

# ALLPORT-VERNON-LINDZEY STUDY OF VALUES (SOV)

Authored by  
**Mohammed looti**

November 19, 2025

## RECOMMENDED CITATION

Mohammed looti (2025). *ALLPORT-VERNON-LINDZEY STUDY OF VALUES (SOV)*.  
Encyclopedia of psychology. Retrieved from  
<https://encyclopedia.arabpsychology.com/?p=18611>

## ALLPORT-VERNON-LINDZEY STUDY OF VALUES (SOV)

The Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values, commonly abbreviated as the **SOV**, represents a foundational and enduring contribution to the field of personality and motivational psychology. Introduced by **Gordon W. Allport**, **Philip L. Vernon**, and **Gardner Lindzey**, this psychometric instrument was meticulously conceived as a two-part character analysis designed to empirically project the comparative significance of six fundamental standards or motivational orientations within an individual's life. First published in 1931 and subsequently revised in 1951 and 1960, the SOV quickly became one of the most widely used and influential tools for assessing core personal values, providing researchers and practitioners with a sophisticated means of understanding the hierarchy of motivations that shape an individual's worldview, decision-making processes, and behavior patterns. The enduring relevance of the SOV lies in its philosophical grounding and its ability to delineate complex personality profiles based on a finite set of universally recognized human drivers, distinguishing it as a precursor to many modern assessments of vocational fit and leadership potential.

The core objective of the SOV is not to measure absolute strength across various domains, but rather to establish a relative ranking among the six specified values--a critical methodological feature known as **ipsative scoring**. This means that a high score in one value must necessarily be compensated by lower scores in others, forcing the participant to prioritize their interests and reveal their inherent motivational structure. This framework moves beyond simple trait descriptions, offering a dynamic perspective on what an individual fundamentally cherishes and what gives their life meaning. As research methodologies evolved, the SOV proved invaluable in studies requiring a nuanced understanding of participant motivation; for example, studies often utilized the SOV as a necessary preparatory step, ensuring that "the precursor to the experiment was a thorough review of each participant via use of the Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values," thereby confirming the motivational baseline against which experimental results could be accurately interpreted and analyzed.

Understanding the intellectual lineage of the SOV is crucial for appreciating its depth. The framework for the six value classifications is directly and explicitly grounded in the philosophical and cultural typologies articulated by the German philosopher **Eduard Spranger** in his seminal 1928 work, *Types of Men: The Psychology and Ethics of Personality*. Spranger posited that all human behavior, culture, and societal structures could be understood as expressions of six fundamental, ideal types of individuals, each dedicated to a distinct form of value. Allport and his collaborators took these philosophical ideals and successfully operationalized them into a quantifiable, measurable psychological assessment, bridging the gap between abstract philosophical concepts and empirical psychological science. This grounding ensures that the SOV is not merely an arbitrary list of interests but a systematically organized classification system reflecting deep-seated, historically recognized human pursuits.

## Theoretical Foundations: Eduard Spranger's Types

The entire conceptual architecture of the Study of Values rests upon **Eduard Spranger's philosophical typology**, which proposed that differences in personality fundamentally stem from variations in the primary value or orientation an individual embraces toward life. Spranger's method was descriptive and humanistic, viewing the person as an integrated entity whose actions are directed toward the realization of specific, culturally defined values. He defined six ideal types, asserting that while no real person embodies only one pure type, every individual possesses a characteristic hierarchy of these values that dictates their reactions, choices, and vocational aspirations. The transition from Spranger's theoretical, ideal types to the psychometric reality of the SOV was a significant achievement, enabling researchers to empirically test and quantify these broad philosophical categories, moving the concept of human motivation from the realm of ethics into the sphere of measurable psychology.

Spranger's six types represent fundamentally different answers to the question of what constitutes a meaningful life. The **Theoretical man**, for instance, seeks truth and knowledge above all else, viewing the world as something to be observed, analyzed, and understood through logical systems and empirical inquiry, valuing rationality and objectivity. Conversely, the **Economic man** prioritizes utility and practicality, focusing on what is useful, efficient, and capable of generating wealth or managing resources effectively. Spranger carefully distinguished these orientations, noting that they often exist in tension; for example, a person highly committed to the Aesthetic value, prioritizing form, harmony, and beauty, might find the utilitarian demands of the Economic value inherently distasteful, showcasing the necessary trade-offs inherent in the human experience that the SOV is designed to capture.

The enduring power of Spranger's model, and consequently the SOV, is its cultural universality; these six motivational domains appear relevant across various societal contexts, as they reflect deep, fundamental human drives. The **Social man** is dedicated to philanthropy and the welfare of others, prioritizing love, kindness, and altruism, often viewing service as the highest good. In contrast, the **Political man** is driven by power, influence, and recognition, seeking control and dominance over others, whether in the realm of governance, management, or social interaction. By translating these complex, often overlapping philosophical distinctions into distinct psychological scales, Allport, Vernon, and Lindzey provided a powerful tool for analyzing personality profiles that transcend simple descriptive traits, focusing instead on the underlying motivational framework that directs behavior and social engagement.

## Structure and Methodology of the SOV

The Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values is structured as a questionnaire consisting of two distinct parts, meticulously designed to elicit the participant's true motivational priorities through a

series of forced choices. The instrument typically contains 45 items in total, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the six defined value areas while maintaining feasibility in administration. The design is deliberately configured to require the participant to make comparative judgments, which is essential for achieving the necessary ipsative measurement. Part I of the test presents 30 items, each consisting of two alternative choices related to various life situations or beliefs, asking the respondent to indicate which of the two alternatives they prefer. Since the two options often pertain to different value types, the selection process immediately reveals a preference hierarchy, forcing the participant to weigh the importance of one value against another in a standardized context.

Part II of the SOV is arguably the more sophisticated component, featuring 15 items, each presenting four possible courses of action or four distinct statements representing the six values. For each set of four options, the participant is required to rank the choices based on their personal preference or agreement, assigning a score of 3 to the most preferred choice, 2 to the next, 1 to the next, and 0 to the least preferred. This ranking mechanism within Part II ensures that the full range of motivational priorities is expressed, providing highly granular data regarding the individual's internal value architecture. The constraint that the total score for each set of four must sum to six reinforces the ipsative nature of the instrument; a high score in the Aesthetic value, for example, necessitates a corresponding reduction in the scores allocated to the Economic, Theoretical, or Social values within that specific item set.

The mathematical outcome of the SOV administration is a profile of six scores, one for each value. Crucially, these raw scores are then converted into normative percentile ranks or standardized scores based on comparison groups, allowing the profile to be interpreted relative to the general population or specific demographic groups. This standardization process mitigates potential biases arising from varying response styles and ensures that the final profile accurately reflects the comparative strength of the six values. The ultimate profile is a visual representation, often a bar graph, showcasing the peaks and troughs of the individual's motivational landscape, allowing for immediate identification of the dominant and subordinate values that govern their interests, vocational leanings, and general philosophical outlook. This two-part methodology, relying on forced choice and ranking, stands as a landmark in the history of psychometric assessment of personality attributes.

## The Six Value Orientations

The six value orientations measured by the SOV--Theoretical, Economic, Aesthetic, Social, Political, and Religious--represent distinct, often competing motivational domains that encapsulate the breadth of human endeavor and prioritization. Individuals scoring highly in the **Theoretical** value are primarily driven by the search for truth and knowledge, valuing empirical observation, logical reasoning, and systemic understanding; their interests lie in the intellectual discovery of

uniformities and differences, and they often view the search for knowledge as the highest form of activity, sometimes detached from practical application or emotional considerations.

The **Economic** orientation, reflecting the utilitarian type, focuses on practicality, usefulness, and efficiency. People high in this value are concerned with the production and accumulation of wealth and resources, viewing the world as a platform for generating profit and managing assets. While often associated with business and commerce, the Economic value broadly applies to any individual who prioritizes efficiency and practical results, including those who manage their time or resources with extreme effectiveness, seeking maximum return on investment in all spheres of life, including non-monetary ones.

Individuals defined by the **Aesthetic** value prioritize form, harmony, balance, and beauty in their experiences. They are keenly attuned to the artistic, sensory, and subjective aspects of life, seeking to experience and appreciate the world's inherent beauty, whether found in nature, art, music, or literature. This orientation emphasizes quality of experience over utility or objective truth, often resulting in a rejection of excessive practicality or purely intellectual pursuits that diminish sensory appreciation.

The **Social** value orientation is characterized by altruism, love of humanity, and genuine concern for the welfare of others. Individuals scoring high in this area find their primary motivation in serving, helping, and supporting their fellow human beings, prioritizing relationships, compassion, and philanthropy. This value aligns closely with the Christian ideal of love and neighborly affection, often leading high scorers toward helping professions or community service, viewing personal gain or power as secondary to human bonding and welfare.

The **Political** value, contrary to a narrow interpretation, refers not only to governmental involvement but to the broad motivation for power, influence, and leadership. High scorers seek control, dominance, and recognition, striving to exert influence over others and achieve positions of authority, viewing life as a competitive arena where strength and leadership are paramount. This drive for power can manifest in various ways, including competitive sports, organizational leadership, or intellectual dominance in debates, always centered on the desire to be a decisive force.

Finally, the **Religious** value orientation is characterized by a deep-seated desire to relate to the cosmos as a whole, seeking unity, meaning, and a comprehensive understanding of life's ultimate purpose. This is not strictly tied to institutional religion but rather to a spiritual or philosophical quest for ultimate values and transcendent experiences. For the person dominated by the Religious value, all other values are often subsumed under this overarching pursuit of ultimate meaning or divine connection, viewing the material and social world as secondary to eternal truth.

## Interpretation and Scoring

The interpretation of the SOV profile is contingent upon its ipsative scoring mechanism, which mandates that the total sum of scores across the six values remains constant for every respondent. Consequently, the profile generated is not an absolute measure of how much an individual values each domain compared to an external standard, but rather a depiction of the relative importance of these six values compared to one another within that specific individual's psychological framework. The raw scores are standardized by converting them into percentile ranks based on extensive normative data, typically categorized by gender and educational level, allowing researchers to determine whether an individual's score in a particular value is high, average, or low relative to their peers. A high standardized score, therefore, signifies a dominant motivational force, while a low score indicates a subordinate or repressed interest area.

Interpreting a profile involves identifying the highest and lowest scores, which together reveal the individual's core priorities and antipathies. For example, a profile showing a high Theoretical score and a low Economic score suggests a person who prioritizes intellectual discovery and abstract knowledge over practicality and material gain. Conversely, a high Political score coupled with a low Social score paints a picture of an ambitious individual driven by influence and power, often at the expense of altruistic or interpersonal concerns. The profile acts as a motivational blueprint, highly predictive of vocational interests, preferred leisure activities, and even political attitudes, as the profile reveals the deep-seated criteria used for evaluating life situations and making ethical choices.

A critical consideration in SOV interpretation is the potential statistical limitation inherent in ipsative measurement. Because scores are interdependent, classical statistical analyses requiring independence of variables are technically inappropriate. However, despite these statistical constraints, the clinical and predictive utility of the SOV profile remains high, particularly in vocational counseling and personality research where understanding the motivational hierarchy is paramount. The strength of the SOV lies in its ability to generate a holistic, easy-to-read graphical representation of a person's values, making complex motivational structures accessible and highly actionable for guidance purposes, especially when used to match individual profiles to organizational cultures or specific career paths known to satisfy certain value types.

## Reliability and Validity

Over decades of use, the Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values has demonstrated generally acceptable levels of psychometric reliability and validity, particularly considering its early origins in psychometric development. Studies assessing **test-retest reliability** have generally yielded consistent results, showing that an individual's value hierarchy tends to be quite stable over time, particularly throughout adulthood, confirming that the SOV measures enduring aspects of

personality and motivation rather than transient moods or situational preferences. Internal consistency, measured through methods like split-half reliability, has also been generally supportive, indicating that the items designed to measure a specific value domain are indeed correlated with one another, validating the coherence of the six scales.

Regarding **validity**, the SOV has strong evidence of both construct and predictive validity. Construct validity has been established through factor analysis, which generally confirms the independence and clarity of the six underlying value factors derived from Spranger's typology. Furthermore, numerous studies have demonstrated strong correlations between SOV scores and relevant external criteria. For instance, high scores on the Theoretical value correlate significantly with success in scientific and academic fields, while high Economic scores are often found among business majors and entrepreneurs. The predictive validity is particularly evident in vocational guidance, where the SOV profiles have successfully predicted job satisfaction and persistence in careers aligned with the individual's dominant value orientation.

However, the ipsative nature of the instrument complicates traditional validity assessments, leading to some ongoing debate. Critics point out that because the scales are forced to be negatively correlated (due to the fixed sum constraint), it becomes challenging to differentiate between a truly low interest in one value and simply a high interest in the competing values. Despite these statistical caveats, the empirical utility has often outweighed the methodological concerns. The SOV's ability to predict behavioral outcomes and differentiate between occupational groups--such as distinguishing engineers (high Theoretical/Economic) from social workers (high Social/Religious)--firmly establishes its practical validity as a tool for understanding how fundamental values translate into real-world choices and behaviors.

## Applications in Research and Practice

The SOV has enjoyed broad application across academic research, vocational guidance, and organizational psychology since its inception. Historically, it served as a crucial tool for **personality research**, helping psychologists understand the motivational underpinnings of various behaviors, including educational choices, political leanings, and ethical judgment. Its structure allowed researchers to move beyond simple trait inventories to examine the dynamic interplay of fundamental life goals, influencing early studies on character and motivation in the mid-20th century. For example, it was frequently utilized in studies comparing the value profiles of different professional groups, offering insights into the typical psychological makeup of clergy, artists, scientists, and politicians.

Perhaps the most significant practical application of the SOV has been in **vocational and educational counseling**. By providing a clear, quantified profile of an individual's motivational drivers, counselors could effectively guide students and career changers toward fields that would

maximize their intrinsic satisfaction. A person with high Aesthetic and low Economic scores, for instance, would be advised toward creative arts or design, rather than high-stakes financial careers. This application remains relevant today, offering a valuable perspective on career alignment that complements assessments focused purely on aptitude or skills, ensuring that the chosen profession satisfies the individual's deepest values.

Furthermore, the SOV has been instrumental in **cross-cultural and sociological studies**, enabling researchers to compare the dominant value orientations of different societies or demographic groups. While caution must be exercised regarding potential cultural bias in the language of the items, the fundamental value categories (truth, utility, beauty, people, power, ultimate meaning) are recognized globally, allowing for comparative research into how cultural norms influence the prioritization of these values. In organizational settings, the SOV has been used to assess team dynamics, identify potential conflicts arising from differing core values among team members, and aid in leadership development by highlighting the leader's primary motivational orientation and its potential impact on organizational culture.

## Criticisms and Limitations

Despite its historical significance and continued use, the Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values is subject to several important criticisms, primarily centered around its methodological structure and dated context. The most frequent and persistent critique revolves around the use of **ipsative scoring**. As discussed, ipsative scales only measure the relative importance of values within a person, making it impossible to compare the absolute strength of a value across different individuals. For instance, two people might both score highest on the Theoretical value, but one might have a very intense focus on all six values overall, while the other might have low intensity across the board. The ipsative nature obscures this absolute intensity, making certain types of statistical comparison and analysis problematic.

A second major limitation concerns **cultural and temporal relevance**. The SOV was developed in the early 20th century, and while the core values remain foundational, the language, context, and specific examples used in some test items may feel dated or culturally specific, potentially limiting its applicability in modern or non-Western contexts without careful adaptation and re-norming. The definition of the Religious value, rooted strongly in Western philosophical traditions, may not fully capture the complexity of spiritual or transcendent values in other cultural frameworks, leading to potential misinterpretation or bias.

Finally, like all self-report measures, the SOV is vulnerable to issues of **response bias**, particularly social desirability. Participants may consciously or unconsciously choose responses that reflect what they believe is socially acceptable or desirable rather than their true motivational priorities. While the forced-choice format attempts to mitigate this by pairing items of roughly equal social

desirability, highly motivated respondents may still manage to game the system. Furthermore, the SOV relies on the individual's conscious awareness and articulation of their values, potentially failing to capture unconscious or latent motivational drivers that influence behavior but are not readily accessible through self-assessment, a limitation common to many early personality instruments.

## Legacy and Influence on Personality Psychology

The enduring legacy of the Allport-Vernon-Lindzey Study of Values is profound, cementing its place as a classic instrument in personality psychology and laying essential groundwork for subsequent research into human motivation and values. Its primary contribution was demonstrating the feasibility of translating complex philosophical typologies into rigorous, quantifiable psychological scales, effectively providing a framework for the scientific study of values as stable components of personality structure. Before the SOV, values were often treated as abstract ethical concepts; after its introduction, they became measurable psychological variables, allowing them to be integrated into theories of personality development and vocational choice.

The SOV served as a vital precursor and inspiration for numerous later assessment tools focused on motivation, interests, and occupational fit. Its success spurred the development of various instruments that sought to expand or refine the motivational dimensions measured, moving toward broader assessments of human interests and life goals. The SOV's emphasis on values as hierarchical, influential drivers of behavior foreshadowed the later recognition in organizational psychology that value congruence--the alignment between personal values and organizational values--is a critical factor in employee satisfaction, commitment, and longevity.

Ultimately, the SOV represents a landmark achievement in the history of psychology for its elegant integration of humanistic philosophy and empirical science. It remains a powerful illustration that comprehensive psychological understanding requires assessing not just what people can do (aptitudes) or how they typically behave (traits), but fundamentally what they value and what they are driven to achieve. Although newer, statistically refined instruments exist, the framework of the six Sprangerian values--Theoretical, Economic, Aesthetic, Social, Political, and Religious--continues to offer a remarkably insightful and robust lens through which to analyze and understand the deep structure of human motivation, securing the SOV's place as a cornerstone in the study of personality.