

Personal Values of Future Seafarers: Cross-Cultural Study Among Maritime University Students

Andrea Russo¹, Marko Galić², Jose Luis Cueto Ancela³, Mohammadreza Bachari-Lafte⁴, Ana Slišković⁵, Leon Sić⁵, Slavka Kraljević¹

Seafarers are key workers who play a crucial role in international trade. Many studies have investigated various factors that influence the well-being, motivation and work performance of seafarers. According to the results of studies conducted among the general population, personal values could be important for the well-being of seafarers, but have not yet been investigated. The aim of this study was therefore to look into the differences in the personal values of future seafarers in a cross-cultural context. 423 students from maritime universities in Croatia, Spain and Iran took part in the online study. The participants completed the demographic questionnaire and the Portrait Values Questionnaire. The results show the differences in the perceived importance of values between students from different countries. For example, Croatian students considered value preservation less important than Spanish and Iranian students, while openness to change and self-improvement were more important for Iranian than for Croatian and Spanish students. In addition, differences were found in conformity, self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, power, security and achievement. The Iranian students considered the above values to be more important than Spanish and Croatian students. These results emphasize the importance of intercultural training for the different stakeholders in the maritime sector.

KEYWORDS

- ~ Seafaring
- ~ Maritime universities
- ~ Personal values
- ~ Cross-cultural training

¹ University of Split, Faculty of Maritime Studies, Split, Croatia

² University of Zadar, Department of Quality Assurance and Lifelong Learning, Zadar, Croatia

³ University of Cadiz, Institute of Marine Research, Cadiz, Spain

⁴ Chabahar University of Maritime and Marine Sciences, Chabahar, Iran

⁵ University of Zadar, Department of Psychology, Zadar, Croatia

e-mail: arusso@pfst.hr

doi: 10.7225/toms.v14.n02.s14

Received: 28 Feb 2025 / Revised: 15 Apr 2025 / Accepted: 15 Apr 2025 / Published: 20 Jul 2025



This work is licensed under

1. INTRODUCTION

The maritime industry, as one of the key industries in the global economy (Park, Kwon and Kim, 2021; Partene et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024), relies on a highly skilled workforce capable of adapting to the unique demands of life at sea. While extensive research has examined the factors that influence the well-being, motivation and work performance of seafarers (Slišković, Galić and Russo, 2021; Baygi et al, 2022; Galić, Sić and Slišković, 2023; Hayes-Mejia and Stafström, 2024; Svetina et al, 2024), the role of personal values in shaping their career development and adaptation to work remains largely unexplored. Personal values can be defined as fundamental cognitive and motivational constructs that guide decision-making, influence career preferences and shape responses to career challenges (Schwartz, 2012; Purc and Laguna, 2019). As seafaring is inherently multicultural (Galešić and Tominac Coslovich, 2019; Jensen and Oldenburg, 2020), understanding how future seafarers from different cultural backgrounds perceive and prioritize values is crucial for the development of effective educational frameworks and the promotion of intercultural competence in the maritime sector (Chirea- Ungureanu and Rosenhave, 2012).

1.1. Personal values

Personal values are enduring beliefs about what is desirable, and serve as guiding principles in people's lives. They shape attitudes, behaviors and decision-making processes, and ultimately influence professional aspirations and performance in the workplace (Schwartz, 2012; Moise, 2014). Personal values are seen as the motivational basis for goals (Levontin and Bardi, 2019) and are relatively stable (Vecchione et al., 2018). According to Schwartz's value theory (Schwartz, 2006), ten values are categorized into four broad dimensions: Preservation (tradition, conformity, security), openness to change (hedonism, stimulation and self-direction), self-improvement (power and achievement) and self-transcendence (universalism and benevolence). Bardi and Schwartz (2003) point to the role of personal values in shaping personal intentions, decisions and behavior.

According to the findings of studies conducted among the general population, personal values could potentially be important for the well-being and mental health of future seafarers. Watanabe, Kawakami, and Nishi (2020) reported that some personal values in adolescence are associated with mental health and subjective well-being in adulthood, while Georgellis, Tsitsianis, and Yin (2009) suggested that intrinsic values increase life satisfaction. Negative effects of extrinsic values on subjective well-being were also observed. Ostermann et al (2017) point out that the realization of personal values related to openness to change (e.g. stimulation and hedonism) is associated with better mental health and higher life satisfaction.

Considering the unique demands of the seafaring profession, which include isolation, long working hours and a high-risk environment (Slišković, 2017), the importance of cross-cultural comparisons (Sortheix and Schwartz, 2017) and the lack of studies on personal values among seafarers (Hystad and Bye, 2013), this study aims to explore the differences in personal values among future seafarers in Croatia, Spain and Iran.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1. Study design and measures

The study was conducted simultaneously in Croatia, Spain and Iran from February to November 2021. It was a cross-sectional study in which participants completed an online survey consisting of demographic questions and the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ21, Schwartz, 2021). Lower scores on the Portrait Values Questionnaire are indicative of a higher importance of an observed value. Considering the brevity of the PVQ-21 subscales (two items per scale), all subscales showed good reliability.

2.2. Participants and procedure

As the study was conducted in three countries, participants completed an online survey in their native language (Croatian, Spanish and Persian). Participants in Iran were given a bilingual questionnaire (Persian and English). In all countries, written informed consent was obtained before completing the questionnaire. The participants were able to contact the main researchers in the three countries if they had any questions or comments about the study and/or wanted feedback on the results.

There were 80 participants from Iran, 105 participants from Spain and 238 participants from Croatia. Their average age was 22.2 years (SD=3.74 years) and they were enrolled in three study programs: Nautical Engineering, Marine Engineering or Maritime Yacht and Marine Technologies.

3. RESULTS

The descriptive parameters of the observed variables for the entire sample are shown in Table 1.

Variable	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness (SE)	Kurtosis (SE)
Conformity	3.04	1.20	1.00	6.00	0.21(0.12)	-0.47(0.24)
Tradition	2.83	1.22	1.00	6.00	0.32(0.12)	-0.69(0.24)
Universalism	2.14	0.97	1.00	6.00	1.18(0.12)	1.66(0.24)
Self-direction	2.27	1.01	1.00	6.00	0.98(0.12)	0.96(0.24)
Benevolence	1.94	1.03	1.00	6.00	1.48(0.12)	2.21(0.24)
Stimulation	2.55	1.21	1.00	6.00	0.57(0.12)	-0.20(0.24)
Hedonism	2.37	1.16	1.00	6.00	0.91(0.12)	0.41(0.24)
Power	3.41	1.24	1.00	6.00	0.21(0.12)	-0.48(0.24)
Security	2.77	1.33	1.00	6.00	0.49(0.12)	-0.52(0.24)
Achievement	2.83	1.25	1.00	6.00	0.40(0.12)	-0.56(0.24)
Conservation	2.88	0.99	1.00	6.00	0.39(0.12)	-0.32(0.24)
Self-transcendence	2.04	0.90	1.00	6.00	1.57(0.12)	3.27(0.24)
Self-improvement	2.87	0.94	1.00	5.83	0.48(0.12)	0.10(0.24)
Openness to change	2.41	0.95	1.00	6.00	0.79(0.12)	0.75(0.24)

Note. SE – standard error

Table 1 Descriptive parameters of the observed variables (N=423)

Although the majority of observed values have a mean that is below the theoretical mean, indicating that the distribution is positively skewed, the values for skewness and kurtosis allow the performance of parametric statistical procedures.

To compare the perceived importance of values between students from different countries, one-way ANOVAs were conducted. The results of the one-way ANOVAs are given in Table 2.

Variable	Iran		Croatia		Spain		F (2,420)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Conformity	2.51a	1.18	3.23	1.16	3.02	1.17	11.46**
Tradition	2.77	1.12	2.94	1.26	2.63	1.16	2.55
Universalism	2.04	0.81	2.19	1.01.	2.12	1.00	0.83
Self-direction	1.86a	0.73	2.42	1.07	2.24	0.95	9.81**
Benevolence	1.81	0.72	2.01	1.14	1.86	0.96	1.64
Stimulation	2.13a	0.99	2.72	1.22	2.48	1.25	7.67**
Hedonism	1.90	0.92	2.59a	1.15	2.22	1.25	12.17**
Power	2.88a	1.10	3.58	1.22	3.44	1.27	10.10**
Security	1.91a	0.94	3.11a	1.33	2.68a	1.28	28.00**
Achievement	2.01a	0.80	2.96	1.20	3.16	1.39	24.32**
Conservation	2.40a	0.83	3.09a	0.98	2.77a	0.98	16.91**
Self-transcendence	1.92	0.64	2.10	0.98	1.99	0.85	1.48
Self-improvement	2.26a	0.67	3.04	0.93	2.94	0.94	23.38**
Openness to change	1.99a	0.73	2.57	0.99	2.36	0.91	11.74**

Note. Subscript a reports significant difference. ; ** - $p < .01$

Table 2 Results of one-way ANOVAs for the perceived importance of personal values (N=423)

While no differences were found between students from different countries for tradition, universalism and self-transcendence, differences were observed in all other personal values. Iranian students consider conformity, self-direction, stimulation, power, security, achievement, preservation, self-improvement and openness to change to be more important than students from Croatia and Spain. Croatian students consider hedonism, security and preservation less important than Iranian and Spanish students.

4. DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to investigate the differences in the perceived importance of personal values of future seafarers in a cross-cultural context. The results indicate differences in individual values and broad dimensions. According to the Cultural Dimensions Theory (Hofstede, 1980), collectivist societies emphasize loyalty and commitment to the group. Considering the fact that Iran is the most collectivist society, compared to Spain as an individualist society, and Croatia which is between collectivist and individualist societies, the findings that future Iranian seafarers consider three out of four broad dimensions as more important than their Croatian and Spanish counterparts indicate the importance of customized leadership training that would contribute to the efficient management and planning of human resources. This is a long-term process, given that a lasting change in the importance of certain values requires repeated commitment (Bardi and Goodwin, 2011). Stakeholders at different levels should provide customized cross-cultural training that improves cooperation and increases tolerance among students (Chirea-Ungureanu and Rosenhave, 2012), helping future seafarers cope with the complexity of their profession, which ultimately contributes to their well-being and professional success.

5. CONCLUSION

To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine cross-cultural differences in the personal values of future seafarers. The findings of this study are relevant to industry and education stakeholders as curricula and induction planning should take cross-cultural differences into account. Further studies are needed to investigate the relationship between personal values, well-being and personality traits in a cross-cultural sample of seafarers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- Bardi, A. and Schwartz, S.H. (2003) 'Values and behavior: Strength and structure of relations', *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 29(10), pp. 1207–1220.
- Baygi, F., Smith, A., Mohammadian Khonsari, N., Mohammadi-Nasrabadi, F., Mahmoodi, Z., Mahdavi-Gorabi, A. and Qorbani, M. (2022) 'Seafarers' mental health status and life satisfaction: Structural equation model', *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10(969231). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.969231>
- Chirea-Ungureanu, C. and Rosenhave, P.-E. (2012) 'A door opener: Teaching cross cultural competence to seafarers', *TransNav: International Journal on Marine Navigation and Safety of Sea Transportation*, 6(4), pp. 527–532.
- Galešić, A.-D. and Tominac Coslovich, S. (2019) 'Working with multinational and multicultural crews', *Pomorstvo*, 33(1), pp. 56–62. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.31217/p.33.1.6>
- Galić, M., Sić, L. and Slišković, A. (2023) "'I constantly feel worn out": Mixed-methodology approach to seafarers' sleep on board', *INQUIRY: The Journal of Health Care Organization, Provision, and Financing*, 60. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00469580231159746>
- Georgellis, Y., Tsitsianis, N. and Yin, Y.P. (2009) 'Personal values as mitigating factors in the link between income and life satisfaction: Evidence from the European Social Survey', *Social Indicators Research*, 91(3), pp. 329–344. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-008-9344-2>
- Hayes-Mejia, R. and Stafström, M. (2024) 'Wellbeing and happiness and their association with working conditions at sea: A cross-sectional study among the global workforce of seafarers', *INQUIRY: The Journal of Health Care Organization, Provision, and Financing*, 61. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00469580241256349>
- Hofstede, G. (1980) *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.
- Hystad, S.W. and Bye, H.H. (2013) 'Safety behaviours at sea: The role of personal values and personality hardiness', *Safety Science*, 57, pp. 19–26. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssci.2013.01.018>
- Jensen, H.-J. and Oldenburg, M. (2020) 'Training seafarers to deal with multicultural crew members and stress on board', *International Maritime Health*, 71(3), pp. 174–180. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5603/imh.2020.0031>
- Levontin, L. and Bardi, A. (2019) 'Using personal values to understand the motivational basis of amity goal orientation', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02736>
- Moise, C. (2014) 'Importance of beliefs, attitudes and values in the frame of human resource motivation', *Annals of "Spiru Haret". Economic Series*, 14(2), p. 17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.26458/1422>
- Ostermann, M., Huffziger, S., Kleindienst, N., Mata, J., Schmahl, C., Beierlein, C., Bohus, M. and Lyssenko, L. (2017) 'Realization of personal values predicts mental health and satisfaction with life in a German population', *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 36(8), pp. 651–674. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2017.36.8.651>
- Park, S., Kwon, J. and Kim, T. (2021) 'An analysis of the dynamic relationship between the global macroeconomy and shipping and shipbuilding industries', *Sustainability*, 13(24), p. 13982. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/su132413982>
- Partene, G.C., Simion, D., Florin, N., Cotorcea, A. and Volintiru, O. (2023) 'Importance of the maritime industry, evolution and statistics', *Scientific Bulletin of Naval Academy*, XXVI(1), pp. 133–143. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.21279/1454-864x-23-i1-016>
- Purc, E. and Laguna, M. (2019) 'Personal values and innovative behavior of employees', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00865>
- Schwartz, S. (2012) 'An overview of the Schwartz theory of basic values', *Psychology and Culture Article*, 2(1), pp. 1–20. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1116>
- Schwartz, S.H. (2006) 'Les valeurs de base de la personne : théorie, mesures et applications', *Revue française de sociologie*, 47(4), pp. 929–968. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3917/rfs.474.0929>
- Schwartz, S.H. (2021) 'A repository of Schwartz value scales with instructions and an introduction', *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1173>

Slišković, A. (2017) 'Occupational stress in seafaring', in MacLachlan, M. (ed.) *Maritime psychology: Research in organizational and health behavior at sea*. Cham: Springer International Publishing/Springer Nature, pp. 99–126.

Slišković, A., Galić, M. and Russo, A. (2021) 'Motivational factors in choosing a maritime career: Descriptive research among Croatian students of secondary and higher maritime education', *Društvena istraživanja*, 30(1), pp. 93–113. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5559/di.30.1.05>

Sortheix, F.M. and Schwartz, S.H. (2017) 'Values that underlie and undermine well-being: Variability across countries', *European Journal of Personality*, 31(2), pp. 187–201. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/per.2096>

Svetina, M., Perković, M., Yang, C., Gu, Y., Mindadze, A., Mikeltadze, N., Davitadze, L. and Gabedava, G. (2024) 'Factors impacting seafarers' mental health and career intentions', *Inquiry*, 61. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00469580241229617>

Vecchione, M., Alessandri, G., Roccas, S. and Caprara, G.V. (2018) 'A look into the relationship between personality traits and basic values: A longitudinal investigation', *Journal of Personality*, 87(2), pp. 413–427. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jopy.12399>

Wang, H., Yang, J., Wu, H. and Niu, C. (2024) 'Research on the impact of marine economic development in coastal areas on regional economic resilience: Evidence from China', *Frontiers in Marine Science*, 11. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmars.2024.1414663>

Watanabe, K., Kawakami, N. and Nishi, D. (2020) 'Association between personal values in adolescence and mental health and well-being in adulthood: A cross-cultural study of working populations in Japan and the United States', *Annals of General Psychiatry*, 19(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12991-020-0260-4>