



Understanding congruence of values: a phenomenographic data analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on understanding the concept of congruence of values. Congruence indicates that there is alignment between the values of an employee and those of the organization. It is a condition where an employee embraces, adheres, and develops a deep understanding of the significance of the organizational core values. The focus of this study is the core values of a tertiary higher education institution located in Manila, Philippines. Congruence is key to the success of the institution as it ensures that the behaviors exhibited by employees in the workplace are strategically aligned with the organizational vision, mission, goals, and objectives. Through phenomenographic data analysis, metaphors have been identified to create a more comprehensive view of congruence of values. As a phenomenon, other meanings may be derived in order to establish a clearer conceptualization of congruence of values. A Phenomenographic Outcome Space of Congruence of Values is presented to provide a complete picture of the phenomenon. The Phenomenographic Outcome Space ties together the metaphors associated with congruence of values, namely: timeline, imprint, compass, light, and legacy.

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Introduction

Formation and internalization of organizational core values are frequently associated with the realm of business; however, increasing interest in this construct has been observed in the domain of educational leadership. Management of educational institutions has adopted principles of strategic planning patterned after business models that often assert the articulation of core values. Literatures in both business and educational administration have underscored the essence of congruence between core and personal values (Mueller, R., 2013). Coherence of the organization and its employees is a source of competitive advantage and can be used as a tool for strategic management (Vveinhardt, J. & Gulbovaitė, E., 2013) by enhancing the impact of person-organization fit and providing a clearer impression of the unique character and brand mark of the organization (Vveinhardt, J., Gulbovaitė, E. & Streimikiene, 2016).

Competence, commitment, and compassion are identified as the core values of the educational institution which is the focus of this study. These are explicitly articulated and declared through important organizational documents and other promotional materials. The prominence and centrality of the core values are underscored as manifested by their reiteration in the various avenues for communication and information dissemination of the University.

The organizational core values are critical to the institution's identity and realization of its vision, mission, and strategic direction. These are essential to success because core values serve as an encompassing basis for all decisions an institution makes, thus, must be introjected into all processes. Organizations that have successfully accomplished the identification of their core values and have aligned the day-to-day business practices have earned the approval of various stakeholders, are known to meet expectations, and

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make lasting contributions to society. It is imperative that employees are aware of the organization's core values from their first interaction until their last involvement as stakeholder of the institution because these are the cultural cornerstone upon which actions and decisions are strongly integrated.

Phenomenographic data analysis is a qualitative approach that facilitates gaining an in-depth understanding of congruence of values. Crafting the phenomenographic outcome space illustrates how metaphors that relate to congruence of values connect to one another and create a clear-cut picture of its meaning and significance.

Literature Review

Based on the Person-Environment (P-E) fit paradigm, attitudes and behaviors arise from the congruence between characteristics of the individual and the environment. Characteristics of the individual include needs, values, end-goals, personality, and abilities, while environment characteristics include rewards, cultural values, and environmental conditions (Darrow, J. & Behrend, T., 2017). This paradigm is comprised of two traditions, namely: the complementary fit and the supplementary fit. Complementary fit is anchored on the psychological need fulfillment and is demonstrated as the match between a person's desires and the resources available from the environment to fulfill these desires. Supplementary fit gives emphasis to the matching characteristics of a person and an organization, including similarity between individual values and the value system of the organization. Theoretically, values congruence has effects on the attitude and behavior of a person because of the tendency to trust and be attracted to people with similar values and characteristics (Gulbovaitė, E., 2017). Similarities in values can yield a common approach to cognitive processing and interpretation of circumstances, thus, increasing predictability and enhances interaction with others. An employee is likely to be comfortable in a work environment where the things important to him are also valuable to others. Having shared values promotes ease in communication and coherence in actions.

The broad concept of P-E fit has been broken down into different facets, namely: person-organization, person-vocation, person-job, person-group, and person-culture. Person-Organization (P-O) fit is oftentimes referred to as congruence between the personal values of the employees and the values of the organization subsumed under organizational culture. The P-O fit model by Jennifer Chatman illustrates the definition of P-O fit as the congruence of values (Gulbovaitė, E., 2017). Congruence affects the attitudes and behaviors of people due to the attraction towards others to whom one has similarities with. Values congruence is central to the study of P-O fit because this deals with the consistency of personal values with the culture and values of the organization the individual works for. P-O fit enhances an employee's identification and compatibility with the organization because it is concerned with the consistency of the employee's values, behaviors, and interests with that of the organization. Both the organization and its employees benefit from high degrees of P-O fit (Vveinhardt, J. & Gulbovaitė, E., 2015). Employees experience comfort and develop competence in an environment with values similar to theirs. The organization benefits as employees develop positive attitudes toward work and this fosters favorable organizational climate.

In a study conducted by Yuanjie Bao, Simon Dolan, and Shay Tzafir (2012), congruence of values is defined as compatibility between the personal work values of an individual and that of the organization. The similarity between the values is anchored on the theory of P-O fit. Congruence of values is one of the elements of P-O fit commonly studied in the 1980's and 1990's. This occurs when the organization satisfies the values of an individual.

The fit between the values of a person and the values of the organization is perceived to be fundamental and enduring. P-O fit and values congruence have been associated with employee workplace behaviors and outcomes, including motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intent to stay, and socialization. Individuals will seemingly remain satisfied and motivated by values that attracted them to the organization in the first place. An activity becomes meaningful if the employee is able to discover its alignment to his or her core values. Without this convergence, a person can become alienated and disengaged from their work.

According to the Social Identity Model, congruence of values is a predictor of employee attitudes. Values are principles that regulate what an individual would consider important in life (Cheng, A. & Fleischmann, K., 2010); thus, the decision to be a part of a certain organization is a reflection of one's values. The perception of society towards an employee is influenced by the values given importance by the employing organization, creating an effect on one's self-definition. Personal values not aligned to organizational values lead to cognitive dissonance and negative job attitudes (Darrow, J. & Behrend, T., 2017). When values are not shared among members of the organization, communication becomes difficult and circumstances are viewed differently, leading to heightened confusion and uncertainty.

Organizations often attempt to capitalize on congruence of values in order to improve employees' work attitudes and behaviors. In hiring applicants, assessments are done to determine congruence of values. Applicants who articulate values consistent with the formally established values of the organization must be selected (Vveinhardt et al., 2016). Even on the onboarding phase, socialization mechanisms are utilized to allow new employees to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills, and behaviors deemed important to the organization. This includes efforts of modifying the values of the new employees toward the direction of the values of the organization. Shared values increase the likelihood of developing a trusting relationship characterized by the willingness of a person to be vulnerable to the actions of another. This implies that alignment of the values between the employee and the organization promotes the perception among employees that their welfare will not be compromised by the organization. Shared values in the organization foster interactions characterized by an open exchange of information (Vveinhardt et al., 2016). Having

common standards minimizes cases of misunderstandings, interpersonal friction, and conflicting personal activities because of similar approaches to processing information. The trust and ease of communication are significant factors that ensue from values congruence that contribute to achievement of positive outcomes.

The congruence of values indicates that there is alignment between the values of an employee and those of the organization (Diskiene, D. & Gostautas, V., 2013). This refers to the semblance in values held by a person and the organization and how this is reflected in the daily activities of an employee (Vveinhardt, J. & Gulbovaitė, 2018). Individuals are guided by values in making decisions and undertaking actions, while the value system of an organization provides norms that guide how organizational members should behave and how resources are to be utilized (Wright, B. & Christensen, R., 2010). The concept of congruence addresses concerns pertaining to the interests of the employee and that of the performance of the organization. It has been observed that congruence of values has positive implications on both the employee and the organization (Vveinhardt, J. & Gulbovaitė, E., 2016).

Congruence goes beyond simply agreeing to values. It is a condition where an employee embraces, adheres, and develops a deep understanding of the significance of the organizational value (Vveinhardt, J. & Gulbovaitė, E., 2016). Employees whose personal values match with the organizational values exhibit high level of job satisfaction and are more likely to stay in the organization. This creates an adaptable, motivated, and committed workforce. Studies also show that values congruence contributes to the reduction of human resource-related issues such as staff turnover, unethical employee behavior, using time in the workplace for activities unrelated to one's work, stress, and anxiety (Gulbovaitė, 2017). Employees give more importance to selecting organizations with which they have a match of values over how much they will be compensated for their work (Diskiene, D. & Gostautas, V., 2013).

Corollary to its positive effects to the organization and its employees, evaluating congruence has become necessary. Assessing congruence enables an organization to undertake steps to lessen the existence of congruence gaps between personal and organizational values (Vveinhardt, J. & Gulbovaitė, E., 2016). The importance of managing a congruence gap is gaining attention in order to ensure that organizations are able to attract and retain employees who exhibit the expected and desired behavior in the workplace. Congruence of values does not only mean that an employee agrees with the organizational values, but also champions and complies with them, thus, contributing to creating a positive work environment and organizational climate (Gulbovaitė, E., 2017).

Gulbovaitė (2017) referred to congruence of values as a phenomenon and emphasized on the importance of diagnosing the congruence of personal and organizational values. It is seemingly possible that the organization has identified a list of values but the process of informing employees about these may be inadequate. Questions such as the extent of the obligatory nature of organizational values, and should organizational values take precedence over personal values may arise if incongruence would persist. Identifying the gap and the reasons for the gap between personal and organizational values will enable management to make decisions and act to strengthen congruence. Indicators of congruence include alignment of personal and organizational values, explicit support provided by top management, and actualization as seen in the day-to-day activities of majority of employees who uphold and abide by the values.

Vveinhardt and Gulbovaitė (2013) performed a comparative analysis of researches about values congruence. According to the study, 34.15% of researches were conducted in Asia, particularly in Malaysia and India; 31.71% in North America, mostly in the United States of America; 26.83% in Europe, including Belgium, Great Britain, among others; 4.88% in Australia; and the remaining small percentage was not specified. The researches were conducted in organizations of varying nature, including, educational institutions; medical facilities; service providers, such as those involved in transportation, communications and technology, law firms, banks, hotels, and restaurants; commercial establishments; and industrial organizations. Most of the studies conducted focused on identifying the impact of congruence of values on the employees and the organization, including job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, intent to stay, motivation, and organizational climate.

Gaps between personal and organizational values may be due to lack of cooperation, vague communication, lack of employee involvement, and inability of leaders to handle issues concerning the implementation of values (Vveinhardt et al., 2016).

Research and Methodology

The qualitative research design was used to establish an extensive understanding of the core values of an educational institution located in Manila, Philippines. Competence, commitment, and compassion are the core values of the organization. This included identifying the definitions and hallmarks or distinct characteristics of the core values to set these apart from the core values of other organizations.

Promoting congruence of values focuses on Resource Management as a Strategic Directional Area of the University. The strategic goal of the institution for Resource Management includes the engagement of a professional workforce who meets international standards and adapts to global change. This sheds light on what it takes to be part of the organization's workforce. To ensure congruence of values, the definitions and hallmarks of the core values have been established and their role in building a values-driven workforce.

Three officials who have been administrators in the University for more than ten years, were interviewed to determine the definitions and hallmarks of the organizational core values. Three randomly selected employees, representing the various employment clusters in the organization, namely, Professional, Technical, and Skilled, were interviewed to validate the data gathered from the interviews

of the administrative officials. This was an essential step for triangulation of data sources to promote objectivity of the study. The interviewees have been with the University for at least ten years to ensure that they have enough experience and exposure with the core values. The respondents were randomly selected from the list of employees arranged according to their employment cluster to achieve an unbiased representation of each cluster.

The qualitative design was carried out through the conduct of semi-structured interviews which lasted for an average of 45 minutes. There were prepared and pre-designed guide questions; however, the flow depended largely on the responses, narrations, and interpretations of the interviewees. Follow-up questions were asked to further draw additional inputs from the interviews. Some of these include inquiring about the details of activities implemented by the organization that help promote the core values, explaining the impact of various training and development activities on performance and expounding on how management maintains the positive relationship with the employees' union.

The interviews were conducted in the offices of the identified respondents, with the exception of one administrator, wherein the interview was conducted virtually through Google Meet. Being in a comfortable environment can posit favorable effects on the interviewee, thus, can positively affect the quality of the interview (de la Croix, Barrett, & Stenfors, 2018).

Interview questions such as "What are the hallmarks/ distinct characteristics of competence, commitment, and compassion as core values of the organization?", "How do they differ from other organizations?", and "What are real work examples of competence, commitment, and compassion?" were intended to draw out valuable information from the interviewees. These questions were intended to establish the clarity of the core values of the organization, how these are communicated to the employees, and how these are translated to actual work behaviors.

Phenomenographic data analysis was used to gain insights as to the conceptualization of the core values. This was carried out following the general steps recommended by Jan Larsson and Inger Holmström, as cited in the study of Jaana Kettunen and Päivi Tynjälä (2018): 1) The whole text of the transcribed interviews were read; 2) The answers of the interviewees pertaining to the identified questions were re-read and highlighted; 3) Emphasis was given on how the core values and congruence of values were promoted; 4) Categories, each represented by a metaphor, were created based on the similarities and differences of descriptions.

Findings and Discussion

Through the phenomenographic data analysis of the interviews, five categories of understanding congruence of values were derived. The table that follows presents the five ways of understanding what congruence of values is and its purpose to the organization which were derived from the interviews.

Table 1: Metaphors of Values Congruence Based on the Phenomenographic Data Analysis of Interviews

Categories	Metaphor	Illustrative Examples
Values congruence is an ongoing process rooted in the institution's history	Timeline	"We are striving to really inculcate in our lives the core values. It is always an ongoing effort".
Values congruence creates the identity of the organization	Imprint	"The core values are part of the culture of the University. They guide the actions of employees, and through these actions, the identity of the University is communicated to stakeholders".
Values congruence gives meaning to what the organization and employees do	Light	"You cannot give what you do not have" (Lana, 2002). "We develop our students to have these values. To teach them these values, we should align our values also".
Values congruence guides employees' actions	Compass	"The core values of the University are important. Living them shows one's dedication to their work. We are able to give service to our stakeholders if we are guided by these core values."
Values congruence enables imparting ideals to employees	Legacy	"You need to understand the core values in order to make them part of your life. It is like paying it forward. If you are not able to experience these from your employer, you will not be able to share these to others. But if you are able to experience the core values in the organization you will be able to impart these to others as well."

Congruence of values is an ongoing process rooted in the institution's history

These values have been established as part of the preparations for the organization's fourth centenary (a celebration of institutional history), aligned with the strategic plan (bringing efficiency in the present order of things), and anchored on the mission and vision (future direction).

Congruence of values is an ongoing process of striving to inculcate the values in the lives of the organization's human resources. The values are rooted in the history of the organization, forward-looking as it aims to achieve the organization's vision and mission, and lived today to guide actions and decisions.

Congruence of values creates the identity of the organization

Congruence of values gives the indelible mark of the organization. The core values guide employees on their daily activities, and in turn, how employees perform their daily activities builds the identity of the organization.

Congruence of values gives meaning to what the organization and employees do

According to St. Thomas Aquinas, "Nemo dat non quod habet" which means "no one can give what he does not have". In order to impart competence, commitment, and compassion to stakeholders, especially students, employees must have these values in their personal value system. Just like the light of a candle, it has to be lit in order to illuminate.

Part of the vision and mission of the University is the formation of graduates who possess the core values of competence, commitment, and compassion. In order to develop such characters among students, it is seemingly imperative that administrators, teachers, and employees must possess a personal value system aligned with the value system of the University. Employees must possess the values to be able to pass them to learners.

Congruence of values guides employees' actions

The core values navigate and orient employees to the direction of what the organization aims to achieve for the benefit of its stakeholders. An organization's core values are basis of the expectations of stakeholders. Congruence of values would ensure that employees are guided by the core values in performing their tasks and rendering service to stakeholders.

Congruence of values enables imparting ideals to employees

Employees are motivated to model the core values of the organization when they experience these from administrators and their superiors. Administrators have a crucial role in reminding employees to incorporate the values in their daily activities and in the implementation of plans and programs. Employees must be made aware of how the values are manifested and embodied in the conduct of their daily duties and responsibilities.

The outcome space in phenomenography explores the relationship of the categories. The categories highlight the variations among perceptions, while the outcome space derives the holistic perception of the phenomenon (Forster, 2015). The summary of the logical relations among the categories can be illustrated as:

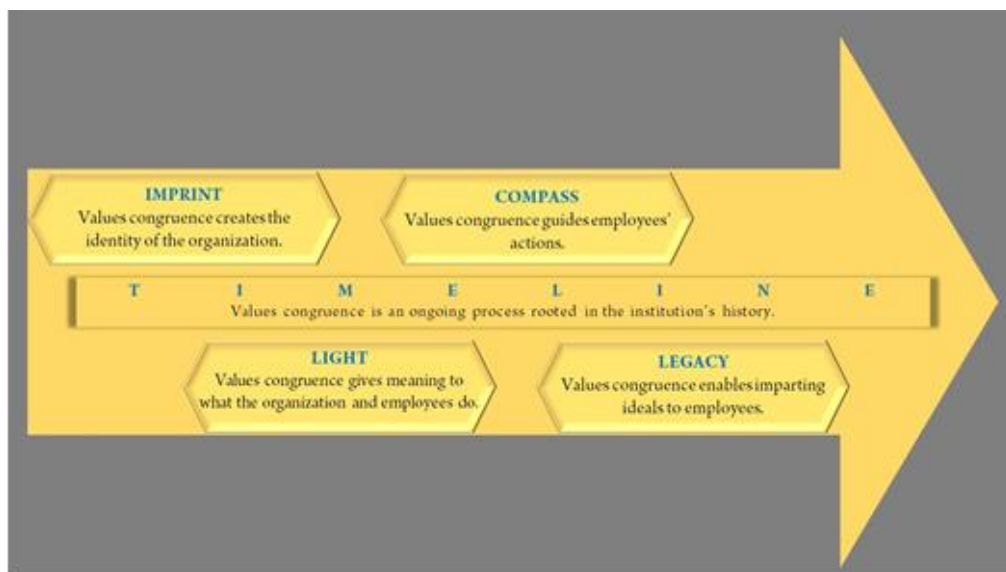


Figure1: Phenomenographic Outcome Space of Congruence of Values

Understanding congruence of values as an ongoing process is a comprehensive view. It is rooted into the organization's history as an educational institution. To fully understand the core values, what they mean, and how these can be lived by employees, one of the interviewees recommended to look back into how these were founded as the organization's core values. Competence, commitment, and compassion were derived from the Strategic Plan of the institution covering the years 2001-2011.

By looking at the timeline, specifically the past and how the core values have evolved through time, the identity of the University is established. One of the interviewees emphasized that the core values create the identity or trademark of the organization. The identity emanates from the organization and is projected to the employees "This is the brand of the University and its stakeholders". The values espoused by the organization are expected to be reflected by the employees as well.

Once this identity becomes clear, the purpose of the organization becomes definite as well. This is expressed as the mission of the organization. As an institution that aims to form competent, committed, and compassionate professionals, there is also a need to have competent, committed, and compassionate women and men serving the University. "You cannot give what you do not have".

It can be derived from the interview of one employee that as part of the University, employees must help develop the core values among students. Imparting the values to the stakeholders, especially the students of the University, gives a deeper meaning to the jobs of employees. Being in an educational institution, not only administrators and teachers can teach. Employees also teach through their actions and the examples they set. In order to do that, employees themselves must align their values with the values of the organization. Just like the metaphor of the light, before a source can radiate light, it has to generate its own light first. Only then can it illuminate.

Referring back to the timeline, at present, the core values serve as guide for employees' actions. Since the interviews were conducted at the height of the Covid-19 global crisis, employees cannot do away with mentioning how the values guided them in the conduct of their work during pandemic times. Amid changing and challenging times, employees are guided to the right direction by the core values in managing their performance. The core values are the true north that guides employees through uncertainties and ambiguities.

The future of the organization is also influenced by congruence of values. An employee emphasized that one way by which values are learned is through the actions of administrators. "As the University, through its administrators, would show compassion to students, as employees, we are inspired to extend compassion as well".

An employee narrated that their office has been receiving requests from students asking for consideration regarding various matters, mainly financial in nature, because their families have been adversely affected by the Covid-19 crisis. The organization has existing policies in line with handling of specific concerns; however, because of the pandemic, requests for consideration are usually dealt with individually. Administrators study the merits of the request and extend consideration as much as possible, citing that they understand the difficulties brought about by the pandemic. Thus, when students approach employees with problems and concerns, they handle the situation guided by the value of compassion. "Observing our superiors extend compassion, we are taught to be compassionate as well. Values are caught not taught".

Conclusion

Congruence of values indicates alignment between the values of an employee and those of the organization. There is semblance in values held by a person and the organization and how this is reflected in the daily activities of an employee. Phenomenographic data analysis provided an opportunity to draw out other meanings of congruence of values. It was an approach that enabled gaining insights as to the conceptualization of congruence of values. Congruence of values can be viewed in the light of metaphors such as timeline, imprint, compass, light, and legacy.

This study focused on one specific educational institution and its core values. Further studies may be conducted in other institutions and industries to have a deeper understanding of congruence of values. Different institutions have different core values. Various industries put emphasis on diverse values. Shifting the focal point towards the core values of varying institutions and industries will likely create alternate phenomenographic outcome spaces that can expand further the understanding of the meaning of congruence of values. Further studies can also highlight similarities and differences across cultures.

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