

Human Values and Religion: Semi-Automatic Human Values Systems Analysis for Religious Institutional Diagnostics

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Abstract: Systematic analyses of the values of religious movements have not received much attention in the control and automation literature. Utilizing a theory of universal value types from the social sciences this paper presents a semi-automatic system for assessing institutional cultural values and leadership values in a religious community. It sets out findings gathered from a large Pentecostal community in Brazil revealing incongruences between leadership and laity value systems in the target community. Tests showed that this semi-automatic system was capable of gathering, processing and presenting robust values congruency data in a usable way to religious leaders and other interested parties. The implications are that it is now possible to build (semi) automatic systems to analyse institutional values and expose deep cultural values which may be out of alignment with the espoused values of the religious movement. Implications are drawn for control systems research and future research directions presented.

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1. INTRODUCTION: ANALYSING INSTITUTIONS

Institutions have not attracted much attention from control systems engineering researchers (Stapleton, Kopacek, and Hajrizi 2014, Stapleton 2015). Systems engineering methods and notations, especially in the area of soft systems and human centred systems, can provide a new perspective on the problem of institutional failure. The misalignment of important cultural holons creates systemic fractures. This in turn leads to dysfunction as the institutions attempts to maintain stability even as its coherence disintegrates.

Tensions within the system, largely due to power-structures embedded within the matrix of social relations, contribute to this fracturing effect (Stapleton (2014)). This suggests that systems are needed which can assess and evaluate alignments between leadership and community values. It might be reasonably speculated that control and automatic systems engineering is one of the few disciplines that can identify and formalise the systemic nature of institutional failure.

2. RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

The formal, systematic analyses of the values of religious movements, and particularly religious leadership, and the extent to which these values are understood in terms of the guiding principles of the relevant religious tradition have not received much attention in the academic literature, especially amongst systems scientists and engineers. International instability leading to violence and warfare in the late twentieth century and into the twenty-first century has, at least in part, been portrayed by antagonists as ethnic conflicts inspired by conflicting religious beliefs. The Yugoslav conflicts in the late twentieth century (Malcom 1998) and the

rise of the Islamic State armed movement in the middle-east in the past decade are possessed of religious overtones where respective religious values of, for example, Christians and Muslims, are portrayed as being in conflict. These have sometimes been described as “clashes of fundamentalisms” (Weir 1997). Due to a variety of factors it can often be unclear as to what the true agendas of the clashing movements are, and the extent to which these movements do indeed reflect the religious values they purport to hold (Fox 2001).

Reflecting upon the deeply held values that inform Islam of justice (‘adl) and goodness and beauty (ihsan) Omid Safi expressed fears that “the humanity of Islam will be fully reduced to correspond to the caricature of violent zealots” (Safi 2003). On the other hand an increasingly hostile rhetoric of fundamentalist American Christians after the 9/11 attacks is seen to be in conflict with deeply-embedded pluralist values in American culture and has placed great strain on inter-faith relations (Cimino 2005).

3. SYSTEMIC CULTURAL ANALYSIS

A systemic approach to cultural analysis and the deep core values analysis which is needed in order to make institutional culture assessments is another important contribution that will be informed by control systems thinking. Theories of culture now allow us to express in formal language value gestalts which were, until recently, very difficult to identify formally and systematically (Fronzizi (1970)).

Their system features and properties are amenable to a formal social systems control analysis. Hofstede’s investigations in IBM set out formal dimensions of institutional culture

(Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov 2010). This was followed by the work of others, such as Richard Barrett (Barrett 1998) who himself drew a lot from the pioneering efforts of Abraham Maslow decades earlier. Schwartz's Universal Values Model provided the basis for the world values survey which provides a picture of cultural values across many national territories and this work is ongoing (Schwartz (2006)). Schwartz's team have utilised a form of principle components analysis to configure value patterns within complex organisational and social settings. Each of these efforts unpack a systems view of institutional culture. IFAC research has leveraged these insights. For example, Carew & Stapleton (2014) and Martin (2012) (both IFAC control research publications) have showed how such theories can inspire the development of powerful lenses by which to access deep value patterns in communities.

4. HUMAN VALUES THEORY AND AXIOLOGY

Throughout the 20th century psychologists and philosophers alike questioned whether human values could be studied in any meaningful way (Adler 1956, Thurstone 1959, Wickert 1940). In the mid-twentieth century A.J. Ayers had argued that nothing meaningful could be said about human values and that someone making a value judgement was simply expressing some feelings (Ayers 1952). However, by the late twentieth century axiologists and philosophers had begun to reframe this problem. Frondizi noted that values had the quality of a gestalt (Gestaltqualität). Values could only be understood as a configuration of relative priorities. What was therefore needed was a theoretical model which treated values as organised into various patterns and configurations, rather than in discrete, uniquely measurable elements.

In the middle of the 20th century anthropologists were also making progress in their understanding of cultural values (Kroeber 1952, Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1963). They described human values as a conception, implicit or explicit, of the desirable which influenced the selection from available modes, means and ends of actions. Meanwhile, during the latter half of the 20th century, psychologists began to link human values with belief, attitude and emergent behaviour. Values were seen as conceptions of global beliefs related to end states or modes of behaviour underpinned by attitudinal processes and which could be linked to organisational outcomes (England and Lee 1974, Rokeach 1973). Schwartz and Bilsky used these ideas as a basis for a universal theory by viewing human values as cognitive and cultural representations of three general requirements particular to hominids (Schwartz and Bilsky 1987):

1. Biologically oriented needs of human individuals.
2. Social interaction needs which enable interpersonal coordination in community settings.
3. Institutional demands for community welfare and survival.

Human values transcended specific situations, guiding the selection or evaluation of behaviour and events in individual and collective contexts (Schwartz 2006). Values were prioritised relative to one another. It was this prioritisation

which acted as the conceptual linchpin around which a perspective of value configurations could be constructed i.e. a theory in which human values were prioritised against one another in unique configurations associated with individuals as well as the communities in which they found themselves. This aligned well with anthropological perspectives of values, whilst also drawing on the important contribution of psychologists. Others had tried to develop similar models, the most notable being Hofstede. He had formulated a model which attempted to account for cultural differences between institutions and nations. It was based upon the idea of "mental programs" ((Hofstede 2001) p. xix) which developed during early childhood and which were subsequently reinforced during education and by the institutions in which people worked as adults.

The proposed model developed by Schwartz and his team was refined and by the mid-2000s a robust universal values model drawn from data gathered during a "World Values Survey" emerged which reflected the gestalt quality proposed by Frondizi. Hofstede's model had primarily been based on attitude survey data collected in the late-1960 and early 1970s from over a hundred thousand employees of IBM Corporation. The new model developed on the basis of the World Values Survey was drawn from similar samples sizes but gathered from the general populations of dozens and dozens of countries and not restricted to a single multinational organisation. Meaningful statements could now be made about both cultural and personal values. Evidence for a universal values model had now been found which seemed to hold up across cultural domains and which satisfied the requirements of Frondizi's axiology.

5. SYSTEMIC CULTURAL ANALYSIS

A systemic approach to cultural analysis and the deep core values analysis which is needed in order to make institutional culture assessments is an important contribution that will be informed by control systems thinking. The above treatment demonstrates that current theories of culture may allow us to express in formal language value gestalts which were, until recently, very difficult to identify formally and systematically. Hofstede's investigations in IBM set out formal dimensions of institutional culture (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov (2010)). This was followed by the work of others, such as Richard Barrett (Barrett (1998)) who himself drew a lot from the pioneering efforts of Abraham Maslow decades earlier.

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