatible and correlated with their personality (Caspi and Bem, 1990; Roberts, 2007; Scarr and McCartney, 1983; Snyder and Ickes, 1985; Wille and de Fruyt, 2014).

Judge *et al.* (2008) have successfully proved the effects of the Big Five Model in many work outcomes, such as job performance, work motivation, job attitudes, leadership, among others. It is one more reason to expect that personality traits affect the use of guidance sources at work, since these can be considered job behaviors (Smith *et al.*, 2002). Whether this effect is direct or indirect, is still something to be investigated and could be shown by the test of the theoretical model proposed here.

Personal values and personality traits complement each other

Although personal values and personality traits are both trans-situational and relatively stable structures of individuals, which makes them variables close to each other (individual level), they differ from each other in some aspects. Accumulating evidence shows that personality traits are primarily endogenous characteristics, while personal values are learned adaptations strongly influenced by the environment (Olver and Mooradian, 2003).

First, while personal values are directly related to the content of the goals of individuals, personality traits relate to the way the individual seeks to achieve these goals. As presented by Schwartz (1994), personal values are conflicting; that is, when specific values are prioritized, others are deprecated. On the other hand, personality traits do not conflict with each other. While personality traits are relatively inborn dispositions (Olver and Mooradian, 2003), personal values are learned and reflect the adaptation of an individual's need to what is considered acceptable in society (Rokeach, 1972).

Personality traits are “dimensions of individual differences in tendencies to show consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions” (McCrae and Costa, 1990, p. 23). Therefore, personality traits are enduring dispositions. On the other hand, personal values are enduring goals. Personality traits describe ‘what people are like’ rather than the intentions behind their behavior. Personal values refer to ‘what people consider important,’ the goals they wish to pursue. Personality traits vary in the frequency and intensity of their occurrence, whereas personal values vary in their importance as guiding principles (ranging from at least minimally to supremely important). People believe their values are desirable, at least to a significant reference group, whereas traits may be positive or negative.

Despite these differences, Parks and Guay (2009) point out that the two constructs also have many similarities, and both impact the individual's motivation. Although personality traits and personal values are conceptually distinct, they are empirically related (Haslam *et al.*, 2009).

For those reasons, we believe that including the two constructs in this model can broaden the understanding of what leads the individual to choose this or that guidance source, by differentiating the impact of each construct separately and to investigate the joint impact of these constructs.

Personal values and personality traits might influence each other

Personal values may affect personality traits because, other things being equal, individuals try to behave in ways consistent with their values (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1996). Conversely, personality traits may affect personal values too, since individuals who consistently present a behavioral trait are likely to increase the degree to which they value the goals that trait serves. Values allow them to justify their behavior. Self-perception theory (Bem, 1972) suggests that personality traits influence personal values because people infer what is important to them from their consistent (trait-expressive) behavior. Three relevant studies have already examined relations between personal values and the Five-Factor Model (Dollinger *et al.*, 1996; Luk and Bond, 1993; Roccas *et al.*, 2002).

Personal values and personality traits are relatively stable

Experience, family dynamics, culture, work, and educational experiences mold an individual's personality. However, many pieces of evidence suggest that a great part of personality predispositions, being present even since the individual's first years, are stable over his life (Caspi *et al.*, 2005; Costa and McCrae, 1992; Gosling *et al.*, 2003).

Even though some studies have shown slight value changes (e.g., Verkasalo *et al.*, 2006), it has been detected that personal values tend to return to their original baseline level over time after these changes. Besides, personality traits can be considered as relatively stable over time.

Even the few authors that claim changes in personality traits acknowledge that they typically occur at a modest rate and over long time intervals (Roberts *et al.*, 2003; McCrae and Terracciano, 2005; Roberts and Wood, 2006; Wille and de Fruyt, 2014).

According to Schwartz and Bardi (2001), personal values and personality traits are trans-situational and relatively stable structures that precede and influence attitudes and behaviors. We considered this strong evidence for the proposed model.

Having these six rationale pillars in mind, we will illustrate the theoretical model in the following section.

A NEW THEORETICAL MODEL

Even though we have already presented the six pillars of the rationale, let us review three essential references that summarize the reason behind the arrows in the illustration of the model (Figure 1):

1 – Judge *et al.* (2008) have successfully proved the effects of personality traits in many work outcomes, such as attitudes and behaviors (this leads us to accept the hypothesis that personality traits might influence the use of guidance sources, since the last represent behaviors: personality traits → SOGs);

2 – Literature has extensively demonstrated the connection between personal values, attitudes and behaviors (Roccas and Sagiv, 2009; Feather, 1999) (this leads us to accept that personal values might influence the use of guidance sources, since the last represent behaviors: personal values → SOGs);

3 – Roccas *et al.* (2002) postulated that personal values and personality traits mutually influence each other (personal values → ← personality traits).

This theoretical foundation, summarized above, enables us to propose a model in which personality traits and personal values influence each other, and both might influence employees' use of guidance sources at work (behaviors): Figure 1.

The fact that the three variables considered in the present theoretical model are trans-situational allows it to be tested in the future through cross-sectional research.

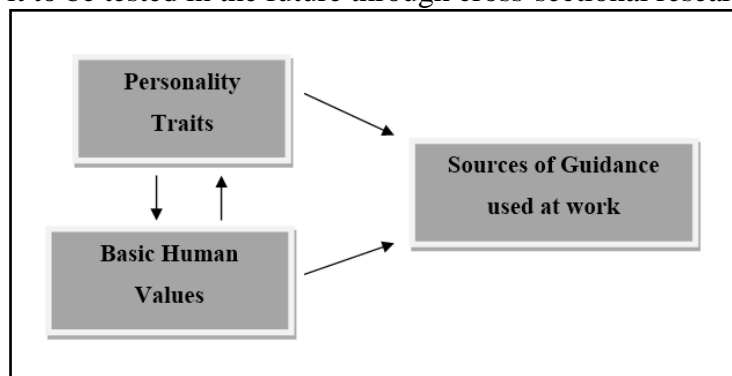


Figure 1. Proposed theoretical model

Source: Prepared by the authors

AN APPLICATION OF THE THEORETICAL MODEL

The most recent cross-cultural study on SOGs (Smith *et al.*, 2011) evidenced significant unhypothesized relationships between variables that may or may not have been coincidental, so what we know about SOGs is incomplete. Smith *et al.* (2011) noted that managers perceive a reliance on established rules and procedures and on one's own experience to be an effective means of handling work events across *all* cultures.

Results indicated counterintuitive individual-level effects. Reliance on oneself was weaker in collectivist countries, as the authors had hypothesized. Nevertheless, the results further indicated the relationships between reliance on formal rules, and both power distance

and uncertainty avoidance were the reverse of what the authors had hypothesized for either the Hofstede measure of the two dimensions or the GLOBE measure. People in societies with larger levels of power distance were less likely to rely on formal rules (using the GLOBE measure), rather than the reverse. Using the Hofstede measure, the relationship was not significant. People in societies with higher levels of uncertainty avoidance were also less likely to rely on formal rules (using the Hofstede measure). Using the GLOBE measure, the relationship was not significant. Both the GLOBE and Hofstede studies have indicated that power distance corresponds to the reliance on persons in authority, while uncertainty avoidance corresponds to a reliance on impersonal rules. However, Hofstede's (2001) uncertainty avoidance measure differs from the GLOBE measure in that it focuses less on routinization and more on anxiety and either increased risk-taking or increased caution.

Accordingly, to develop a better understanding of the SOGs that people draw on when making sense of work events, one should further examine personal values that correspond to power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Values corresponding to power distance include hierarchy and authority. Those corresponding to uncertainty avoidance include risk-taking, conservation, openness to change, and order. Peterson (2017) distinguished between order and chaos, suggesting that people have a desire to maintain order in their lives and to eliminate chaos. However, what people know they ought to do (e.g., seek order) may vary from what they usually do (c.f., House *et al.*, 2004), so people may be on a continuum of order and chaos. Schwartz (1992; 1994) identified the second-order value domains of conservation vs. openness to change and lower-level values of conformity, security, tradition, and hierarchy.

Personality traits may further correspond to uncertainty avoidance. For example, order is a facet of the conscientiousness domain, and openness to experience is a personality domain of the Five-Factor Model of Personality (Costa and McCrae, 1992).

Taken together, we propose the relationships between the aforementioned personality traits, personal values, and SOGs may be better understood using our proposed theoretical model. The model suggests that these personal values and personality traits are antecedents in a model explaining the SOGs people use to handle work events.

CONCLUSION

The present paper aimed at discussing profoundly the internal antecedents of a very important work-related variable known as 'sources of guidance' and their probable relationships. As expected, discussing work behavior would naturally involve different knowledge fields, which, in this case, were Organizational Behavior, Personality Psychology, and Social Psychology. Based on strong literature evidence from those fields, the present article achieved successfully its main objective: to culminate in proposing a theoretical model that can be tested in future primary empirical studies, shedding light on a theoretical gap about the individual antecedents of SOGs.

By discussing the relationship between three variables that have never been analyzed together, the present article has contributed to the advancement of the theory of three main knowledge fields to which it is related. Even though the study was limited to the construction of a theoretical model and to answering theoretical secondary questions, it elaborated a robust ground upon which the internal antecedents of guidance sources can be tested in future primary empirical research for the first time.

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