

# Social Psychological Bulletin

Psychologia Społeczna

## Social Position and Personal Versus Social Focus: A Multinational Study of Managerial Values

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Social Psychological Bulletin, 2022, Vol. 17, Article e8265, <https://doi.org/10.32872/spb.8265>

Received: 2022-01-31 • Accepted: 2022-05-27 • Published (VoR): 2022-09-06



**Handling Editor:** Konrad Bocian, University of Kent, Canterbury, United Kingdom

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### Abstract

Managerial positions involve influencing others, hence the importance of studying the standards guiding managers' attitudes, decisions, and behavior. Drawing on structural theories and psychological findings on the effects of subjective social status, we predict that holding a managerial position is related to individual value structure via self-perceived social rank of those in managerial positions. We argue that holding a managerial position is associated positively with prioritizing values reflecting personal focus (self-enhancement and openness to change value types) and, as a consequence, negatively with prioritizing values reflecting social focus (self-transcendence and conservation value types). Using data from the European Social Survey 2012 (N = 48,105) from 29 countries, we found a mediating effect of subjective social status between holding a managerial position and personal versus social focus not moderated by the country context. We discuss the implications of these findings for psychological theories of social hierarchy and managerial practice.

### Keywords

managers, subjective social status, values, Schwartz Value Survey, personal focus, social focus



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## Highlights

- The relationship between organizational position and personal values was tested.
- Managers value self-enhancement and openness to change more than non-managers.
- Non-managers value self-transcendence and conservation more than managers.
- Managers' lower social focus, and higher personal focus, may undermine leadership.

Holding a managerial position requires influencing other people in a number of important ways. Rather than planning, organizing, coordinating, or controlling, contemporary managerial roles involve informing, making decisions, and handling interpersonal relations (Mintzberg, 1989), that is, exercising power over others (Magee & Galinsky, 2008). Because managers translate vision, mission, and goals into the everyday running of the company, their role is critical in determining whether social institutions serve society well and talents and resources are not wasted or ill-used (Mintzberg, 1975). As posited by upper echelons theory (Hambrick, 2007; Hambrick & Mason, 1984), managerial characteristics predict strategic choices and the performance level of the company. Thus, managers' experiences, values, and personalities greatly influence their interpretation of situations they face in managing the organization. As the managerial position involves influencing others, the question regarding individual beliefs and standards of managers is a vital research aim. Standards informing decision-making are reflected in values, that is, the beliefs that refer to desirable trans-situational goals (Schwartz, 1992, 1994; Schwartz et al., 2012), which thus allow making predictions regarding a broad spectrum of socially relevant choices, attitudes, evaluations, and behaviors.

In this work, we aim to integrate sociological and social psychological literature. We draw on structural theories (Wright, 1997) and social psychological theories of class and social status (Kraus et al., 2012; Rucker et al., 2018) to derive hypotheses regarding the association between managerial roles and value structure. We predict that holding a managerial position is related to individual value structure via subjective social status. Specifically, we hypothesize that because a high subjective position manifesting in status (Kraus et al., 2012; Piff et al., 2010) or power (Cislak & Cichocka, 2018) promotes a focus on self, holding managerial positions is positively linked to prioritizing values reflecting personal focus (self-enhancement and openness to change value types) and negatively to prioritizing values reflecting social focus (self-transcendence and conservation value types). We put this question in a transnational perspective and test these predictions using data from the European Social Survey (wave 2012) conducted in 29 European countries ( $N = 48,105$ ) with ISCO08 coding as a measure of organizational position, subjective social status measured with the ladder measure (Adler et al., 2000), and Schwartz's measure of values.

## Value Structure

Schwartz's (1992) theory of basic human values provides a theoretical framework for studying values both from a universal and an individual perspective (Schwartz, 1994). Basic values are trans-situational goals that serve as guiding principles in persons' or groups' lives and are recognized in all societies. According to Schwartz's circumplex model, 10 first-order value types are organized along two basic dimensions (Schwartz et al., 2012; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995). This structure stems from motivational conflicts or congruities between values people experience in everyday life (Schwartz, 1992, 1994).

The first dimension is self-enhancement versus self-transcendence. Self-enhancement encompasses achievement and power first-order value types. Achievement reflects motivation for personal success, while power reflects dominance over others and access to resources (Schwartz, 1994; Schwartz et al., 2012). Self-transcendence covers first-order value types of universalism and benevolence. Universalism reflects motivation for tolerance, while benevolence represents societal concern and caring for ingroup members. Therefore, this first dimension involves feelings of social superiority and self-interest motives on the one end, and enhancing others and going beyond self-interest on the other.

The second dimension is openness to change versus conservation. Openness to change encompasses stimulation and self-direction first-order value types, whereas conservation covers three first-order value types: conformity, tradition, and security. The second dimension involves novelty and change on the one end and stability on the other. The remaining tenth first-order value type, hedonism, is related both to openness to change and self-enhancement (Cieciuch, Davidov, Vecchione, et al., 2014; Schwartz et al., 2012; Schwartz & Huismans, 1995). This is because value types form a circumplex continuum, with adjacent values having similar motivational content and opposing values having conflicting motivational content. According to Schwartz's theory, "the value circle is like a necklace of pearls, with values ordered as power–achievement–hedonism–stimulation–self-direction–universalism–benevolence–tradition–conformity–security–power. In this structure, when one moves from any point (i.e., value) to its neighbouring points, the distances to the start point grow monotonically until one reaches its opposing point." (Borg et al., 2017, p. 2). Thus, behaviors, opinions, or decisions serving one value tend to simultaneously serve or maintain values that are closely located on the circular continuum but undermine values that are located on the opposite side of a value circle (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Cieciuch, Davidov, Schmidt, et al., 2014).

The Schwartz Value Survey (SVS) is a reliable and valid measure that has been widely used in cross-cultural psychology research across multiple national samples allowing for meaningful cross-country comparisons (Davidov et al., 2008; Knafo et al., 2011; Schwartz & Rubel, 2005; Schwartz & Sagiv, 1995). Values measured with SVS are associated with a multitude of attitudinal (Puurko et al., 2011; Schwartz & Huismans, 1995), decision-making (Feather, 1995, 2002), and behavioral (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Brunso et al., 2004;

Knafo et al., 2008; Sagiv & Schwartz, 1995) variables, thus convincingly demonstrating the high predictive power of this relatively simple model.

The classic version of the theory proposed that the circular motivational continuum is formed by ten basic values and four higher-order values. Recently (Cieciuch, Davidov, Vecchione, et al., 2014; Schwartz et al., 2012), the basic values model has been refined to reflect a more nuanced understanding of nineteen values (grouped in ten first-order value types) on the one hand, and a more general perspective on the meaning of values in the social life on the other. The aim of the refined model was to highlight the central assumption of the original work, that is, the circular continuum formed by the values based on their compatible and conflicting motivations, expression of self-protection versus growth, and personal versus social focus (Schwartz et al., 2012). Importantly, the updated model allows distinguishing between various levels of abstraction within a motivational hierarchy: narrowly defined nineteen first-order values, broader four value types, and on a more abstract level, growth versus self-protection motivation and personal versus social focus. This is because basic human values fulfill various functions. According to the updated model, openness to change and self-enhancement value types reflect personal focus, while conservation and self-transcendence reflect social focus (Schwartz et al., 2012). The latter organizing rule reflects a vital self- versus others distinction, correspondingly to other psychological models – for instance, agency versus communion as dimensions of human existence (Bakan, 1966) and social perception (Abele & Wojciszke, 2014) or individualism versus collectivism as cultural dimensions (Triandis, 1995).

As a result, the updated model allows focusing on the more concrete versus the more abstract level of motivational orientation: “Depending on the required precision, researchers can derive hypotheses based on the different levels of motivational orientation that the theory provides.” (Schwartz et al., 2012, p. 684). Still, one of the main tenets of the original theory holds: values or orientations located in opposing wedges of the circular continuum reflect opposing motivations. Thus, decisions, choices, or behaviors that serve one value (or go in line with the more abstract orientation or focus) are likely to come at the expense of the opposing value (or go against the more abstract orientation or focus).

## Organizational Position and Prioritizing Values

Structural theories link values, beliefs, and attitudes to the position in the labor market. The social class theory of Erik Olin Wright (Wright, 1997) posits that class distinction affects social relations. Class is the construct used across disciplines from epidemiology and public health science (Adler et al., 2000; Marmot, 2004) to sociology (Weber, 2019) and psychology (Kraus et al., 2012; Manstead, 2018). According to Wright’s theory, class distinction is based on property relations and exploitation, which stems from them. Exploitation is a relationship between those who own and those hired by owners, which can be understood as the transfer of work outcomes. Managers, whose role involves

supervising others, are more closely linked to the company's income and are able to appropriate the surplus, thereby occupying "a privileged position" (Wright, 1997, p. 17), which stems either from being less exploited than non-managers (and less monitored because it could negatively affect initiative), or from exploiting others (in a way similar to the owners). In a similar vein, according to Wright, employees who possess high levels of skills/expertise are also in a potentially privileged position. Thus, attaining a high organizational position is linked to immediate change in relative social rank. Those who hold executive power are therefore characterized by enhanced self-interested and exploitative tendencies (Wright, 1997) as well as the internal focus of control and prioritizing self-direction (Kohn, 1999; Kohn et al., 1990; Kohn & Słomczyński, 1990). Also, in order to be able to generate a financial gain in the changing social reality, managers are expected to reveal higher levels of openness to change and lower levels of conservation and impose them on other workers (Beaud & Pialoux, 1999; Dunn, 2004). With financial stability losing its importance in the changing social reality of the new capitalism, openness to change should thus be prioritized over conservation by those in managerial positions.

Drawing on structural theories, which link a higher position in the labor market to lower egalitarianism, enhanced self-interested and exploitative tendencies (Wright, 1997), we predict that a higher organizational position is positively associated with prioritizing openness to change, which involves valuing independent thought and action like choosing, creating, exploring, but also excitement, novelty, and challenge in life, together with pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself. In the same vein, we predict that a higher organizational position is negatively linked to prioritizing conservation, which involves valuing safety, harmony, and stability of society and relationships, as well as restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses which are likely to upset or harm others and acceptance of customs and norms. Due to property relations and exploitation following them, we predict that having a managerial position is also linked to prioritizing self-enhancement (personal achievement and dominance over others) over self-transcendence (tolerance and caring for others).

Relying on recent work in the field of social inequalities (cf. Rucker et al., 2018), we further hypothesize that the psychological mechanism that stands behind these tendencies is subjective social status experienced by those attaining higher organizational positions.

## Subjective Social Position and Focus on Self Versus Others

Subjective social status is the perception of one's rank within society relative to others (Diemer et al., 2013). Importantly, one of the main predictors of subjective social status is occupational position (Gunn, 2011; Shaked et al., 2016; Zhou, 2021). A vast psychological literature shows that high status can have stimulating and intoxicating effects.

High status fosters an individualistic orientation and focus on one's own goals (Kraus et al., 2012). High-status individuals tend to prioritize their own internal states, needs and feelings when making decisions (the phenomenon called solipsism; Kraus et al., 2012). A subjective sense of high status is also related to a heightened sense of agency and personal control. Importantly, this relationship remains significant even when controlling for objective status indicators (Kraus et al., 2009). When it comes to social relations, high-status people value personal freedom in their relationships and emphasize their uniqueness relative to others (Stephens et al., 2007). They are less likely to engage in prosocial behavior, and more likely to engage in unethical behavior, such as cheating or lying (Piff et al., 2012). In terms of social beliefs, high status is linked to essentialism—the belief that fixed, dispositional factors are at the root of social hierarchies (Kraus & Keltner, 2013).

Low status, on the other hand, fosters orientation toward others, their demands and needs (Kraus et al., 2012). According to Kraus et al. (2012), low status activates a sort of detection system, that is, the constant monitoring of the environment to interpret the intentions of others. The sense of interdependence typical for low-status individuals also affects their self-concept, relationships, and social behavior. They define themselves through their relationships with others. They are also more likely to exhibit empathy, e.g., in terms of greater empathic accuracy (Kraus et al., 2010) and engage in prosocial behavior (Piff et al., 2010). In terms of social beliefs, low-status individuals tend to be constructivist, believing that social categories are shaped by sociocultural factors (Kraus et al., 2009).

In this, experiencing higher social status is similar to other instances of having a higher position: holding power over others. Powerful people are less dependent on others, and show less conformity to others' ideas (Galinsky et al., 2008). Power increases a sense of agency by enabling people to feel that outcomes are related to their personal action (Obhi et al., 2012), arguably due to increased personal control. Power also has a corruptive effect on social relationships (Kipnis, 1972; Kipnis et al., 1976). First, it diminishes the ability to take the perspective of others (Galinsky et al., 2006), and lowers motivation for interpersonal accuracy (Stevens & Fiske, 2000), including empathic accuracy (van Kleef et al., 2008). Power also builds social distance between individuals (Kipnis, 1972, 1974; Lammers et al., 2012) as people in high power positions distance themselves from others (Kipnis et al., 1976) and perceive others as a means to their goals (Cislak, 2013; Gruenfeld et al., 2008). In contrast, those lacking personal control (similarly to power, personal control also stems from having a higher organizational position; Cislak et al., 2018) aim to affiliate with agentic groups as a compensatory way of control restoration (Fritsche et al., 2013). This might help explain why low social position can lead to enhanced social focus.

Importantly, negative social effects of the relative power (or social class) are manifested only when the behavior is self-beneficial, thus qualifying the overall increase in une-

thicality of those in higher ranks (Dubois et al., 2015). Similarly to social status, power promotes authenticity by decreasing social pressure (Galinsky et al., 2008), which is manifested by enhanced reliance on inner states (Guinote, 2010) and preferences (Kossowska et al., 2016). In an interpersonal domain, power may have positive consequences when prosocial individuals in high power conditions become even more prosocial (Chen et al., 2001) and more accurate in assessing the inner states of others (Côté et al., 2011). In a broader perspective, power enhances self-focus (Cisłak & Cichočka, 2018) rather than directly depraves.

Although a sense of having higher status and a sense of power are separate mindsets (cf. Blader & Chen, 2012), they are often intertwined (Rucker & Galinsky, 2017). As they are both instances of social advantage, they bring about similar effects in terms of agency – communion focus (Rucker et al., 2018). We thus predict that perception of one's rank within society as higher relative to others, which often stems from attaining a higher organizational position, is positively related to self-enhancement and to valuing personal success through demonstrating competence, social status, prestige, control, or dominance over people and resources. Consequently, due to the circular structure of values, the higher rank should be negatively linked to values located on the opposite wedge: self-transcendence involving appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of others and nature.

## Hypotheses

Summing up, we hypothesize that holding a higher organizational position is positively linked to personal focus, reflecting higher endorsement of self-enhancement and openness to change value types (Hypothesis 1). At the same time, being in a socially disadvantaged position is linked to communal focus (Rucker et al., 2018). Thus, we hypothesize that a higher organizational position is also negatively linked to social focus, reflecting higher endorsement of self-transcendence and conservation value types (Hypothesis 2). In the same vein, we hypothesize that perception of one's rank within society as higher relative to others, that is, subjective social status, is the psychological mechanism behind the relationship between organizational position and prioritizing self-enhancement and openness to change over self-transcendence and conservation (Hypothesis 3).

In structural theories, class distinctions stemming from property relations and its social consequences are perceived as the core of capitalist societies. As such, they are predicted to be universal and not dependent on the national context (Wright, 1997). We verify this prediction using cross-national data and expect to observe significant effects of the organizational position on values and indirect effects of subjective social status across different European countries. We expect, however, that in countries with greater economic disparities (where income is distributed less evenly), holding a managerial position can be associated with even greater subjective social status. Thus, our second

aim in integrating structural theories with psychological literature on social status is verifying whether the subjective social status stemming from holding a managerial position is greater in countries characterized by greater income inequalities (operationalized as Gini index). In line with structural theories, we do not expect similar effects directly for the value structure.

## Overview of the Study

In order to test these hypotheses, we used the European Social Survey 2012 dataset (European Social Survey ERIC (ESS ERIC), 2013) – the most geographically diversified wave of the ESS. The ESS 2012 database includes data from participants representing 29 European countries (Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, the United Kingdom). The organizational position of the respondents was coded according to the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO08, International Labour Organization, 2016). According to the ISCO description, a managerial position involves planning, directing, coordinating and evaluating the overall activities of enterprises, governments and other organizations, or of organizational units within them, especially formulating and reviewing their policies, laws, rules and regulations. This dataset contains a measure of subjective social status captured with MacArthur rank measure (Adler et al., 2000), and Schwartz's Portrait Values Questionnaire adapted for the ESS.

We used these variables to test the conceptual model, according to which organizational position positively predicts subjective social status, and in turn, positively predicts personal focus (captured by prioritizing self-enhancement and openness to change value types) and negatively predicts social focus (captured by prioritizing self-transcendence and conservation value types). In practice, as values form a circumplex model with opposing values facing each other, such a conceptual model cannot be directly tested due to multicollinearity. Thus, we verify these predictions in two separate models: one with personal focus as a DV and the other with social focus as a DV. In both cases, the predictor is the organizational position, and the mediator is subjective social status. Additionally, we verify similar mediation models for each value type separately. Because the ISCO08 index is a categorical variable, in each case, we use a series of dummy variables allowing for comparisons of each professional group with managers. Finally, we test moderation hypotheses applying the country-level Gini index as a moderator.



## Method

### Participants

The database included data from  $N = 54,673$  respondents. We did not analyze the answers from those respondents who missed data on organizational position or represented a small professional group whose size did not allow for meaningful comparisons (please, see the details below). The final sample consisted of  $N = 48,105$  participants (25,682 women, 22,409 men and 14 individuals with missing data on gender), aged between 15 and 103 ( $M = 49.90$ ,  $SD = 17.50$ ).

### Measures

#### Organizational Position

We used ISCO08 coding to obtain information about the organizational position. The ISCO classification divides different jobs into ten major groups: managers, professionals, technicians and associate professionals, clerical support workers, service and sales workers, skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers, craft and related trades workers, plant and machine operators, and assemblers, elementary occupations, armed forces occupations. We excluded from comparisons 6,388 (11.7%) participants with missing data and army employees ( $N = 180$ , 0.3%).

Among them 3,359 (6.1%) were employees on managerial positions; 8,175 (15%) were professionals; 6,622 (12.1%) were technicians and associate professionals; 4,144 (7.6%) were clerical support workers; 9,059 (16.6%) were hired within service sales; 1,364 (2.5%) within agriculture; 5,769 (10.6%) within craft; 4,208 (7.7%) were plant machine operators; 5,405 (9.9%) were cleaners/helpers.

#### Subjective Social Status

Subjective social status was measured with modified MacArthur's self-reported rank measure (Adler et al., 2000). The respondents read: "There are people who tend to be towards the top of our society and people who tend to be towards the bottom" and were asked to assess their subjective position within society nowadays on a scale ranging from 0-bottom of our society to 10-top of our society ( $M = 4.83$ ,  $SD = 2.52$ ).

#### Personal Values

Personal values were measured with the 21-item version of the Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ21) adapted by Schwartz (2005) for the ESS. Each item describes a different person regarding what is important to them. Respondents are asked, "How much is this person like you?" on a scale from 1—very much like me—to 6—not like me at all. We recoded responses so that high scores represent greater similarity with the portrait (the detailed procedure is described in Schwartz, 2015). We controlled for individual

differences in scale use by centering individuals' value scores on their mean response. Following the procedure suggested by Schwartz et al. (2015), we then computed the mean scores for ten first-order value types, four second-order value types, and personal and social focus (Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Means and Standard Deviations for Second-Order Value Types, Personal and Social Focus*

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self-enhancement (Hedonism, Achievement, Power)	-0.58	0.72
Openness to Change (Self-Direction, Stimulation)	-0.24	0.62
Self-transcendence (Benevolence, Universalism)	0.60	0.52
Conservation (Confidence, Tradition, Security)	0.14	0.61
Personal Focus (Self-Enhancement, Openness to Change)	-0.41	0.47
Social Focus (Self-transcendence, Conservation)	0.37	0.41

### Gini Index

Our measure of social inequality was the 2012 country-level Gini index from the open knowledge repository of the World Bank (2012), which ranged from 24.7 (Ukraine) to 41.3 (Israel). The higher values reflect greater income inequalities.

The detailed country-specific descriptive statistics may be found in the Supplementary Materials (Table S1).

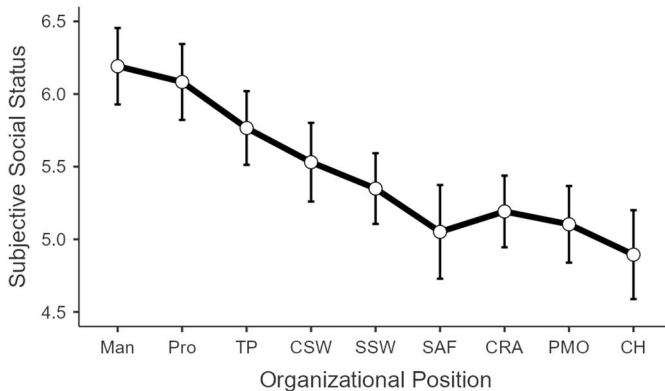
## Results

Using multi-level models with REML estimator, random slope, and random intercept, we first verified the relationship between organizational position and subjective social status and the relationships of subjective social status with second-order value types and personal and social focus using jamovi 2.2.5 statistical software and the GAMLj module (Gallucci, 2021). Fixed effect Omnibus tests were used to assess the significance for the average effects. As hypothesized, we found that when the prestige of the organizational position rises (Figure 1), the subjective social status also rises and is positively linked to openness to change and self-enhancement and negatively linked to conservation

and self-transcendence. More broadly, subjective social status was positively linked to personal focus and negatively linked to social focus.

**Figure 1**

*The Means of Subjective Social Status Across Occupational Groups With 95% Confidence Intervals (REML Estimator)*



*Note.* Man = managers; Pro = professionals; TP = technicians and associate professionals; CSW = clerical support workers; SSW = service/sales workers; SAF = skilled, agricultural, forestry workers; CRA = craft workers; PMO = plant and machine operators and assemblers; CH = cleaners and helpers.

Thus, we were able to verify whether the relationship between organizational position and values depends on the cultural context. We found the expected pattern across different countries (with small exceptions), as predicted by structural theories (Table S2).

We report these analyses in detail in the [Supplementary Materials](#), including effect sizes across countries.

The main analyses were performed using MPlus (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). We estimated the multigroup path models with robust standard errors for personal and social focus and each second-order value type separately. The multigroup path models were first tested assuming full mediation. In those cases, when the fit indices suggested that full mediation model did not fit the data well, the path models were then tested assuming partial mediation.

## Path Analyses

### Social and Personal Focus

Both models fitted the data well. Next, we examined the direct paths between organizational position and subjective social status. Except for professionals, we again observed significant negative relationships between organizational position and subjective social

status for the comparisons between managers and all other employee groups evidencing lower subjective social status of those in non-managerial positions (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Direct and Indirect Effects of Organizational Position and Subjective Social Status on Personal and Social Focus*

Organizational position	Subjective Social Status (direct effects)		Personal Focus (indirect effects)		Social Focus (indirect effects)	
	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	$\beta$	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	$\beta$	<i>B</i> (S.E.)	$\beta$
professionals	-0.11 (0.07)	-.02	-0.01 (0.004)	-.004	0.01 (0.003)	.004
technicians and associate professionals	-0.48 (0.06)*	-.09	-0.02 (0.004)*	-.02	0.02 (0.003)*	.02
clerical support workers	-0.67 (0.07)*	-.10	-0.03 (0.01)*	-.02	0.03 (0.004)*	.02
service / sales workers	-0.94 (0.08)*	-.20	-0.04 (0.01)*	-.04	0.004 (0.01)*	.04
skilled, agricultural, forestry workers	-1.42 (0.18)*	-.13	-0.07 (0.01)*	-.02	0.06 (0.01)*	.02
craft workers	-1.18 (0.08)*	-.21	-0.06 (0.01)*	-.04	0.05 (0.01)*	.04
plant and machine operators and assemblers	-1.39 (0.12)*	-.21	-0.07 (0.01)*	-.04	0.06 (0.01)*	.04
cleaners and helpers	-1.60 (0.13)*	-.27	-0.08 (0.01)*	-.05	0.07 (0.01)*	.05

Note. Model fit indices for Personal Focus:  $Chi^2$  ( $df$ ) = 150.40 (8);  $CFI$  = .94;  $RMSEA$  = .02;  $SRMR$  = .02;  $R^2$  (power) = .08;  $R^2$  (value type) = .04. Model fit indices for Social Focus:  $Chi^2$  ( $df$ ) = 159.77 (8);  $CFI$  = .94;  $RMSEA$  = .02;  $SRMR$  = .02;  $R^2$  (power) = .08;  $R^2$  (value type) = .04.  $N$  = 47,822.

\* $p$  < .001

Then, we examined direct paths between subjective social status and focus. As expected, we observed a positive effect of subjective social status on personal focus ( $B$  = 0.05;  $\beta$  = .19;  $p$  < .001), and a negative effect of subjective social status on social focus ( $B$  = -0.04;  $\beta$  = -.20;  $p$  < .001).

Finally, we examined indirect effects of organizational position on personal and social focus via subjective social status (Table 2). We observed significant indirect effects of organizational position on personal focus via subjective social status for the comparisons between managers and all other employee groups (again except for professionals). Similarly, we observed significant indirect effects of organizational position on social focus

via subjective social status for the comparisons between managers and all other employee groups (again except for professionals). These patterns suggest that in comparison to all other employee groups (except for professionals), managers perceive their own rank as relatively higher, which, in turn, is related to prioritizing values reflecting personal focus and lower regard for values reflecting social focus.

### Value Types

Then, we examined similar models for first-order value types. Except for conservation, models assuming full mediation fitted the data well. As reported in Table 3, in all cases, we again observed a significant negative relationship between organizational position and subjective social status (except for managers-professionals comparison). As expected, we observed positive effects of subjective power on self-enhancement and openness to change and negative effects of subjective social status on self-transcendence and conservation. Also, we observed significant indirect effects of organizational position on first-order value types via subjective social status for the comparisons between managers and all other employee groups (again except for professionals). These patterns suggest that in comparison to all other employee groups (except for professionals), managers perceive their own social rank as relatively higher. In turn, it is related to prioritizing self-enhancement and openness to change values, and lower regard for self-transcendence and conservation values.

**Table 3**  
*Model Fit Indices, Direct and Indirect Effects of Organizational Position and Subjective Power on Value Types*

Effect	Self-enhancement		Openness to Change		Self-transcendence		Conservation		
	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β	
position → status (direct effects)	professionals	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.02	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.02	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.02	-0.11 (0.07)	-0.02
	technicians and associate professionals	-0.48 (0.06)*	-0.09	-0.48 (0.06)*	-0.09	-0.48 (0.06)*	-0.09	-0.48 (0.06)*	-0.09
	clerical support workers	-0.67 (0.07)*	-0.10	-0.67 (0.07)*	-0.10	-0.67 (0.07)*	-0.10	-0.67 (0.07)*	-0.10
	service / sales workers	-0.93 (0.08)*	-0.20	-0.94 (0.08)*	-0.20	-0.94 (0.08)*	-0.20	-0.94 (0.08)*	-0.20
	skilled, agricultural, forestry workers	-1.41 (0.18)*	-0.13	-1.41 (0.18)*	-0.13	-1.41 (0.18)*	-0.13	-1.41 (0.18)*	-0.13
	craft workers	-1.17 (0.08)*	-0.21	-1.18 (0.08)*	-0.21	-1.17 (0.08)*	-0.21	-1.18 (0.08)*	-0.21
	plant and machine operators and assemblers	-1.39 (0.12)*	-0.21	-1.39 (0.12)*	-0.21	-1.39 (0.12)*	-0.21	-1.39 (0.12)*	-0.21
	cleaners and helpers	-1.60 (0.13)*	-0.27	-1.60 (0.13)*	-0.27	-1.60 (0.13)*	-0.27	-1.60 (0.13)*	-0.27
	power → value type (direct effect)	0.04 (0.01)*	.12	0.05 (0.01)*	.17	-0.02 (0.04)*	-0.09	-0.05 (0.01)*	-0.16
	position → value type (direct effects) <sup>a</sup>	professionals							-0.001 (0.02)
technicians and associate professionals								0.07 (0.01)*	.04
clerical support workers								0.16 (0.01)*	.08
service / sales workers								0.09 (0.01)*	.06
skilled, agricultural, forestry workers								0.30 (0.02)*	.08

Effect	Self-enhancement		Openness to Change		Self-transcendence		Conservation	
	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β	B (S.E.)	β
craft workers							0.13 (0.02)*	.07
plant and machine operators and assemblers							0.19 (0.02)*	.09
cleaners and helpers							0.23 (0.02)*	.12
professionals	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.003	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.004	0.003 (0.002)	.002	0.01 (0.004)	.003
associate professionals (indirect effects)	-0.02 (0.004)*	-0.01	-0.03 (0.004)*	-0.02	0.01 (0.002)*	.01	0.02 (0.004)*	.01
clerical support workers	-0.03 (0.01)*	-0.01	-0.04 (0.01)*	-0.02	0.02 (0.003)*	.01	0.03 (0.01)*	.02
service / sales workers	-0.04 (0.01)*	-0.02	-0.05 (0.01)*	-0.03	0.02 (0.004)*	.02	0.05 (0.01)*	.03
skilled, agricultural, forestry workers	-0.06 (0.01)*	-0.01	-0.08 (0.01)*	-0.02	0.03 (0.01)*	.01	0.07 (0.01)*	.02
craft workers	-0.05 (0.01)*	-0.02	-0.06 (0.01)*	-0.03	0.03 (0.01)*	.02	0.06 (0.01)*	.03
plant and machine operators and assemblers	-0.06 (0.01)*	-0.02	-0.07 (0.01)*	-0.04	0.03 (0.01)*	.02	0.07 (0.01)*	.03
cleaners and helpers	-0.07 (0.01)*	-0.03	-0.09 (0.02)*	-0.05	0.04 (0.01)*	.02	0.08 (0.01)*	.04
N	47,822							
Chi <sup>2</sup> (df)	78.09 (8)		216.89 (8)		156.33 (8)			
CFI	.97		.92		.93			1
RMSEA	.01		.02		.02			0
SRMR	.01		.02		.02			0
R <sup>2</sup> (power)	.08		.08		.08			.08
R <sup>2</sup> (value type)	.01		.03		.01			.06

\*  $p < .001$ .

<sup>a</sup>We report only values for the Conservation value where the full mediation model was rejected as unfitting the data.

## Country-Level Income Inequalities as a Moderator of the Relationship Between Organizational Position and Subjective Social Status

Finally, using jamovi 2.2.5, we verified whether the relationship between organizational position and subjective social status depended on the country-level's contextual influences (income inequalities). For the sake of consistency, we verified similar models for personal and social focus as the dependent variables, which are reported in the [Supplementary Materials](#).

We tested whether country-level income inequalities moderate the relationship between organizational position and subjective social status. The Gini index was introduced as a second-level predictor of the mean level of subjective power and a moderator. As previously, the organizational position was introduced as a series of dummy variables (with managers as a reference category). Similarly, the moderation effect was captured as a series of interactions between the country-level Gini index and a specific dummy variable (Table 4).

**Table 4**

*The Effects of Organizational Position and Gini Index on Subjective Social Status With Confidence Intervals for All Comparisons (With Managers as a Reference Category)*

Effect	Estimate	LL	UL	df	t
Intercept	5.44	5.19	5.70	27.0	42.49***
Gini index	-0.05	-0.11	0.01	27.0	-1.71 <sup>†</sup>
professionals <sup>a</sup>	-0.12	-0.19	-0.05	10064.3	-3.48***
technicians and associate professionals <sup>a</sup>	-0.43	-0.52	-0.35	63.4	-10.48***
clerical support workers <sup>a</sup>	-0.67	-0.77	-0.56	32.0	-12.54***
service / sales workers <sup>a</sup>	-0.85	-0.96	-0.74	35.1	-15.52***
skilled, agricultural, forestry workers <sup>a</sup>	-1.15	-1.32	-0.98	31.5	-13.29***
craft workers <sup>a</sup>	-1.01	-1.10	-0.92	55.3	-22.09***
plant and machine operators and assemblers <sup>a</sup>	-1.09	-1.20	-0.98	31.9	-19.64***
cleaners and helpers <sup>a</sup>	-1.31	-1.46	-1.17	29.8	-18.13***
Gini index x professionals <sup>b</sup>	-0.03	-0.05	-0.01	13434.0	-3.53***
Gini index x technicians and associate professionals <sup>b</sup>	-0.03	-0.05	-0.09	76.3	-2.83**
Gini index x clerical support workers <sup>b</sup>	-0.03	-0.06	-0.01	33.6	-2.77**
Gini index x service / sales workers <sup>b</sup>	-0.03	-0.06	-0.01	37.4	-2.43*
Gini index x skilled, agricultural, forestry workers <sup>b</sup>	-0.04	-0.08	-0.004	36.0	-2.19*
Gini index x craft workers <sup>b</sup>	-0.03	-0.05	-0.01	63.1	-3.05**
Gini index x plant and machine operators and assemblers <sup>a</sup>	-0.02	-0.05	0.002	34.3	-1.78 <sup>†</sup>
Gini index x cleaners and helpers <sup>a</sup>	-0.05	-0.08	-0.01	31.8	-2.77**

<sup>†</sup> $p < .1$ . \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

<sup>a</sup>Organizational position was coded as a dummy variable using managers as a reference category. <sup>b</sup>The cross-level interaction effect.

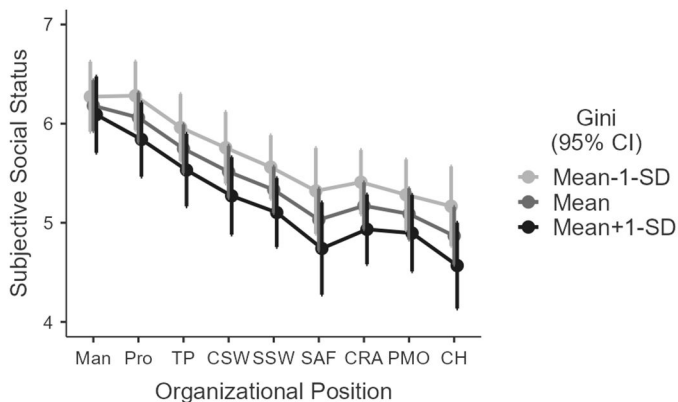


The Gini index was marginally associated with the mean level of subjective power across the countries,  $F(1, 27) = 2.91, p = .099$ . Again, the overall relationship between organizational position and subjective power was significant,  $F(8, 39.9) = 95.73, p < .001$ . The interaction effect between Gini index and organizational position was marginally significant,  $F(8, 39.8) = 2.18, p = .051$ . The marginal  $R^2$  for the whole model was .07.

As illustrated in Figure 2, when the subjective power decreases, the prestige of the organizational position also falls and is even lower in countries with greater income inequalities. Also, the gap in subjective social status between managers and other professional groups increases with increasing income inequalities.

**Figure 2**

*The Means of Subjective Social Status Across Occupational Groups With 95% Confidence Intervals Across Countries With Low, Medium, and High Gini Levels (REML Estimator)*



*Note.* Man = managers; Pro = professionals; TP = technicians and associate professionals; CSW = clerical support workers; SSW = service/sales workers; SAF = skilled, agricultural, forestry workers; CRA = craft workers; PMO = plant and machine operators and assemblers; CH = cleaners and helpers.

Such a pattern was not observed for the interaction effects between subjective social status, personal and social focus (see the [Supplementary Materials](#)).

## Discussion

The research presented here showed that social position is linked to values. Managers perceive their social rank as higher and value self-enhancement and openness to change to a higher extent than non-managers, thus evidencing enhanced personal focus of those in managerial positions. We also found that managers value self-transcendence and conservation to a lower extent than non-managers, thus evidencing decreased social

focus. We verified the robustness of these effects across 29 countries with over 40,000 participants. Furthermore, we found that the relationship between the organizational position and subjective social status was dependent on the extent of income inequalities within societies, as evidenced by the significant moderation effect by the Gini index. The greater the income inequalities, the stronger the effect of having a managerial (versus non-managerial) position on subjective status. Thus, in countries with greater disparities, employees holding non-managerial positions perceive their social rank as relatively lower (in comparison to managers) than in countries with greater equality. It is possible that in countries with greater disparities, those holding non-managerial positions can be paid less in comparison to countries with greater equality. Hence lower self-perceived social rank of those in non-managerial positions. Also, in countries with less even distribution of income, the proportion of employees holding non-managerial positions may be higher, thus producing similar effects.

These results are in line with structural theories linking organizational position to social relations (Wright, 1997) and theories linking social class to social behavior (Kraus et al., 2012). Managers whose work involves supervision of other employees cannot be treated by the owners in the same way as those other employees because it could negatively affect managers' outcomes and consequently harm the owners' income. Thus, for the sake of efficiency, managers are granted some power and access to resources that enable exerting influence over others. As we observed here, this affects their perception of their social rank relative to others. Supporting Wright's theorizing, we found that employees who possess high levels of skills/expertise (professionals) perceive their social rank as higher relative to others (and they do not differ in that respect from managers). In line with past research conducted in the American context, which linked social structure to personal values (Kohn et al., 1990), we found that managers, compared to non-managers, place greater importance on values representing personal focus and less on values representing social focus, and the mechanism of this relationship is precisely the perception of one's social rank as higher relative to others. Perception of the managers (or those representing higher social classes, and presumably, also members of other privileged groups, Rucker et al., 2018) is dominated by self-focus. Integrating structural and socio-psychological theories, the present study shows that this increased self-focus also manifests in more reflective processes, which are personal values. This might reinforce the exploitative tendencies of those in higher positions (Cislak et al., 2018; Gruenfeld et al., 2008), thus supporting existing social hierarchies. This is in line with a broader idea of the system-level considerations affecting social relations (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999).

Both the previous and the present work on the effects of power on self-focus can be theoretically grounded in the Dual Perspective Model (DPM, Abele & Wojciszke, 2014; Baryla et al., 2019). According to this model, the perspective of the actor, i.e., the person performing an action (here: a manager) compared to the perspective of the observer/re-

recipient (here: a subordinate) implies a focus on goal fulfillment, which results in the increased weight of agentic rather than communal content. This basic mechanism of the dominance of agentic content in the actor perspective and dominance of communal content in the observer/recipient perspective explains a broad class of the effects of holding power (and being subjected to power) on attitudes, self and other perception, social cognition, motivation, and behavior. The Dual Perspective Model is consistent with the Agentic–Communal Model of Advantage and Disadvantage (Galinsky et al., 2015; Rucker et al., 2012, 2018), which suggests that power produces an agentic orientation resulting in self-expression, self-expansion, and self-protection, while low power produces communal orientation resulting in taking others into account.

This research, however, is not without limitations. Although this line of research seems to offer high external validity due to almost fifty thousand participants representing 29 countries, it should be noted that despite the large sample, the ESS respondents are recruited mostly from WEIRD countries, thereby limiting external validity. Overall, WEIRD societies constitute less than 15% of the global population (Arnett, 2008; Henrich et al., 2010). It is possible that the relationships between organizational position, subjective social standing, and values are more likely to be observed in highly-industrialized countries with a free-market economy (but see Kohn & Słomczyński, 1990). Also, in this research, we relied on ISCO08 coding as a measure of the organizational position of the employees, which does not cover owners. Future work could investigate the value orientation of the owners of the means of production, who in line with social class theory should reveal enhanced personal focus similarly to those in managerial positions (Wright, 1997), but perhaps even more strongly.

Moreover, the effects we observed seem fairly small in magnitude. However, the meta-analytical research showed that the mean effect size for socio-psychological research does not exceed .20 what may be translated into 4% of explained variance (Schäfer & Schwarz, 2019; see also Richard et al., 2003). Thus, the effects we found are not much weaker than the average effects of socio-psychological variables.

Finally, the design was correlational and did not allow for causal inferences, thereby limiting internal validity. It is not unlikely that those who value self-enhancement and openness to change are more prone to holding managerial positions. First, they could opt for such positions more frequently (while those who value self-transcendence and conservation could be more likely to opt out), and second, they could be more likely to be promoted by their superiors. Also, higher social position has been shown to lead people to greater selfishness, but especially those dispositionally focused on self, while it can also lead to greater generosity among those dispositionally focused on others (Blader & Chen, 2012; Chen et al., 2001). Building on this, it would be worthwhile to examine, using longitudinal designs, whether rising social position leads to the adoption of values reflecting personal focus even in those individuals who hold values reflecting social focus before gaining a higher organizational position.

## Conclusion

Integrating sociological and socio-psychological literature, we predicted and found that managers from different countries perceive their social rank as higher relative to others, and thus their values are more likely to reflect personal focus and less likely to reflect social focus. Holding a managerial position involves influencing others. The lower regard of managers for self-transcendence reflecting tolerance, equality, caring for others, and conservation reflecting rule-following and safety against threats may put others at risk. Thus, this finding strongly emphasizes the importance of workplace selection and monitoring processes.

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**Funding:** ADW was supported by Eurolab grant for visiting researchers at GESIS – Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften.

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**Acknowledgments:** Authors thank Peter Schmidt, Shalom Schwartz, Jan Cieciuch, as well as GESIS – Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften and CBRS members for their useful comments on the previous versions of the manuscript.

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**Competing Interests:** The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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**Author Note:** Aleksandra Cislak and Adrian Wójcik share the first authorship, the order is alphabetical.

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## Supplementary Materials

In the Supplementary Materials we provide detailed data regarding country samples and additional analyses (for access see [Index of Supplementary Materials](#) below).

### Index of Supplementary Materials

Cislak, A., Wójcik, A., & Białobrzaska, O. (2022). *Supplementary materials to "Social position and personal versus social focus: A multinational study of managerial values"* [Tables, Analyses]. PsychOpen GOLD. <https://doi.org/10.23668/psycharchives.8154>

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