

# Work Values: A Comparative Research between Italian and Spanish Youth

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## VALORI DEL LAVORO: UNA RICERCA COMPARATIVA TRA GIOVANI ITALIANI E SPAGNOLI

### ABSTRACT

*A dynamic framework that is «clearly identifiable» in relation to values research (Super, 1995) is essential in order to identify the meaning of interests, motivations, attitudes and ethics (Bellotto, 2004), focused on young generations facing work world. This research aims to: identify work values and values' orientation in relation to work; specify generational and cultural differences. The research topic consists of: a sample of Spanish, composed by 230 persons, that has a more materialistic and risk-taking orientation that, even if it decreases with age, show how young Spanish are more competitive; in the Italian sample there are 203 subjects, that shows differences in terms of old and young generations regarding value orientation; the group of people from 18 to 29 years old has a significant mate-*

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\* Valeria Caggiano is responsible of the research, she has structured the methodology and made the data analysis; Andrea Bellezza has collaborated in writing the theoretical introduction and has also participated collecting the Italian and Spanish sample; Iker Omar Belsaguy has collaborated collecting the Italian sample, he is also responsible of the English language review; Jeronimo González-Bernal, has collaborated collecting the Spanish sample and has made the review of this research original language (Spanish).

*realistic self-orientation, definitely high if compared to the other groups. The results show the importance of work values and contribute to studies about how various groups adopt different values depending on cultural and social needs.*

*Keywords:* Education, Generational change, Orientations, Values, Work values.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

There are many scientific contributions in literature, various authors, different psychological theories, all related to work values and orientations. These include interests, needs, motivations, attitudes, opinions, beliefs and ethic (Bellotto, 2004). At the same time the debate over values has been assigned to other disciplines such as sociology, which has studied social values, anthropology or philosophy that have often faced the ethical question (Ajzen & Cote, 2008). Sometimes the lack of interest of these disciplines, in relation to scientific method, is linked to the fact that values cannot be investigated through objective tools. Furthermore, for the science that set the goal of predicting human behavior, values were considered only indirectly related to observable behavior, this generated an approach with few predictive values, and a limited use of them (Capanna & Vecchione, 2005). In this framework a more specific purpose of this study is to analyze the role of education in relation to the neo-liberal economic model proposed by the European Union, considering that the dominant culture imposes a great number of choices and educational actions to individuals (Linan, 2008). Different studies show how students' specific learning style preferences depend on their cultural values (Baumann, 2011).

The European Commission and the European Council adopted a guideline in 2006 entitled *Modernizing education and training: A vital contribution to prosperity and social cohesion in Europe*, where education is analyzed from a global and inclusive perspective. Automatic processes become clear to our consciousness only when this processes end, as for a background noise. In the same way we perceive the continuous and fast change that permeates our contemporary society. In this vision values change as fast as society, and they are treated in a superficial way, there is more a communication about values that not a real coherent and functional system of values (Donati, 2001). This is the reason why recently the «problem of values» has come to light in the Education field.

## 2. ANALYSIS OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In view of the above it's necessary and appropriate to define a specific research sector about work values, focusing a precise definition of «work values»: as

«characteristics or conditions of work that meet the professional aspirations and that can be satisfied, more or less independently, by the different professional sectors» (Lidaka, 2013). Values are a lasting organization of beliefs and attitudes of what is preferable, right, or good in life. A value is considered all that is part of a need, a desire or an interest (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998). The intention is based on a system of desires and purposes, structured hierarchically according to an order with different levels of priority: a criterion that guides behavior of people, orienting them and facilitating decision-making processes (Caprara & Schwartz, 2006). Values are key factors that influence the way we define situations, consider alternatives, and ultimately choose a course of action (Holland & Shepherd, 2013). In every complex decision, in all the experiences that need a strategy and a plan, values play a vital role (Linan & Chen, 2009). Each value can be considered an instrument to reach the attainment of other values considered superior. Necessity tends to value, but once the need is satisfied, tension ends as well; value does not finish once satisfied, in any case it is strengthened (Caprara & Alessandri, 2012). A value can be represented as an instrument that people use to measure and evaluate experiences, facts and things; in this respect work values become fundamental in terms of social integration and development. Super (1995) considers work values as basic resources for all the activities and roles that we afford in a professional career. Work values guide people's attitudes and behaviors related to work, influencing performances; in this sense it is important to understand work values for the effects they have in terms of strategy and management of human resources (Donati, 2001). We can definitely affirm that values are instruments to access learning and entrepreneurship (Chen, 2005). Learning institutions and instruments are the strategic driver to spread knowledge and engage young people, education about work value is one of the important areas of a learning curriculum; education is the way to stimulate entrepreneurial behavior's development in different directions (Linan, Moriano, & Zarnowska, 2008). All this creates the basis for further in-depth research, which may in the future lead to concrete projects on work value and entrepreneurship education through a conscious and targeted value proposition (Fayolle, 2005).

### 3. RESEARCH'S OBJECTIVE AND HYPOTHESIS

The main purpose of this study is to identify values, pointing out orientation of values, and at the same time observing differences in Italy and Spain.

This research rests on the following hypothesis:

- there will be significant differences between Italian sample and Spanish sample about the 5 orientations of values: Materialist Orientation; Self ori-

- entation; Orientation towards others; Orientation to independence; Orientation to the challenge;
- there will be significant differences between generations, in the two samples, for these 5 orientations;
  - there will be significant differences between Italian and Spanish young people.

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

*Sample.* The sample is non-probabilistic and consists of 433 subjects: in particular, 203 subjects belong to the Italian group, coming mainly from the region of Lazio and other regions of southern Italy; 230 Spanish subjects, concentrated in the Community of Castile and Leon. Sample's geographic distribution is based on the relationship between Università Roma Tre and Universidad de Burgos that supported this research.

In the Italian sample we have 48% of men and 52% of women. This group is made of: 0.5% of high school students, 13.3% of university students, 86.2% of working age adults; in terms of age we have 30% between 18 and 29 years old; 43.4% between 30 and 49 years of age; and over 50 years as 26.6%.

The Spanish group is composed of 230 subjects, 49% men and 51% women; 5.3% are high school students, 13.9% are university students, 80.8% working age adults; 30.8% have an age between 18 and 29 years, 43% between 30 and 49 years, while 26.2% over 50 years.

*Instruments and procedure.* From a methodological point of view, the study is developed in several phases: during the first phase the most important and recent bibliographical references were collected to deepen the desk study; in the second phase pilot study was carried out to adapt the questionnaire to the Spanish sample. In the third phase instruments were administered: the questionnaire *Work Values & Work Importance Study*; and the statistical tests Mann-Whitney test, T Student and ANOVA.

In the following phases, we have analyzed data collected.

The questionnaire, besides detecting the professional values of the subjects, is able to measure 5 fundamental orientations, useful for a more synthetic and global understanding of the dynamics of values. The conventional denomination of the 5 orientations is formulated as follows: Materialistic Orientation; Self orientation; Orientation towards others; Orientation to independence; Orientation to the challenge.

## 5. DATA ANALYSIS

In order to make a comparison and detect differences that are statistically significant, data were obtained from the statistical tests already indicated. The first is a non-parametric test, the Mann-Whitney test, that is important to compare the position's parameter in relation to the two populations. The sum of the ranges of values F1, F2, F3, F4, F5 of the Mann-Whitney test was calculated in the two reference groups.

First research hypothesis:

- H0 states that the mean of the Italian group = the mean of the Spanish group, while the alternative hypothesis states that the mean of the Italian group  $\neq$  mean of the Spanish group. If H0 is true, the sum of the ranges of the first sample, and the sum of the rows of the second sample, should not differ significantly.
- H1 is accepted. The mean of the Italian group differs from the Spanish group respecting the MATER average, that is, the materialistic orientation.

Table 1. – Levels of significance test (a).

	MATER	SELFO	OTHER	INDEP	CHALL
U of Mann-Whitney	12203.000	21112.500	20991.500	21367.500	23009.000
W of Wilcoxon	32909.000	47677.500	41697.500	47932.500	43715.000
Z	-8.578	-1.719	-1.812	-1.523	-.259
Sig. Asint. a 2 code	.000	.086	.070	.128	.796

As shown in *Table 1*, regarding significance levels for each value orientation the Mann-Whitney test rejects the null hypothesis with a significance level of less than 0.05 for the dimension of the Materialism orientation values (F1).

Interestingly, assuming a threshold value/*p*-value equal to 0.07, the alternative hypothesis could also be accepted with respect to the third orientation of values: orientation to others. In the latter case, the mean of the Spanish sample is higher than that of the Italian workers. As for the remaining value orientations, the null hypothesis must be accepted, and therefore the two groups do not differ significantly between them. For an additional study, another test was performed for each dimension of the values, the parametric T Student, to test the hypothesis that the two samples present a mean value equal to the dimension considered, versus the alternative that the Italian mean is different compared to the sample from Spain.

This test confirms the results of the Mann-Whitney test, which shows that the mean values of the dimension of F1 values are higher in Spain, as can be deduced from *Table 2*.

Table 2. – Test T Student for independent dimensions.

LEVENE'S TEST FOR EQUALITY OF VARIANCES		T-TEST FOR EQUALITY OF MEANS							
F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-code)	Difference between means	Difference of standard error	Confidence interval for the 95% difference		
							Inferior	Superior	
MATER	18.443	.000	-9.334	431	.000	-9.87312	1.05781	-11.95223	-7.79401
			-9.156	364.95	.000	-9.87312	1.07827	-11.99353	-7.75271
SELFO	31.314	.000	1.461	431	.145	1.27053	.86962	-.43870	2.97976
			1.429	351.57	.154	1.27053	.88934	-.47856	3.01962
OTHER	3.164	.076	-2.080	431	.038	-2.58049	1.24069	-5.01905	-1.14193
			-2.069	413.12	.039	-2.58049	1.24717	-5.03208	-1.2889
INDEP	2.151	.143	1.587	431	.113	1.40677	.88647	-.33557	3.14910
			1.595	430.21	.111	1.40677	.88192	-.32664	3.14018
CHALL	16.121	.000	.160	431	.873	.17136	1.07240	-1.93642	2.27915
			.157	380.24	.875	.17136	1.08890	-1.96965	2.31238

The Student t values calculated from the materialistic orientation have a significance level,  $p$ -value of  $\alpha$  (.000), indicating the significant comparative differences. In addition, the table identifies another difference between the two samples, this time related to Orientation towards others.

The  $p$ -value of this numerical value is equal to 0.038 ( $< 0.05$ ) and for this reason, considering a very low probability of a first class error, we could say that the orientation towards others is more present in the Spanish group.

In order to verify the second research hypothesis, that is to detect significant differences between generations, we used ANOVA. The null hypothesis  $H_0$  indicates that there are no differences between the generations:

$$H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2 = \mu_3$$

Instead, the alternative hypothesis is constructed in this way:

$$H_1: \text{at least two significantly different averages}$$

From *Table 2*, in relation to the materialistic orientation, we observe a level of significance  $\alpha$  equal to 0.000 in the Italian group. In other words, we reject the null hypothesis and accept  $H_1$  for this orientation.

For self-orientation, we have a  $p$ -value equal to  $0.012 < \alpha = 0.05$ , and then we will have to accept the alternative hypothesis also in this case. In the group of Italian workers there are significant differences between the generations in terms of materialistic and toward others orientation.

In both cases, as the graphs suggest, the age group between 18-29 years is the one that presents the two orientations more than the group between 30-49 years and over 50 years old.

To describe the Italian group we can say that the older people become the less MATER and SELFO is (*Figure 1*).

The Spanish sample is significant considering the value of  $p$   $\alpha < (\alpha = 0.05)$  of the fifth orientation, that is, the orientation to challenge. So, there is a statistically significant difference between the generations of Spain for this orientation: we accept  $H_1$ .

Also for this group, the direction of the challenge orientation is greater at 18-29 years of age and then decreases as the age increases. As for the other guidelines, we accept the null hypothesis since there are no significant differences between the generations. Spanish young people are comparatively more oriented to MATER and the challenge, therefore we accept  $H_1$  with respect to the first, second and fifth orientations.

The third and last hypothesis to be checked is focused on the significant differences in the five values orientations in the two different young groups.

$$H_0: \mu_{1it} = \mu_{1al}$$

$$H_1: \neq \mu_{1it} \mu_{1al}$$

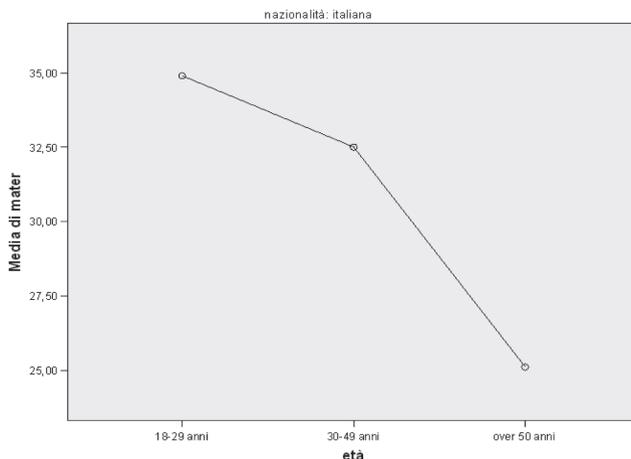


Figure 1. – Orientation towards itself of the Italian group according to age.

To test this hypothesis the T Student test was performed, in order to compare the five values guidelines in the two groups of young people. The groups differ significantly from each other in relation to these three guidelines: materialistic orientation, orientation to challenge and self-orientation.

For the MATER orientation, there was a  $p$ -value equal to .002; .008 for the SELFO orientation, and  $\alpha = .000$  for the orientation to Challenge.

If we observe the means' differences we can notice that Italian group is more self-oriented than Spanish group, while young Spanish people is more oriented to materialism and challenge than young Italians; we can reasonably accept the alternative hypothesis (H1) regarding first, second and fifth orientation.

## 6. RESULTS

It is appropriate to summarize the results of this research (*Table 3*). Regarding the first hypothesis we observe that in the Spanish group there are two orientations that are definitely stronger than in the Italian group: materialistic orientation and towards to others orientation. For this group it is important prestige, economic success, achievement of results, but also relationships, altruism, and social environment. In relation to the second hypothesis it's possible to observe differences between the two samples. The Italian sample differs for the first and second orientation; the 18-29 years old group has a stronger MATER and SELFO orientation than the other age groups in the same sample.

Table 3. – Comparison of young people in different orientations.

LEVENE'S TEST FOR EQUALITY OF VARIANCES		T-TEST FOR EQUALITY OF MEANS							
F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Difference between means	Difference of standard error	Confidence interval for the 95% difference		
							Lower	Upper	
MATER	18.443	.000	-9,334	431	,000	-9,87312	1.05781	-11.95223	-7.79401-
			-9,156	364.95	,000	-9,87312	1.07827	-11.99353	-7.75271
SELFO	31.314	.000	1.461	431	.145	1.27053	.86962	-.43870	2.97976
			1.429	351.57	.154	1.27053	.88934	-.47856	3.01962
OTHER	3.164	0.76	-2.080	431	0.38	-2.58049	1.24069	-5.01905	-1.14193
			-2.069	413,12	0.39,	-2.58078	1.24085	-5.01803	-1.12193
INDEP	2.151	.144	1.588	431	.112	1.40767	.89647	-.33446	3.14911
			1.598	430,21	.110	1.40767	.89669	-.32446	3.14018
CHALL	16.119	.000	.159-	431	.863	.17129	1.07238	-1-87654	2.28917
			.157	380.20	.865	.17129	1.07129	-1-87665	2.48919

In the Spanish sample we can observe that the only difference between generations is the Orientation to challenge, that decreases with age. Young people, 18-29 years old, compared to 30-49 and over 50, is more agonist than competitive. The last hypothesis, which compares the young groups of these two samples, tells us that young Italians have a stronger self orientation than Spaniards, thinking to work as a way of expression and self-realization. On the other hand Spanish showed a more competitive and pragmatic concept of work.

It is important to notice that these results do not determine a negative profile of one or the other sample, but they confirm the importance of work values, and they describe how different groups adopt different values according to cultural and social needs. This study is important in terms of work impact and can contribute to support projects of employment orientation through education. Value education projects represent a great challenge in the European framework, that can train a new generation of workers, prepared to work across Europe, aligned not by geographical boundaries, but by personal values.

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## RIASSUNTO

La definizione di uno scenario teorico esaustivo rispetto allo studio dei valori (Super, 1995) risulta essenziale al fine di identificare il significato degli interessi, delle motivazioni, degli atteggiamenti e dell'etica (Bellotto, 2004) rispetto alle nuove generazioni che si apprestano all'esperienza lavorativa. Il contributo si propone di: individuare i valori e gli orientamenti valoriali legati al lavoro; specificare le differenze tra generazioni e culture, anche in relazione alla differenza geografica. L'oggetto di studio consta di: un campione di 230 soggetti di nazionalità spagnola, caratterizzato da un orientamento più materialista, con propensione al rischio che, pur diminuendo con l'età, evidenzia la maggiore competitività dei giovani spagnoli; il campione italiano è costituito da 203 soggetti, in cui si notano differenze rispetto agli orientamenti valoriali in relazione all'età; il gruppo di giovani dai 18 ai 29 anni risulta caratterizzato da un significativo orientamento materialista, accompagnato da marcato auto-orientamento, di gran lunga maggiore rispetto alle altre fasce

*di età. I risultati mostrano l'importanza dei valori legati al lavoro e contribuiscono agli studi che indagano come i vari gruppi adottano valori differenti a seconda delle esigenze culturali e sociali.*

*Parole chiave:* Cambio generazionale, Educazione, Orientamenti, Valori, Valori lavorativi.

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