


Article

The Psychology of Financial Giving: Values Congruence and Normative Organizational Commitment as Predictors of Alumni Monetary Donations to Higher Education

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Abstract: Many universities around the world depend on financial donations to maintain and enhance their operations. We propose that donating money to an organization is a specific form of organizational citizenship behavior. We theorize that perceived values congruence between alumni and their colleges/universities and normative organizational commitment each provide motivation for people to donate money. We tested our hypotheses using alumni from a private college in the USA, measuring both the amount as well as the frequency of their donations to the college. We also measured alumni self-reports of values congruence and normative organizational commitment. We found empirical support for a positive relationship between values congruence and commitment and between commitment and financial giving. Values congruence, however, was not related to giving behavior; normative organizational commitment fully mediated the relationship between values congruence, and the alumnus' financial giving behaviors. Higher education organizations that depend on donations from members to sustain their operations might focus advancement efforts on developing a perception of values congruence in potential donors, and/or by stimulating a sense of obligation to give back to the colleges from which they have previously derived benefits.

Keywords: financial giving; values congruence; organizational commitment; higher education; social exchange



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1. Introduction

Building a motivated donor base is critical to the financial health of higher education institutions because of declining government funding and falling enrollment in the USA [1]. As the second-largest source of higher education contributions in the USA, alumni are an indispensable source of revenue for colleges and universities. In 2018, alumni giving accounted for 26% of all higher education donations, totaling USD 12.15 billion—an increase of 6.9% from 2017 [1,2]. While the total sum of alumni contributions has risen to record levels, the number of contributing alumni has declined [3]. The biggest decline in donors is among younger alumni, and advancement offices struggle to engage them to grow their donor base. If advancement efforts fail to attract younger alumni to their donor base, overall contributions in the future may worsen as older alumni cease to contribute.

To overcome these challenges, colleges and universities must build a motivated, reliable donor base to support their financial health. This is true in the USA and is becoming increasingly true in other institutions of higher education around the world (e.g., Asia, Europe). Toward that end, this study seeks to examine the psychological basis that motivates alumni to make financial donations to the colleges from which they graduated, which is not culturally or politically bound. This study is somewhat rare, as most studies of alumni donors tend to focus on donor demographics, or changes in government policy (e.g., [4,5]). We draw on well-established theories in organizational psychology to develop a model to predict giving behaviors (i.e., financial donations) and empirically test it with

data collected from a private, non-profit college and its alumni. More specifically, this study sheds light on charitable giving behaviors, as a specific type of organizational citizenship behavior, directed toward the organization (the college) as an outgrowth of the congruence (or similarity) of personal and organizational values, and donors' normative organizational commitment (a sense of obligation to an organization). We will hypothesize that the perceived congruence of one's personal values with those of the organization (college) with which one is affiliated leads to normative commitment. This in turn motivates personal giving behaviors because it is perceived as the "right thing to do". These relationships are illustrated in Figure 1.

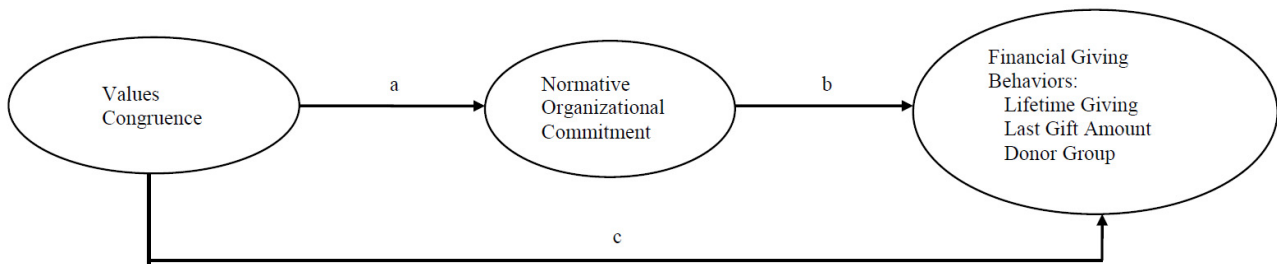


Figure 1. Illustration of hypothesized relationships between values congruence, normative organizational commitment, and giving behaviors.

We first look at values congruence and normative commitment, and their relationship to one another. Following this discussion, we focus on organizational citizenship behaviors and voluntary giving to the organization as particular types of citizenship behavior. We explore how values congruence and normative organizational commitment might predict giving behaviors. We state the study hypotheses as we elaborate on our reasoning for each. After detailing the characteristics of the study and the methods employed, we look at tests of the hypotheses and the results of our investigation. We discuss implications for theory, as well as for colleges and universities who seek to expand their alumni donor bases.

1.1. Values Congruence

Consistent with prior research [6], we define values as general beliefs about the importance of normatively desirable behaviors or end states. Individuals draw from their personal values to guide their decisions and actions, while organizational value systems provide norms that specify how organizational members should behave and how organizational resources should be allocated. Values congruence refers to the perceived similarity between values held by individuals and the organizations of which they are members [6]. Values congruence is reliably related to a number of work attitudes and behaviors, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors [7–10], as well as to a variety of non-work attitudes and behaviors, such as life satisfaction [11], support for refugees [12], and voting choices [13]. There are questions regarding the psychological processes by which values congruence actually determines these outcomes [6], and we propose one such mechanism (see below). In our study, values congruence is operationalized as the perceived match between alumnus' values and the values that they believe predominate in the college from which they graduated. It is these perceptions that are often major drivers of human behaviors.

1.2. Normative Organizational Commitment

Organizational commitment can be seen as a "psychological force that binds an individual to a course of action" [14], p. 301. It is commonplace to think of organizational commitment as multidimensional in nature. The work of Meyer and Allen [15,16] suggests that a person can be committed to maintaining a previously established relationship with an organization for three distinct reasons: (1) because it has been enjoyable, (2) because the cost of severing the relationship is more than the person is willing to pay, or (3) because it is

the right thing to do. These three psychological forces are distinct from one another. They are differentially grounded in “wanting”, “needing”, and feeling the sense that one “ought or should”; thus being labeled affective, continuance, and normative commitment, respectively.

We chose to focus on normative commitment in this study because, unlike affective and continuance commitment, normative commitment is spoken of in terms of it being the moral or right thing to do (a moral duty), or the outgrowth of a sense of indebtedness. Continuance commitment is not relevant to the present study because once a degree is awarded by an educational institution, alumni almost never decide to sever their relationship by relinquishing their degrees, as the costs would be too high. Affective commitment is an emotional attachment to an organization, and best predicts other attitudes about the organization or units within it [17,18]. Normative commitment, on the other hand, generates a feeling of obligation that is under most circumstances fulfilled through behaviors that convey value to the recipient organization [19,20]. Prior research comparing the two major forms of commitment does indicate that normative commitment relates more strongly to theoretically related behaviors than to attitudes (e.g., [21]), while the opposite is true for affective commitment [17,18]. Given our outcome variable is a relevant behavior, we reasoned that normative commitment would be more strongly predictive of it.

1.3. Values Congruence and Normative Organizational Commitment

Research on values congruence suggests that people are likely to become attached to their organizations when they perceive that they are similar to its other members [8,9,22]. When individuals fit their environment, they experience more positive and less negative affect [23]. Because the positive feelings generated by an experience or entity are valued, and people seek a balance in exchange relationships [24], as well as a need to reciprocate something of value [25], values congruence should generate a sense of obligation to the source of the positive experience (the college in our case). Values fit would be reflected in higher levels of normative organizational commitment, giving back to the organization. Consistent with this, Yao and Wang [18] found positive relationships between measures of values internalization (resulting in congruence) and the strength of the norm of reciprocity, and normative commitment. In addition, Gonzalez [22] noted that awareness that one shares self-defining attributes (such as values) with other members of an organization, and the organization as a whole, generates normative organizational commitment—a sense of obligation to continue and to enhance membership. He empirically demonstrated a substantial relationship between perceived values congruence and normative organization commitment, even after controlling for a number of other study variables. Amos and Weatherington [7] and O’Reilly et al. [26], similarly found significant relationships between values congruence and normative organizational commitment. Based upon this prior research, we propose that values congruence is causally antecedent to normative commitment.

Hypothesis 1. *There is a positive relationship between perceived values congruence and normative organizational commitment.*

1.4. Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Giving Behaviors

The origin of the construct of organizational citizenship behavior dates back at least to the writings of Katz [27] and Rothlisberger and Dickson [28], and their suggestions that organizations are fragile social systems in need of spontaneous, innovative, and cooperative behaviors of its people to sustain themselves. They are behaviors engaged in spontaneously and voluntarily, neither rewarded when they are displayed nor punished when they are not. That said, they are observable behaviors, and if consistently seen by others in the organization, they might indirectly lead to rewards (or discipline) via the organization’s performance appraisal system. The target of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) can be the organization, a particular individual, or a group of people (e.g., a work team). OCBs are acts that are not formally expected nor intended to benefit the giver other than the intrinsic reward of feeling that one is a “good soldier.” As such, these behaviors come in many

different forms as revealed by the different typologies and their inclusion of such factors as altruism, compliance, sportsmanship, civic virtue, obedience, loyalty, and participation.

The act of donating one's personal money to an organization (i.e., charitable giving) is an extreme form of OCB. In most situations, OCBs do not cause substantial personal loss to the giver. Helping a coworker, offering suggestions for improvement, or staying late to complete a project do not represent great personal sacrifices on the part of the giver. On the other hand, giving away one's discretionary funds to an organization does represent a real cost, as those funds could be used alternatively to purchase goods or services that return pleasure to the giver or to purchase necessities of life. Giving behaviors such as donating one's money is in many respects the ultimate in altruistic behaviors (just before giving one's life). In the next sections, we develop hypotheses about the psychological processes that might predict when people might do so.

1.5. Values Congruence and Normative Commitment as Antecedents of Giving Behaviors

We propose two antecedents of giving behaviors, values congruence and normative organizational commitment. As noted above, values are described as broad, stable life goals that are important to people, and which motivate many of their behaviors, thoughts, and emotions [29]. As learned beliefs, they serve as standards by which individuals judge the appropriateness and worthiness of their behaviors. To greater or lesser degrees, people behave in ways that are consistent with their values. Values congruence represents an internalization or matching of an organization's values to those held by the individual. We theorize that under conditions of high-value congruence the organization is an extension of the self, and the act of helping the organization achieve its goals (e.g., through giving) enables a person to feel like they have acted in ways that are consistent with or promote their own values. This relationship was suggested by Weerts and Ronca [30] when they proposed that personal values (about service) may motivate alumnus' behaviors more than external motivators such as solicitations. Personal values predict donations to charities [31], presumably to charities that embrace values similar to the givers' values. In addition, "[h]aving a membership that shares the organization's goals and values can ensure that individuals act instinctively to benefit the organization" [32], p. 493. That is, OCBs in general and giving behaviors specifically are direct consequences of perceived values congruence with an organization. Prior research on this relationship is sparse, but there is empirical evidence that values congruence is positively related to charitable giving to a university [33,34] as well as to non-profit organizations in general [35]. There is other empirical evidence that values congruence motivates giving behaviors. Tian and Konrath [36] performed a review of research on the similarity effect in donor research, in which people are more likely to make donations if they perceive that others who are like them also make donations. They concluded that while it is not a straightforward relationship, self-other overlap (including values similarity) predicts charitable giving. Drezner [37] studied historically black colleges and universities in the USA and found that alumni were more likely to donate money when they understood that their interests were aligned with those of the institutions. Beatty et al. [38] observed a positive relationship between personal values and gift-giving behavior in a sample of two hundred forty U.S. and Asian university students. We add to this knowledge base by proposing and empirically testing the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. *There is a positive relationship between perceived values congruence and financial giving behaviors.*

Social exchange theory has been used to explain the relationship between organization commitment (in general) and OCBs. Social exchange theory contends that employees who have satisfying experiences in or with an organization develop commitment and respond by behaving in ways that benefit the organization (i.e., OCBs). Meta-analyses of organization commitment research support robust, positive relationships between both

affective and normative organization commitment, and OCBs (e.g., [20,39–41]). There are few studies of OCBs that are discretionary, impose direct costs to the individual (money, time), and are unlikely to be personally rewarded. In a study closely related to the current one, McDearmon [42] found in an online survey of alumni at a USA university that those higher in alumni role expectations were more likely to support the university through joining the alumni association, attending university-sponsored events, and charitable giving (all measured as yes or no). Alumni role expectations were measured with a scale similar in content (e.g., “As an alumnus (a), it is my duty to support the university through financial contributions, donations or gifts”) to normative organizational commitment. Related, Weerts and Ronca [30] found that agreement with a scale item reflecting normative commitment (“Alumni should support their alma mater through volunteer service”) predicted volunteering behaviors of financial donors to the university. The current study builds upon McDearmon [42] and Weerts and Ronca [30] by using archival records of the amount and consistency of financial contributions to a college, as opposed to self-reports of financial giving or volunteering. We also examine theoretical antecedents of normative commitment (see below).

Other research also suggests a relationship between normative commitment and giving behaviors. Borden, Shaker, and Kienker [43] found that indicators of alumni commitment to a university predicted actual donations to the university, and suggested the relationships be examined with measures of commitment. Francioni et al. [32] found that commitment to an American university predicted positive attitudes toward donations to the university. Mainardes et al. [44] conducted a qualitative study in Brazil and found that behavioral factors, which included a sense of obligation to the target organization (as well as identification with its causes and its perceived similarity with the donor), were the strongest predictors of charitable donations. Boezeman and Ellemers [45] found that normative organization commitment was positively related to volunteer work for charities and that it mediated the relationship between pride in the charity’s mission (conceptually related to values congruence), and volunteering one’s time. Neumayr and Handy [46] found that religiosity, which includes a “duty to help” others, predicted overall donations to eight different types of charities (but not to “culture and education”). Maruping et al. [47] found that commitment to a software community (a form of normative commitment) predicted volunteering one’s time to develop the software. Mierzwa [48] studied 420 churchgoers and observed a significant relationship between normative commitment and attendance, participation, and financial giving, while controlling for the effects of age, income, and tenure. It has also been noted by Li et al. [49] that regardless of giving form (e.g., time, money, blood), OCBs such as the ones in this study are largely driven by one’s normative commitment (that it is the “right thing to do”). Thus, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3. *There is a positive relationship between normative organizational commitment and financial giving behaviors.*

1.6. The Mediated Relationship

In the sections above, we delineate our reasoning for positing positive relationships between values congruence and normative organization commitment (H1), giving behaviors (H2), and normative organization commitment and giving behaviors (H3). Combining these relationships, we further propose that the effects of values congruence on giving behaviors are in part due to the effect that values congruence has on normative organizational commitment, which itself is theorized to affect giving behaviors. While our study is non-experimental, precluding firm conclusions about causality, positive relationships between measures of the constructs, as well as a positive indirect effect, would provide some support for our model. Thus, our final hypothesis in this study is:

Hypothesis 4. *Normative organizational commitment mediates the positive relationships between perceived values congruence and financial giving behaviors.*

2. Method

2.1. Sample and Study Design

This study was carried out in cooperation with the advancement office of a private liberal arts college located in the upper mid-western USA. The office was interested in the psychological processes that predict alumni financial giving to the college. Participants were recruited from their alumni database. At time one, email invitations to complete a survey were sent to 7074 randomly selected alumni, out of a population of over 22,000 alumni. We could not send the invitation to all alumni because the advancement office routinely surveyed their alumni, and did so with subsets of the total population. This practice alleviated the burden of completing multiple surveys from the advancement office each year. Our sampling procedure, controlled by the host college, reflected this practice.

Research Ethics

In a study like this, it is essential that participants be promised and given anonymity of their data. People generally feel a violation of their privacy when personal information is divulged to third parties without their permission [50]. We went to great lengths to preserve this anonymity. Alumni completed online measures of the study's main predictor (perceived values congruence) and mediating (normative organizational commitment) variables, as well as an informed consent form. The email invitation included a "Unique Identification Number", which was the number associated with each alumnus in the advancement office database. At the end of the survey, participants were asked to enter this number to enable the researchers to match their survey data to other data, as well as to any possible future surveys. Participants were free to identify themselves with this number, or they could leave that survey section blank. Out of 369 useable surveys, 286 (77.5%) voluntarily provided this number. At time two, approximately four months after completion of the online surveys, the host college provided a database of all alumni which included their financial donations to the college, and participants' self-reported numbers were matched with their information in the database. As a result, personal identities were unknown to both the researchers and the host college. This method of participant identification was approved by the host college's ethics board (IRB) as well as another ethics board (IRB) at one of the authors' institutions.

Table 1 reports the demographic characteristics of the final sample. Ns vary slightly due to missing data.

2.2. Variables and Their Measurement

Values Congruence. We adapted O'Reilly and Chatman's [33] five-item index of values internalization to assess values congruence. Specifically, all items make reference to a relationship between the organization's values (what it stands for) and those of the individual responding to the questionnaire. Sample items are "If the values of [college name] were different I would not be as attached to this organization", and "My attachment to [college name] is primarily based on the similarity of my values and those represented by the college". These items were assessed on seven-point Likert-type scales, anchored from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Normative Organizational Commitment. We adapted Meyer and Allen's [16] seven-item scale to measure normative organizational commitment. Sample items are "[The college] deserves my loyalty", and "I ought to give more of myself to [the college]". These items were assessed with seven-point Likert-type scales, anchored from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Member (Alumni) Giving Behaviors. The three outcome variables in this study reflect different aspects of organizational citizenship behaviors. First, we obtained data on the total amount of money that had been donated to the college since the alumnus graduated (Lifetime Giving). This measure indexes the magnitude or amount of discretionary financial giving to the college (this was adjusted for the number of years after graduation; see below). Second, we obtained information on the size of the alumnus' most recent gift (in the year of

the survey). This represents the citizenship behavior closest in time to the collection of the self-report data, though some contributions could have been made up to six months prior to the online survey. The third index was called “Donor Group” by the college and represents the consistency of giving behaviors by the alumnus. Each alumnus was categorized into one of four categories: 1 = Never; 2 = Long Lapse; 3 = Periodic; 4 = Regular. Higher scores thus reflect how consistently alumni made financial contributions to the college. The use of archival data on giving behaviors overcomes problems associated with self-reports about the frequency and amounts of donations to non-profit organizations [51].

We also collected demographic data from the advancement office’s database: graduation year, sex, age, marital status, race/ethnicity, and the highest level of education.

Table 1. Demographics of the final sample.

Age		Frequency	Cumulative Percent
	18–24	38	10.1
	25–34	73	29.5
	35–44	61	45.7
	45–54	45	57.7
	55–64	42	68.9
	65–74	81	90.4
	75–84	34	99.5
	85 or older	2	100.0
	Total	376	
Sex		Frequency	Cumulative Percent
	Female	215	57.3
	Male	156	98.9
	Prefer not to say	4	100.0
	Total	375	
Education		Frequency	Cumulative Percent
	4-year degree	126	33.8
	Masters level	149	73.7
	Doctorate	98	100.0
	Total	373	
Marital Status		Frequency	Cumulative Percent
	Married	211	56.7
	Widowed	14	60.5
	Divorced	21	66.1
	Separated	1	66.4
	Never married	100	93.3
	Partnered	25	100.0
	Total	372	
Ethnicity/Race		Frequency	Cumulative Percent
	White non-Hispanic	319	86.0
	Black or African American non-Hispanic	6	87.6
	American Indian or Alaska Native	1	87.9
	Asian	17	92.5
	Other	17	97.0
	White Hispanic	10	99.7
	Black Hispanic	1	100.0
	Total	371	

2.3. Analyses

Mediation hypotheses provide strong tests of theory because they address the *how* of X to Y relationships [52]. The test for mediation involves calculating the product of the predictor variable to the mediator pathway (labeled “a” in Figure 1) and the mediator to outcome pathway (labeled “b” in Figure 1). Because this parameter is not normally distributed, 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals are estimated. If the confidence interval excludes zero, the mediation parameter is considered statistically significant (at $p < 0.05$). We used OLS regression to test our hypotheses, employing the PROCESS macro for SPSS to facilitate mediation parameter estimation and testing [52].

3. Results

Before testing hypotheses, confirmatory factor analyses were conducted on the values congruence and normative organizational commitment self-report measures, to assess their dimensionality (using the Mplus v8.4 software, Muthén & Muthén: Los Angeles, CA, USA; [53]). The two-factor model was a good fit to the data (RMSEA = 0.08; CFI = 0.95; TLI = 0.94; SRMR = 0.05), and significantly better than a model forcing all items to load on a single factor (RMSEA = 0.21; CFI = 0.69; TLI = 0.63; SRMR = 0.14).

Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of the study variables. Because the variances for both lifetime giving and most recent gift (in dollars) were over 100,000 (causing computational problems), as well as highly skewed and kurtotic, raw data were transformed by a square-root transformation. This transformation reduced skewness from 6.21 to 2.77 and kurtosis from 50.88 to 9.22 for lifetime giving. Similarly, skewness was reduced from 5.26 to 2.97 and kurtosis from 32.65 to 9.91 for the last gift data. Descriptive statistics and correlations for both the raw and transformed data are reported in Table 2, as recommended by Becker et al. [54]. The reduction of skewness and kurtosis increased the magnitude of the correlations for the transformed variables. Finally, because income correlates positively with years participating in the workforce, and people with higher income have more discretionary money to donate to organizations, and more opportunities (years) to donate, the number of years since participants graduated from the college was used as a covariate in all tests of hypotheses (reported below).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and intercorrelations of study variables.

Variables	Mean	SD	N	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Values Congruence	5.45	1.22	369	(0.87)							
2. Normative Organizational Commitment	4.86	1.40	368	0.43 **	(0.92)						
3. Lifetime Giving	8637.47	25,515.68	286	−0.07	0.10	1.00					
4. Square Root Lifetime Giving	55.86	74.41	286	−0.00	0.21 **	0.90 **	1.00				
5. Last Gift	392.58	1216.48	286	0.00	0.19 **	0.54 **	0.61 **	1.00			
6. Square Root Last Gift	11.68	16.04	286	0.00	0.23 **	0.58 **	0.73 **	0.93 **	1.00		
7. Donor Group	3.40	0.82	282	0.25 **	0.52 **	0.15 **	0.32 **	0.15 *	0.24 **	1.00	
8. Years Since Graduation	24.77	18.51	285	−0.03	0.12 *	0.30 **	0.50 **	0.26 **	0.41 **	0.10	1.00

Sample reliability estimates (coefficient alpha) appear on the diagonal in parentheses for the self-report measures. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

Table 3 reports the results for tests of hypotheses. H1 stated that there would be a positive relationship between values congruence and normative organizational commitment. This hypothesis was supported as the standardized regression coefficient for the relationship between values congruence and normative organizational commitment is 0.48 ($p < 0.01$). H2 stated that there would be positive relationships between perceived values congruence, and each of the three outcome measures. This hypothesis was not supported, as the regression coefficients between values congruence and lifetime giving,

last gift, and donor group are statistically non-significant ($p > 0.05$) after controlling for variance associated with normative commitment. H2 was not supported. H3 stated that there would be positive relationships between normative organizational commitment and each of the three outcome measures. The tests of H3 are conservative, as they are estimated with the predictor variable (values congruence) in the regression equation. This hypothesis was supported by significant regression coefficients between normative organizational commitment and lifetime giving ($\beta = 0.17$; $p < 0.01$), last gift ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$), and donor group ($\beta = 0.50$; $p < 0.01$). H4, the main hypothesis in this study, predicted that normative organization commitment would mediate the relationship between values congruence and the outcome variables. This hypothesis was supported because the parameter estimates for the mediation effects ($a \times b$) were all statistically significant, for lifetime giving ($\beta = 0.06$; $p < 0.05$), last gift ($\beta = 0.08$; $p < 0.05$), and donor group ($\beta = 0.19$; $p < 0.05$). Because all of the direct relationships between values congruence and the outcomes were nonsignificant, this implies that the relationship between values congruence and the outcomes are fully mediated by normative organization commitment.

Table 3. Results for tests of Hypotheses 1 through 4.

Predictor	Mediator	Outcome	a	b	c	a × b (95% CI)
Values Congruence	Normative Organizational Commitment	Lifetime Giving	0.38 **	0.17 **	−0.05	0.06 * (0.02, 0.12)
Values Congruence	Normative Organizational Commitment	Last Gift Amount	0.38 **	0.20 **	−0.05	0.08 * (0.03, 0.13)
Values Congruence	Normative Organizational Commitment	Donor Group	0.38 **	0.50 **	0.06	0.19 * (0.12, 0.27)

See Figure 1 for illustrations of the a, b, and c pathways. Mediation parameter estimates ($a \times b$) are all significant at $p < 0.05$ (bootstrapped 95% CI excludes zero). * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

4. Discussion

In this study, we based our hypotheses on extensive research literature on values congruence, organizational commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors to predict financial giving to higher education. We employed a research design that combined alumni self-report data with the college's archival data, including the consistency and amount of money donated to the college by alumni. Most of the study hypotheses were supported. Values congruence was substantially and positively related to normative organizational commitment, suggesting that the belief that one shares personal values with those of the organization results in a sense of obligation to the organization. Those members who derive a sense of worth and cohesiveness from shared values develop a belief that they need to reciprocate, to “pay back” this positive affective state by doing something good for the organization in exchange. It should also be noted that because organizations are fragile social systems, having people within them who share the organization's values can be extremely important and beneficial in the near term as well (i.e., when members are still students).

Normative organizational commitment is positively related to actual donations of money to the organization. The importance of this finding should not be underestimated. Human behavior is difficult to predict, and behaviors such as donating money are especially difficult because of the direct costs incurred by the donor, a force that operates against engaging in the behaviors. A donor is in effect exchanging extrinsic rewards for intrinsic rewards. Normative organizational commitment also mediated the relationship between values congruence and giving behaviors. The implications of this finding are discussed below.

The act of donating money to a college from which one has been separated for several years (the average was almost 25 years in this study), makes this a very weak situation in which to predict behavior [55]. In weak situations, external factors (such as organizational policies) play less of a role in determining behavior, while internal factors (such as normative organizational commitment) take on a larger role. The challenge in weak situations is to

identify those psychological variables that predict the focal behaviors. In this study, we found that normative commitment predicted the magnitude of donations as well as their consistency. Notably, the relationship between normative organization commitment and donor group (consistency) was substantially larger than the analogous ones for lifetime giving and last gift. Other factors (such as disposable income) may mitigate against large donations, but the desire to donate does not subside. For some alumni, it seemed that their sense of obligation did not erode over time, consistent with much research in social psychology (e.g., [56]). It would seem that once achieved, high levels of normative organizational commitment pay dividends to the focal organization for long periods of time.

There is a great need for more empirical research on the psychological motivations for giving behaviors, and this study sheds light on one process by which people might be motivated to part with their valued, personal assets. Besides replicating our results, future research should explore other psychological aspects of giving behaviors. Expanding on our findings, research might explore moderating variables that strengthen the relationships between values congruence and normative organization commitment, for example, the particular values that are shared (e.g., sustainability; [35]). Alternatively, there might be ways to strengthen the normative commitment and giving behavior relationship. Prior research may provide clues, such as enhancing alumni involvement (e.g., [5]). Other OCBs should be studied as well, such as donating time, sharing creative thoughts, and assuming volunteer leadership positions, that might evolve from the experience of values congruence between an organizational member and his/her organization.

The motivations and types of giving (or generosity) behaviors vary around the world [57]. It is also important to study the relationships between values congruence, normative organizational commitment, and giving behaviors in other cultures and contexts. Some of the research cited above was conducted in countries besides the USA (e.g., Brazil, Netherlands). Still, it appears that cultures play a role in the motivation to donate. For example, Wright [58] concluded that people in the UK donate to charities out of a sense of altruism, while people in the USA are more likely to donate because “giving is an expression of personal and social identity goals” (p. 413). Values congruence might explain why people in the USA give more to higher education than they do in the UK, and many other countries as well (e.g., China; [59]). While the normative organizational commitment–OCB relationship is believed to be universal, it may be that culture (including predominant religion; [60]) and context (e.g., tax policies on donations) could weaken or strengthen the relationships.

4.1. Implications

The substantial roles that values congruence and normative organizational commitment appear to play in predicting alumni donations to colleges have important implications for institutions of higher education. Colleges and universities can enhance the normative organizational commitment of students and alumni by ensuring that they appreciate the value of their college education and experiences, including the lifelong friendships that were developed while at college. One way this is done in the USA is by sending alumni periodic magazines and/or newsletters highlighting the successes, and personal relationships, that featured alumni have achieved in their lives. Because of the norm of reciprocity, the greater the perceived value of what was received from the college positively predicts how much is later given back to the college. Our finding that values congruence predicted normative organizational commitment also has implications for higher education. While there are many reliable predictors of normative organizational commitment [9,10], most of them are not under the control of most colleges and universities for their alumni (e.g., supervision quality, job design, pay). Enhancement of values congruence for students who later become alumni is one factor that can, to some extent, be promoted by colleges [61,62]. Whatever values are embraced by the college/university should be made explicit to all stakeholders, and the curriculum that students experience should clearly show how they can demonstrate those values in their lives after graduation.

Note that we are not encouraging higher education institutions to use our results in manipulative ways. For example, it might be tempting for colleges to select applicants who already possess values that the college endorses. While this might ultimately result in greater donations to the college, it would also deny some students the opportunity to develop broader culturally embraced values that promote harmony within societies (e.g., diversity and inclusion). Given that most colleges and universities aspire to develop the minds of students so that they become effective, contributing members of society, it would be short-sighted to focus only on applicants who already possess the appropriate values.

4.2. Limitations

Our study has a number of strengths, including measurement of actual monetary donations to the college, as opposed to self-reports of donations which might be biased. In addition, the hypothesized antecedents to giving behaviors were measured prior to the measurement of the consequence (giving behaviors). That said, this is a non-experimental study and reports only covariations between variables. The major threat to the internal validity of the study is the omission of other causal variables. For example, it might be that values congruence and normative organization commitment are confounded with some other unknown causal factor, rendering our findings spurious. Still, our theorizing is based on substantial prior research on values congruence, commitment, and citizenship behaviors, and predicting a mediated causal pathway lessens the likelihood that our results are spurious [52]. Nevertheless, future researchers might attempt to replicate and expand on our results by employing an experimental design in which values congruence and normative organizational commitment are manipulated (e.g., with scenarios), and their effects on intended donation amount and frequency are determined.

A second potential limitation of our study is that common methods variance might account for the significant relationship between values congruence and normative commitment. This is a problem endemic to any research that requires self-reports of non-observable psychological processes that are known only to the participant. That said, two features of our study make this less likely to be a problem. First, the confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated two factors (values congruence and normative commitment) were a significantly better fit to the raw data than one common factor. Second, because the indirect effect parameter is a product of two direct relationships, it is less likely to be biased by common method variance [52].

A third limitation of our study is that we used a convenience sample, which limits our ability to generalize to the population of all college alumni. We studied alumni from a small, private college in the USA. Future research that examines our hypotheses with alumni from different cultures and types of colleges/universities (e.g., large vs. small, public vs. private) can assess the degree to which our results generalize to other alumni populations.

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