

From Learning Value to Sustainable Action: Motivational Pathways in the Context of Higher Education and Organisational Ethics

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Abstract

How does perceiving one's studies as meaningful translate into sustainable action? Building on self-determination and moral motivation literatures, we test a serial mediation model linking perceived learning value to sustainable behaviour through competence/autonomy and moral orientation. Cross-sectional data from higher-education students (N = 417) were analysed using standardised composites and a PROCESS-style path framework with 1,000 bootstrap resamples. Perceived learning value strongly predicted competence/autonomy ($\beta = .71, p < .001; R^2 = .51$), which in turn predicted moral orientation ($\beta = .49, p < .001; \text{model } R^2 = .54$). In the outcome equation, competence/autonomy remained a significant predictor of sustainable behaviour ($\beta = .28, p < .001; \text{model } R^2 = .18$), whereas moral orientation did not ($\beta = .08, n.s.$). The indirect effect of learning value on sustainable behaviour via competence/autonomy was robust ($\beta = .20, 95\% \text{ CI } [.11, .29]$); the serial path via competence \rightarrow moral orientation was small and non-significant. The total effect of learning value on sustainable behaviour was moderate ($\beta = .36$), with the total indirect ($\beta = .25, 95\% \text{ CI } [.16, .34]$) accounting for most of it. These findings suggest that capability and perceived control are the primary bridge from meaningful learning to sustainable action. Practically, universities and organisations seeking ethics-aligned outcomes should prioritise competence-building (tools, practice, feedback) alongside values education to convert intentions into behaviours at scale.

Keywords: Learning Value, Competence/autonomy, Moral Orientation, Sustainable Behavior, Organizational Ethics