

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Perspectives on Values

2.1 Introduction

The aim of the study is to formulate and investigate the validity of the structure of work values during an early stage of career process by means of the development of a Work Values Questionnaire. The first step in the questionnaire development process is to formulate a description of values and work values as constructs. A useful description will be transformed into items of the Work Values Questionnaire. In this chapter, I will discuss different theoretical perspectives of values (as construct). Before discussing these perspectives, I will first attempt to place the description of values as construct in perspective against the backdrop of the shift from a modern to post-modern rationality.

In light of the preceding discussion on rationality during medieval times, the irrelevance of individual values during this period should be expected. This statement can be explained by the fact that the rationality of the individual and the rationality of the church and therefore the values of the individual and the values of the church were the same.

The modern era followed the medieval era. Kirsten (1988) describes the standing of modern axiology (the study of values) according to the following factors. When not neglected or ignored, it was expected that cultural values transferred by modern principals, would increase human control over the environment, form an objective self and world concept, establish moral and legal principals and enhance human happiness. These characteristics were the focus of post-modern critique (Kirsten, 1988).

Modern perspectives of values include the work of theorists from different fields. Miller (1983) categorises theories of values according to the following psychological phenomena. He distinguishes between hedonistic, connotative, conceptual and linguistic theories. Miller (1983) considers the total spectrum of pleasure and pain as

experienced by people, as a basis for hedonistic value theories such as classical utilitarianism. The second perspective includes a process where motivations and attitudes act as determinants of values. Examples of such theories are emotive theories from positivists, preference theories proposed by economists and projects proposed by existentialists. Miller (1983) mentions conceptual and linguistic theories as a third type of values theory.

A search for psychological role players in this area produced three types of studies. First, studies referring to different types of values include the work of Rokeach (1969), Spranger as used in the Study of Values by Allport, Vernon and Lindzey (1970) and Hofstede (1980). Second, applications of personality theories serve as explanation for the existence of values as construct. Examples of this type include the work of Kelly (Kelly, 1955; Bannister, 1979) and Rogers (in Critelli, 1987). Third, values are included in developmental approaches. With regard to the development of the adolescent, literature frequently refers to the development of an individual values system as one of the developmental tasks of the adolescent (Mussen, Conger, Kagan & Huston, 1990). Other theorists such as Piaget (1979) and Kohlberg (1981) (theories on moral development) received less recognition for their work on this topic. More specifically, Sagie, Elizur and Koslowsky (1996) divide research on work values into studies dealing with structure, correlates and cultural differences. Theories on work values will be discussed in the following two chapters.

No comprehensive attempt to construct a values theory could be found in the psychological literature. Smith (1978) supports this statement. Smith (1978) poses the question whether psychologists are capable of contributing to the field of axiology in any other way than giving broad descriptions of values. In general, it seems that psychologists either made a hesitant entrance into this field or ignored it all together.

In contradiction to the restrictive context provided by modern rationality, a post-modern rationality includes the possibility to study constructs such as values, which were previously under represented or even excluded from empirically based research. Hoffman (1993) describes these changes metaphorically as mental phenomena (including values) returning from a long exile. Like most psychological constructs, values have been discussed in the context of various epistemological approaches. An

epistemological approach refers to the basic premises that underlie cognition and action (Keeney, 1983).

Fekete (1988) emphasises the important role of values in a postmodern paradigm. Perspectives on values gain importance as different theoretical views assimilate to a postmodern perspective. This does not imply the conceptualisation of a unified theory of values. It rather points in the direction of the development of a field of reasoning marked by tension between different stances on the topic.

The aspect of the classification of values according to hierarchies is discussed in the following paragraph. The rest of this chapter focuses on different perspectives on the construct of values. Five perspectives are discussed, including a linguistic, cognitive, emotive, needs and social co-constructed perspective. The chapter is concluded with a discussion on how these perspectives will be utilised in the development of the Work Values Questionnaire.

2.2 Values hierarchies



Several theorists distinguish between values according to a hierarchical classification of values. Different theorists have different views on this topic. This section reflects some of these views.

According to Stern (1962) individuals are confronted with a world consisting of physical and psychological inequalities. People refer to these hierarchical inequalities as values. Individuals have a subjective experience of these hierarchical inequalities. This results in different perceptions and therefore the values that individuals have (Stern, 1962).

Cadwallar (1980) distinguishes between higher and lower values. This distinction has a bearing on a distinction between abstract and concrete values. An example of a higher and lower concrete value would be that in a certain context the empty soup tin would be of lower value than a new car. On an abstract level, having job security could be of greater value for a worker than advancement within an organisation. Other theorists such as Scheler and Hartman (Stern, 1962) share Stern's hierarchical

division of higher and lower values. Hartman also distinguishes between stronger and weaker values.

For the purpose of this study, it is accepted that people do not attach equal value to different values. It can be useful to distinguish between values of greater and lesser importance as it influences an individual's creation of a career and determines an individual's satisfaction with the career he or she is in at the time. Individuals and organisations can utilise the Work Values Questionnaire in order to distinguish between values of a greater and lesser importance. This aspect is discussed in Chapters Three and Four. In this study, a framework of values is used as opposed to the idea of creating a hierarchy of values. The rationale for this decision is discussed in paragraph 6.4.1.

Apart from the fact that values can be distinguished from other concepts by hierarchical ordering, distinctions are drawn according to grammatical uses for the word. The following section will deal with these ideas.

2.3 Linguistic perspective

A theory of values based on a linguistic construction refers to a differentiation in the grammatical use of the construct values. The description of this perspective in this section is based on the practice of the philosophy of language, as opposed to psychological analysis. Psychological theories associated with the post-modern rationality place great emphasis on language in as much as Lupton and Barclay (1997) refer to the "linguistic turn" as an important characteristic of the poststructural perspective. This section discusses the use of the concept values as concrete noun and abstract noun, verb and adjective. Each application will be described separately.

2.3.1 Noun

With regard to the noun, a distinction can be made between an abstract and concrete noun. An abstract noun refers to value as attribute. A value is the attribute according to which something can be described as valuable or good (Runes, 1964). Other definitions refer to appropriateness and usefulness as a result of this attribute. In this

regard, the practical value of an object can refer to the usefulness of the object (Baldwin, 1960). Runes (1964) uses a wider definition by including the possibility of attributing positive or negative value to something. In using the word value as noun, one refers to things with the property of value or to what can be viewed as valuable.

Different theorists have varied arguments distinguishing between abstract values and other grammatical uses of the construct values as well as constructs that are altogether different from values. Mulder (1981) distinguishes between values and emotions, Frondizi (1963) and Miller (1983) between values and what is valuable. Frondizi (1963) further distinguishes between values and valuing. According to Frondizi (1963), to confuse values with valuing will be equivalent to confusing perception with a perceived object.

2.3.2 Verb

According to Runes (1964) the use of the word value as verb refers to a mental action or attitude of valuing or valuation. Runes (1964) defines valuation as a process or action according to which value is attributed to something or according to which the value of some thing is determined. Baldwin (1960) defines the use of valuing or valuation as any form of subjective appreciation or in other words the process according to which value is attributed to something. It is concluded that in psychological terms the use of the construct value in this context relates to cognitive processes. These processes are described in section four of this chapter.

2.3.3 Adjective

Third, the use of values as an adjective is discussed. This use of the word refers to the result of the valuing or valuation process. The outcome of this process determines how valuable something is (Najder, 1975). Valuableness is the adjective used for the word value. The distinction between the use of the word value as noun and adjective lies in the fact that the former refers to the entity that is valuable as opposed to the latter referring to valuableness itself.

2.3.4 Summary

Theorists are in dispute with regard to the importance and role of the different grammatical uses. An example is Gaus' (1990) view that the use of the verb is central to any value theory. From a modern perspective, it could have been important to motivate the usage of one of these forms, as a point of departure for this study. From a postmodern perspective a discussion on the usefulness of these descriptions from a position of temporal locality will be more appropriate.

2.4 Cognitive perspective

Cognitive psychology gained prominence as psychological phenomenology during the last three decades. It developed in reaction to behaviourism and posits that individual thoughts and ideas determine human behaviour. Cognition refers to both content and processes involved in thought. It further proposes the existence of cognitive structures. These structures consist of accounts of previous experiences and can be viewed as a blue print to individual cognitive organisation (Kelly, 1955). Reber (1985) defines cognition as a general term that refers to activities such as thinking, arguing, insight, imagination and problem solving. Popular personality theories in cognitive psychology include Kelly's (1955) Personal Construct Theory, as well as, the Rational Emotive Approach as conceptualised by Ellis (1996). On the level of developmental psychology, Piaget's Structural-Cognitive Approach can be viewed as important (Piaget 1979).

Cognitive psychologists such as Kelly (1991) and Piaget (1979) make use of unique terminology to explain their theories. The first of these terms is schema. Schema refers to constructed thoughts, organised in patterns. It can be extrapolated that individuals will organise their values in schemata and will evaluate the value that they attach in a context in accordance with these schemata.

Piaget (1979) explains that individuals live in equilibrium. This equilibrium will stay intact if individuals can deal with situations using existing schemata. With regard to values it can be said that individuals will experience a state of equilibrium when their schemata of values are unchallenged. If a situation arises that the existing schemata

cannot deal with, adaptation will be required in order to restore the equilibrium. Piaget (1979) proposes two possible methods of adaptation, namely assimilation and accommodation. Adaptation by means of assimilation refers to changes in the environment in order to adapt to the individual's existing schemata. Adaptation by means of accommodation refers to changes in individual cognitive structures in order to adapt to the environment.

Cognitive science and neuro-science have taken our understanding of the existence of structures that impact on the content and process of thought, one step further. An overview of this rapidly growing field studying concepts such as attention, perception, memory, decision-making, evaluations and information processing, fills outside the scope of this study (LeDoux, 1998). For the purpose of this study, I accept that values form part of our memory content and are dynamic insofar as cognitive science and neuro-science indicate that these systems are active and dynamic.

Experience of the frame of a cognitive approach to values can be illustrated by the story of a forty-nine year old English speaking person. He was referred to me as result of an access dispute pertaining to his minor children. While discussing his occupational background, he related his experiences during a term of imprisonment. He was a banker, was involved in financial markets and valued money and all aspects related to money. He was accustomed to work an eighteen-hour day and functioned on a high level of efficiency. Being incarcerated for more than a decade as a result of fraud charges, forced disequilibrium in terms of his schemata of values. He dealt with this disequilibrium by means of both assimilation and accommodation. An example of adaptation through assimilation follows. He had always been an active person and found the passive life in prison unbearable. He had the option of accommodating his schemata to this new life of inactivity or he could attempt to assimilate by attempts to change the environment, in order to adapt to his schemata with regard to human activity. He did the latter and organised donations for recreational facilities to different South African prisons.

2.5 An emotive perspective

The project of emotivism is associated with philosophy as field of study. Specific emotive theories never gained popularity in modern psychology. Reber (1985) defines emotion as an umbrella term for a number of subjective experiences. Reber (1985) views emotions to be relatively acute and situationally bound.

The views of Gaus (1990) and Stern (1962) posit emotions to be a precondition to any process of valuing or valuation. According to this point of view, only entities capable of emotive responses can develop value concepts. Gaus (1990) views emotions as something that triggers a person to proceed with a process of valuing or valuation.

Different theoretical stances describe emotions as bodily responses, mental states, unconscious impulses, conscious decisions or social co-constructions. Research in cognitive science and neuro-science indicate that emotional experiences are linked with concepts such as memory, activation of the amygdala and responses from the arousal systems and associated structures (LeDoux, 1998). This leads me to the same conclusion with which I ended the previous section. For the purpose of this study, I accept that values form part of our memory content and are dynamic insofar as cognitive science and neuro-science indicate that these systems are active and dynamic.

Experience from the frame of an emotive approach to values can be illustrated by the story of an Afrikaans speaking female person. She consulted me because of depressive symptoms that she ascribed to her working conditions. She was a highly qualified person in her fifties working in the civil service. According to her own planning and developments within her department, she expected an appointment in a directorship position. As result of the restructuring of the civil service in accordance with affirmative action policy, she did not receive the expected promotion and she effectively viewed her new appointment as a demotion. This situation triggered depressive symptoms. The depressive symptoms in turn triggered an evaluation of her work values. She realised that in contrast to her current emotional state, she flourishes emotionally when expressing the values of new challenges, responsibility and creativity. By using a narrative therapeutic approach, she realised she had to mobilise

her creative powers from within in order to address her situation and emotional responses.

2.6 Values as needs

Reber (1985) defines needs as any entity that can improve the well-being of the individual. It can therefore be described as basically a physical entity such as food, as well as, social and personal factors. Reber (1985) also refers to internal individual states as needs. This definition is in accordance with other theoretical constructions on needs such as that of Maslow (Maddi, 1989). According to Kaplan (in Gaus, 1990) only persons with the ability to identify needs, states of well-being and interest will be positioned to develop value concepts and to evaluate.

Other theoretical constructions that tie in with the construction of values as needs or a reaction to needs, are constructions of values as desires or reaction to desires. Gaus (1990) a proponent for an affective-cognitive construction of values, dismisses desires playing a significant role in valuing. Gaus (1990) argues that desire is no precondition to valuing and if it features in the valuing process, it can be regarded as an affective response.



Experience of the perspective of a needs approach to values can be illustrated by the story of a thirty year old Afrikaans speaking female person. She entered the legal profession on an entrepreneurial basis and experienced both her work and the independence she experienced as satisfying. In discussion over the last six months, she mentioned that although she valued these aspects of her work she found the lack of security and guaranteed financial rewards frustrating. She felt that she needed the stability of knowing how much she will earn each month, more than knowing that she is working for herself. In this situation there was an interrelation between her values and needs. She therefore decided to explore the possibility of a career change.

2.7 The social co-construction of values

According to Hoffman (1990) social construction theory holds that our beliefs about the world are social interventions. As we move through the world, we build our ideas

about it during conversation with others. The social construction theory posits an evolving set of meanings that emerge unendingly from the interactions between people. Reality is co-constructed by the persons that are in-language on a specific issue (Hoffman, 1990; Real, 1990). Dare (1995) explains the focus of social constructionism to be the process whereby meaning is arrived at communally. Content is secondary to a preoccupation in the way that we perceive, interpret and semantically construct.

These views can be extrapolated to the co-construction of a consensual reality about what values are and what people value. During each conversation an endless number of new meanings can be co-constructed. Therefore, according to the theory of social construction no one theory of values can be proposed as no objective reality exists.

Experience of the perspective of a social co-construction of values can be illustrated by the career story of a thirty-four year old, English speaking, and male person. He was referred to me as result of stress-related health problems of a serious nature. In conversation, consensus was reached that his present situation could be ascribed to a number of factors including his work and the fact that his wife was expecting their first child. He was a self-employed engineer. He enjoyed his work but felt uncomfortable to market his services in order to generate new opportunities. He asked for assistance in deciding what action to take with regard to his occupational future. I asked him to tell me about a time in the past that he was most satisfied with his working conditions. He related a story about his involvement in an organisation, where he worked in a team on a specific project. We discussed the story, the themes and plots, the strands of optimism and value. During this discourse, we co-constructed the values that form the consensual reality from which he could make the necessary decisions.

2.8 Conclusion

As stated before it is not the purpose of this chapter to provide a unified theory of values. The usefulness of any theoretical perspective set out in this chapter should be determined from a position of temporal locality. In other words, a person has to legitimise the theoretical perspective or combinations of perspectives he uses in a

specific context. Legitimation cannot be found in the formulation of a unified theory.

The theoretical perspective set out in this chapter is utilized to explain the process of questionnaire use and for generating items of the Work Values Questionnaire. In considering the three linguistic uses of the word value as it relates to a Work Values Questionnaire, it seems that the three uses will be applicable at different times in the development and use of the Questionnaire. Values as abstract noun refers to the specific constructs that will be represented in the Questionnaire, for instance whether it is valuable to have support from co-workers. Support from co-workers will be a value (noun) of high or low valuebleness. The process a person will engage in, in order to evaluate (verb) whether this construct has value (noun) refers to the use of value as a verb. To answer items of the questionnaire on the answer sheet, will be a process of evaluation. The outcome of such an evaluation (verb) will determine how valuable (adjective) a value (noun) is. In other words, the scores obtained for the defined constructs will determine how valuable certain values are for the participant.

The other perspectives, namely, the cognitive, emotive and needs perspectives are utilised in creating the stem of each question in the Work Values Questionnaire. Questions start with the stem “To what extent do you feel..” or “To what extent do you think..” or “To what extent do you need..” or “To what extent do you view.. “ or “To what extent do believe..”. Other verbs that are used include see, desire and regard. The following two chapters form the basis for the second part of any item, referring to the construct of work values. In Chapter Three, the work of Buchholz (1978) is explored as a source for developing a theoretical framework for the Work Values Questionnaire.