Do you know the values that motivate you?: An experiential learning activity

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ABSTRACT

Teaching the values paradigm can prove difficult to business educators. A challenge is helping students understand values beyond a definitional level. Using an experiential learning activity with both a "hands-on" and "minds-on" component, this paper presents a process to help students learn about and employ values in their personal and business life at a deeper level. The activity begins with a traditional introduction to values. Then a deck of value cards listing values and definitions is provided to students. Students sort these cards such that they discover their top five and ultimately the number one personal value influencing and motivating their behaviors. A discussion follows to help students reflect on and make connections about their core values and business concepts. This process has been used across a range of business courses. Student feedback from undergraduate and graduate samples as well as suggested applications and adaptations of this activity are provided and discussed. Overall, evidence suggests this is an effective and enjoyable learning activity that provides students with a better understanding of their values and the values of others.

Keywords: Values, business education, experiential learning, diversity, class activity

INTRODUCTION

Today's workplace is increasingly diverse, and it is becoming increasingly important for students to have an awareness and understanding of values and the diversity of personal values in business. Diversity is "differences between individuals on any attribute that may lead to the perception that another person is different from self" (van Kippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004, p. 1008). In business, among other elements, diversity manifests itself in organizational structure and selection of markets and customers. Diversity includes elements beyond the traditionally classified surface-level characteristics such as age and gender (Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002). It also captures deep-level psychological characteristics such as personality, values, and attitudes (Harrison et al., 2002). Such deep-level characteristics "cannot be obtained directly by observing their features but [have] to be learned by interacting with group members and observing their verbal and non-verbal behavior" (Liao, Chuang, & Joshi, 2008, p. 107).

Personal values are "desirable transsituational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in the life of a person or other social entity" (Schwartz, 1994, p. 21). This definition implies that:

(1) they serve the interests of some social entity, (2) they can motivate action—giving it direction and emotional intensity, (3) they function as standards for judging and justifying action, and (4) they are acquired both through socialization to dominant group values and through the unique learning experiences of individuals. (Schwartz, 1994, p. 21)

It is important to note that a given value may be important to one person but not important to another (Steenhaut & van Kenhove, 2006).

Multidisciplinary in nature (Mayton, Ball-Rokeach, & Loges, 1994), values have been shown to be key influencers of managers', employees', and consumers' attitudes and behaviors in business. For example, values impact consumers' perceived service quality (Ladhari, Pons, Bressolles, & Zins, 2011), consumers' inclination to adopt new products (Daghfous, Petrof, & Pons, 1999), environmental attitudes (Grunert & Juhl, 1995), group cooperative behavior (Schwartz, 1996), consumers' ethical beliefs (Steenhaut & van Kenhove, 2006), ethical business behavior by marketing professionals (Akaah & Lund, 1994), organizational culture (Deshpande & Webster, 1989; Schein, 2010), a firm's market orientation (Gao & Bradley, 2007) and organizational citizenship behaviors (Arthaud-Day, Rode, & Turnley, 2012). In addition, values are an important component of Strategic Business Insight's well-known VALS framework used in the United States and abroad as a segmenting and strategic business tool.

As deep-level characteristics such as values are underlying and non-visible (Liao et al., 2008), they can be difficult to teach in a way that students find meaningful. A challenge for business educators is to find an effective pedagogical approach to help students learn about personal values. Kolb (1981) and Young (2002) suggest providing a concrete "hands-on" learning activity designed to engage, motivate, and evoke an affective aspect to the experience. That learning activity should also include a "minds-on" component requiring a reflective cognitive component that links the experience to learning objectives.

The overall objective of the activity described in this paper is to enhance students' understanding of personal values. This includes the range of values that influence each student and awareness of the diversity in values that influence others. Finally, the activity should be an enjoyable and worthwhile classroom experience.

In the following pages, an activity that includes a "hands-on" and "minds-on" process to help individuals better understand their personal values and those of others through self-discovery is described. Approaches to adapt this activity to suit instructor and student needs are then discussed. Due to the universal nature of personal values (Schwartz, 1994), this activity may be implemented in a variety of business courses. This activity has been successfully carried out in a variety of business courses including undergraduate general business, marketing, and management courses as well as at the graduate level.

THE VALUES ACTIVITY

In its entirety, this activity includes an initial overview of values and their importance, a sorting activity, and an activity discussion. The activity takes approximately one hour to implement.

Values Overview and Sorting

To begin this activity, a brief overview of personal values is presented. Definitions of personal (e.g., Rokeach, 1973; Russell, 2001) and organizational values (e.g., Bean, 1993) and applications of those values are reviewed. A deck of value cards is then distributed to each student. This is a "hands-on" component. Each card provides and defines a specific value. The Center for Creative Leadership's Values Explorer™ values cards which include 44 values (e.g., achievement, justice, self-respect) were employed, but instructors may wish to develop their own cards using established values lists (e.g., Kahle & Kennedy, 1988; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1994, 2009; Schwartz et al., 2012).

Students are instructed to sort the value cards into three piles (i.e., "Always Valued," "Sometimes Valued," and "Never Valued") according to the degree to which they generally consider the values to be important to their daily lives. After sorting, students discard the "Sometimes Valued" and "Never Valued" piles. Students are then asked to reflect on the values in their "Always Valued" pile. After allowing time for reflection, students are instructed to reduce the number to a maximum of their 10 top values.

Once students successfully reduce their top values to no more than 10 values, they condense their values to their top five. Students tend to struggle to narrow their top values to only five. Once the top five values are selected, students record these values on a worksheet. A sample worksheet is provided in Appendix A. Students are asked to define the value from each card, list behaviors they would associate with the value, and note why that value is important to them.

Finally, students select their number one value. This final instruction is typically met with a strong reaction from the students about the difficulty of this last step. On another worksheet, students record their number one value and describe why that value is their most important and how they believe that value impacts them at home and work. A sample worksheet is provided in Appendix B. This process encourages self-discovery and the ability to help individuals identify the top values that influence them.

Segmenting

The next step in the process is to discover the range of values that exists in a students' cohort. Segments are formed by having students stand in designated parts of a room according to their number one value. Standing is recommended as it provides a powerful visual representation of the diversity of values within the room. Not all values will necessarily be represented in a given cohort. Some segments may contain only one student; other segments may contain many students.

Activity Discussion

Reflection and feedback help enhance learning (Fink, 2003). This activity includes multiple opportunities for both reflection and feedback. To begin the discussion, while still in their segments, students share why their values are important to them, where they learned their number one value, and who the major influencers are of their values. Next, students make a list capturing the top five values of everyone in the segment. This demonstrates that although everyone in their segment has a similar top value, there are many other values that influence their behaviors. Finally, a representative from each segment shares with the entire class what they have learned about themselves, others in their segment, and others in the class and applications to business.

ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE VALUES SORTING ACTIVITY

How valuable is this activity to overall business education? To answer this question, the perceived value of this activity was investigated across three different levels of business courses (i.e., 2000-level, 4000-level, and graduate-level) at a large Southeastern University. These courses were comprised of five sections of General Business courses, two sections of Marketing courses, and an MBA course. The activity was presented to each class separately.

Upon completion of the activity an electronic survey was sent to each student. Following earlier research on the perceived value of experiential class activities, students answered Likert-type and open-ended questions. Items were adapted from Elam and Spotts (2004) and Kemp, McDougal, and Syrdal (in press). Additional items and questions were developed specifically for this study. Each Likert-type item was measured on a scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree).

Following data collection, 198 usable responses were obtained (n = 92 from 2000-level, n = 91 from 4000-level, and n = 15 from graduate-level). The overall sample was made up of freshman (n = 1), sophomores (n = 54), juniors (n = 84), seniors (n = 44), and graduate students (n = 15) from a variety of majors including Marketing (n = 82), Supply Chain Management (n = 16), Finance (n = 16), Accounting (n = 14), and Management (n = 12). The sample was 49.0% male (n = 97) and 50.5% female (n = 100) with one participant preferring not to answer. Average participant age was 21.39 years (SD = 3.57) with three participants preferring not to answer. Approximately 40% of the participants indicated they were currently employed. The top number one values chosen were happiness (n = 42), family (n = 34), spirituality (n = 27), love (n = 12), integrity (n = 11), and personal development (n = 7).

An ANOVA was run on the average of the quantitative survey items across the three levels of business courses with results suggesting no significant differences in the overall survey

at the α = 0.05 level. As an assessment of reliability of the quantitative survey items, the Cronbach's alpha was .90 indicating high internal consistency.

Table 1 (Appendix C) provides an empirical assessment of this activity including the means and standard deviations for each level in the sample as well as the percent agreeing or strongly agreeing with each item in the overall sample.

One of the major objectives of this activity was to enhance students' understanding of personal values. This objective was assessed with several survey items. These items are indirect measures of learning, specifically students' perceptions of their understanding and learning (Bacon, 2016). The overall objective was assessed with the survey item "My understanding of personal values was enhanced by completing this activity." Results suggested participants believed this activity enhanced their understanding of personal values as 87.8% of the total sample agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Students also believed the activity was helpful to them in understanding their own personal values. For example, 90.4% of the total sample agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "This activity was helpful to me in understanding my personal values." Further, participants also indicated the activity helped them learn to better appreciate how values influence others. To illustrate, 87.9% of the total sample indicated they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "As a result of completing this activity, I have a greater appreciation of how values influence other people." Students provided deeper insight into what they perceived they learned about personal values in their responses to open-ended questions. Below are sample responses:

- I found this activity very interesting as I was forced to narrow down my values quickly and efficiently. It was eye-opening to see what my values were in comparison to what I had previously thought that they were.
- I was able to be honest with myself and find what matters most to me. I realize that everyone is different, and we need to be very aware of that as we go about our lives. In a sales environment, this can make or break a sales call, so I realize that even people who appear to have the same values really do not.
- I learned which values were important to me and why I valued some over the others. I also learned that my most important value, could be someone else's least important value.

Because personal values influence individuals' behaviors in a variety of contexts, the activity provides the opportunity for personal reflection. The sorting process helps participants unpeel the various layers of values. Students discovered how values influence their behaviors. These values impact both an individual's personal life and their professional life on the job. Overwhelmingly, over 86% of participants indicated agreement or strong agreement that the activity was helpful to better understand the influence of values in their personal or professional life. The following is representative of students' reflection:

- …it made me think about experiences that I have had and how they have shaped my values. It was also interesting to see how different or similar different people's values are.
- I thought it was very interesting to see how other people categorized their priorities and values. It was a reminder of the differences and diverse groups that I can potentially interact with in future associations and jobs.
- It's important to understand personal values in business because your values reflect on the company and the company's values reflect on you. If those values often tend to be in opposition, this can lead to a significant amount of tension as well as low

employment satisfaction. It's important for the values of the employee to reflect the values of the company as a whole.

- I learned that everyone I'm surrounded with has a more diverse set of values than I was aware of.
- As an aspiring outside sales rep, it's very important that I know what my top values and priorities are in connecting with potential clients and buyers. My values will demonstrate to them who I am and why they should or should not want to build a relationship with me.

Further, many students noted the difficulty they had narrowing their values. For example:

- Narrowing [the values] down to 10 was hard, narrowing them down to 5 was very hard, and picking the top one was nearly impossible.
- From this activity I learned that it was difficult for me to narrow down my most important values because during the first round, I placed over half my cards in the always valued section. While I knew that these values were important to me, it was eye opening to write out exactly why each of these values landed above others.

An important part of this activity is the sharing and learning about the range of number one values across the class. The majority (87.9%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed they have a better understanding of the range of values that influence other people by completing this activity. Further, 91.4% believed the activity helped them understand what they value is not necessarily the same as what others may value.

By physically standing next to a student's number one value, students are able to visually see the size of a value segment and the range of values considered most important to their classmates. Open-ended responses suggested that the visualization component of the activity was indeed effective. Sample responses are as follows:

- It was cool to see some of the values that some people had as number one that I didn't even have in my top 5. It gives a glimpse into the business world.
- This activity was very helpful because it physically showed how so many people in just one given classroom can value so many different things. It was a great visual that really helped me realize how people can think so differently.

The final goal of this activity was for it to be an enjoyable and worthwhile classroom experience. Several items in Table 1 (Appendix C) assessed this. To illustrate, more than 87% of the participants indicated agreement or strong agreement that the activity was enjoyable, and the learning experience was worth the effort. Most notably, 91.9% recommend this activity to other business students. Students' comments echoed the quantitative results:

- I thoroughly enjoyed this activity and found it very helpful. I wish we did more activities like this. It makes us think and more importantly think inwardly about ourselves and what is important to us.
- I really enjoyed [this activity], and I think more students should complete this activity.
- I thoroughly enjoyed this activity. It was very different than anything I have ever done in a class and was very eye-opening.

FURTHER APPLICATION

Depending on the learning goal(s) of the instructor, additional discussion questions are provided in Appendix D. The activity lends itself to a variety of opportunities for adaptation in

business courses leading to rich discussion and reflection. For example, it may be used to discuss issues relating to values that influence various consumer and organizational behaviors. Specific applications may include developing marketing strategies, segmenting markets, positioning products, understanding psychographic issues, person-job and person-organization fit, and team dynamics.

Further, the activity lends itself to a discussion regarding diversity in values as it relates to leaders/managers (e.g., sales managers) and followers/employees and coworkers (e.g., sales force). For example, how can managers benefit from learning the different values that motivate their employees? What happens when managers do not hold the same values as their employees or as their organization's stated values? What happens when employees do not hold the same values as their manager, team leader, coworkers, or organization? Academics who work with practitioners may also find this activity helpful in applied business settings.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of this activity is that it has both a "Hands-on" and "Minds-on" component required for higher-order learning. Many students mentioned they liked having physical cards to sort in piles and re-sort. They also indicated that having to think about what the values meant to themselves and others was enlightening. Students found this approach engaging, enjoyable, and unique. Another strength is the consistency of positive responses across three levels of students. For pedagogical purposes, employing Center for Creative Leadership's ready-made Values Explorer[TM] deck greatly reduces the time commitment for a single class activity.

A potential limitation of this activity is the employment of the Values Explorer[TM] cards. A review of these cards in comparison to value constructs studied by Rokeach (1973), Schwartz (1994, 2009) and Schwartz et al. (2012) demonstrates a variation in values. Consequently, results may differ slightly depending on which values inventory is employed.

CONCLUSION

This paper introduced and described a proven experiential class activity to help students learn about personal values. Although values have been studied in variety of contexts, this activity is specifically designed for self-discovery and understanding of others. It allows students to immediately apply conceptual and theoretical ideas into something very personal and concrete and fully engages students in their learning well beyond a traditional lecture. Overall, this activity provides a unique learning experience for both students and educators.

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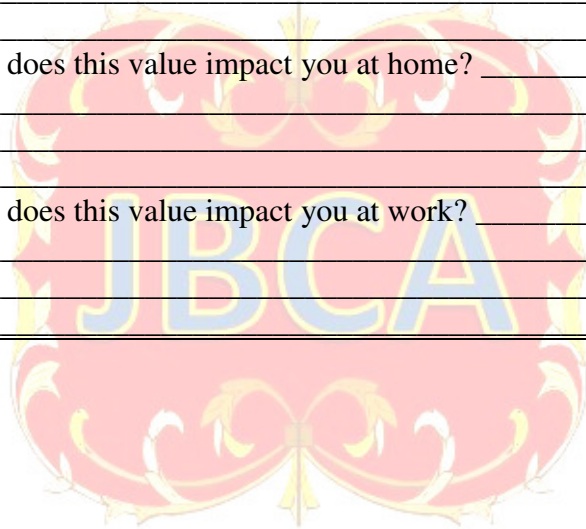
APPENDIX A

Sample Worksheet for Top 5 Values

Top 5 Values (List below.)	Instructions: In your own words define the value on the card, and then list behaviors that illustrate this value in action. Finally, note why this value is important to you.
	Define: _____ Behaviors: _____ Why is it important to you? _____
	Define: _____ Behaviors: _____ Why is it important to you? _____
	Define: _____ Behaviors: _____ Why is it important to you? _____
	Define: _____ Behaviors: _____ Why is it important to you? _____
	Define: _____ Behaviors: _____ Why is it important to you? _____

APPENDIX B

Sample Worksheet for Top Value

Your Number One Value (List below.)	Instructions: Please describe how this value impacts your behaviors at home and work.
	Define: _____ _____ Home Behaviors: _____ _____ Work Behaviors: _____ Why is this value important to you? _____ _____ _____ How does this value impact you at home? _____ _____ _____ _____ How does this value impact you at work? _____ _____ _____ _____

APPENDIX C

Table 1
Survey Results from Three Levels of Students and Overall Sample

Survey Item[a]	M (SD) (2000)	M (SD) (4000)	M (SD) (Grad)	M (SD) (Total)	Agree (%)[b]
Self-Discovery					
My understanding of personal values was enhanced by completing this activity.[c]	6.30 (1.14)	6.46 (0.69)	6.07 (0.59)	6.36 (0.92)	87.8
This activity was helpful to me in understanding my personal values.[c]	6.34 (1.10)	6.48 (0.77)	6.27 (0.46)	6.40 (0.92)	90.4
I have had experience in developing an understanding of my personal values before this activity.[c]	5.16 (1.65)	4.74 (1.73)	5.47 (1.81)	4.99 (1.71)	44.9
I feel confident in my understanding of my personal values after completing this activity.[c]	6.10 (1.01)	6.38 (0.61)	6.13 (0.74)	6.23 (0.84)	87.9
Before this activity, I had not taken the time to sit down to methodically think through the values that influence my behaviors.	4.92 (1.88)	5.10 (1.83)	4.20 (2.18)	4.95 (1.89)	52.0
This activity was helpful to better understand the influence of values in my professional life.	6.03 (1.09)	6.30 (0.64)	5.93 (0.59)	6.15 (0.89)	86.8
This activity was helpful to better understand the influence of values in my personal life.	6.05 (1.18)	6.31 (0.81)	5.60 (0.74)	6.14 (1.01)	86.9
Awareness of Others					
As a result of completing this activity, I have a greater appreciation of how values influence other people.[c]	6.17 (1.12)	6.54 (0.70)	6.00 (0.85)	6.33 (0.94)	87.9
I have a better understanding of the range of values that influence other people based on this activity.	6.16 (1.02)	6.36 (0.81)	6.33 (0.72)	6.27 (0.91)	87.9
This activity helped me understand what I value is not necessarily the same as what other people may value.	6.36 (0.94)	6.51 (0.90)	6.47 (0.64)	6.43 (0.90)	91.4

Perceptions of Activity					
As a learning experience, this activity was more productive than listening to a lecture.[c]	6.32 (1.06)	6.22 (1.09)	6.07 (1.58)	6.25 (1.12)	86.3
As a learning experience, this activity was more enjoyable than listening to a lecture.[c]	6.45 (1.09)	6.58 (0.84)	6.20 (1.52)	6.49 (1.03)	93.0
As a learning experience, this activity was more interesting than listening to a lecture.[c]	6.49 (1.00)	6.51 (0.90)	6.20 (1.57)	6.47 (1.01)	94.4
This activity should be offered to future classes.[c]	6.49 (1.05)	6.57 (0.93)	6.27 (1.53)	6.51 (1.04)	94.0
The learning experience provided by this activity was worth the effort.	6.34 (1.10)	6.46 (0.83)	6.47 (0.64)	6.40 (0.96)	90.4
This activity was enjoyable.[c]	6.08 (1.29)	6.29 (0.89)	6.13 (0.35)	6.18 (1.07)	87.3
I would recommend this activity to other business students.[c]	6.28 (1.14)	6.53 (0.78)	6.60 (0.51)	6.42 (0.96)	91.9
The process of reducing the value cards into my top ten list was more difficult than I thought it would be.	5.59 (1.53)	5.97 (1.14)	5.80 (1.32)	5.78 (1.35)	70.2
The process of reducing the value cards into my top value was more difficult than I thought it would be.	5.84 (1.75)	6.24 (1.40)	6.40 (1.35)	6.07 (1.58)	80.8
I took this activity seriously.	6.45 (0.62)	6.58 (0.54)	6.47 (0.52)	6.51 (0.58)	96.0

Note. n = 198 (n = 92 for 2000-level, n = 91 for 4000-level, n = 15 for Graduate-level); M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation
[a]The items are not presented in the order they were on the survey. They have been grouped in this table according to the concepts of self-discovery, awareness of others, and perceptions of the activity. [b]Total Strongly Agree and Agree (%). [c]Adapted from Elam and Spotts (2004) and Kemp et al. (in press).

APPENDIX D

Example Discussion Questions

1. What are some key take-aways you gained from this activity (e.g., What did you learn about yourself? What did you learn about others?)?
2. Look at the values you identified as your five most important. Do they share similarities with each other? Do any of them contradict each other? What does this mean to/for you?
3. Would you have selected a different number one value if the question had been context-specific (e.g., at work, with friends, with family, etc.)?
4. What, if anything, did you learn about yourself from the values you discarded (Never Valued/Sometimes Valued)?
5. Were you surprised at the value you ultimately decided upon? Why?
6. How can this activity be used to effectively form and/or develop teams (e.g., work teams, school teams, etc.)?
7. Imagine you are a marketing manager. What do the number and size of value segments in the room tell you?
8. How does seeing the various value segments help you better understand how products may be positioned by personal values?
9. How might the range of values and the size of each segment in this class be used to position a new product?
10. Activities, interests, and opinions are important factors in psychographic product positioning. How could you use the values demonstrated by your peers to develop a market segmentation strategy?
11. Organizations each have values that guide them. Seeing the range of values in the classroom, how important is it for you personally to work for a firm that shares your personal values? How might your personal values impact your ability to work for organizations that exhibit values that differ from your personally important values?
12. What implications do you think your core values have for you as a manager/leader in an organization, in a sales team, etc.?
13. What implications do you think your core values have for you as an employee/follower?
14. How can an awareness of your own personal values and the range of values that exist help you in team interactions as a team member and/or a team leader?