



VALUE ORIENTATIONS OF FUTURE FITNESS INSTRUCTORS

E. Mileva*¹, M. Bahchevanova²

¹National Sports Academy “Vassil Levski”, Sofia, Bulgaria

²Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia, Bulgaria

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the value orientations of future fitness instructors aimed at their successful professional activity. For this purpose, a questionnaire was used, containing twenty values, among which the respondents must rank five in a hierarchical sequence. In this regard, the opinions of 27 students from postgraduate qualification center were surveyed and analyzed. The analysis of the results reveals a desire and motivation to support the activities of athletes to achieve the desired results, continuous enrichment of their own competence in the field and the pursuit of independent work.

The respondents want to gain all the necessary knowledge to optimize the condition of their future clients and to successfully practice this profession. Risky actions, authoritarian style of communication and work in a tense environment are not among the preferred values. The perspectives for improving the activities of future fitness instructors are outlined.

Key words: values, fitness, students, profession, clients, knowledge

INTRODUCTION

Values are a fundamental concept, providing the criteria for choice among alternative behaviour patterns. According to Milton Rockeach, “a value is an enduring belief that a particular mode of conduct or a state of existence is personally or socially desirable”; and “a value system is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance” (1).

The selection of values is a major factor for the effectiveness of the training process in the instructor-athlete system. Every person is guided by certain values in their profession in order to anticipate certain results. Ultimate success requires purposeful and systematic effort, clear goals, motives, an overall outline and action plan.

*Correspondence to: *Eleonora Mihaylova Mileva, National Sports Academy “Vassil Levski”, 21 Stefan Mladenov str., 1710 Sofia, Bulgaria, +359898776676, E-mail: emileva2002@gmail.com*

Any achievement in professional coaching is unthinkable in the absence of clearly defined and firmly incorporated values to guide the specialist towards the ultimate goal. These values reveal the essence about the instructor and facilitate the path towards the desired ideal development of his or her professional career. Value orientations are characterized by certain properties, creating initiative, purposefulness and sustainability of behaviour (2).

Establishing, adopting and incorporating certain values and their respective behaviour patterns is a complex and time-consuming process (3). It is precisely because they are slow to create and hard to change that values provide stability and outline the specific characteristics of every instructor’s coaching practice. People have different sets of values, but when they are part of a sports organization which integrates common organizational values, they become carriers of a national culture and they are obliged to take it into consideration in the course of their professional activities.

At an individual level, the changeability or immutability of values is determined mainly by the feelings of self-satisfaction or self-dissatisfaction which result from a person's awareness of the relevance or irrelevance of values (4).

The factors which influence the formation or mutation of values differ in scope, degree of impact or depth of incorporation into the value system and the interaction in-between them is complex and hard to predict. It is a crucial fact that they are the principal determiner of behaviour. Therefore the ways values change determine lifestyles, interpersonal relationships, behaviour patterns at work and in moments of leisure, the professional and family life balance, the quality of lifestyle and the degree of overall life satisfaction - that is, the consequences are important for the individual and for society as a whole (3).

In specialized literature there is a range of contradictory concepts on the nature of values. Values have been defined as: "a comprehensive aggregate or organic system of a person's conscious attitudes towards society, the immediate group, towards labour, or oneself"; as an "interweaving of meaning and essence"; as "the dynamics of the establishment"; as "a person's moral stances and behavioural stimuli" (5).

Values are an important building block of a person's psychological structure. Along with other social and psychological units, they function as regulators of behaviour, manifesting themselves in all spheres of human activity (6).

Individually, the subjective significance of one set of values over another is determined by different sources. The dynamics of social environment, a person's needs and psycho-physiological aptitude, their interests, desired behaviour, choice of priorities – to a great extent these shape the evolution of emerging professional values. The very system of value orientations determines the path of the future professional, the direction of their development as a person with the view to a successful professional fulfilment (7).

Hard work, diligence and contributions to society figure as major moral virtues and outline social expectations towards athletes in sports circles. Those qualities could be manifested in different ways or combine in different ratios; some could be dominant, others less so; some wouldn't go beyond secondary importance. The values in a given society, and their respective sports-related values in particular, undoubtedly influence motivation and behaviour in the course of preparation and project themselves into teaching styles and the amount of effort invested in the process. Different sports specialists share similar concepts about the teaching methods they apply and their role towards ensuring a productive process of training and competition.

The necessity to develop, enrich and perfect training sessions for schoolchildren, adolescents and adults requires a step-by-step evaluation of the overall outline of the preparation process; there is a call for mechanisms for an optimal flexible strategy aimed at effective physical activities and sports, as well as for personal and professional growth opportunities. The latter necessitate an enquiry into optimization factors, a clarification of criteria for professional training and their weight; an expansion of the opportunity scope for specific actions and strategies.

Pedagogical practice has seen attempts at developing specialized models for the organization of physical education and sports activities, carried out by students at the Faculty of Medicine, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, which facilitates the formation of a new dynamic paradigm of students' value orientation (8, 9).

The problems outlined so far have channeled our exploration interests into investigating the values that would significantly influence not only the personal and professional development of fitness instructors, but also the degree of satisfaction derived from their everyday professional practice.

METHODS

The hypothesis of this study was based on the concept that revealing the leading tendencies in the value orientation of future fitness instructors would enhance the quality of athlete training

through the implementation of more effective teaching methods, and hence boost the degree of satisfaction derived from fitness instructors' own professional activities.

The purpose of this study was to explore and analyse the leading value orientations of future fitness instructors as a factor for their successful professional careers.

The tasks of this study were:

1. A theoretical analysis of existing studies on this issue.
2. A review of tendencies in the significance and hierarchies of value orientations of future fitness instructors.
3. An outline of perspectives aimed at improving the activities of future fitness instructors.

The object of this study was the process of building value orientations and making value choices through the future fitness sessions.

The target group of this study was 27 postgraduate students at the National Sports Academy "Vassil Levski", Centre for Postgraduate studies, Bodybuilding and Fitness postgraduate course. The respondents were aged 19 - 59; 44.4% were male, 55.6% were female; the study was carried out between August 2019 and the end of June, 2020.

In order to reveal any peculiarities in the value systems of the target group members, a questionnaire was used (7). The questionnaire listed twenty values. The respondents were asked to rank them in a hierarchical sequence. The participants' responses present a clear and accurate idea as to future fitness instructors' interests, priorities and the way they envisage their own prospects as professionals.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is a well-known fact that fitness activities are suitable for the young and the elderly, for males and females, and that they are aimed at a person's harmonious development. There are no limits to practising fitness. Every person, depending on their age and gender, can plan their own tailor-made work-out sessions as well as other people, taking into account the individual differences in physique and constitution.

The data collected confirmed the considerable age span of those wishing to practice fitness professionally. The youngest future fitness instructor was aged 19 and the oldest was aged 59. Both the youngest and the oldest respondents are capable of acquiring the necessary knowledge in order to be of assistance to their own pupils or clients, by helping them develop essential qualities relevant to health and aesthetics.

It should be noted that the majority of respondents already had a university degree - 55.6%; slightly over a third had completed their secondary education - 37%; and only 7.4% were still undergraduate students.

The survey results revealed a logical overall picture:

- a fitness instructor professional license requires high intelligence and extensive knowledge, skills and inner qualities relevant to this line of work;
- the respondents who had only a secondary school diploma most probably also had a great deal of hands on experience, which would enable them to become good professionals;
- the undergraduate respondents, even at so early an age, had the ambition and motivation to acquire the necessary qualifications and to enhance their chances for successful professional fulfilment.

It should be noted that the majority of respondents - 88.9% - had never practiced as bodybuilding or fitness instructors, but they had the strong ambition to qualify and master the full range of knowledge and skills in order to begin this practice. Very few respondents – only 11.1% - had had any background professional experience in this field. But the leading value among this target group was a higher level of competence. By acquiring the relevant certificate, they manifested their determination for self-improvement.

As for the reasons for enrolling into the Bodybuilding and Fitness postgraduate course, the results show that the majority of respondents intend to practice this profession in the future (47.6%). A considerable percentage of

respondents attended the course to acquire additional knowledge and skills (28.6%). These results are not surprising, bearing in mind the overall aims and goals of this particular course.

The secondary reasons for enrolling in the course include: financial incentives (4.8%); working with people (4.8%); a general love for sport and a long-lasting ambition to complete such a course (4.8%); a healthy lifestyle (9.5%) and other reasons (22.2%).

The detailed analysis regarding the hierarchy in the value orientations reveals indicative tendencies: the values related to *helping others* ranks as a very high priority value (85.2%), followed by *acquiring additional knowledge and skills* (77.8%), *communicating with people* (74.1%), *decision-making* (55.6%), and *working at one's own pace* (51.9%) (**Figure 1**).

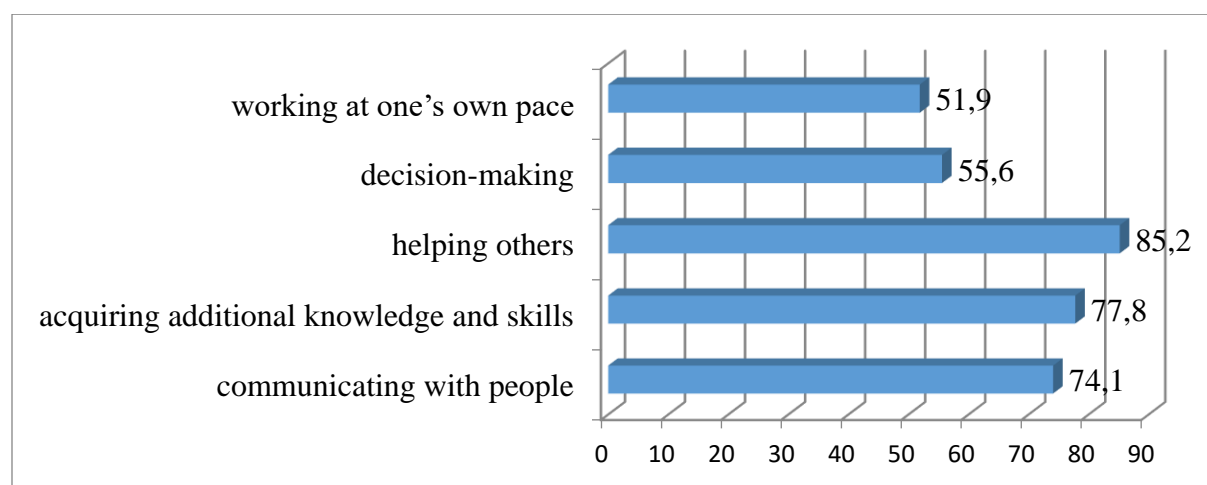


Figure 1. Top values of future fitness instructors

The tendencies revealed above point at the high standard value orientations among respondents. A successful coach, possessing extensive theoretical competence, is capable of sharing knowledge with their clients to help them maintain their overall fitness and health (85.2%). The coach gives discussion about an athlete's health, provides advice and guidance concerning the selection of specific drills, creates and implements individual workout programmes, aiming to optimize an athlete's condition and achieve the desired results. All these factors actively involve future fitness instructors into assisting athletes on the way to attaining their goals.

A high level of qualification is a leading value, comprising professional competence, knowledge and practical skills (77.8%). Respondents believe that, in their future profession, it is crucial to continually enrich and replenish their knowledge in all areas related to the world of sport as a

whole, as well as fitness and healthy lifestyles. Designing individual workout programmes to meet individual clients' needs is considered important; individual performances should be careful and technically accurate, relevant to individual capacity; resilience towards higher strain and stress levels should be enhanced. This is a comprehensive profession and it involves much more than just giving explanation or practical drill demonstrations.

Communicating with people also stands out as a high priority value (74.1%). The communicative competence fitness instructors usually develop goes beyond ordinary instruction or technical guidance during workout sessions. Providing guidance, information and advice grows into a pleasant interpersonal exchange, attracting respondents to the choice of this profession. The capacity to motivate and inspire clients makes a fitness coach popular and successful. Everyday training sessions help build mutual confidence

and trust, combining biomechanical knowledge with techniques for physical training, adapted to different demands, styles and daily routines. Predictably, communication ranks among leading values as a means to modify behaviour, bring about change, and achieve goals.

Decision-making is another value ranked high by respondents (55.6%). Approximately half consider it an appealing opportunity to be in charge of another's activities, to be authorized to select methods or drills, to have the last say on choosing alternative courses of action, in concert with a client's preferences and opinions. Future fitness coaches go after leadership in communication, perceiving it as a vehicle for achieving certain results.

Decision making is closely connected with the next value – “*working at one's own pace*” (51.9%), which is another priority in future professional realization. It allows respondents to freely set deadlines, priorities and important tasks in the course of an athlete's preparation; it

eliminates dependence on other people or other techniques and enables the physical exercise load to be distributed according to factors such as a day job, exhaustion, specific needs etc. Working at one's own pace is closely linked with appointing sessions at a convenient time, preferences for a particular setting or workout dosage, with optimal accuracy and interaction between instructors and athletes.

The following values ranked medium in the hierarchy of significance: *problem-solving* (48.1%), *contribution to society* (44.4%), *creativity* (40.7%), *working for oneself/ on one's own* (40.7%) (**Figure 2**). Almost half of the respondents (48.1%) are not keen on encountering and solving problems in their line of work. Such a mindset is not typical for them. Probably this unwillingness is due to the demand for greater mental exertion that problems create, as well as the unpredictability of outcome, which leads to tensions and stress that the respondents did not feel ready to face.

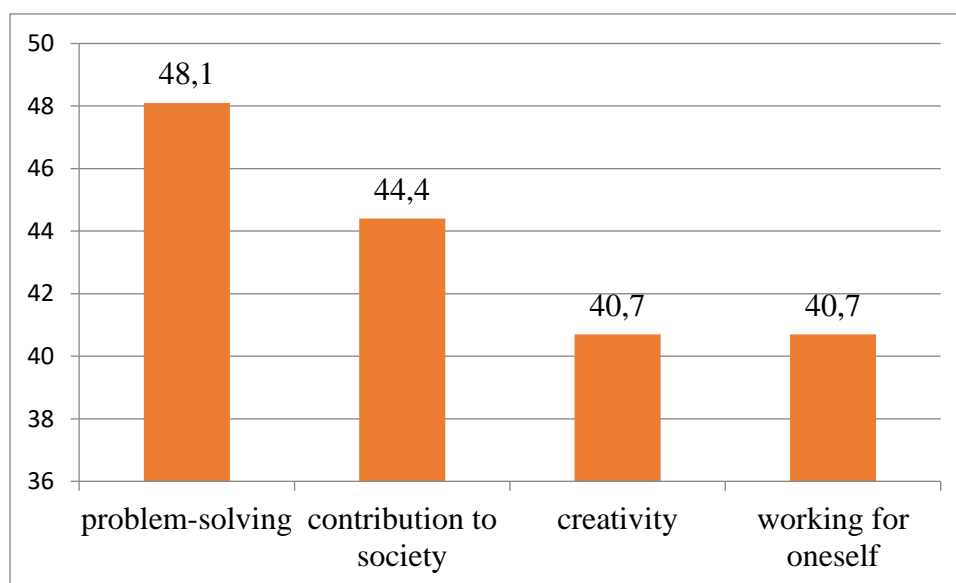


Figure 2. Values with medium significance of future fitness instructors

The percentage of respondents who believed that as future instructors they could *contribute to society's development*, is relatively high (44.4%). And yet, by nature this activity depends on individual choices, and it could not possibly reach the majority of citizens. Every society usually has

its own convictions, values and behaviour patterns, and individual athletes do not have the influence to alter them. A perceivable change could be detected among social layers where sport is a popular and regular pastime.

A considerable deal of the respondents regarded *creativity* as a rather significant value (40.7%). In fitness circles this is crucially important, as instructors need to take each client's individual characteristics into account. All athletes have different preferences and needs regarding the effect of their workout sessions, and this is where an individual approach steps in, based on a creative method selection.

Working on one's own had its loyal base of supporters as a value (40.7%). Most probably, it

was popular among people who prefer to manage their own time, who wouldn't rely on other people's judgements, and who resent dependence on external influences and factors. These people have sufficiently high self-esteem and they expect a more tranquil work environment and greater success if they work on their own.

Risk-taking (3.7 %), *competitiveness* (11.1%), *exercising power* (0%), and *working under pressure* (0%) ranked the lowest in the preferences scale (**Figure 3**).

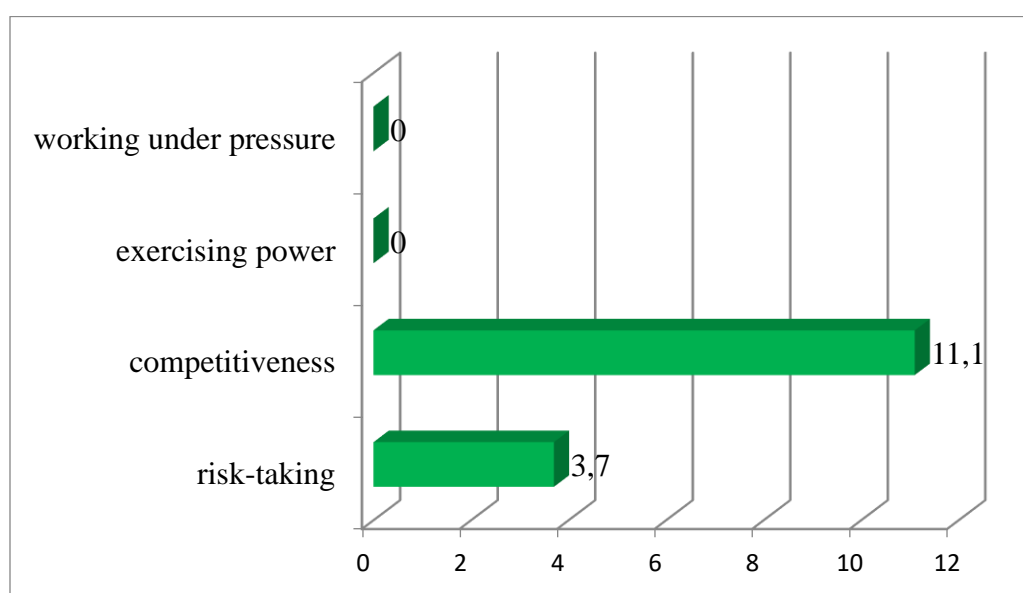


Figure 3. Lowest ranking values among future fitness instructors

Probably, the respondents' unwillingness (11.1%) to be *competitive* can be put down to upbringing, character and social behaviour patterns. For them, being compared to colleagues could become a source of unfair practices, which could lead to the rise of a number of problems of moral or ethical nature.

Obviously, the respondents were not, on the whole, prone to risk-taking; their emphasis lay on the security in their line of work (3.7%). Most probably, they were reluctant to leave their comfort zone, feeling uneasy at the prospect of unpredictable change. They would much rather pursue clear and straightforward goals and tasks and are unwilling to stray from a pre-determined course in their careers.

The following fact stands out – nobody pointed at any moments of deviating behaviour during the fitness instructor's work, which would necessitate exercising power or lead to working under pressure. An authoritarian style of communication or unrelenting control during workout sessions do not rank as values in the course of the desired profession. This leads to the conclusion that fitness activities are perceived as a basic socio-psychological value of the interpersonal rapport between the instructor and each athlete.

CONCLUSIONS

The study into the value orientations of future fitness instructors and the analysis of the results reveal that enhancing one's competence is a

major value, enabling respondents to effectively assist their clients in the pursuit of desired goals. Respondents believe that close interpersonal contact will consolidate certain modes of behaviour that can bring about positive changes and lead their clients towards the desired goals. They are not in favour of working under pressure or in a tense and controlled environment, as managing their own time stand out as a priority. The results of this study give a clear picture of the factors that influence a successful fitness instructor's activities and the orientation towards one's own behaviour, general outlines and methods of work aiming to increase professional job satisfaction.

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