
INVESTIGACIONES

LA RELEVANCIA DE LOS ROLES VITALES PARA EL BIENESTAR DE LOS INDIVIDUOS

THE IMPORTANCE OF ROLE SALIENCE FOR THE INDIVIDUAL WELL-BEING

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RESUMEN

El estudio en asesoramiento y gestión de carrera sobre la relevancia de los roles vitales desempeñados permite comprender mejor la importancia de la articulación que los individuos establecen sobre sus roles y en relación con los diferentes contextos en que los desempeñan. Hoy, se ha reconocido la importancia de otras actividades, además de las laborales, como parte de nuestras necesidades para una plena satisfacción y bienestar. Dichos factores ayudan al individuo a enfrentar los imprevistos y la competitividad que hoy en día encuentra en el mundo laboral. El objetivo de esta investigación es estudiar la relevancia de los roles vitales sobre una muestra de 57 adultos que solicitaron asesoramiento profesional. El instrumento utilizado fue el Inventario de Relevancias (Salience Inventory), desarrollado en el Proyecto Internacional Estudio sobre la Importancia del Trabajo "Work Importance Study" (WIS) que analiza la importancia de cinco roles vitales (estudios, trabajo, servicio comunitario, hogar y ocio). Los resultados revelan que los adultos otorgan cada vez más importancia a algunas de las tareas. Por ejemplo, además del trabajo y el hogar, los estudios y las actividades de ocio han ganado gran relevancia en los

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últimos tiempos. Estos resultados han sido confrontados con algunos del WIS, y se ha comentado su contribución para el bienestar de los individuos y para lidiar con los cambios constantes y nuevas situaciones. Se presentan, además del desarrollo de la investigación, algunas consideraciones sobre la cuestión de relevancia de las actividades e indicaciones en relación con un enfoque diferente sobre la investigación.

Palabras clave: adultos, asesoramiento, bienestar, carrera, roles vitales

ABSTRACT

The study of role salience in career counseling and management has contributed to a better understanding about the relevance of the articulation that the individuals do of their roles and in relation to the different contexts in which they play these roles. Nowadays, it is recognized the importance of having other roles, besides work, as means of satisfying needs and fulfil values as well as their importance to well-being. This evidence helps individuals deal with the current competitive and unpredictable labor market. The aim of this research is to study the role salience within a 57 adult sample that requested help in career counseling and management. The instrument used was the Saliency Inventory, developed in the context of the International Project "Work Importance Study" (WIS), a study that analysed the importance of five roles (study, work, home, community service and leisure activities). The results reveal that adults give more and more a growing importance to other roles. For instance, besides work and home, study and leisure activities have become increasingly more important. These results are put into comparison with the ones from the WIS, and commented regarding the contribution for individuals to better adjust to new life scenarios. Also, besides the present research development, some considerations are made on the importance of role salience in relation to different research approaches.

Key Words: adults, career, counseling, well-being, role salience

Introduction

Regarding the instability in which organizations are currently and the major changes related to work nature, it is strategically important that these organizations invest on promoting workers' satisfaction and also on the importance of stressing out other roles beside the worker's one, as means to attain satisfaction and to achieve their values. Besides work, people's well-being involves their ability to develop their potential, to build strong and positive relationships and to contribute to their community (Beddington et al, 2008).

Nowadays, individuals not only value career progress, as did the generation "baby-boomer", but also look for balance between work and personal life (Harrington & Hall, 2007). Individuals have a wide range of goals, aspirations, accomplishments and identities that they develop in a variety of contexts, institutions, qualification structures and labour markets (Brown, Bimrose, Barnes & Hughes, 2012). As an example, other roles besides work, such as leisure activities, are considered to be more important as means of satisfaction for the individuals (Argyle, 1996). A constant growth can be distinguished when considering the importance that individuals' attribute to their roles balance and articulation and in relation to the different scenarios in which they play these roles. Therefore, the research development concerning life roles salience can be justified.

The importance an individual places on a life role is designated by role salience (Super, 1990). Some individuals perceive their life roles as enhancing one another, others as conflicting and some perceive them both ways (Cook, 1994). When individuals perceive that work and non-work roles are compatible and promote growth according to their current lives priorities they experience work-life balance (WLB) (Kalliath & Brough, 2008), which benefits both the individual and the organization he/she works for. Work-life practices began around 1930 when W. K. Kellogg Company reduced working hours, which resulted into enhanced productivity and morale (Lockwood, 2003). In 1960s, the changing nature of the workforce, including working mothers and dual earner families, brought some light to such research theme (Lewis, Gambles & Rapoport, 2007). Such working conditions no longer permitted work and family to be treated as two different segments and Kanter (1977) highlighted the interdependence between both constructs. This originated the "spill-over theory" and the "compensation theory". The "spill-over theory" suggests that spill-over from one segment of life into another can have negative and positive exchanges, for instance, between work and non-work roles (Grawitch, Maloney, Barber & Mooshegian, 2013). The compensation theory claims that people participate in activities that satisfy needs that they cannot satisfy in other aspects of life (Staines, 1980). For example, individuals may engage in leisure activities investing in this role to compensate a deficit experienced in another role, such as work. In the 1980's work-life policies were created for women with children (Lockwood, 2003), but in the 90's they started incorporating all kind of status: men, women, married or not, with or without children.

Such evolution has led more and more companies to pay attention to WLB practices and their benefits to avoid inter-role conflict, in which the participation in one role makes it harder to participate in another role. These initiatives affect the performance of the employees enabling them to be more effective (Lazăr, Osoian & Ratiu, 2010), enhancing employee morale, increasing productivity, commitment to the organization and reducing absenteeism (McDonald, Guthrie, Bradley & Shakespeare-Finch 2005). On the other hand, when inter-role conflict occurs, physical and psychological health are affected resulting in stress, anxiety, job burnout, among other effects (Allen, Herst, Bruck & Sutton, 2000). WLB has two big components, achievement through work and enjoyment through life (Kumar & Chakraborty, 2013). Therefore, the notion of WLB is connected to the individual's overall well-being and can counter negative effects.

As the role commitment increases and the boundaries between work and non-work roles becomes increasingly blurred it is important to help individuals to find balance as means of satisfaction and well-being. Career counseling has contributed to solve career concerns. This practice has into account the convergence between life span perspective goals in career counseling and goals of other psychological fields (Lima & Gouveia, 2002). It is a holistic perspective connecting career guidance and personal counseling (Santos et al., 2001). Although career counseling initial focus was on work it developed into different life roles (Richardson, 1993). Since the different roles, work and non-work ones, are present throughout our lives, the study of role salience becomes relevant to career counseling in order to help individuals deal with transitions and inter-role conflict (Lima, 2001). Individual career counseling is the most effective career intervention (Whiston, 2000). The role salience, concerning a personal approach, has been especially useful in helping individuals to face the life roles they have or may have and giving them the opportunity to define and clarify their personal and professional goals (Lima, 2001). Helping individuals identify their goals and concerns facilitates decision making, which in return improves their well-being.

The present study aims to analyse the roles' salience within an adult sample that asked for help in career counseling and management. Moreover, it aims to compare some results from "Work Importance Study" (WIS), whose main findings were published by Super and Šverko during the 90's (1995) and dated from a time in which the labour market and the way the individuals occupy their time were very different from today's challenges. In the end, bearing in mind the

present labour context and individual lifestyle, we explore the importance that the individuals give to each role they play.

Method

Sample

The sample is composed of a total of 57 individuals (23 male and 34 female), with ages between 24 and 52 years old ($M=33.65$; $DP=6.64$). These individuals belong to different contexts (school/ academic, looking for work/ job, unemployed or participants in an active life), and requested for help through career counseling and management concerning decision making. Overall, the participants worked in average for about 10 years, 42% had a graduate degree, 23% had finished high school, and 19% had a master degree, were post graduates or had a PHD. Regarding the job situation, most (about 70%) worked full time or part-time and 26% of the participants were unemployed.

Instruments

The instrument used in the present research was the Saliency Inventory (3rd edition), one of the psychological measures developed in the Research Project known internationally as "Work Importance Study" (WIS), in which several countries from five continents were involved, including Portugal (Ferreira Marques, 1982, 1989). The Project began in 1979 and was internationally coordinated by Donald Super, providing a cross-cultural study on individuals' life roles and values which they seek in their careers and life (Ferreira Marques, 1989; Nevill & Super, 1986; Super & Šverko, 1995).

This Inventory measures the importance of five main roles (student, worker, citizen, homemaker and activities developed as leisure) in three dimensions, one behavioral and the other two emotional: the behavioral component is *Participation*, in which the individual is evaluated in what he does or recently did regarding each one of the five roles; the first emotional component – *Commitment* –, allows the individual to express how he feels in each role; and the second emotional component – *Values Expectations* –, measures the opportunities that the individual has or doesn't have, at the moment or in the future, to fulfil important values in each of the five roles (Niles & Goodnough, 1996). These roles are described as:

- Study: Taking courses, taking classes (daytime or nighttime, conferences, laboratory work); preparing classes, study at the library or at home; and also self-learning;
- Work: Paid activities or partial paid activities, on a job or on their own;
- Community Service: Community organizations' activities, such as leisure groups, scouts, the Red Cross, social services centers, local associations, political parties, syndicates, etc.;
- Home: Taking care of one's room or house, making meals, go shopping, taking care of family (children, old relatives);
- Leisure: Practicing Sports, watching TV, devoting time to favourite hobbies, going out (cinema, theatre, concerts, etc.), reading, resting, doing nothing, spending time with family or friends.

The Inventory includes a total of 190 items, organized as follows: Participation Scale with the items 1 to 50; Commitment Scale with the items 51 to 100; and Values Expectations Scale with the items 101 to 190.

The Alpha's Cronbach coefficients for American high school students, college students and adults showed high levels of reliability (over 0.80) for the three samples (Nevill & Super, 1986). At the same time, the reliability results obtained from the WIS national project are considered adequate (Ferreira Marques, 1995), showing satisfactory precision levels for their use as an research measure and as regarding individual evaluation (Šverko & Super, 1995). To evaluate the internal consistency of Saliency Inventory Scales in the present study, the Alpha Cronbach coefficients were also calculated. Its values are all above .70 as suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994), more specifically Participation Scale (0.87), Commitment Scale (0.91) and Values Expectations Scale (0.95).

Procedure

Bearing in mind the procedure adopted in earlier studies (Afonso & Lima, 1995; Fraga, Lima & Sousa Ferreira, 2010), the results analysed in the present study were obtained using the same instrument (Saliency Inventory), with adults who sought for help in the Faculty of Psychology's Community Service (nowadays the Counseling and Career Management Service for the promotion of employability) within the years of 2005 and 2012. The counselees/participants were followed individually throughout a career counseling and management process, whose intervention format is divided into three stages (preliminary interview, psychological evaluation/acquisition of personal data and counseling sessions). Throughout the psychological evaluation stage counselees must respond to different measures and several variables are considered, including personality traits, interests, values and role salience. Since role salience presents special theoretical relevance to individuals' well-being, counselees responses at this specific measure were considered globally for further study and data were analysed using SPSS statistics.

Results

Considering the overall obtained values (Table 1), the Work and Leisure roles present the highest levels in the behavioral and emotional dimensions corresponding to the three scales. On the other hand, within both dimensions and three scales, the Community Service role has the lowest scores, reflecting the little importance given by the participants to this activity. It must also be stressed out that, by making a comparison test between mean values to analyse the activities' hierarchy, significant differences were found between the Study and the Community Service roles (both Participation and Values Expectations Scales), and between Work and Leisure roles in emotional dimensions (Commitment and Values Expectations Scales).

TABLE 1. Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD) and Hierarchy of Saliency Variables (N=57)

SCALE AND ROLE	M	SD	HIERARCHY
Participation			
1. Student	22.9	6.54	Worker
2. Worker	26.5	5.75	Leisure
3. Citizen	15.4	6.79	Homemaker

4. Homemaker	23.6	5.90	Student
5. Leisure	25.2	5.73	Citizen
Commitment			
1. Student	29.7	6.85	Worker
2. Worker	33.6	4.64	Leisure
3. Citizen	26.6	7.80	Student
4. Homemaker	28.4	7.55	Homemaker
5. Leisure	30.8	5.72	Citizen
Values Expectations			
1. Student	47.5	11.61	Worker
2. Worker	55.3	10.31	Leisure
3. Citizen	42.5	14.26	Homemaker
4. Homemaker	49.4	10.30	Student
5. Leisure	50.3	12.21	Citizen
<i>Notes: M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation</i>			

Analysing the data obtained from adult samples in the WIS International Project (Table 2), these showed that in the behaviour dimension, the Work role presented the most important relevance followed by Home and Leisure activities. Regarding the emotional dimension, the data were inverted, being stressed the Home role followed by Work and Leisure roles. Therefore, in the WIS sample, adults seem to be more connected in emotional and behavioural terms to Home instead of Leisure activities. As far as the Values Expectations Scale goes, while in the WIS Project roles maintain the same hierarchy represented in the Commitment Scale (giving priority to Home, followed by Work, Leisure and Study), in the present study the Participation Scale represents a similar hierarchy to that of the Values Expectations Scale (giving priority to Work, followed by Leisure and Home before the Study role). The results seem to present a scenario in which nowadays adults spend more time in leisure activities. This outcome can relate to the individuals' current predisposition to seek balance between occupational and personal life, without the Work role ceasing to be the individuals' main activity.

TABLE 2. Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) of Salience Variables for Adults at the WIS

ROLE	N= 8581	
	M	SD
Participation		
1. Student	23.2	7.49
2. Worker	28.8	6.13
3. Citizen	18.0	7.33
4. Homemaker	26.8	6.71
5. Leisure	26.1	6.54
Commitment		
1. Student	25.5	7.87
2. Worker	33.0	6.09
3. Citizen	22.0	8.05
4. Homemaker	33.2	7.32
5. Leisure	28.4	6.94

Values Expectations		
1. Student	33.8	10.62
2. Worker	42.9	8.82
3. Citizen	30.1	11.18
4. Homemaker	43.5	9.26
5. Leisure	38.9	9.45
<i>Notes: M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation From: Šverko & Super, 1995 (p.375)</i>		

Tables 3, 4 and 5 present the intercorrelations between roles for each Scale. Table 3 shows that there are no significant correlations in the Participation Scale, which measures what the individuals do or recently did in each of the five roles. However, concerning the Commitment Scale (TABLE 4), which leads individuals to say how they feel regarding each of the roles, significant correlations can be noticed ($p < 0.01$) between Study and Work (0.35), and between Community Service and Home (0.36), and Leisure (0.35). Finally, roles intercorrelations at the Values Expectations Scale (TABLE 5), which appraises whether the individual has or will have opportunities, at the present time or the future, to accomplish important values in each of the five roles, very significant correlations can be verified ($p < 0.01$) between Study and Work roles (0.69), and between Leisure and Work (0.39), Community Service (0.46) and Home (0.46) roles. Within the same scale significant correlations can be verified at a lower level of confidence ($p < 0.05$) between Work and Community Service roles (0.31), and Community Service and Home roles (0.29).

TABLE 3. Participation Scale Correlations (N=57)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Student	22.9	6.54				
2. Worker	26.5	5.75	0.18			
3. Citizen	15.4	6.79	-0.11	0.13		
4. Homemaker	23.6	5.90	0.16	0.16	0.16	
5. Leisure	25.2	5.73	-0.09	0.00	0.19	0.17
<i>Notes: M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation</i>						

TABLE 4. Commitment Scale Correlations (N=57)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Student	29.7	6.85				
2. Worker	33.6	4.64	0.35**			
3. Citizen	26.6	7.80	0.13	0.17		
4. Homemaker	28.4	7.55	0.04	0.13	0.36**	
5. Leisure	30.8	5.72	0.00	0.20	0.35**	0.23
<i>Notes: M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation **$p < 0.01$</i>						

TABLE 5. Value Scale Correlations (N=57)

	M	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Student	47.5	11.61				
2. Worker	55.3	10.31	0.69**			
3. Citizen	42.5	14.26	0.24	0.31*		
4. Homemaker	49.4	10.30	0.17	0.22	0.29*	
5. Leisure	50.3	12.21	0.21	0.39**	0.46**	0.46**
Notes: M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation ** $p < 0.01$ * $p < 0.05$						

These relations can endorse the Study's importance along with the occupational activity. In other words, more and more people seem to need to update their occupational skills due to the growing competitive edge in the labour market. On the other hand, when it comes to the Leisure activities, the significant relations with the other roles (with the exception of Study), confirm this activity's importance as being complementary and contributing to the individuals' well-being. Adults seem to value the time they spend doing activities that fulfil interests outside the occupation context and such activities, on their turn, might bring a positive attitude and energy that ultimately promotes well-being. The relation between Community Service and other roles (with the exception also of Study), enables the hypotheses that this role's activities can simultaneously be developed in the context in which the individuals play the roles of Leisure, Home and Work.

Discussion

As presented in the Results section, alongside to Participation and Work Commitment, adults attributed importance to developing leisure activities along with the occupational activity. This evidence may highlight the importance of the Leisure role, which is no longer only seen in a complementary one towards Work, concerning needs' satisfaction or values' fulfilment that individuals wish to pursue. Furthermore, when taking into account the Values Expectations Scale, the results seem suggest that nowadays adults spend more time in leisure activities. Such goal-motivated activities, that people choose to do for their own sake, free from coercion, contribute to well-being (Seligman, 2011; Hofer, Busch & Kiessling, 2008). It also allows self-exploration opportunities and the living reality of developing attitudes and skills that may contribute to play other roles, specially the Work role (Seligman, 1994).

On the other hand, comparing this same result to the ones obtained in the WIS Project (Šverko & Super, 1995), emphasizes other roles' importance as means of satisfaction and individual well-being besides Work and Home roles. These activities, in the past, were considered to be of extreme importance to time spending and adults' energy. Already in the beginning of the last Century, Parsons (1909) commented on the individual's participation in other activities besides work, which the author named as civic life. This aspect has been a growing reality as major changes in work's nature and lifestyle occur, forcing workers to adapt themselves to new realities.

It must also be noted the less or absent importance given to the Community Service role, which can be due to the fact that this activity is can be considered as being present in other roles (as part of the occupational activity or of the leisure activity, or even, part of a family context). Furthermore, it is equally interesting the relation in the emotional component between Study and Work roles, which can be related to changes and competitive edge, requiring the individuals to adapt and permanently update. For example, to develop competences and face new challenges by

pursuing new learning and training opportunities. Moreover, the concept of employability centered at the individual might be highlighted, since it focuses on career results obtained through the individual's ability in keeping his job or acquiring a job he wants (marketability perceived by the individual) (De Vos & De Hauw, 2010; Eby, Butts & Lockwood, 2003).

Considering that the job no longer represents our whole life, there are different attitudes towards work and a growing search for balance between work and personal life. The notion of subjective well-being has been conceptualized as having a multidimensional nature, with both cognitive and affective components. Among the components of subjective well-being, satisfaction with life is regarded as a distinct construct, representing a cognitive evaluation of the overall quality that the person attributes to his life as a whole (Pavot & Diener, 1993, 2008). Although satisfaction with life as a whole can be an important index of subjective well-being, satisfaction with life can vary according to the different contexts or roles that a person is committed with. Career development models (Savickas, 2005; Super, 1990) consider the different stages and roles developed in the life course as being interrelated and contributing for an adaptive way of the individual life. This will accentuate the importance of roles salience (Lima, 2001) in the human resources development and management in an organizational context. Nowadays, the importance given to the variety of roles played (besides work), as means of needs' satisfaction, values and well-being, becomes evident and contributes to individuals cope with the present competitive and unpredictable labour market. Therefore, career theories must be appropriated to the complexity individual experience in this intricate world (Patton, 2008), by also including in such complexity the comprehension of the several roles' salience

Sample dimension, the specific context in which it was obtained, as well as the present study's exploratory character should be considered while analysing the present data, since it constraints conclusions generalization. Nonetheless, results from this study and from a previous one with college students (Fraga, Lima & Sousa Ferreira, 2010) encourages the research's development on roles salience. Specifically, research on the current applicability and theoretical relevance of the Model of Role Importance (Super, 1995) preconized by the WIS Project in the 90's. This would have as main aim not only a more contemporary approach in the context of career counseling and management, but also the study of the instrument and the conceptualisation concerning life roles. In other words, the development of an investigation project that would contribute to the psychological evaluation of role salience considering the roles that individuals' play in the 21st century. And also, the development of an intervention to help them realize how to interpret and represent the tasks that each role and context places to them, which meaning they give them and how to integrate these representations in their story and personal build-up in career development and management. To sum up, from a theoretical point of view role salience (a concept from the 90's psychological research), seems to maintain its relevance. And from an interventional point of view, the current labour pressures and the need that individuals experience to attain balance between work role and other roles might be adding further meaning to such concept, since such balance can be positively related to well-being and fulfilment of needs, interests and values. Thus, career counselors should consider the analysis of the roles salience, identifying the ones that most affect the individuals' satisfaction with life and well-being.

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