

Theoretical Roots of The Values Bridge

Foundations, Development, and Applications

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Introduction & Scope of Paper

The Values Bridge is not the product of sudden inspiration. It is the outcome of decades of lived experience, professional practice, and rigorous academic inquiry by its creator, Dr. Suzy Welch. Long before the first item bank was built or a statistical model tested, Welch had been exploring values—not as abstract ideals, but as the real forces shaping the choices people make in the midst of work, relationships, and life transitions. Her earliest investigations were personal, forged in moments when “What matters most?” was not an intellectual exercise, but an urgent, practical question.

As a university instructor and leadership coach, Welch incorporated values exploration into her teaching and client work. She drew on leading frameworks, most notably Shalom Schwartz’s theory of basic human values, pairing readings with reflective exercises to help students link personal principles to academic and career goals. The research was sound, well-respected and rigorous, but in her classrooms and coaching sessions she saw a consistent barrier: many people found the language and structures of existing models inaccessible, abstract, or even alienating. Terms like hedonism carried moral baggage that obscured meaning; intricate circular structures, while elegant, often failed to spark real self-recognition or applied reflection.

This disconnect between academic rigor and everyday resonance, became a key inflection point. Welch began imagining a framework that could preserve the validity and rigor of established models while reimagining their presentation so that today’s learners, leaders, and teams could immediately see themselves in the language, structure, and purpose.

The formal development of the Values Bridge began during Welch’s doctoral research, where her dissertation work allowed her to integrate theoretical study with applied design. She revisited legacy models such as those of Rokeach, Schwartz, and Reiss, mapping their conceptual terrain into a more intuitive structure. She assembled a team of psychometricians and academics to test early versions, ensuring that accessibility did not come at the expense of reliability, validity, or statistical rigor. Parallel to this academic process, she engaged a network of coaches, educators, and organizational leaders who stress-tested the tool in real-world contexts and fed back qualitative insights.

The result is a model of sixteen core values, each defined in contemporary, clear-language terms, supported by an assessment that measures both a person’s value priorities and what Welch calls the “authenticity gap”—the measurable distance between the life one wants to live and the life one is currently living. Unlike static, one-time-use frameworks, The Values Bridge is designed for ongoing calibration, drawing on both large-scale quantitative data and continuous qualitative feedback from the field. More than 50,000 users—from classrooms to C-suites—have contributed to its iterative refinement.

This white paper focuses on the theoretical foundations of The Values Bridge:

- Examining the scholarly traditions from which the sixteen values were derived, including the mapping of each to concepts in leading values models.
- Explaining how the tool measures what Welch calls the “authenticity gap,” the difference between the values that define one’s ideal life and the values actually lived day-to-day.

While companion papers cover psychometric validation in detail, this white paper is written for educators, coaches, organizational leaders, and researchers who want to understand not just *what* The Values Bridge measures, but *why* it measures it the way it does—and how this approach fits into the broader landscape of values research.

Why Values, Why Now?

Values have long been recognized as central drivers of human thought and behavior. They are the enduring principles that guide our decisions, shape our priorities, and define how we interpret the world around us. As Rokeach (1973) argued, values form an enduring belief system that influences attitudes and actions across contexts. Schwartz (1992, 2012) refined this perspective, proposing that values are universal in content but vary in their relative importance to individuals and cultures. Reiss (2000) brought a more psychological lens, framing values as expressions of fundamental human desires that manifest differently across life domains.

Yet while the academic understanding of values has advanced over decades of research, the everyday conversation about values has not always kept pace. Many of the terms used in legacy models still reflect the language, cultural norms, and even moral sensibilities of the eras in which they were developed. For example, Rokeach's value of *salvation* reflected a mid-20th-century framing tied to specific religious traditions. While meaningful in its original context, the term can feel doctrinal or exclusionary in diverse, pluralistic environments. The Values Bridge reframes this space as Cosmos, defined simply as "a faith tradition," which is broad enough to encompass organized religion, personal spirituality, and other systems of meaning. This shift preserves the conceptual intent while making the construct more inclusive, clear and relatable for today's audiences.

At the same time, the need for accessible, research-based tools to clarify and prioritize personal values has never been more pressing. Across workplaces, classrooms, and communities, people are navigating unprecedented levels of change and complexity. Career paths are less linear, work-life boundaries are more fluid, and global challenges have heightened the urgency of aligning personal action with deeply held beliefs. In coaching and leadership contexts, values clarity is increasingly seen not as a "nice to have," but as an essential foundation for decision-making, resilience, and meaningful engagement.

It is within this environment that Dr. Suzy Welch developed The Values Bridge. Drawing on both empirical research and decades of teaching and coaching practice, Welch observed two persistent gaps:

- 1. Language barriers** — People struggled to identify with the labels and structures of existing models, even when the underlying concepts resonated.
- 2. Application gaps** — Many could list their core values but found it difficult to connect them meaningfully to daily choices, career direction, or long-term goals.

The Values Bridge addresses these challenges in two key ways. First, it preserves the theoretical depth of established frameworks while reimagining their language and structure for clarity, cultural relevance, and practical use. Second, it introduces a distinctive metric—the authenticity gap: the measurable distance between one’s ideal value priorities and the values actually lived in daily practice. This metric moves values work from the realm of aspiration into actionable insight, enabling individuals and organizations to see not only what matters most, but where alignment is strong and where intentional change may be needed.

In short, The Values Bridge is both a continuation and an evolution of the rich tradition of values research. It offers a tool designed for the realities of the twenty-first century—scholarly in foundation, accessible in language, and actionable in application—arriving at precisely the moment when the need for such clarity has never been greater.

What the Values Bridge Is—and Is Not

The Values Bridge is a motivational values framework designed to help individuals identify the core life principles that guide their decisions, priorities, and aspirations. It does not describe personality traits, moral virtue, or innate talent. Instead, it maps what matters most—and measures how closely a person’s current life aligns with the values they consciously prioritize.

This focus distinguishes The Values Bridge from other widely used assessment tools. Personality measures such as the Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) or the Big Five describe how people tend to think and behave. Strengths-based tools such as CliftonStrengths or VIA Character Strengths highlight *how* people excel when they act. Even moral frameworks, such as Moral Foundations Theory, seek to explain patterns in judgment rather than reveal individual life motivations.

The Values Bridge asks a different question:

**“What principles do you want at the center of your life,
and to what extent are they truly there?”**

By focusing on **motivational priorities and alignment**, it complements but does not replicate the purposes of other tools.

Table 1. How the Values Bridge Differs from Other Popular Tools

Tool or Framework	Primary Focus	What It Measures	Why It’s Not a Values Assessment
Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)	Personality type	Cognitive preferences (e.g., introversion vs. extraversion)	Describes how people perceive and process information, not what motivates their life choices.
Big Five / OCEAN	Personality traits	Stable personality dimensions (e.g., openness, conscientiousness)	Captures behavioral tendencies, not personal priorities or core commitments.
CliftonStrengths (Gallup)	Strengths-based development	Natural talents and ways of thinking (e.g., Achiever, Learner)	Identifies how people do things well, but not what they value or seek in life.

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Tool or Framework	Primary Focus	What It Measures	Why It's Not a Values Assessment
VIA Character Strengths	Positive psychology traits	Enduring character qualities (e.g., kindness, creativity)	Measures inner traits seen as virtues, not prioritized life goals or tradeoffs.
Moral Foundations Theory (Haidt & Graham)	Moral intuitions	Core moral concerns (e.g., care, loyalty, authority)	Aims to explain moral judgment patterns, not individual life motivations.
Enneagram	Personality/ spiritual typology	Nine personality types and underlying fears/ desires	Used for personal growth, but not designed to measure or prioritize core values.
Barrett Values Centre Tools	Organizational alignment	Cultural and leadership values in teams or firms	Focuses on collective or institutional values, not individual motivational clarity.
DISC Assessment	Communication style	Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, Conscientiousness	Focuses on behavior in social or workplace settings, not underlying personal values.

Each of these tools offers meaningful insight into human behavior, interaction, and development. The Values Bridge builds on this ecosystem by providing something distinct: a rigorous, research-based way to pinpoint the values that matter most in an ideal life, measure how present they are in current reality, and illuminate the “authenticity gap” between the two.

Scholarly Foundations and Values Selection

The Values Bridge is grounded in decades of empirical research on human values, yet it was designed from the ground up for the complexities of contemporary life. While informed by a broad scholarly tradition, three foundational models have been especially influential in shaping its conceptual backbone:

- **Milton Rokeach (1973)** — distinguishing between terminal values (desired end states) and *instrumental* values (modes of conduct).
- **Shalom Schwartz (1992, 2012)** — developing a cross-cultural theory of universal values, organized by motivational domains.
- **Steven Reiss (2000)** — identifying sixteen basic human desires as core motivational drivers.

These models share an aim: to define enduring human motivations present across cultures. However, their original purposes leaned toward academic explanation and cross-cultural comparison rather than guiding individuals in evaluating how well their lives align with their values. The Values Bridge builds on these foundations, reorganizing their insights into a framework that is both theoretically robust and immediately usable for personal decision-making, coaching, and education.

The sixteen core values of the Values Bridge—including the recent addition of **Belovedness** as a distinct motivator—were chosen through three key criteria:

- 1. Motivational Clarity** — Each value must capture a clearly identifiable driver of decisions and priorities.
- 2. Emotional Resonance** — Language must be accessible, culturally relevant, and free from unnecessary jargon or moral overtones.
- 3. Real-World Salience** — The value must influence daily choices and long-term goals in tangible ways.

Table 2: The 16 Values in the Values Bridge and Their Definitions

Value	Description
Achievement	Visible success in professional or personal spheres.
Affluence	Wealth and/or financial security.

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Value	Description
Agency	Self-determination over life's decisions and outcomes.
Beholderism	Aesthetics regarding one's home, belongings, and/or personal appearance.
Belonging	Community and/or connectivity with friends or affinity groups.
Cosmos	A faith tradition.
Eudemonia	Self-care, recreation, leisure, and other forms of personal pleasure.
Familycenterism	Family considerations around health, wellbeing, and presence.
Luminance	Fame, recognition, wide public renown.
Non Sibi	Altruism on a local or personal scale.
Place	One particular location or type of location.
Radius	Systemic change on a societal, cultural, global, or national scale.
Scope	Stimulation, excitement, learning, activity.
Voice	Creative self-expression and authenticity.
Workcenterism	Work-related activities and responsibilities.

Mapping the Values Bridge to Legacy Frameworks

While every Values Bridge construct has roots in prior literature, the relationship is rarely one-to-one. In some cases, a broad legacy value was split into distinct motivations to capture differences in scale or focus. In others, overlapping constructs from multiple models were combined into a single, more intuitive category.

Example of a split value: Schwartz's *universalism* encompasses understanding, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and nature, a wide-ranging set of concerns! In the Values Bridge, this territory is divided into Radius (desire for systemic change at a societal, cultural, global, or national scale) and Non Sibi (altruism at a local or personal level). This distinction allows users to pinpoint not just that they value making the world better, but at what scale and through which channels they are most motivated to act.

Example of a combined value: Beholderism integrates related but previously separate constructs from multiple frameworks. It draws from Schwartz's face (concern with public image), the aesthetics component within *universalism-nature*, aspects of *hedonism*

(appreciation for beauty and sensory pleasure), and Rokeach’s *a world of beauty*. Considered individually, none of these fully capture the combined motivation of caring for one’s surroundings, personal presentation, and the sensory experience of beauty. By bringing them together under a clear, behaviorally anchored definition—“aesthetics regarding one’s home, belongings, and/or personal appearance”—Beholderism offers a more intuitive and actionable way to understand this value.

This approach preserves the theoretical integrity of earlier models while reorganizing and refining their concepts for clarity and practical use.

Table 3: Mapping the Values Bridge Framework onto Legacy Values Models

Values Bridge (2025) 16 Values	Rokeach (1973) 18 Instrumental Values (modes of conduct)	Rokeach (1973) 18 Terminal Values (end states to be reached)	Reiss (2000) 16 Basic Desires	Schwartz (2012) 19 Values - Refined
Achievement	Ambitious, Capable	Sense of Accomplishment, Self-Respect, Social Recognition	Status, Power	Achievement, Power-Dominance, Power-Resources, Face
Affluence	—	A Comfortable Life	Saving, Power	Power-Resources, Security-Personal
Agency	Independent, Responsible	Freedom	Independence, Power	Self-Direction- Action, Self-Direction- Thought
Beholderism	Clean	A World of Beauty	Beauty (subset of Curiosity/ Order)	Face, Universalism- Nature, Hedonism
Belonging	Loving, Loyal	True Friendship	Social Contact, Acceptance	Benevolence- Caring, Conformity- Interpersonal
Belovedness	Loving	Family Security, Mature Love	Romance	Benevolence- Caring

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Cosmos	Obedient	Salvation	Idealism, Honor	Tradition, Spirituality
Eudemonia	Self-controlled	Pleasure, Happiness, Health	Eating, Physical Activity, Tranquility	Hedonism, Stimulation
Familycenterism	Loving	Freedom	Family	Benevolence- Dependability
Luminance	Ambitious	A World of Beauty	Status	Face, Power-Dominance
Non Sibi	Forgiving, Helpful	—	Idealism, Honor	Benevolence- Caring
Place	—	—	Order, Tranquility	Security-Societal, Tradition
Radius	Broad-minded	Equality, A World at Peace	Idealism	Universalism- Concern, Universalism- Nature, Universalism- Tolerance
Scope	Courageous, Imaginative	An Exciting Life	Curiosity, Physical Activity	Stimulation
Voice	Honest, Imaginative	Inner Harmony	Independence	Self-Direction- Thought

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Workcenterism	Responsible	—	Order	Conformity-Rules
Unmatched Values	Intellectual Logical Polite Capable	National Security, Wisdom	Vengeance	Humility, Security-Societal

Note: Blank cells are marked with dashes (—) to indicate no clear conceptual equivalent. The final row lists values from each legacy model that are not represented in the Values Bridge.

Presenting the Values Bridge alongside its academic predecessors serves two purposes. First, it acknowledges the strong scholarly foundations on which the framework is built. Second, it demonstrates that while the Values Bridge draws heavily from prior research, it is not a carbon copy in updated language. The refinements, whether through separating broad values into distinct motivations or combining overlapping ones into a single, more useful category, are intentional and grounded in both theory and real-world application.

Positioning Within the Broader Values Literature

While The Values Bridge draws most directly from Rokeach, Schwartz, and Reiss, it also sits within a wider lineage of values assessment. Many earlier and contemporary models have made significant contributions to our understanding of values, yet each was developed with specific contexts, audiences, and purposes that differ from the life-wide, motivational alignment focus of The Values Bridge.

Allport and Vernon’s *Study of Values* (1931)

- **Purpose and scope:** One of the earliest psychological approaches to values, categorizing them into six abstract types—Theoretical, Economic, Aesthetic, Social, Political, and Religious.

- **Methodology:** Self-report inventory designed to measure preference strength across the six categories
- **Strengths:** Groundbreaking in introducing values as measurable psychological constructs; offered a coherent typology that influenced later frameworks.
- **Limitations for The Values Bridge's aims:** Philosophically and categorically oriented, with broad abstractions rather than behaviorally anchored motivations; lacks the emotional resonance and practical applicability needed for real-time decision-making.

Super's Work Values Inventory (1970; revised 2006)

- **Purpose and scope:** Developed within vocational psychology to identify values relevant to career choice and satisfaction, such as Achievement, Independence, Security, and Relationships.
- **Methodology:** Inventory-based assessment with domain-specific value statements.
- **Strengths:** Highly influential in career counseling; clear linkages between values and occupational fit.
- **Limitations for The Values Bridge's aims:** Focuses exclusively on work-life priorities, leaving out values that drive decisions in family, community, or personal identity contexts.

Gouveia's Basic Values Survey (2003; Gouveia et al., 2014)

- **Purpose and scope:** A cross-cultural model that organizes values into a compact structure based on function (materialist vs. humanitarian) and motivational goals (promotion vs. prevention).
- **Methodology:** Concise, psychometrically validated survey instrument with applicability in international research.
- **Strengths:** Strong empirical foundation; efficient measure suitable for large-scale comparative studies.
- **Limitations for The Values Bridge's aims:** Primarily academic in orientation; language and structure optimized for research comparability rather than personal resonance or coaching application.

Hartman's Value Profile (1973)

- **Purpose and scope:** Applies formal axiology to measure how individuals assign value to people, things, and ideas, using a mathematical-philosophical framework.

- **Methodology:** Ranking of complex value-laden statements, scored through a proprietary algorithm based on formal value theory.
- **Strengths:** Offers a unique lens on value judgment and prioritization; highly regarded in specialized coaching and consulting contexts.
- **Limitations for The Values Bridge's aims:** Requires trained facilitators for administration and interpretation; the abstract nature of results can make personal application less intuitive for general audiences.

Hofstede's *Cultural Dimensions Theory* (1984; 2013) and Inglehart's *World Values Survey* (1997; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005)

- **Purpose and scope:** Both focus on mapping value patterns at the cultural or societal level rather than at the individual level. Hofstede identified dimensions such as Individualism-Collectivism and Power Distance; Inglehart examined shifts from materialist to postmaterialist values across societies.
- **Methodology:** Large-scale surveys and statistical modeling to identify cultural-level value trends.
- **Strengths:** Foundational for understanding societal norms, cultural differences, and macro-level value change over time.
- **Limitations for The Values Bridge's aims:** Not designed for individual reflection, alignment tracking, or personal decision-making; insights operate at a collective rather than personal motivational scale.

The Values Bridge advances the field by integrating the **scholarly rigor** of legacy frameworks with the **emotional accessibility** and **practical usability** required for individual decision-making in today's complex personal, professional, and societal landscapes.

Taken together, the development of the Values Bridge can be understood as a three-phase process:

- 1. Scholarly grounding** — Anchoring in validated motivational theory from multiple traditions.
- 2. Observational refinement** — Integrating insights from teaching, coaching, and cross-context application to reshape language and structure.
- 3. Empirical validation** — Subjecting the framework to psychometric testing, large-scale statistical calibration, and ongoing real-world feedback.

The result is a model that bridges the gap between academic rigor and lived experience: a framework that not only identifies what people care about most, but also illuminates the *authenticity gap* between values in principle and values in practice—supporting reflection, alignment, and intentional change over time. As environments, roles, and aspirations change, the Values Bridge will continue to evolve, guided by ongoing research, large-scale statistical refinement, and feedback from classrooms, coaching clients, and organizational partners.

The Authenticity Gap

One of the most distinctive contributions of The Values Bridge is its introduction of the **Authenticity Gap**—a metric that quantifies the distance between an individual’s *Ideal Life* values profile (the principles they most want to live by) and their *Real Life* values profile (the principles they perceive themselves as actually living). In other words, it measures **self-congruence**—the degree to which a person’s deeply held motivations are reflected in their daily experience (Rogers, 1961; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999).

This alignment—or lack of it—is not a cosmetic concern. It sits at the heart of personal well-being, sustained motivation, and effective decision-making.

Theoretical Foundations

The concept is anchored in a long-standing body of psychological and sociological research:

- **Carl Rogers’ humanistic theory** emphasized that congruence between self-concept and lived reality is essential for authenticity, growth, and mental health.
- **Self-Determination Theory** (Deci & Ryan, 2000) identifies autonomy, competence, and relatedness as basic psychological needs; value alignment often functions as the bridge between these needs and enduring well-being.
- **Shalom Schwartz’s research on values and behavior** (1992, 2012) demonstrates that when core values are expressed consistently in daily life, individuals report higher life satisfaction, vitality, and social integration.
- **Conversely, Milton Rokeach** (1973) and later Sagiv & Schwartz (2000) show that persistent misalignment between guiding principles and behavior correlates with stress, disengagement, and a diminished sense of purpose.

From Intuition to Measurement

Most people can sense when they are “out of alignment,” but without a concrete metric, that intuition remains vague and difficult to act upon. The Authenticity Gap translates this subjective feeling into a **clear, actionable measure**. This allows for targeted interventions that move beyond general encouragement toward precise, values-based change.

Unlike other “fit” or “alignment” measures—such as those focused narrowly on job satisfaction or organizational culture—the Authenticity Gap assesses **alignment across the full spectrum**

of life domains: work, relationships, health, community, spirituality, creativity, and more.

Practical Applications

Repeated measurement of the Authenticity Gap turns it into both a **diagnostic** and a **developmental** tool:

- **For individuals** — it provides a reality check, showing whether life changes, career moves, or relationship decisions are bringing them closer to the life they want to live—or further away.
- **For coaches and educators** — it enables tracking of progress over time, identifying where alignment is improving and where persistent gaps remain.
- **For organizations** — it offers insight into whether structural or cultural changes are supporting, undermining, or leaving untouched the values alignment of their members.

Understanding Misalignment

Misalignment can arise in two ways:

- 1. Value conflict** — when two or more personally important values compete for time, energy, or resources (e.g., Familycentrism vs. Workcentrism). This tension forces trade-offs that inevitably leave one or more values under-served.
- 2. Value suppression** — when a value is not in direct conflict with others, but environmental, cultural, or personal factors make it difficult to express (e.g., high Voice in a restrictive organizational culture; high Scope in a highly routine job).
- 3. Overexpression** — when a single value is given disproportionate time, attention, or resources, crowding out other important values (e.g., high Achievement pursued so relentlessly that Eudemonia and Belonging are neglected; high Non Sibi expressed to the point of burnout). Even a deeply held value can become a source of misalignment if its dominance undermines the broader balance of one's value system.

Conversely, harmony among values can make alignment easier to achieve and maintain. Future white papers will explore these dynamics in greater depth, particularly in relation to **value conflicts** and **value harmonies**.

In this way, the Authenticity Gap operationalizes decades of theory on congruence, autonomy, and self-determination—transforming them from abstract constructs into something measurable, monitorable, and meaningfully improvable. It enables a shift from *awareness* to *alignment*, providing a concrete pathway for individuals and organizations to close the distance between the life they live and the life they most want to lead.

Conclusion

The Values Bridge is not a static instrument—it is a living framework that will continue to evolve as it is applied with tens of thousands of people across diverse contexts. Ongoing statistical calibration, grounded in rigorous psychometric testing, will sharpen the measurement model, while continuous qualitative feedback from classrooms, coaching sessions, and organizational settings will surface new opportunities for insight. As cultural contexts shift, emerging values may be refined or added, ensuring the framework remains both scientifically rigorous and culturally relevant.

More than a snapshot of personal priorities, The Values Bridge is a **roadmap**—a way to align daily life with what matters most. By integrating decades of values research with the concepts of value-behavior congruence and the **Authenticity Gap**, it transforms abstract ideals into actionable metrics that can be measured, monitored, and improved over time.

Applied in educational, coaching, and organizational settings, The Values Bridge deepens our understanding of how values drive decision-making, shape motivation, and sustain well-being. Its iterative design ensures it remains responsive to cultural change, emerging research, and the evolving needs of those who use it.

In an era when clarity about one's values is not just personally fulfilling but strategically essential, The Values Bridge serves as both **mirror** and **guide**—reflecting who we are today, and illuminating the path toward who we aspire to become.

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