

# **Personality and the Structure of Resource Preferences**

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## Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to explore relations between individual preferences for resources and personality traits. For measuring resources we used the questionnaire "Persönliche Wunschvorstellungen" (Stangl 1989a) - a German version of the "Inventory of Wishes for Interpersonal Resources" (Foa and Bosman 1979), which is based on a taxonomy of resource classes (love, services, goods, money, information, status) proposed by resource theory (Foa and Foa 1974). Four groups (clusters) of persons could be found: Group **A** is characterized by a high need for love and a low need for money (idealistic, particularistic), group **B** by high needs for goods and money and a low need for love (materialistic, non-particularistic), group **C** by a high need for status and a low need for information, and group **D** by high needs for goods and money and a low need for status. The results of personality testing of the subjects in these four groups support our interpretation, as the first type (A) is highly interpersonal orientated and has high sociability, the latter (B) is more self-assertive, pragmatic, and highly independent. The subjects of cluster D are also materialistically orientated but they are more initiative and active than the persons of cluster B. The persons in cluster C with high interpersonal orientation show lower ego strength and seek for social acceptance.

## **Introduction and Theoretical Background**

Most empirical studies of interactional processes (e.g., bargaining, interpersonal conflict, conflict resolution, coalition research, behavior modification) involve some interpersonal resources as independent variables, outcomes, or both (Turner, Foa and Foa 1971). In general, resources can be defined as anything that can be transmitted from one person to another (Foa and Foa 1974, 1976). "This definition is broad enough to include things as different as a smile, a check, a haircut, a newspaper, a reproachful glance, and a loaf of bread" (Foa and Foa 1976: 101).

"Resources are obtained through social exchanges and the availability or non-availability influences one's well-being, happiness, and satisfaction with interpersonal relations. From an objective standpoint, the ability to function effectively as a member of society depends on the possession of social capabilities, i.e., specific resources. Many problems of mutual adjustment and social adequacy may be conceptualized in terms of possession and need for resources. In order to assess the functionality of a particular social institution of the society on the whole as well as that of an individual, it seems necessary to study the extent to which needs for resources exist, and to which extent specific resources are possessed and used in social contexts" (Stangl 1989a: 140).

This paper outlines a study in resource theory (Foa and Foa 1974, 1976; Stangl 1989a) using the questionnaire PW ("Persönliche Wunschvorstellungen"; Stangl 1989a) - a German version of the "Inventory of Wishes for Interpersonal Resources" (IWIR; Foa and Bosman 1979). The PW and IWIR are based on the taxonomy of resource classes proposed by resource theory. This taxonomic system is a structural model of the relative degree of cognitive differentiation of various interpersonal resources (Turner, Foa and Foa 1971: 169). The theoretical

formulation of Foa and Foa (1974, 1976), extending previous work of Foa (1961, 1964), proposes a grouping of resources into six classes ordered along their similarity. The proposed order is circular; the ordering follows two general conceptual orthogonal dimensions (Stangl 1989a: 141). In Figure 1 the theoretical structure of resources is presented.

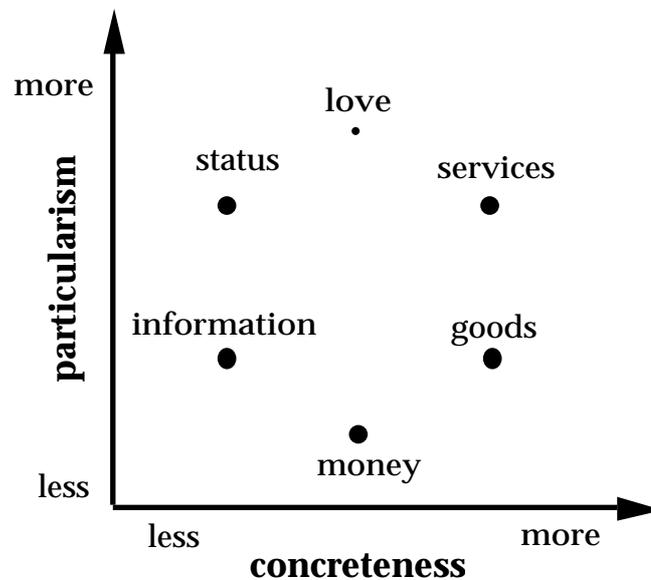


Fig. 1. The cognitive structure of resource classes.

- *Love* is an expression of affectionate regard, warmth or comfort;
- *services* involve activities that affect the body or belongings of a person and that often constitute labor for another;
- *goods* are tangible products, objects, or materials;
- *money* is any coin, currency, or token that has some standard unit of exchange value;
- *information* includes advice, opinions, instruction, or enlightenment;
- *status* indicates an evaluative judgment that conveys prestige, regard, or esteem.
- *Particularism* (versus universalism), the first conceptual dimension for ordering the classes in a circular way, is derived from writings of Parsons (1951)

and Longabaugh (1963) and refers to the interpersonal orientation of the resource. It is similar to Blau's (1967) notion of intrinsic and extrinsic reward. Foa and Foa (1974) have emphasized the significance of the particularism-universalism (target-specific/target-general) dimension in the structural analysis of social behavior (Adamopoulos 1984). The amount of particularism indicates the extent to which the value of a resource is influenced by the particular person involved in the exchange. Love is the most particularistic resource, and it refers to the extent to which the value of a resource is influenced by the particular person who delivers it. The most universalistic resource, money, however, is in general independent from the reinforcing agent and recipient. The other classes of resources are more or less particularistic according to their position on this dimension; service and status are less particularistic than love, but more than goods and information.

- *Concreteness* (versus symbolism) specifies the form or type of expression characteristic of the resources. Services and goods involve the exchange of some overtly tangible activity or product, therefore they are classed as concrete. Status and information, on the other hand, are typically conveyed by verbal or paralinguistic behaviors and are thus highly symbolic. The remaining resources, love and money, are exchanged in concrete and symbolic forms.

The categorization of a particular resource is an act of individual evaluation. This process is closely related to the cognitive structure of the particular subject, and its experiences in the past with this specific behavior, generally speaking, the individual learning history. It is hypothesized, that people differ in the kinds of resources they prefer to exchange in differing social situations. The preference for distinct resources is hypothesized to vary with the cognitive structure of the subjects, an important component of personality, which must not be neglected in psychological investigations on economic and social processes and relations.

Turner, Foa and Foa (1971: 168) point out that any resource is a potential reinforcer. Certainly, resources and their classification are no "objective" detectable facts and relations, but rather pertain to the meaning which is assigned or attributed to behaviors by the persons involved. Foa and Foa (1974: 82) emphasize, that "we should remember that the resource classes are categories of the meanings assigned to actions and not a classification of action". It is often the case that the same behavior will vary in meaning across different social contexts (Turner, Foa and Foa 1971).

Attributions of meaning are individual matters, which indicates that the value and the importance of a resource depends first of all on the individual learning history and experiences of a person. The result of these individual experiences is the evaluation of a resource, which can be measured by the preference for a given resource. Therefore, we attempted to identify patterns of preferences for resources given and the relation of the patterns to personality structures. It is hypothesized that people differ with respect to their resource preference profiles. That means that groups of persons can be found who are similar with respect to their needs for exchanging particular resources. Such groups or types of persons can be interpreted in accordance with personality traits.

## **Methods**

The questionnaire PW included six situations (institutions), which differ with respect to the resources usually exchanged in them. These situations are: employment (status), hairdressers (service), insurance (money), partnership (love), school or training (information), stores (goods). In each institution six statements are presented, one for each resource class. At the outset of the questionnaire a try-out situation (family of birth) is included, which is excluded from the computation of preference scores. The questionnaire uses a graphic

(symbolic) presentation of the steps of scale. Symbolic representation has proved its value in previous questionnaire constructions, especially with respect to (interval) scalability. For the computation of individual scores, the symbols are codified in numbers: 1 (not at all desirable) to 5 (very desirable). In addition, the six ratings corresponding to a distinct resource class are averaged so that a higher score indicates a greater preference for a particular resource. This average score can be computed by the mean of a scoring sheet (Stangl 1989a).

Additional to the PW, the ESV ("Eigenschaften-Situationen-Verhaltensweisen" - "Adjectives-Situations-Behaviors"; Stangl 1989b) was administered to the subjects. The ESV consists of 3 x 16 contrasting pairs of adjective groups, situations, and behavior groups for a self-rating of personality. Sixteen personality factors can be computed, each containing a situation, an adjective, and a behavior rating on a scale from 1 through to 5. These scales are derived from the German version of the 16 PF (Schneewind, Schröder and Cattell 1983) and represent a further development of the PKP ("Polaritätsprofil zur Erfassung der kindlichen Persönlichkeit" - "Semantic differential for measuring child personality"; Stangl 1986) and of the 16 PA ("Sechzehn Persönlichkeits-Adjektivskalen" - "Sixteen Personality-Adjective-Scales"; Brandstätter 1988). Additionally, these 16 factors can be combined to 5 second order factors (see Table 1).

To reduce the data, a hierarchical cluster analysis was used in addition to the correlative measures. The Wardian (1963) clustering algorithm applied in this study uses the squared Euclidian distances between the individual resource preference profiles as a similarity index. A class (group, type) of persons is defined as a clustering of objects wherein every object in the class is more similar to every other member of the class than it is to any object placed outside the class. This algorithm produces clusters of persons that are highly homogeneous and distinct

from one another. To recheck (cross validate) the classification of cluster analysis, a discriminant analysis was performed. Sixty percent of the sample was used to compute a linear combination of the six preference scores. The discriminant function coefficients were used to predict the cluster membership of the unselected cases.

## **Subjects**

The PW and the ESV were administered to a stratified sample of 183 subjects in Oberösterreich (Austria). Mean age of this sample was 33 years (range 15 to 71 years), 89 male, 94 female. The distribution according to the size of communities, educational level and occupational status are corresponding to the population of Oberösterreich. Testing was conducted in single sessions by the author, by psychologists working in a child guidance institution, and by students of economics.

## **Results and Discussion**

To obtain interrelations between resource preferences and personality factors, product-moment correlations between preferences for resources and ESV factors were computed. Six primary factors and three second order factors show interpretable interrelations with preference scores. The signs of coefficients in a particular personality factor are in the same direction for all resource preferences (Table 1).

### **Table 1**

Correlations between primary and second order personality factors of the ESV with preference scores. Pearson product-moment correlations significant at a level of  $p \leq 0,05$  are printed bold.

Personality factors	Preference factors					
	Love	Services	Goods	Money	Information	Status
task vs interpersonal orientation	,11	,12	<b>,15</b>	-,07	,06	,12
concrete vs abstract thinking	-,10	-,03	,05	,01	-,07	,01
emotional irritability vs resistance	,04	,04	,02	,08	,06	,03
social adaptation vs self assertiveness	-,07	,05	-,03	-,03	-,09	-,09
soberness vs enthusiasm	,06	,04	,00	-,09	-,04	,00
flexibility vs sense of duty	<b>,26</b>	<b>,38</b>	<b>,25</b>	<b>,25</b>	<b>,28</b>	<b>,31</b>
restraint vs self-assurance	,09	-,01	,10	-,03	,07	,11
robustness vs sensitivity	<b>-,15</b>	<b>-,17</b>	<b>-,20</b>	<b>-,24</b>	<b>-,18</b>	<b>-,21</b>
confidentiality vs scepticism	-,13	-,03	-,06	,12	-,07	-,04
pragmatism vs unconventionality	-,13	<b>-,16</b>	<b>-,22</b>	<b>-,21</b>	<b>-,15</b>	<b>-,15</b>
openness vs deliberation	-,04	,09	,04	,11	-,03	,00
self-confidence vs anxiety	-,10	<b>-,21</b>	<b>-,14</b>	-,08	<b>-,20</b>	-,12
conservatism vs radicalism	-,10	<b>-,20</b>	-,13	<b>-,14</b>	-,10	<b>-,14</b>
group adherence vs autonomy	<b>-,23</b>	<b>-,23</b>	<b>-,17</b>	<b>-,15</b>	<b>-,16</b>	-,13
spontaneity vs self-control	,01	,11	,03	,10	,02	,08
low vs high ergic tension	-,12	-,11	-,05	-,05	-,13	-,11
constraint to norms	,13	<b>,27</b>	<b>,19</b>	<b>,22</b>	<b>,15</b>	<b>,19</b>
level of endurance	<b>,16</b>	<b>,15</b>	,13	,05	<b>,18</b>	<b>,16</b>
independence	-,02	,02	,01	-,02	-,04	,00
strength of purpose	,03	,10	,07	<b>,23</b>	,08	,06
sociability	<b>,20</b>	,12	<b>,18</b>	,04	<b>,14</b>	<b>,15</b>

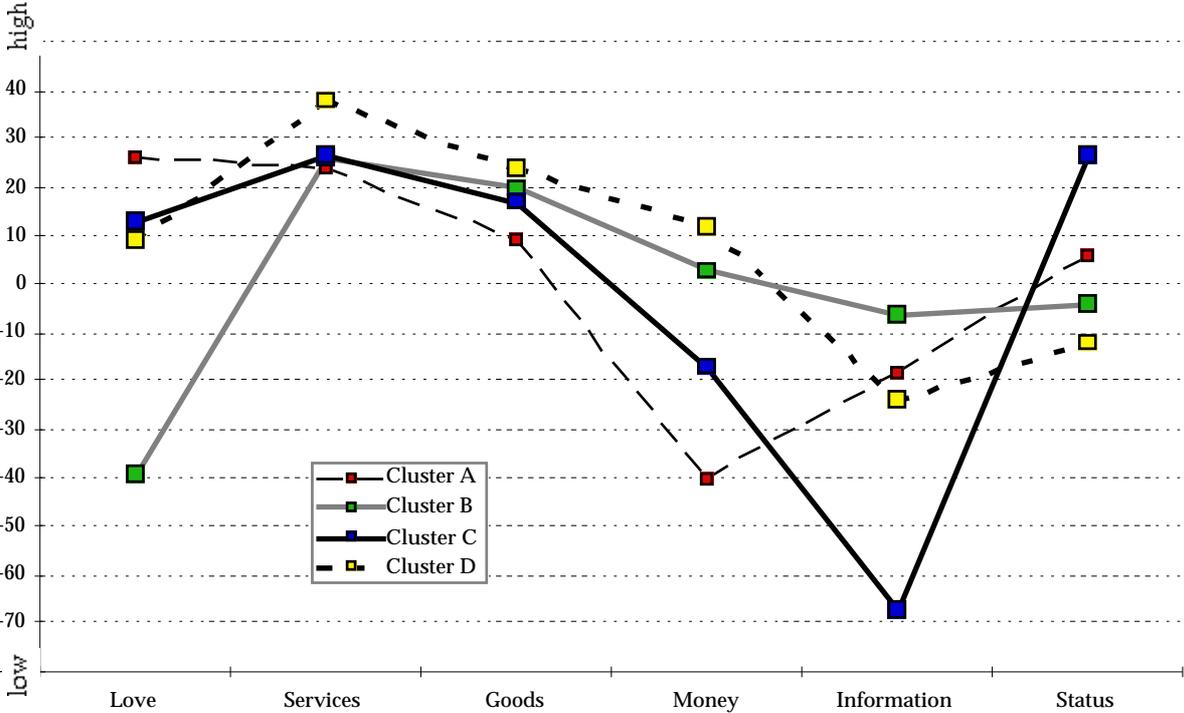
### People with high preference scores

- are more conscious of their duties,
- show high group adherence and high sociability,
- are more pragmatic and robust,
- are self confident and have a high level of endurance.
- are more conservative, and
- are more conforming.

In general, people with high preferences for resources - irrespective of resource class - are optimistic, "look at the sunny side of the things", and have developed appropriate social skills for exchanges of resources. On the other hand, people with weaker needs for resources are more anxious and cautious, especially in social contacts, but they are more independent and autonomous.

To reduce the complexity of the data, a cluster analysis was used to identify classes, groups or types of persons with similar preference profiles. Visual inspection of the increase of the squared error sums (weighted distances from centroids), which is usually taken as a criterion for defining the number of clusters, resulted in four clusters. Figure 2 presents graphically the resource preferences for these groups.

Fig. 2. Resource preferences profiles of four clusters.



**Cluster A** is characterized by a high need for love and a low need for money.

**Cluster B** is characterized by high needs for goods and money and a low need for love.

**Cluster C** is characterized by a high need for status and a low need for information.

**Cluster D** is characterized by high needs for goods and money and a low need for status.

The cluster solution reveals the second order structure of resource theory.

Cluster A and cluster B are opponents with respect to particularism, the first corresponds to an idealistic position and the second to a more materialistic view of the world. In like manner, cluster C and cluster D are opponents with respect to the concreteness dimension. The cross validation of clustering using the algorithm described above, resulted in a correct classification of 86 percent, a number far greater than chance (24 percent). In summary, the cluster analysis of resource preference profiles reveals structurally characterized groups of subjects, and proves the conceptual orthogonal dimensions of the theoretical model.

Using the same clustering of persons reflecting the similarity of resource preference profiles, the ESV-profiles of the 16 primary and 5 second order factors measured by the ESV are reported.

Fig. 3. Personality profiles (primary factors) of four clusters.

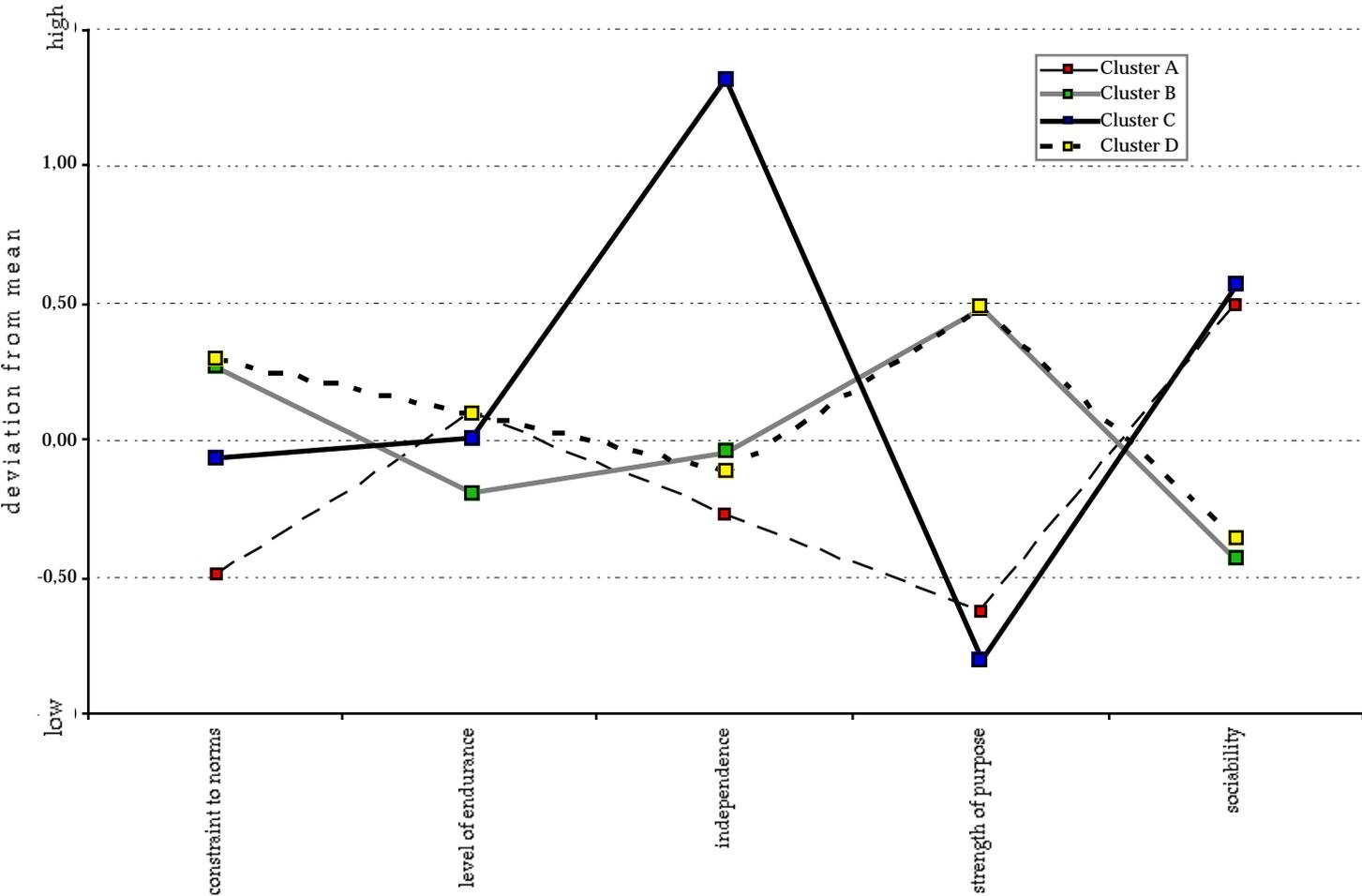
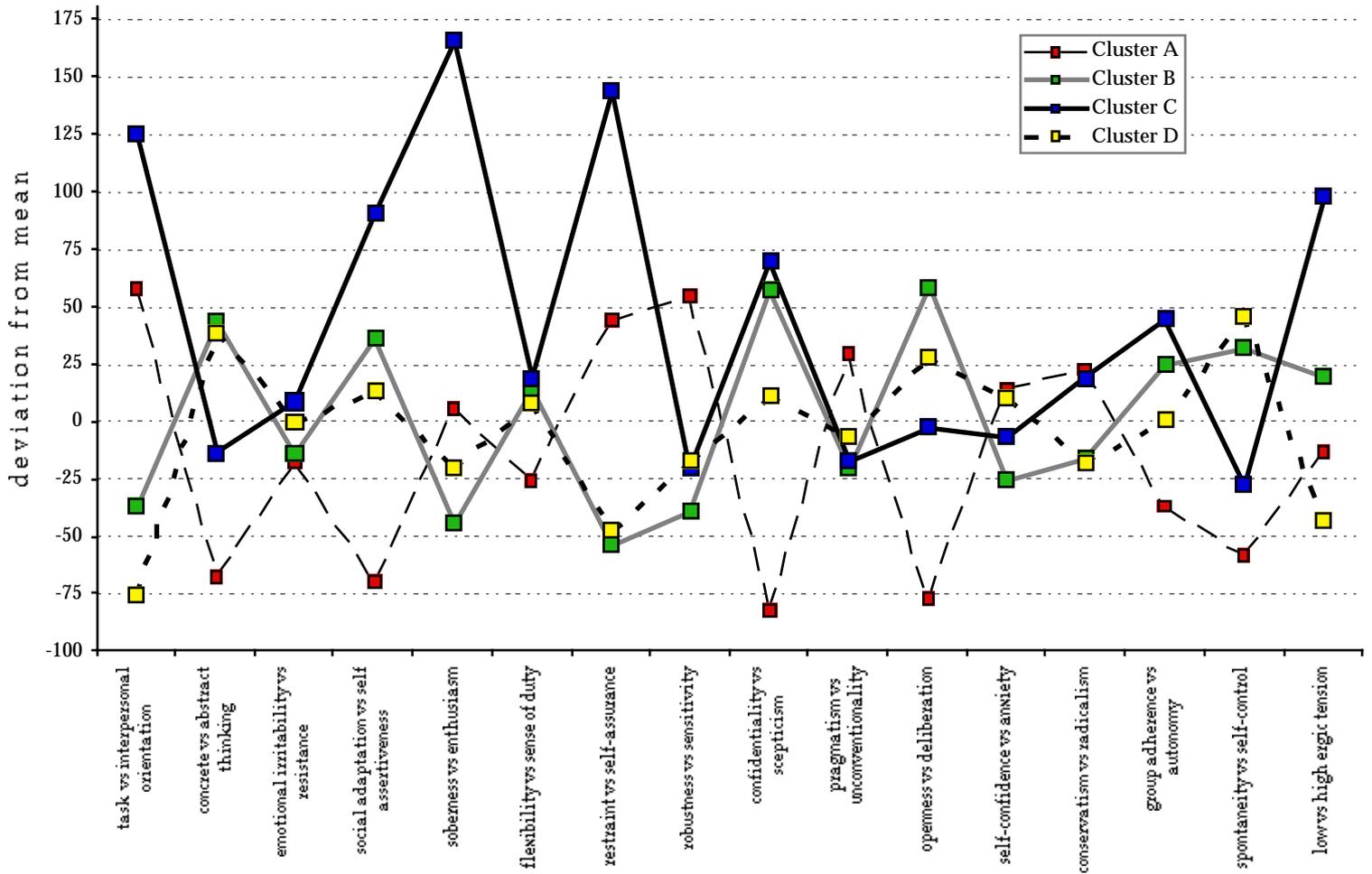


Fig. 4. Personality profiles (second order factors) of four clusters.



The above groups of persons could be characterized with respect to their personality profile like this:

**Cluster A** (love, no money): interpersonal orientation, concrete thinking, social adaptation, sensitivity, confidentiality, openness, spontaneity; low strength of purpose, low constraint to norms, high sociability.

**Cluster B** (goods and money, no love): restraint, scepticism, deliberation; high strength of purpose, low sociability.

**Cluster C** (status, no information): interpersonal orientation, enthusiasm, self-assurance, scepticism, high ego tension; high independence, high sociability, low strength of purpose.

**Cluster D** (goods and money, no status): task orientation, restraint, self-control, low ego tension; high strength of purpose, low sociability.

The personality self-rating scores of subjects in cluster A (idealistic) and B (materialistic) support the above interpretation as the first type is highly interpersonal oriented and has high sociability, the latter is more self-assertive, pragmatic, and highly independent. As the subjects in cluster B the subjects of cluster D are materialistically oriented but they are more initiative and active than the latter ones. The persons in cluster C with their interpersonal orientation show lower ego strength and seem to seek for social acceptance.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Economic psychology deals with preferences and factors influencing these, it attempts to discover systematic relationships between economic variables and psychological variables. Economic and noneconomic resources intertwine in societal functioning of an individual. The ability to function as a competent member of society is influenced by the possession and lack of resources. Scarcity of particularistic resources often results in economic losses, and economic gains

may produce particularistic losses. An adequate assessment of the quality of life should provide indicators that will cover the whole range of resources, since we have learned that quality of life can be poor even when the gross national product is high (Foa and Foa 1976).

Resource theory is a theoretical model which combines economic variables (money, goods) with psychological variables (love, status) and allows an universalistic view of individual needs and exchange processes. In addition, Foa, Salcedo, Tornblom, Garner and Glaubman (1987) found cross-cultural support for resource theory with data from the United States, the Philippines, Sweden, and Mexican Americans. These findings mean that resource theory has an interdisciplinary function for psychology and connects economic, social, psychological, and cross-cultural perspectives.

The results of the present study tests the theoretical concepts of resource theory, and shows a relationship between person-environment interaction (exchange of resources) and the development of personality (need and preference for resources). The relations of resource preferences to personality characteristics evidence the fact that individual preferences for resources - regardless of whether they are economic or psychological - depend on personality characteristics. These findings are not surprising because the interpretations of situations and behaviors result to a great extent from individual experiences in the past. Further research on the exchange of resources should therefore take this fact into account.

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