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Benevolence and universalism as sustainable entrepreneurship mindset triggers on undergraduate students

Sylvia Mónica Pérez Núñez ⓘD, Raúl Martínez Flores ⓘD, and Diana E. Woolfolk Ruiz ⓘD

School of Business Administration, CETYS Universidad, Mexico

ABSTRACT

This study's purpose is to statistically measure the differences between values perception of first- and fourth-year undergraduate students by evaluating the relative importance of the values of the self-transcendence spectrum, universalism, and benevolence as triggers of the sustainable entrepreneur's mindset. Educating for sustainability means students' engagement in projects and initiatives that nurture a sustainable mindset. Values do matter when it comes to sustainability focus business. Using the Schwartz human value scale to address values at the heart of education for sustainability, and a sample of 236 undergraduate students, we found evidence that the value of benevolence moves up the scale on the values profile once the fourth-year students are exposed to projects and initiatives that nurture the development of students' sustainable mindset. Understanding the values profile of undergraduate students should help practitioners, policy makers, and those on the frontlines of entrepreneurial education identify and develop entrepreneurs' mindsets in addressing sustainable challenges.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship has changed our world and generated numerous positive results. Perhaps more than ever, entrepreneurship is considered a powerful means to transform society and achieve desired economic and social well-being.

Enterprises are engines of development and economic growth needed to alleviate the significant inequalities in living standards worldwide. Business activities are intertwined with critical sustainable development issues and priorities.

Some companies already use their creativity and innovation capability to solve social challenges. They evaluate the risks and opportunities involved in dealing with these challenges and have incorporated sustainability into their purpose and the climate change variable into their strategies. Behind each of

these business decisions is an entrepreneur who develops sustainable business strategies and models; that is to say, economically successful ideas that minimize environmental impact, create sources of employment, contribute to the improvement of society, and support local communities (Rodriguez, 2016). Learning from processes determines the development of a business opportunity with these objectives, the actions of entrepreneurs, and the role played in the context of social integration (Perez & Musteen, 2020). Values do matter when it comes to sustainability-focused business. These entrepreneurs are classified as entrepreneurs with a sustainable mindset (Gagnon, 2012; Kassel et al., 2016).

Mindset is how an individual views the world and his or her role and place, including information derived from assumptions, beliefs, and values. This allows the individual to create a framework to understand, predict, and judge various events in one's environment (Bernecker & Job, 2019).

According to Pidduck et al. (2021), the entrepreneurial mindset is a goal-oriented behavior nurtured by dispositional beliefs about entrepreneurship and opportunity. Lynch and Corbett (2021) argued that the entrepreneurial mindset embraces two predominant orientations—one that seeks to find and select potential solutions, and another that centers on implementing and executing these solutions. According to the above conceptualization, the entrepreneurial mindset is mostly based on technical knowledge.

A sustainable entrepreneurship mindset means incorporating a systemic approach to understanding the environment beyond technical knowledge, including the interconnections between a healthy ecosystem and a prosperous society (Kassel et al., 2018), and the being dimension, including personal values, aspects related to purpose in life, making a difference, and self-transcendence (Atwater et al., 2008).

Because mindsets can be developed (Sidhu et al., 2014), the critical challenge for business schools is to find curricular and noncurricular strategies, projects, and initiatives for students to develop the values that trigger a sustainable business mindset.

The reviewed literature accounts for using the Schwartz human value scale to understand sustainable development (Shepherd et al., 2009), understand entrepreneurs' engagement in sustainable venturing practices (Gagnon, 2012), and address values at the heart of education for sustainability (Gentil, 2017; Lin & Li, 2022).

Gagnon (2012) argued that the Schwartz human values categories of benevolence and universalism of the self-transcendence spectrum are values held by sustainably minded entrepreneurs. Identifying these values will have utility in explaining individual attachment to sustainability and values impact behavior. There is a need to understand the factors that drive entrepreneurs to engage in sustainable business.

This study uses the definition of values provided by Schwartz (1992), who described values "as concepts or beliefs that pertain to desirable end states or behaviors, transcend specific situations, guide selection or evaluation of behavior and events and are ordered by relative importance" (p. 4). The relative importance of multiple values guides to action; for example, "attending church might express and promote tradition, conformity, and security values" (Schwartz, 2015, p. 68).

Schwartz (2015) defined benevolence "as a value that preserves and enhances the welfare of those with whom one identif[ies] personally, and promotes cooperative social relations. Universalism means the understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and nature" (pp. 70–71). Figure 1 presents Schwartz's (1992) model of universal human values, and Table 1, Schwartz's 10 basic human values and their definitions.

Studying the transformational impact of undergraduate programs that develop sustainable knowledge is necessary (Hermes & Rimanoczy, 2018) to focus on the values that shape entrepreneur attitudes, cognition, and ultimately behavior, which has significant potential to better understand "what's behind the blue curtain" of sustainable business ventures (Gagnon, 2012, p. 20).

To educate for sustainability is to develop a sustainable mindset in four main content areas: systems perspective, spiritual intelligence, ecological
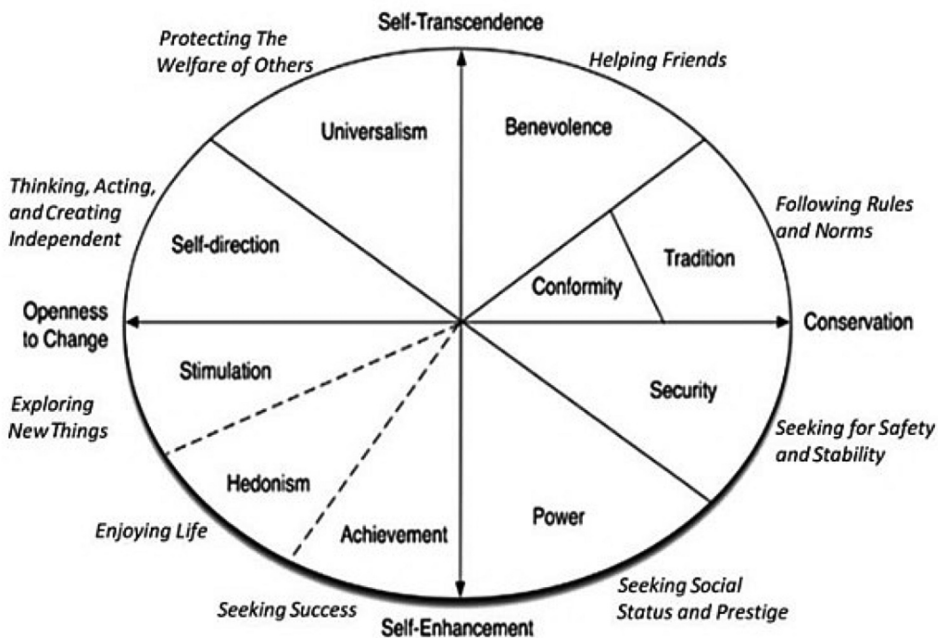

Figure 1. Schwartz's (1992) model of universal human values.

Table 1. Schwartz's 10 basic human values definitions.

Value	Definition
Security	Safety, harmony, and stability of society, relationships, and self.
Conformity	Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.
Tradition	Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion provides.
Benevolence	Preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one identifies personally.
Universalism	Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.
Self-direction	Independent thought and action—choosing, creating, exploring.
Stimulation	Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.
Hedonism	Pleasure or sensuous gratification.
Achievement	Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.
Authority	Control or dominance over people and resources.

Source: Schwartz (2015).

worldview, and emotional intelligence. "These four content areas are enacted through collaborative and innovative action, which are projects or initiatives that both nurture the development of the four areas, and become the mindset in action" (Kassel et al., 2016, p. 11).

Hermes and Rimanoczy (2018) recommended comparing the results at the beginning and end of an undergraduate class program with the previously mentioned characteristics or evaluating first- and fourth-year students.

Following Hermes and Rimanoczy's (2018) recommendation, we compare the human values profile of first- and fourth-year students of the Center for Technical and Higher Education (CETYS) Universidad undergraduate program that nourishes the development of a sustainable mindset through projects and initiatives that enhance collaborative and innovative action.

Table 2 accounts for CETYS Universidad undergraduate projects and initiatives that nurture the development of the four areas (systems perspective, spiritual intelligence, ecological worldview, and emotional intelligence) that become students' sustainable mindset in action. Participation in these projects and initiatives is open to students' interests except for the Human Being and Sustainability class and the Zero Waste initiative. This last initiative aims to achieve a Zero Waste Campus by adopting a Zero Waste philosophy and incorporating the 5 Rs (refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose, and recycle) into everyday academic, administration, and indirect operations of the university. In 2019, CETYS Universidad received the Honorary Member Award from the International Sustainable Campus Network for the Zero Waste initiative.

The purpose of this study is to statistically measure the differences between the human values profile of first- and fourth-year undergraduate students by evaluating the relative importance of the values of the self-transcendence spectrum, universalism, and benevolence as triggers of the sustainable entrepreneur's mindset.

Table 2. CETYS Universidad education on sustainability projects and initiatives.

Area	Project/Initiative
Systems perspective	Human Being and Sustainability Class
	100 K Americas
	PRME UN
	ENACTUS Social Business Journey
	Francisco Gallego Mongue Fund
	Innovator Under 35 LATAM
	Zero Waste
Spiritual intelligence	Human Being and Sustainability Class
	FORTES
	TerraVita
Ecological worldview	Human Being and Sustainability Class
	Fowler Global Social Innovation Challenge
	Human Being and Sustainability
	Babson Collaborative Student Challenge
	IAUP International Business Model
Emotional intelligence	Human Being and Sustainability Class
	Zero Waste
	Waste Hero
	REDES

This work is guided by the following research questions: What is the relative importance of the values of the self-transcendence spectrum in the human values profile of students enrolled in the undergraduate programs of the School of Business Administration of CETYS Universidad? and What are the differences in human values profile between first- and fourth-year students?

Materials and methods

The research instrument was the value scale of Shalom Schwartz (1992); Schwartz and Boehnke (2004), in its adaptation to Spanish by Arciniega and González (2002); and its validation for the Mexican population by Druet et al. (2017).

The original instrument comprises 40 items representing organized values based on two basic bipolar dimensions. Each pole represents a higher order of values that combines two or more of the 10 general types. The first dimension is Openness to Change (Self-Determination and Stimulation) versus Conservation or Conservatism (Conformity, Tradition, and Security). The second dimension is composed of Self-Transcendence (Universalism and Benevolence) versus Self-Promotion (Social Power and Achievement).

The survey was applied to first- and fourth-year students enrolled at CETYS Universidad School of Business Administration at the three campuses for the 2021–2022 semester. The survey was electronically administered to a probability sample of 236 students with a confidence level of 95 percent. Respondents were 55 percent from the first year and 45 percent from the fourth year. The analysis of the survey results was carried out using the statistical software Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Results

The total sample was 236 participants. Carrying out an analysis through SPSS and Excel statistical software, the following general results are as follows (see Table 3).

According to Abella et al. (2017), one effective technique to contrast the average results of each variable between the two groups considered is Student's *t*-test. In the previous table, comparing the results among the participating students, significant differences are observed depending on the year, whether it is the first or the fourth year. The variables that appear significant in the test are universalism t (236) = −2.524, $p < 005$; self-direction t (236) = −3.032, $p < 0.005$, stimulation t (236) = −2.633, $p < 0.05$; security t (236) = −2.751, $p < 0.05$; compliance t (236) = −2.955, $p < 0.005$; and tradition t (236) = −2.764, $p < 0.05$. Similarly, in the hierarchy of averages by variable, it is observed that the highest average value is related to hedonism, while the lowest is related to authority in both groups. However, they are in a similar range, changing in the order of importance from one semester to another.

In the case of the participants in the first year, the following image represents their human values profile, see Figure 2.

Once the students have been exposed to the projects and initiatives that nurture the development of the four areas—systems perspective, spiritual intelligence, ecological worldview, and emotional intelligence—and have advanced toward the final year of their major, the averages show the following trend: In Figure 3, it is observed that, although the position of the dimensions of hedonism and authority are preserved (in the first and last place, respectively, in the average number of responses obtained), some variables change position, such as the case of self-direction, benevolence, achievement, and stimulation. The rest of the dimensions maintain the same order among the participants of both groups.

Discussion and conclusions

Taking the Schwartz personal values scale to statistically measure the differences between the human values profile of first- and fourth-year undergraduate students by evaluating the relative importance of the values of the self-transcendence spectrum as triggers of the sustainable entrepreneur's mindset, our study provides some interesting insights.

Results show that the five most important human values that guide the actions of the first-year undergraduate students are: *hedonism*: self-gratification and satisfaction of own needs; *self-direction*: being independent in own's thought and action so that one's own self can be determined; *universalism*: evidencing concern, tolerance, appreciation, and respect for all people and nature; *benevolence*: seeking the welfare of those groups or people

Table 3. First- and fourth-year students, descriptive statistics, and Student's t-tests (results).

| Variable	Benevolence	Universalism	Self-direction	Stimulation	Hedonism	Achievement	Authority	Security	Conformity	Tradition
7S Media	5.068	5.042	5.019	4.736	5.261	4.748	4.028	4.892	4.524	4.307
1S Media	5.187	5.271	5.292	5.033	5.356	4.894	4.210	5.149	4.835	4.627
7S Variance	0.609	0.516	0.547	0.969	0.764	0.983	0.961	0.592	0.726	0.922
1S Variance	0.596	0.445	0.416	0.563	0.505	0.616	0.999	0.441	0.583	0.672
t statistic	−1.164	−2.524	−3.032	−2.633	−0.925	−1.268	−1.403	−2.751	−2.955	−2.764
p-value	0.246	0.012*	0.003**	0.009**	0.356	0.206	0.162	0.006**	0.003**	0.006**
Total	236									

Note. *=p< 0.05; **=p< 0.01; ***=p< 0.001.
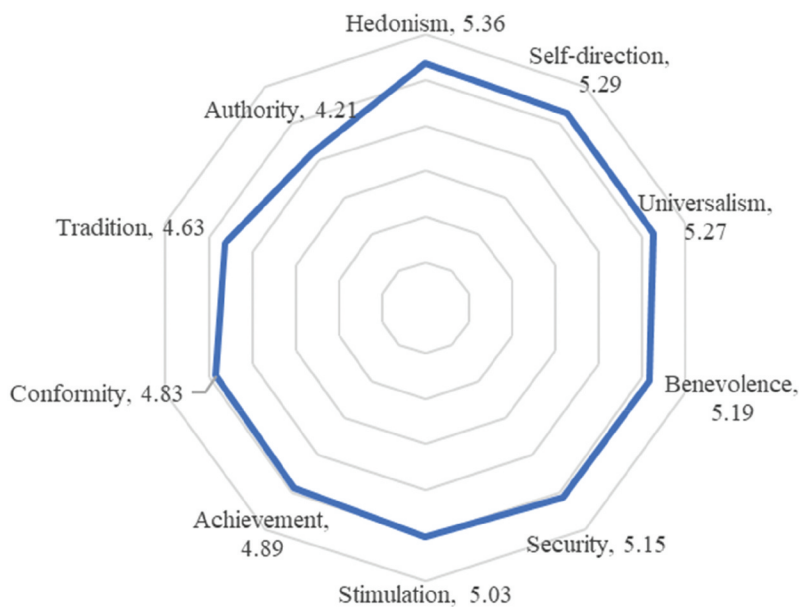
Figure 2. Values profile of first-year students who have not been exposed to projects and initiatives that nurture students' sustainable mindset.
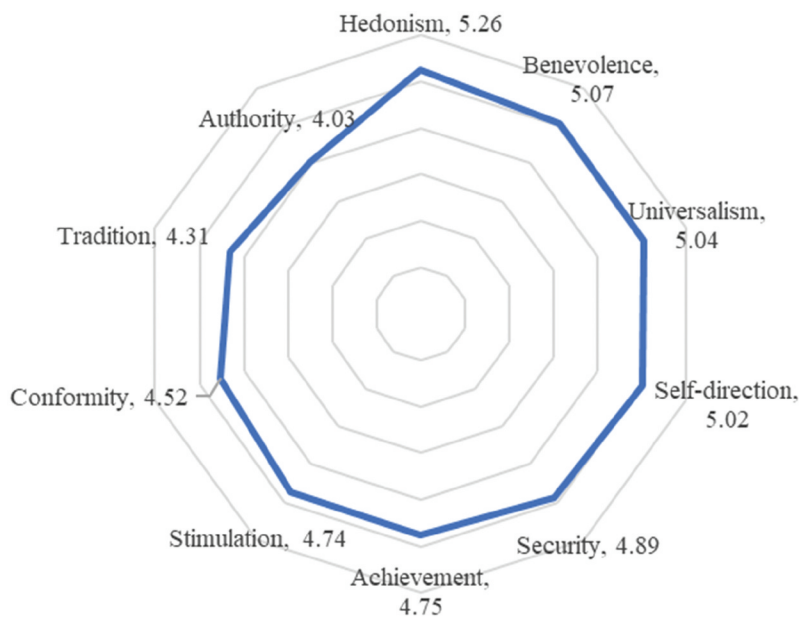

Figure 3. Values profile of fourth-year year students, once they have been exposed to projects and initiatives that nurture students' sustainable mindset.

with whom there is a link and who give a certain sense of belonging; and *security*: seeking to ensure both personal and social integrity.

On the other hand, for fourth-year undergraduate students, the following are the five most important values that guide their actions: *hedonism*: self-gratification and satisfaction of one's own needs; *benevolence*: seeking the well-being of those groups or people with whom there is a link and who give a certain sense of belonging; *universalism*: evidencing concern, tolerance, appreciation, and respect for all people and nature; *self-direction*: being independent in one's own thought and action so that one's own self can be determined; and, *security*: seeking to ensure both personal and social integrity.

Comparing first- and fourth-year students' human values profiles, there is significant statistical evidence that the value of benevolence moves up the scale once the fourth-year students are exposed to projects and initiatives that nurture the development of students' sustainable mindset. Universalism, on the other hand, maintains the same position, third place of the 10 values, for both groups of students.

This means that toward the end of students' undergraduate studies, CETYS Universidad graduates have a better understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of others and for nature. Moreover, they preserve and enhance the welfare of people with whom they personally identify.

The findings address the research questions that guide this study because more is known about the differences in human values profile between first- and fourth-year students of an undergraduate program that nourishes the development of a sustainable mindset.

Understanding the values profile of undergraduate students and the relative importance of benevolence and universalism values should help practitioners, policy makers, and those on the frontlines of entrepreneurial education identify and develop entrepreneurs' mindsets in addressing sustainable challenges. Moreover, noncurricular or mentoring programs could be designed to fortify these values with content delivery for increased connection with sustainably minded entrepreneurs.

Further research should explore a longitudinal study to have more conclusive evidence of the transformational impact of undergraduate programs that develop sustainable knowledge by nourishing a sustainable mindset.

Disclosure statement

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ORCID

Sylvia Mónica Pérez Núñez 🔟 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0623-7810
Raúl Martínez Flores 🔟 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4931-3334
Diana E. Woolfolk Ruiz 🔟 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2949-488X

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