A Theory of Cultural Value Orientations: Explication and Applications

SHALOM H. SCHWARTZ

ABSTRACT

This article presents a theory of seven cultural value orientations that form three cultural value dimensions. This theory permits more finely tuned characterization of cultures than other theories. It is distinctive in deriving the cultural orientations from a priori theorizing. It also specifies a coherent, integrated system of relations among the orientations, postulating that they are interdependent rather than orthogonal. Analyses of data from 73 countries, using two different instruments, validate the 7 cultural orientations and the structure of interrelations among them. Conceptual and empirical comparisons of these orientations with Inglehart's two dimensions clarify similarities and differences. Using the cultural orientations, I generate a worldwide empirical mapping of 76 national cultures that identifies 7 transnational cultural groupings: West European, English-speaking, Latin American, East European, South Asian, Confucian influenced, and African and Middle Eastern. I briefly discuss distinctive cultural characteristics of these groupings. I then examine examples of socioeconomic, political, and demographic factors that give rise to national differences on the cultural value dimensions, factors that are themselves reciprocally influenced by culture. Finally, I examine consequences of prevailing cultural value orientations for

1 The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. This research was supported by Israel Science Foundation Grant No. 921/02-1.
attitudes and behavior (e.g., conventional morality, opposition to immigration, political activism) and argue that culture mediates the effects of major social structural variables on them.

A Theory of Cultural Value Orientations: Explication and Applications

Recent years have seen the emergence of several theories and instruments for mapping and comparing national cultures. Interestingly, the main theories have emerged from different disciplines. Hofstede developed his theory of work values (e.g., 1980, 2001) to make sense of data gathered for purposes of management by IBM. The four and later five dimensions he derived to compare country cultures have been widely applied in the fields of business and management. Inglehart developed his theory of materialism-postmaterialism (e.g., 1977, 1990), which he later refined to include two dimensions (e.g., 1997, Inglehart & Baker, 2000), in order to address issues in political science and sociology about the effects of modernization. My own theory emerged later than these two (Schwartz, 1994b, 1999, 2004) out of my studies of individual differences in value priorities and their effects on attitudes and behavior, a sub-field of social psychology.

This article presents my theory of seven cultural value orientations that form three cultural value dimensions. At the cost of greater complexity than the other theories, this theory permits more finely tuned characterization of cultures. To validate the theory, I present analyses of data from 73 countries, using two different instruments. Conceptual and empirical comparisons of the cultural value orientations with Inglehart’s two dimensions clarify their similarities and differences. Using the seven validated cultural orientations, I generate a worldwide map of national cultures that identifies distinctive cultural regions. The article then addresses the question of the antecedents that give rise to national differences on the cultural value dimensions. Finally, it examines some consequences of prevailing cultural value orientations on attitudes and behavior within countries.

The approach presented here is distinctive in deriving the seven cultural orientations from a priori theorizing and then testing the fit of these orientations to empirical data. Moreover, the a priori theorizing specified a coherent, integrated system of relations among the orientations, which was then tested.

Cultural Orientations – Basic Assumptions

I view culture as the rich complex of meanings, beliefs, practices, symbols, norms, and values prevalent among people in a society. The prevailing