

The evolution of work values during the school-to-work transition: the case of young adults in the “missing middle”

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Abstract Adopting a mixed method design, this paper explores the configuration and evolution of work values of 64 young adults in transition from education to employment. Qualitative analyses point out the existence of four categories of work values: interesting tasks, good relationships, self-fulfillment, and attractive work conditions. Quantitative analyses show that work values are questioned during the school-to-work transition, refined according to the experience of labor market integration, and partially different according to gender, education type, and the quality of the integration process. Consequently, career counseling should integrate a deeper understanding of what clients consider as important in their work lives.

Résumé. L'évolution des valeurs professionnelles au cours de la transition école-emploi: Le cas de jeunes adultes ni en formation, ni en emploi. A l'aide d'une méthodologie mixte, cet article explore la configuration et l'évolution des valeurs de travail de 64 jeunes adultes en transition de la formation à l'emploi. Des analyses qualitatives mettent en avant l'existence de quatre catégories de valeurs de travail: Des tâches intéressantes, des relations agréables, l'épanouissement personnel, et des conditions de travail attractives. Les analyses quantitatives, quant à elles, montrent que les valeurs de travail sont questionnées durant la transition école-emploi, affinées en fonction de l'expérience de l'insertion professionnelle, et partiellement différentes en fonction du genre, du type de formation, et de la qualité du processus d'insertion. En conséquence, le conseil en orientation devrait intégrer une compréhension plus approfondie de ce que les clients considèrent comme important dans leurs vies professionnelles.

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Zusammenfassung. Die Entwicklung von beruflichen Werthaltungen während des Übergangs von der Schule zur Arbeit: Der Fall junger Erwachsener.

Dieser Artikel erforscht die Konfiguration und Entwicklung von beruflichen Werthaltungen von jungen Erwachsenen beim Übergang vom Ausbildungs- in das Arbeitsverhältnis mittels einer Anpassung eines gemischten Methodendesigns. Qualitative Analysen wiesen auf die Existenz von vier Kategorien von beruflichen Werten hin: interessante Aufgabe, gute Beziehungen, Selbstverwirklichung und attraktive Arbeitsbedingungen. Quantitative Analysen zeigten das berufliche Werte während des Übergangs von der Schule in die Arbeitswelt in Frage gestellt werden. Durch die Erfahrungen der Arbeitsmarktintegration werden die Werte weiterentwickelt. Diese unterschieden sich teilweise nach Geschlecht, Bildungstyp und die Qualität des Integrationsprozesses. Infolgedessen sollte Karriereberatung ein tieferes Verständnis für die Dinge entwickeln, die für Klienten in ihrem Arbeitsleben wichtig sind.

Resumen. La evolución de los valores de trabajo durante la transición de la escuela al trabajo: el caso de los jóvenes en el “intermedio”.

Mediante la adopción de un método de diseño mixto, este artículo explora la configuración y evolución de los valores de trabajo de 64 jóvenes en la transición de la etapa educativa al empleo. Los análisis cualitativos señalan la existencia de cuatro categorías de valores de trabajo: tareas interesantes, buenas relaciones, la autorrealización, y las condiciones de trabajo atractivas. Los análisis cuantitativos muestran que los valores del trabajo son cuestionados durante la transición de la escuela al trabajo, refinados de acuerdo con la experiencia de la integración en el mercado laboral, y son en parte diferentes dependiendo del sexo, el tipo de educación, y la calidad del proceso de integración. En consecuencia, la orientación profesional debería abordar una comprensión más profunda de qué es para los usuarios, lo más importante en su vida laboral.

Keywords Work values · School-to-work transition · Mixed methods

Introduction

The contemporary world of work in modern western societies is characterized by globalization, lean production and near-constant change (Blustein, 2006; Guichard, 2015). This leads to the proliferation of non-linear and non-standard career trajectories, and to an increase in the number of work transitions people have to cope with during their lives (Fouad & Bynner, 2008; Fournier & Bujold, 2005). The first important career transition is the passage from school to employment, also called school-to-work transition (STWT). The STWT is defined as the movement from full-time school to full-time employment (Vuolo, Mortimer, & Staff, 2014). Nowadays, it is considered as a complex process rather than a simple one-time change (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006). The quality of a STWT may be evaluated from several objective viewpoints, such as the time needed to find a job after leaving school and the characteristics of that job, e.g., in terms of employment stability

(Warr, 2008). An interesting indicator of a successful transition is the link between young adults' career intentions and their first employment (Johnson, Sage, & Mortimer, 2012). A STWT may then be considered successful when young adults leaving school are able to find a job in the domain they were trained for, the latter being an indicator of their career plans (Danziger & Ratner, 2010).

The degree of complexity of the STWT process depends on several factors. Among them, educational factors seem to play a central role. College- and university-bound youth generally experience easier work integration processes than work-bound youth or young people not in education, employment, or training (NEET, cf. Furlong, 2006). The latter present a higher risk of experiencing what authors call "floundering" transitions (Fouad & Bynner, 2008; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, 2010; Vuolo et al., 2014). Psychosocial factors also influence the way young people cope with the STWT, including self-efficacy (Pinquart, Juang, & Silbereisen, 2002), the perception of social support (Phillips, Blustein, Jobin-Davis, & White, 2002), role identity (Ng & Feldman, 2007), or the quality of work socialization (Cohen-Scali, 2003). The meaning young people attribute to work seems to be a central psychosocial factor underpinning the STWT process (Harpaz, Honig, & Coetsier, 2002; Masdonati & Fournier, 2015). The relationship that young adults have with the world of work and the meaning that they attribute to working influence the way they approach and cope with the challenge of integrating the labor market and, more generally, adulthood (Young et al., 2011). Meaning of work can be conceived as the resultant of the interplay of multiple variables, such as the importance people attach to the work-role, the function they attribute to work, the way they integrate and cope with work and social norms, and their work values (Meaning of Work, MOW International Research Team, 1987; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010).

Work values

Although the different components of the meaning of work are not unanimously addressed (Rosso et al., 2010), work values are often considered as a key variable of this construct. Work values refer to the job characteristics people look for while working and are associated with the aspirations and goals that people seek to fulfill through work (Harpaz & Fu, 2002; Hartung, 2006; Sverko, Babarovic, & Sverko, 2008; Warr, 2008). Among the several existing typologies of work values (cf. Rounds & Armstrong, 2005), Ros, Schwartz, and Surkiss's (1999) is perhaps the most solicited and empirically validated. It distinguishes four types of work values: intrinsic (autonomy, interest, growth), extrinsic (job security, income), social (social relations, contribution to society), and prestige (power, authority, influence). Work values vary according to several factors, such as gender, educational level, labor market characteristics, employment status, ethnicity/culture, age, aspirations, pathways, social status and origin, parental attitudes, generation, and early working experiences (Chow, Krahn, & Galambos, 2014; Duffy & Sedlaceck, 2007; Hansen & Leuty, 2012; Jin & Rounds, 2012; Johnson, 2001, 2002; Johnson & Elder, 2002; Johnson et al., 2012; Twenge, 2010; Warr, 2008; Wray-Lake, Syvertsen, Briddell, Osgood, & Flanagan, 2011).

The existing literature stresses that the educational level and gender of young adults are two particularly relevant factors influencing work values. Concerning educational level, Warr (2008) pointed out that more educated workers tended to endorse intrinsic work values, whereas less educated workers tended to focus on extrinsic work values. High school graduates seemed to accord more importance to job security, whereas post-secondary graduates were more drawn to work values related to challenges and positions of authority (Johnson & Elder, 2002). When gender was taken into account, women traditionally tended to endorse intrinsic work values more frequently than men, whereas men seemed more oriented towards extrinsic values (Johnson, 2001). However, gender differences are weaker among recent generations of young workers (Wray-Lake et al., 2011), and depend on the type of job workers are enrolled in (Johnson, 2001).

In their meta-analysis, Jin and Rounds (2012) highlighted a global, relative stability of work values across the life span. However, they also found that during college years, work values are less stable and students attach more importance to intrinsic values than during the first few years of employment. According to Porfeli (2008), young people may also experience a discrepancy between their expectancies and their actual first work experiences. When the discrepancy is particularly strong, authors speak of a “reality shock” that leads young people to a re-evaluation of their work values (Harpaz et al., 2002). These results suggest that work values are somehow solicited and questioned during the STWT period, and are associated with other research in the field (e.g., Chow et al., 2014; Johnson, 2001, 2002).

The “missing middle”

Despite the abundance of literature investigating young people’s work values, three shortcomings become evident. First, literature on youth transitions tends to focus either on successful STWTs of advantaged and highly qualified youths or on at risk transitions of marginal youths (Roberts & MacDonald, 2013). Yet, the literature lacks studies that investigate the experiences of “the missing middle” (Roberts, 2011, p. 21). As indicated by Roberts, the missing middle consists of young adults who are neither oriented toward an academic path—such as college or university students—nor designed to non-qualified positions in the labor market—such as youth in NEET pathways (Furlong, 2006). Thus, “in adopting this dualism—successful versus unsuccessful transitions, slow-track versus fast track trajectories, advantaged versus disadvantaged—youth research is in danger of ignoring the experiences of young people who fall somewhere in-between” (Roberts & MacDonald, 2013, para. 1.1). For example, little is known about the work values of students enrolled in different types of vocational education, who are qualified for practicing skilled occupations without following an academic course.

Second, most studies adopt quantitative methodologies and are based on solid psychometric instruments (cf. Rounds & Armstrong, 2005). These studies are appropriate to test intergroup differences and to assess changes over time. However, since the types of work values are predetermined in the adopted instruments, this kind of research often disallows highlighting potential new forms, nuances, and types of work values. Third, very little research has accurately investigated the

relationship between work values and the work situation of young adults who integrate the labor market (Johnson, 2002). For example, we know that their employment status affects work values (Chow et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2012; Warr, 2008), but nothing is said about the possible influence that the integration chances offered by the education programs in which these young adults are enrolled may have on their work values. There is also a lack of knowledge on how the difficulties of finding a job linked with the education domain may affect the work values of young in transition.

The present study sought to fill in these gaps: (1) by focusing on the evolution of work values in students completing a vocational education and integrating the labor market; (2) by adopting a mixed methods embedded design and inductive consensual qualitative procedures; (3) by investigating possible variations of work values according to gender, the type of program they were enrolled in, the integration chances offered by these programs, and the type of job these young adults were able to find upon leaving school.

Aims and context

This research had three aims. The first was to explore, classify, and qualitatively describe work values of students completing a technical or a vocational program and integrating the labor market. The second was to detect and describe possible changes of work values during the STWT process, i.e., between the last months of school and 12–18 months after graduation. The third was to verify, both before and after the STWT, whether young people's work values differed according to some sociodemographic, educational, and contextual characteristics, such as gender, the type of program in which they were enrolled, their chances of finding an occupation related to their field of study at the moment of leaving school, the actual link between the education field and their occupation 12–18 months after graduation. However, the present investigation is considered exploratory, because there is a lack of literature addressing the link between work values and these last two aspects.

The research was carried out in the metropolitan area of Quebec City, a mid-size Canadian town, in the Province of Québec. The standard Québec education system consists of 12 years of compulsory education (Bosch & Charest, 2008; Molgat, Deschenaux, & LeBlanc, 2011). After secondary school, most young people enroll in a college, called *Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel* (CÉGEP) known officially in English as a “General and Vocational College.” Colleges offer two types of programs: pre-university education or technical training (TT). The latter lasts 3 years and is intended for students who want to learn and practice specialized occupations, such as graphic design, nursing or social service. Students who do not meet the requirements to enter a college—or who wish to complete their training more quickly in order to rapidly integrate into the labor market—enroll in a vocational education and training (VET) program. These programs generally last 1 year; they are offered directly after secondary school or during the last years of it; and they lead to the practice of manual occupations, such as butcher, hairdresser, or carpenter. Most studies on youth's work values in Québec focus on precarious youth and NEET pathways (e.g., Malenfant, LaRue, Mercier, & Vézina, 2002; Robert &

Pelland, 2007) or on college and university students (e.g., Hamel, 2003; Roy, 2007). Despite the abundance of studies in this domain, research on work values in Québec presents the same general shortcomings listed above.

Method

Participants

Sixty-four young adults participated in the entire study, which involved two measurements. One hundred and two young adults, 53 males (52 %), 49 females (48 %), were met a first time during the three last months of their training (Time 1, between January 2011 and April 2012). At this time, they were aged between 17 and 25 years old ($M = 21$). Forty-six (23 females and 23 males) were completing a TT program, leading to ten different occupations, such as early childhood educator, graphic designer, and police officer. Fifty-six (26 females and 30 males) were finishing a VET program, leading to 11 different occupations, such as welder, baker, and pharmacy assistant. The inclusion criteria were: having the intention to integrate the labor market after finishing school and being under 25 years old. Students were selected with a quota sampling procedure according to sex, program type (TT vs. VET), and labor market integration chances. Concerning the latter criterion, participants were chosen from programs where the rate of students entering occupations linked with the learned profession was 10 % higher or 10 % lower than the averages in the Province of Québec, i.e., 79.5 % for VET and 85 % for TT (Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, MELS, 2011a, b). Overall, nine schools in the Quebec City metro area, providing 21 different VET and TT programs, took part in the study.

Sixty-four participants—34 males (53 %) and 30 females (47 %), 33 having a VET qualification (52 %), and 31 having a TT qualification (48 %)—were met a second time 12–18 months after completing school (Time 2). Participants were aged between 18 and 27 years old ($M = 22.4$). Fifty-eight (91 %) were employed, four (6 %) were unemployed, and two participants (3 %) decided to enroll in a new training program. Among the 58 employed participants, 49 (84 %) had a full time job, 25 (43 %) had a fixed-term contract, and 46 (79 %) had a job linked with their domain of training. The latter information was used to partly address the third aim of the study, i.e., comparing the work values of young adults working in their education field with those of participants who did not find a job in their field of study. Participants' socioeconomic status was also determined on the basis of the skill level relied to their parents' employment situation, which was classified according to the occupational classification of the Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2011). Thirty-one participants (48.5 %) were classified in the upper-middle class, since they had at least a parent in a job requiring a university degree or occupying an executive position in a company. One or both parents of 24 participants (37.5 %) had a job requiring 2–3 years of postsecondary education, placing them in the lower-middle class. Nine participants (14 %) had at least a parent in a job requiring secondary education or less. We considered them as

member of the lower or working class. Almost all participants were born in the Province of Québec, except for three who were of foreign origin and two who came from another Canadian province.

The Time 1 to Time 2 retention rate was 63 %, which is considered an acceptable response rate for studies with hard-to-reach populations (Kleschinsky, Bosworth, Nelson, Walsh, & Shaffer, 2009). At Time 2, all participants actually could be considered a hard-to-reach population because they left school and entered the labour market, which often implies moving, changing address and lifestyle, and having less time for participating in the research. There were three main reasons for dropouts: the contact information that participants gave at Time 1 was no longer valid; participants abandoned the study due to not having time; or participants were excluded from the study because they no longer met the inclusion criteria. Participants who took part in both phases of the study and participants who dropped out at Time 2 did not significantly differ from each other in terms of age, $t(101) < .01$, $p > .05$; sex, $\chi^2(1) = .09$, $p > .05$; or program type, $\chi^2(1) = .77$, $p > .05$.

Materials

Data were collected through individual, semi-structured interviews, lasting between 45 and 90 min, and divided into four themes: sociodemographic information and school path; program choice and perception; work representations, values, importance, and functions; and future plans and anticipations (Time 1 interviews) or experience of the labor market integration process (Time 2 interviews). The present analyses are driven from questions pertaining to the third theme. The primary question investigated participants' work values: "What do you seek in your future occupation?" Interviewers had the possibility to ask follow-up questions in order to obtain accurate descriptions of work values: "How would you define a 'good' occupation/an 'ideal' job?"; "What characteristics does your future occupation need to have so that you feel happy doing it?"

Procedure

We contacted colleges and VET schools in the Quebec City metro area that offered the programs selected in order to get their approval to proceed with recruitment in their establishment. Two researchers presented the project in last-year classes of the colleges and VET programs that agreed to participate in the study. After a 15-min presentation, students interested in participating in the study were asked to write down their name, phone number, and e-mail address on a confidential list. Therefore, participation in the study was voluntary.

For Time 1 interviews, students who agreed to participate in the study were contacted in order to schedule an individual interview in a room located in the school they attended. The same students were contacted, by e-mail or telephone, 12–18 months after their graduation in order to schedule the Time 2 interview. The second interview was carried out in an isolated room at Laval University, by Internet conference or by telephone for participants who were not able to come to

campus. In order to incentivize ongoing participation in the study, two tablet computers were randomly drawn and offered to two participants who took part in the two phases of the study. Time 1 and Time 2 interviews were recorded and fully transcribed with participants' authorization. Data were collected and treated in accordance with the American Psychological Association ethics and with approval from the Ethics Committee of Laval University.

Mixed method design

The three study aims suppose both qualitative and quantitative procedures: qualitative procedures enable the categorization and description of participants' work values; quantitative procedures support pre-post and intergroup comparisons. A mixed methods design was chosen in order to coherently combine qualitative and quantitative procedures within a single study. Particularly, we adopted a "mixed method embedded design," which is a specific form of mixed method design consisting in the embedding of quantitative analyses within qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Consensual qualitative analyses were first carried out on Time 1 interview transcriptions in order to explore and describe the participants' work values (first study's aim). A second consensual qualitative analysis based on the codes and categories defined in the first phase was performed on Time 2 interview transcriptions. Repeated measures non-parametric quantitative analyses were then carried out with the aim of exploring possible changes in work values (second study's aim). Finally, independent samples non-parametric quantitative analyses were realized on Time 1 and Time 2 data in order to test intergroup differences (third study's aim).

Qualitative procedure

Qualitative analyses were based on the modified consensual qualitative research approach (CQR-M, cf. Spangler, Liu, & Hill, 2012) and were carried out using the QDA-Miner 3.2.3 software. Consensual qualitative research is a qualitative research approach whose particularity is to focus on the multiplication of analyzers or "judges." Judges analyze the same material, i.e., transcriptions of semi-structured interviews, following a fixed, step-based process. This approach was chosen because it leans on the combination of constructivist and postpositivist underpinnings. This allows focusing on participant subjectivity and meaning making, but also to summarize results as objectively as possible and to carry out analyses across participants (Stahl, Taylor, & Hill, 2012). CQR-M consists of an adaptation from consensual qualitative research with large samples and "can be used in combination with quantitative methods" (Spangler et al., 2012, p. 271). Four researchers participated in the CQR-M analyses: two professors (researchers 1 and 2), a PhD student (researcher 3) and a Master student (researcher 4). Researchers 1 and 2 teach and conduct research in the field of career counseling. Their previous and current projects focus on career pathways and the meaning of work, as well as on qualitative content analyses procedures. Researchers 3 and 4 have been working as research assistants in the present study since 2010 and 2012, respectively. They are familiar

with the concept of work values and were trained in CQR-M by researcher 1. The CQR-M procedure was carried out in three steps:

1. *Theme identification.* From the body of all interview transcriptions, we selected the transcription sections covering participants' discourses about work values. These transcriptions were divided into classification units, corresponding here to meaning units. This material was then associated to two distinct themes: *evoked work values*, indicating the presence of specific work values in the discourse of the participant; and *dominant work value*, referring to the value that the participant considered as the most important among the evoked ones.
2. *Categories definition.* Researchers 1 and 2 separately read an initial data set of 30 interview transcriptions in order to identify the categories of work values addressed by participants. They then met and sought consensus on these categories. This step led to the definition and description of four mutually exclusive categories of work values, each divided into two to three subcategories.
3. *Coding.* Researchers 3 and 4 separately coded the classification units of each interview transcription section according to the categories defined in Step 2 for Time 1 and Time 2. Cohen's Kappa inter-rater reliability indexes were .88 for evoked work values and .64 for dominant work value. In case of divergence in the classification, researchers 3 and 4 met and tried to reach consensus. Finally, a team meeting was held in order to reach an agreement on the classification units that did not lead to consensus. When an agreement was impossible to reach, classification units were then unanimously considered as unclassifiable and were removed from the analysis, as suggested in CQR-M procedures (Spangler et al., 2012).

The qualitative procedure was conceived as an iterative process, and Steps 2 and 3 were more parallel processes than sequential stages. In fact, the coding phase sometimes led the research team to clarify or redefine the categories and subcategories of work values. The results of the CQR-M procedure addressed the first aim of the study.

Quantitative procedure

Quantitative analyses were carried out using SPSS 22 software, and consisted of two distinct non-parametric procedures (Field, 2009). The first procedure consisted in a repeated measures analysis and was adopted in order to fulfill the second aim of the study. Researchers calculated and compared the frequencies of evoked and dominant work values in Time 1 and Time 2 interviews. McNemar's tests were carried out in order to determine if there were significant Time 1—Time 2 differences in the proportion of participants evoking or prioritizing a given work value.

The second procedure consisted of an independent samples comparison. We carried out Pearson's Chi square analysis with regards to both evoked and dominant work values in order to identify possible significant differences between groups:

male/female, VET/TT, good/bad perspectives of finding a job in the field of training, and existence/absence of the education-occupation link. We used odd ratios to estimate effect sizes. This second quantification procedure brought answers to the third aim of this study.

Results

Results are presented in line with the three aims of the study. First, we describe and illustrate the categories of work values participants spoke of in the interviews. Second, we address the way work values evolved over time. Third, we describe results concerning the comparisons between participants' subgroups.

Categories of work values

In accordance with the first aim of the study, evoked and dominant work values are addressed with a description of the emerged categories of values and with quotes. Quotes were considered as paradigmatic, i.e. exemplary illustrations of a category. Four categories of work values emerged from the categorization process. We labeled them *interesting tasks*, *good relationships*, *self-fulfillment*, and *attractive work conditions*. Each category of work value covered two to three subcategories, leading to a deeper understanding of its nuances. Table 1 presents an overview of all categories and subcategories.

Interesting tasks

Some participants mentioned that a good job implies having work with interesting tasks and contents. What people seek is to love what they concretely do, to draw satisfaction in practicing their occupation and the actions this occupation enables them to perform. This category of work value covered two subcategories. The first was related to *interesting job contents*, in direct relation to the specific learned occupation. As participant 60, a female with technical training in forest technology said:

Table 1 Categories and sub-categories of work values

Categories of work values	Sub-categories of work values
Interesting tasks	Interesting job contents
	Attractive work settings
Good relationships	Positive working atmosphere
	Shared values
	Self-efficacy
Self-fulfillment	Social recognition
	Feeling of usefulness
	Good salary
Attractive work conditions	Other attractive work conditions

In my opinion, it's important to be happy at work, to have a job you love. I prefer... I don't know, earning less money, moving, whatever... but doing work I like... I could have done something else, I could have continued studying... but I don't think that I would have liked it. Forest technology, I know that I like it.

The second subcategory concerned *attractive work settings*, i.e. more general job characteristics, such as autonomy, but also creativity, responsibilities, and well established routines. As participant 29, a male participant with technical training as a police officer said:

Being able to have a job, as they say, that is different every day. Not to have a routine. [...] At the skating rink [his current work place], I know the schedule by heart [...]. That sickens me, kills me.

Good relationships

This category of work value refers to positive, direct, concrete, daily interactions with colleagues, clients, or superiors. Participants evoking this work value sought a friendly, non-judgmental, and not overly competitive work environment. They wished to feel included, accepted, and appreciated by their teammates. Relationship values were divided into two subcategories, the first one being a global *positive working atmosphere*. Participant 68, a female with technical training in fashion marketing illustrated this best, when she said, “A good team: I must get on well with my colleagues, because otherwise... it doesn't work... Even if you can't be everyone's best friend, you know.”

The second sub-category of relational work values was the search of a working environment where colleagues and superiors *share the same values*. This subcategory refers to participants who aspire to work with “people who think like them,” and wish to share their professional values—a form of work ethic—and even life values, as illustrated by one female participant with vocational and educational training in pastry baking said: “Incompetent people, I don't like that. Often, in pastry, you must be clean, but there are colleagues who don't care about having dirty hands.”

Self-fulfillment

A fulfilling employment situation enables people to grow, learn, develop new skills, feel valued, and be proud of what they do. Self-fulfillment may have two sources: It may arise from individual processes, like an inner feeling of satisfaction and pride with regards to one's accomplishments, or it may arise from psychosocial process, such as the feedback of peers on one's work. The combination of these two sources of self-fulfillment led to three subcategories of work values. The first was *self-efficacy*, i.e. a self-judgment leading to the feeling of being competent and progressing in their job, as illustrated by participant 21, who has vocational and

educational training in painting: “A job that would make me happy is, first of all, a job that you know how to do well. Something that you are able to do well. A job that you feel competent in.”

The second self-fulfillment sub-category was *social recognition*, i.e. the statement of competence coming from significant others, such as clients or experienced colleagues. Participant 1, a female with technical training as a pharmacy assistant, stated: “I need to know if the clients are happy. And that they appreciate what I do.”

The third sub-category of self-fulfillment was the *feeling of usefulness to society*, linked to a general feeling of contributing to social progress. As participant 26, a male with police officer with technical training explained, “[In my job], I’ll feel useful, because you’ll [sic] work on problems that no one else will really work on in society.”

Attractive work conditions

Work conditions refer to a more extrinsic motivation and to instrumental values. Participants were concerned with different work characteristics, such as job stability and security, income, proximity, and work-life balance. This category of work values was divided into two subcategories, the first one being linked to a *good salary*. Participant 11, a male with vocational and educational training in welding emphasized the importance of salary when he stated, “A good salary, that’s what I mostly want... I want to work and make money. The insurance [policies], I really

Table 2 Frequencies and evolution of work values

Work value	Time 1		Time 2		χ^2	
	Evoked	Dominant	Evoked	Dominant	Evoked	Dominant
Tasks	54	26 (53 %)	44	25 (40 %)	3.68	0.00
Job contents	44		34		2.89	
Work settings	31		21		3.38	
Relationships	39	14 (29 %)	32	13 (21 %)	1.44	0.00
Atmosphere	37		29		1.89	
Value sharing	10		8		0.07	
Self-fulfillment	35	6 (12 %)	23	12 (19 %)	4.03*	1.79
Self-efficacy	25		15		4.05*	
Recognition	10		11		0.00	
Usefulness	8		3		1.46	
Work conditions	32	3 (6 %)	39	12 (19 %)	1.09	7.11**
Salary	24		28		0.38	
Other conditions	21		24		0.12	

$N = 64$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

don't care about that: If I make money, I'll be able to pay for insurance and things like that."

The second sub-category refers to *other attractive work conditions*. Participant 8, a female with vocational and educational training in pastry baking defined what this meant for her: "I would like to have a job still close to home, to those I love: my friends, my family... I don't want to go to the other end of the world and come back only once a year to tell them hello."

Evolution of work values

The second aim of our study was to detect and describe possible changes of work values during the STWT. Table 2 shows the frequencies of evoked and dominant work values at Time 1 and Time 2. The sum of the frequencies of evoked work values is higher than the total sample size because many participants evoked more than a single value. The sum of the frequencies of dominant work values is lower than the total sample size because, in some cases, the qualitative procedure did not lead to consensus.

Evoked work values

On average, participants evoked 2.50 values at Time 1 and 2.16 values at Time 2, which indicates a significant decrease in the number of evoked work values, $t(63) = 2.27$, $p < .05$. Before integrating the labor market (Time 1), the most frequently evoked work values were interesting tasks, followed by good relationships, possibility to self-fulfillment, and attractive work conditions. 1 year to 18 months later (Time 2), work conditions became the second most frequently evoked value. As shown in Table 2, McNemar's test indicates that self-fulfillment work values were less frequently evoked at Time 2 than at Time 1.

Dominant work values

Twenty-three out of 64 participants did not change their dominant work value, whereas 26 modified it. Thirteen out of 15 participants who could not identify their dominant work value at Time 1 were able to do it at Time 2, which can also be considered a dynamic of change. Overall, a change in dominant work values between Time 1 and Time 2 was found for 39 out of 64 participants (61 %). McNemar's test confirms a significant Time 1/Time 2 increase of participants who were able to identify a dominant work value, $\chi^2(1) = 9.39$, $p < .001$. As Table 2 shows, the ranking of dominant work values is stable over time: both at Time 1 and Time 2; having interesting tasks was the most frequently mentioned dominant value, followed by good relationships, self-fulfillment, and attractive work conditions. However, McNemar's tests indicated a significant Time 1/Time 2 increase of participants identifying attractive work conditions as their dominant work value.

Intergroup differences

In order to address the third aim of the study, we compared evoked and dominant work values according to participants' gender, type of program, the chances of finding a job in their field of training at Time 1, and the education-employment link at Time 2. Table 3 summarizes the results of these analyses. An overview of Table 3 shows that most Chi square statistics did not show significant differences between subgroups, with the exception of the following eight cases: gender (male or female), type of program (VET or TT), labour market integration chances (high or low), and the employment-education link (working or not in the field in which participants trained).

Gender

Two significant results were found when comparing participants based on gender. First, a significant link was highlighted between gender and the dominance of relational work values at Time 1. This means that the odds of participants mentioning relational values as dominant were 3.75 times higher in females than males. Second, there was also a significant association between gender and the dominance of task-oriented work values at Time 1. This represents the fact that the odds of participants asserting that task-oriented values were the most important work values were 5.71 times higher in males than females. However, both associations were not significant at Time 2.

Type of program

Three significant associations were found when comparing participants in VET with participants in TT. There seems to be a link between the type of program and the mention of self-fulfillment work values at Time 1. This means that, based on the odds ratio, the odds of participants evoking self-fulfillment values were 3.76 times higher if they were enrolled in a TT program than if they were in a VET program. Moreover, a significant association was found between the type of program and dominant task-oriented values at Time 2. This result indicates that the odd of participants having task-oriented dominant work values was 3.80 times higher for TT graduates than for VET graduates. Finally, the type of program also seems to be associated with the dominance of the work conditions value at Time 2: the odds of participants saying that good work conditions was the most important work value was 6.30 times higher for VET graduates than for TT graduates.

Labor market integration chances

Two significant associations were found between work values and the labor market integration perspectives offered by the programs. The first one indicates an association between integration chances and tasks as the dominant value at Time 1. This means that the odds of participants saying that tasks was the dominant work value were 5.22 times higher if they were completing a program with poor

Table 3 Intergroup comparisons of work values at time 1 and time 2

Work value	Gender			Type of program			Program integration chances			Education-employment link		
	Female	Male	χ^2	VET	TT	χ^2	Good	Bad	χ^2	Yes	No	χ^2
Task												
Time 1, evoked	26	28	.23	27	27	.34	25	29	1.90	36	18	1.02
Time 1, dominant	6	20	9.96**	16	10	1.75	7	19	9.33**	19	7	1.55
Time 2, evoked	20	24	.11	20	24	2.10	22	22	.00	30	14	1.03
Time 2, dominant	12	13	.02	8	17	6.29*	13	12	.07	20	5	4.53*
Relationships												
Time 1, evoked	22	17	3.64	21	18	.21	22	17	1.64	26	13	.29
Time 1, dominant	10	4	4.39*	9	5	1.16	8	6	.37	7	7	1.54
Time 2, evoked	17	15	1.00	19	13	1.56	21	11	6.25*	19	13	.61
Time 2, dominant	8	5	1.41	8	5	.65	8	5	.87	6	7	2.27
Self-fulfillment												
Time 1, evoked	20	15	3.27	13	22	6.43*	17	18	.06	25	10	1.82
Time 1, dominant	3	3	.03	1	5	3.23	3	3	.00	4	2	.02
Time 2, evoked	13	10	1.34	10	13	.94	11	12	.07	14	9	.16
Time 2, dominant	7	5	.78	5	7	.58	4	8	1.64	7	5	.21
Work conditions												
Time 1, evoked	14	18	1.29	16	16	.06	15	17	.25	20	12	.07
Time 1, dominant	0	3	2.78	3	0	2.96	1	2	.35	0	3	5.61
Time 2, evoked	15	24	2.84	20	19	.00	18	21	.59	27	12	1.16
Time 2, dominant	3	9	2.84	10	2	5.97*	7	5	.41	7	5	.21

N = 64

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

integration perspectives than if they were enrolled in a program that guaranteed good chances of finding a job in their field of study. We found a second association between labor market integration perspectives and the mention of relational work values at Time 2. This seems to signify that the odds of participants who evoked

relational work values were 3.65 times higher for participants who had been in a program that guaranteed them good chances of finding a job in their field of study than for participants having enrolled in a program with lesser integration perspectives.

Education-employment link

A significant association was found between work values and the integration situation at Time 2, i.e., the fact of working or not in the domain in which participants were trained. We found an association between the employment-education link and dominant task-oriented work values. This seems to indicate that participants who actually worked in the field they were trained for had 3.43 more chances to identify task-oriented values as their dominant value than participants who were not working in their training domain.

Discussion

Results are discussed according to the three study aims: work values categories, work values evolution, and intergroup differences. For each aim, the main results are summarized and discussed according to the existing literature. We also propose interpretations for particularly interesting or innovative results.

Categories of work values

With regards to the first aim of the study, participants mentioned four different categories of work values: interesting tasks; good relationships; self-fulfillment; attractive work conditions. All categories of work values could be sub-divided into more specific categories. Our results seem to confirm that intrinsic work values are important for graduating students, which supports Jin and Rounds's (2012) findings regarding college students. This aspect also seems to apply to VET and TT students, because task-related work values were the most frequently evoked and dominant work values in our population, both before and after graduation.

Our categorization generally confirms the pertinence of Ros et al. (1999) typology. Ros and colleagues' intrinsic, extrinsic, and social work values seem to largely correspond to what we called task-, work condition-, and relationship-oriented work values. However, some nuances and discrepancies compared with previous studies need to be highlighted and explained. First, autonomy was not the only work setting that participants looked for when working. On the contrary, some of them spoke about other important characteristics that they would like to find in their job, such as creativity, self-expression, variety, challenge, or having greater responsibilities. Second, relational work values could fall into two distinct subcategories: atmosphere and shared values. The first subcategory seems to correspond to Ros and colleagues' definition of social values, whereas what we named "values sharing" refers to a different sort of social value. In this case, participants aspired to establish a values-based bond with their colleagues. Ideally,

colleagues would share the same outlook on life and the same work ethics as the newcomers.

Some observations are crucial concerning the self-fulfillment category and its three subcategories: self-efficacy, social recognition, and feeling of usefulness. In our results, self-fulfillment seems to be a broad category that includes Ros et al. (1999) three types of values. Self-efficacy values may be considered as a form of intrinsic value, i.e., related to personal growth; social recognition may contribute to attain prestige values; usefulness may be related to social values, i.e., contributing to society. Self-fulfillment might then be understood as work values that result from diversified processes or a way to achieve them. Concerning more specifically what Ros and colleagues called prestige values, it is notable that participants in the present study did not mention values related to the need for power or influence over others. The specific characteristics of our population may explain this discrepancy. Our participants seemed conscious that their training program rarely leads to prestigious or influential work positions. Thus, the only way for them to reach any kind of prestige is through social recognition.

Overall, the nuances and discrepancies between our results and those from previous studies can be interpreted in two distinct ways. On one hand, they may be linked to the specific characteristics of the “missing middle” (Roberts, 2011, p. 21). This population might present a set of work values that differs slightly from a better-known population, such as college students. The lack of prestige, work values, and the fact that autonomy is not the only work setting that they look for might support this interpretation. On the other hand, the richness of our qualitative material allows us to explore the nuances underlying a general typology of work values. The fact that both relational and self-fulfillment work values cover very distinct sub-categories is an illustration of this phenomenon.

Evolution of work values

With regards to the second aim of the study, results show that participants evoked less work values at Time 2 than at Time 1, and that the number of participants able to identify a dominant work value increased from Time 1 to Time 2. We also observed stability concerning the most popular value: the task-oriented work value. The proportion of participants asserting that work conditions were the most important work value increased over time, whereas self-fulfillment values were less frequently evoked at Time 2 than at Time 1.

These observations confirm the results of previous research that stressed a progressive stabilization of work values during the labor market integration process (e.g., Jin & Rounds, 2012). In our study, this stabilization may take the form of a consolidation of work values during the STWT process. After entering the labor market, participants were able to evoke a more limited number of work values and to identify the most important one with greater ease. The increase in the proportion of participants who identify work conditions as a dominant work value, associated with the decrease in the evocation of self-fulfillment values may also confirm Jin and Rounds' (2012) results, highlighting a trend during the STWT of switching from intrinsic to extrinsic values. Finally, the fact that most participants modified or

better defined their work values priorities between Time 1 and Time 2 confirms the global observation that work values are somehow solicited and questioned during the STWT process (Harpaz et al., 2002; Johnson, 2001, 2002; Johnson & Elder, 2002).

These results may also suggest the existence of an adjustment process between work expectations and the actual experience of working (Chow et al., 2014). Experiencing the real world of work may have led some young adults to both clarify and re-evaluate their own system of values. Even if we were not able to identify clear situations of “reality shock” (Harpaz et al., 2002), the observed changes could suggest the existence of a sort of “principle of reality” process. Through the labor market experience, some participants realized that they were actually not (or not yet) able to fulfill all the work values they hoped to by the end of their education programs. This could explain, for instance, both the loss of popularity of self-fulfillment values and the increasing centrality of work conditions values.

Intergroup differences

Regarding the third aim of the study, an overview of intergroup comparisons indicates a relative homogeneity of participants’ evocation of work values. Yet, we found recurrent intergroup differences concerning the hierarchy of work values in terms of work values dominance. Specifically, subgroups differed regarding the centrality of interesting tasks, which were mainly prioritized by males, by students enrolled in TT, and by students in programs that do not guarantee optimal integration chances.

More specifically, when approaching the end of their program, females seemed to focus on relational values more often than males, and males asserted that the most important work value was the task-oriented one more often than females. Compared to VET students finishing their program, students in TT more frequently evoked self-fulfillment work values. 12–18 months later, TT graduates focused more frequently on task-oriented values, whereas VET graduates placed work conditions as the dominant values more often than TT graduates. At the end of their program, participants enrolled in programs leading to poor job-integration perspectives tended to consider the task-oriented work value as a dominant value more often than other students. Inversely, at Time 2, participants who graduated in programs offering good integration perspectives evoked relational values more often than others. Finally, participants who were able to find a job that was linked with their field of study considered more often than others that task-oriented values were the most important work values.

These results confirmed that work values are not totally independent from gender. Gender mainly seems to influence one’s expectations regarding one’s work life (Time 1). According to the literature, males and females’ aspirations are somehow different (Johnson, 2001). Interestingly, these differences tended to disappear after labor market integration (Time 2), which confirmed Johnson’s (2001) results. Gender differences concerning anticipations may then have faded throughout the real experience of working, at least in regard to work values. Our results highlight that occupational thinking is shaped by social variables and is not

solely a psychological process. Among these social influences, gender habitus could explain differences between females and males concerning the hierarchy of values that young people aspire to reach through work (Vilhjálmisdóttir & Arnkelsson, 2013).

Concerning the influence of educational factors, work values also partly depend on the type of program in which young adults are enrolled. This difference could illustrate the fact that young adults adapted their expectations toward the world of work according to the opportunities inherent to their specific training program. Since TT programs lead to specialized occupations (Molgat et al., 2011), TT graduates valued intrinsic aspects of work, such as self-fulfillment (Time 1) and tasks (Time 2). In other words, they had more of a tendency to look for and to reach job satisfaction in the act of working, itself, possibly due to the more “challenging” nature of their jobs, when compared to VET students. Contrastingly, VET leads to manual, less specialized jobs, which may suggest fewer opportunities to attain satisfaction in the “act of working” itself. This would explain VET graduates’ trend of focusing more than TT graduates on extrinsic work values, such as work conditions. Such results are in line with previous research associating intrinsic work values with higher levels of education (e.g., Warr, 2008).

With regards to contextual factors, our exploratory procedure seems to indicate that loving a specific occupational domain is a strong motivational factor, which may have compensated for the risk of not being able to find a job in the field of study. In other words, the career choices of participants enrolled in programs with poorer integration perspectives were probably more related to vocational factors than to labor market factors. Similarly, it is not surprising that participants who were able to find a job in their field of study considered task-related work values more often dominant. Young adults who did not work in their field of study could not do the work for which what they were trained. Therefore, they possibly had to attribute more emphasis on other work values than on values inherent to that work’s set of tasks. This result is partly consistent with Johnson et al. (2012) findings, which showed that intrinsic work values were weakened for young adults who were not able to find a job in line with their career plans.

All in all, intergroup differences tend to confirm that work values are not solely isolated psychological processes, but that they also depend on contextual, sociodemographic, and educational influences (Warr, 2008; Wray-Lake et al., 2011). These influences mainly affect the hierarchy of work values, and particularly the importance of working on interesting tasks. As suggested in the sociological literature, work values—considered as the manifestation of work aspirations and expectations—may be affected by young adults’ social position (Johnson, 2001; Johnson & Elder, 2002). Education and gender are indicators of this social position and actually somewhat influence work aspirations and expectations and the way early work experiences shape work values. Our exploratory results also suggest that contextual factors related to the labor market situation may affect work values and should be further investigated in research on the meaning of work and work values (Young et al., 2011).

Implications for educational and vocational guidance

The results of our study have some implications for career counseling. First of all, they confirm the importance of accurately assessing young adults' work values. Just as other career factors, this means not only using validated scales, but also carrying out qualitative assessment of work values (Whiston & Rahardja, 2005). A deeper and finer understanding of what clients consider as important in their future work lives may be an integral component of effective career counseling. Above all, it may increase the chances for young adults to experience successful STWTs and satisfying labor market integration processes. Second, career counseling should ideally be carried out longitudinally, because work values are questioned during this transition and shaped by early work experiences. This would allow counselors to help young adults to cope with labor market integration experiences that potentially challenge their work values, and may be the origin of a reality shock (Harpaz et al., 2002). Third, career counseling should take into account the influence of gender, as well as educational and contextual factors, on the way young adults approach the working world and cope with their early working experiences (Frey, Schober, & Hollinger, 2014).

Recent theories in the field of educational and vocational guidance may be helpful in preventing reality shocks and in fostering successful labor market integration processes through values-centered interventions. For example, interventions based on Savickas's theory of career construction could lead to the development of the adaptability of students who enter the labor market (cf. Savickas, 2011). Specifically, working on young adults' life themes could lead to the identification of their work values. Work values may than be addressed and questioned in activities on the "concern" dimension of young adults' adaptability. Guichard's (2009, 2015) life-design dialogues may also be promising value-based intervention techniques. Such dialogues may be useful for identifying and addressing the value system of young adults, and to support them through challenging transition processes. Both Savickas's and Guichard's intervention models also open up the integration of social influences on career thinking and behaving, such as gender and education path.

Limits and future directions

This research has four main limits that pave the way for future studies. Its first limit is that it focused on a restricted number of variables. Accordingly, it would be important to cross data on young adults' work values with other factors, such as the linearity of their integration process and the stability of their employment at Time 2. For example, one could hypothesize that work values are more highly questioned when a person is not able to find a stable job and has to cope with a more problematic integration process (i.e., unemployment, part-time jobs, etc.). The second limit of the study is the fact that we exclusively focused on work values, overlooking other key-processes that are determinant for the more general meaning that young adults attribute to work. Future research should investigate how work values are interwoven with other variables related to the construct of the meaning of

work, such as work functions, work importance, and the perception of the work norms. Third, this study focused exclusively on participants belonging to what is called the “missing middle” (Roberts, 2011, p. 21). Reliable generalizations about this population are imaginable only if these data are put into perspective with similar studies carried out with other populations that experience a STWT. Finally, the longitudinal aspect of the present study may be criticized, mainly because STWTs and labor market integration processes can be long-lasting processes (Hamilton & Hamilton, 2006; Vuolo et al., 2014). It is possible that work values continued to change after our Time 2, and could have led to different results. Future researchers should plan to use a long-term, repeated measures research design.

In sum, this research contributed to a better understanding of how the work values of young adults in transition from school to work are configured, how they evolve during the integration process, and how they differ according to sociodemographic, educational, and contextual factors. Thus, it has contributed to partially reducing the lack of mixed methods studies in the field of career counseling, as well as in the more specific research domain of STWT and the meaning of work. We also shared a better understanding of the specific characteristics of an overlooked population, i.e. students enrolled in vocational or technical education. Finally, in this longitudinal study we were able to stress how work values changed and evolved during a key moment in people’s pathways; therefore, this study contributed to a better understanding of one of the complex issues of the STWT process.

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