


Evaluation of the knowledge and commitment that students of a university subject focused on organizational behavior have on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with the aim of increasing the link between university teaching and the SDGs

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Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) promoted by the United Nations (UN) within its global initiative "2030 Agenda" are part of the social commitments adopted and promoted by the Polytechnic University of Valencia (UPV). It's critical to know what the initial state of knowledge and commitment of UPV students with respect to the SDGs is, so that consistent and coherent training actions around the SDGs can be promoted.

The search for sustainable solutions and alternatives that change the current production and social model, and that make our planet a more friendly, sustainable, fair and equitable place, seems to be a common goal for all people with a minimum of judgment. However, the commitment and knowledge about the way in which each one can impact on these objectives is not as widespread as one might imagine. This situation can ruin the intended achievements of the SDGs, so it is crucial to promote their knowledge and their social adoption.

In this project, it has been evaluated, through the responses of the students of a carefully selected subject, what is their knowledge and commitment to the

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SDGs, with the final objective of identifying if the students themselves consider and show that there is any initiative that the University can adopt to help them in their preparation for pro-SDG activism from their close incorporation into the world of work, and therefore from the exercise of their professional work. As expected, the study shows that students have some knowledge about the SDGs, although they do not know how and who is responsible for this exercise of social volunteering or what their personal role in this initiative may be. They also show a certain interest in the possibility of the University taking a step forward and including the SDGs in its training catalogue.

Keywords: *organizational behavior and change management; Sustainable Development Goals; University subject; increased awareness and interest.*

Introduction

One of the initiatives with the longest journey at the global level is the "2030 Agenda" of the United Nations Organization (UN), in which the scope of development of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is circumscribed as a fundamental pillar of a call to collective action for a more friendly and sustainable world (UN, 2020a). As it is a global initiative, all social, productive, and academic entities are called to be an active part in the awareness process, and that is why Universities are one of the main actors in the development of an effective collective awareness to make the SDGs succeed. Within this area, specifically using the tools that the Polytechnic University of Valencia (UPV) makes available to researchers, an Educational Innovation and Improvement Project (PIME) has been launched, to which the study presented belongs in this article (Oltra-Badenes, 2022a). It is, specifically, that the students of a subject carefully selected for its special characteristics, self-assess their knowledge about the SDGs, their awareness of their role in achieving the SDGs, and their interest in including the SDGs within the basic elements to be developed transversally in university subjects. To achieve this objective, a series of planned actions and a research protocol are proposed that will allow reaching the stated goal (Oltra-Badenes 2022b).

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The SDGs are the pillars of the UN "Agenda 2030" (UN, 2020c), in which 17 objectives are reflected that the signatory countries of the agreement commit to promoting among all the actors of society. As a whole, and globally, it is about all citizens, whatever their responsibility, acting in their day-to-day activities, both personally and professionally, bearing in mind and deep down his thought a series of concepts and paradigms that make the planet a more sustainable and friendly place for its inhabitants (Allen et al., 2018). It is therefore a social initiative, which contains a call to action to each and every one of the planet's inhabitants, and with the aim that, together, we make this world a better place to live, and where society is governed by criteria of social justice and equity. (UN, 2020a).

Among all the SDGs, this study has worked to improve objective number 4, known as Quality of Education (UN, 2020b). Its principles integrate all kinds of actions that can be undertaken to ensure that education is the best possible and reaches the greatest number of people and places. Democratizing education is the basis for a fairer and convergent society towards a more sustainable environment.

The approach of this study has been, within the university environment, as the last training stage for future professionals who will govern the destiny of the productive economy in the coming years, to ask them to evaluate the relevance that the SDGs should have in this context. scope of Quality Education, not only at the level of objective number 4 itself, but globally. The objective of the study is therefore to obtain a picture of what is the current initial stage of knowledge, involvement, and awareness of students about the SDGs, to detect possible future training actions that improve this current stage.

Organizational Behavior and Management of Change” University subject

The students at the university subject "Organizational Behavior and Change Management", from the 3rd year of the Degree in Informatics Engineering in the Universitat Politècnica de València (UPV), have been surveyed following a series of empirical tested questions. This subject has been selected due to the special character of its academical plan, focused on the psychological view of management inside the organizations.

Organizational Behavior (OB) is the field of study of behavior and psychological processes in contexts related to work. Individual, group and organizational variables are part of the global scenario that may lead to improve performance (Robbins et al., 2013; Guerola-Navarro et al., 2020). What people do in an organization in order to facilitate the understanding of the complexity of the interpersonal relationships and people interactions, is the base to construct hypothesis about how that behavior affects the performance of the organization. It covers individual variables (perception, learning and change of attitudes, motivation and satisfaction, design and stress at work), group variables (group work, group communication, leadership and conflict), and organizational variables (politics, climate and culture and organizational change). The teaching guide of the subject includes the following competencies, all of them related directly or indirectly to ODS principles, that should be gathered by the students at the end of the course, directly linked to the established competences (ICE, 2015):

Ability to understand and apply the principles of risk assessment and apply them correctly in the preparation and execution of action plans.

Ability to integrate Information Technology and Communications solutions and business processes to meet the information needs of organizations, allowing them to achieve their objectives effectively and efficiently, thus giving them competitive advantages.

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Ability to understand and apply the principles and practices of organizations, so that they can act as a link between the technical and management communities of an organization and actively participate in the training of users.

Locate relevant information from different sources and investigate technological developments in their field of work and related areas.

Reason in an abstract, analytical and critical way, knowing how to elaborate and defend arguments in their area of study and professional field.

Know how to apply their knowledge to their work or vocation in a professional way and possess the skills that are usually demonstrated through the elaboration and defense of arguments and the resolution of problems within their area of study.

Given the focus of the subject and the objectives of the SDGs, the matching between one and the other appears as a determinant, making it evident that the students who have chosen this subject appear a priori to have a special predisposition to take action for improvements in their professional and personal spheres, and therefore also a priori for improvements in the quality of life and in the sustainability of the planet, thus confirming the decision to choose these students as the study sample population (Guerola-Navarro et al., 2019).

The objective of the study is to know the initial point of interest and commitment of the students surveyed regarding the SDGs, to detect possible formative actions in the line of increasing this initial picture.

1.Methodology

The methodology used to obtain the picture that reflects the initial state of interest and knowledge about the SDGs shown by the students surveyed in this study is detailed below.

1.1.Population sample

For this study, it was chosen to survey the students of the subject Organizational Behavior and Change Management, taught at the Polytechnic School of Alcoy (EPSA), one of the UPV campus, and more specifically the students of the 2021/2022 academic year. The reasons for choosing this sample have been:

Most of them are final year students.

These students have chosen this branch of specialization due to their interest in organizational behavior, and therefore in factors such as personality, motivation and the management of the most intrinsic aspects of human decision-making.

One of the professors involved in the PIME teaches this subject and has direct access to the students to pass the questionnaire and to evaluate future actions based on the initial result.

With the choice of this sample, it is not intended to obtain a representative sample of the entire population, but rather a starting point from which to work and be able to obtain a comparison after taking awareness and training actions.

1.2. Questionnaire design.

Previous studies on knowledge of the SDGs have been reviewed, and among all the scientifically validated questionnaires, questions with answers in Likert format (Likert, 1932) have been chosen, along with some open-type answers so that students can express themselves freely. The advantage of the Likert format is the possibility of quantifying the results. In the initial questionnaire prepared for the students' response, the Likert scale (Likert, 1932) has been followed, where the answers are integers from 1 to 5:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Medium term (neither agreement nor disagreement)
4. Agree
5. Totally agree

The questionnaire has three areas of work:

knowledge about the SDGs

awareness of the role of each individual on the SDGs in their daily lives

evaluation of the interest in having more references to the SDGs within the university environment

One of the school days has been used for the students to answer the questionnaire freely and without any type of predisposing indication.

2. Results

The sample population is made up of the 18 students of the subject who take it in the 2021/2022 academic year, having obtained a total of 11 responses. Given that the remaining 7 students are exempt from class attendance, and that the project includes face-to-face work in the theoretical-practical sessions of the subject, it is concluded that 100% of the students who are going to work have responded and therefore the data are representative of the sample. It is insisted that it is not a matter of extrapolating to the entire university population, but that it is intended to carry out a study on a controlled environment and with concrete actions from this initial phase.

From the analysis of the answers, the following conclusions are obtained about the initial state of the SDGs among this group of students, specifically focused on the knowledge and auto-evaluation of personal impact capability:

the students indicate “Work and economic growth” as the SDG in which they believe they can have the **greatest impact with the future exercise of their profession**, with

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a great difference compared to the second “Health and Well-being” and the third “Industry, Innovation and Infrastructures”; in last place appears "Peace, justice and solid institutions"

regarding the students’ self-assessment about their **knowledge about what the SDGs are**, the 72.73% of the answers are "I know perfectly well what they are and what they consist of", and 27.27% of the answers are "I've heard of the SDGs, but I don't know what they are". This result shows a high initial knowledge (72.73%) among this group of students.

asked about who is **responsible for implementing and achieving compliance with the SDGs**, the students have shown that 72.73% believe that the responsibility is "For everyone: companies (large and SMEs), citizens, public administrations, universities.", while 27.27% respond that "Honestly, I don't know". Again, this result presents a high compromise of the students as accountable for the SDGs.

regarding how the students feel about their **personal capability to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs**, the 90.91% of the answers are "Yes, with small contributions like recycling" and 9, 09% answered "No, it is impossible to participate", showing a great confidence on the impact that they may have with individual contribution.

On the other hand, there has been some questions especially directed to know how the students feel about **which should be the role of University regarding SDGs**, using Likert scale. The following results show the initial assessment, being "Students Assessment" a weighted average of the answers, using the numerical values of the Likert scale (5 for Strongly Agree, 4 for Agree, 3 for Indifferent, 2 for Disagree, and 1 for Strongly Disagree) and weighting said results by the number of responses to each of these Likert scale values. These results are shown in Table 1.

Which should be the role of University regarding SDGs	Students Assessment
1.- I think it is important for university students to have extensive knowledge about the SDGs and Sustainability in general	3,64
2.- I would like the University to teach how my (future) profession could contribute to achieving the SDGs and creating a more sustainable world	2,85
3.- I believe that the SDGs, and sustainability in general, should be integrated as part of the themes of university subjects	2,94
4.- I believe that the University should have a comprehensive plan for the integration of the SDGs in training, similar to what is done with transversal competences.	2,94
5.- I believe that at the University we are already taught enough about Sustainability issues and the SDGs	2,91

Table 1. How the students feel about which should be the role of University regarding SDGs

As global conclusion of this table, seeing that all the weighted values are above the median of the Likert values, which is 2.5, the students show a **general positive attitude towards the inclusion of SDGs into University framework**.

Regarding the open format questions, most of the students use them to show a certain interest in advancing their knowledge about the SDGs, although one of them shows radical anger and discomfort towards the inclusion of this type of initiative within dl university field.

With these results, it seems that a certain margin of maneuver is glimpsed for the PIME of which this study is part, and whose main objective is to detect if the transversal formation in the ODS has traveled. Indeed, it seems that this group of students, with some initial knowledge and interest in the SDGs, can be included in a project to assimilate training pills on the SDGs that will lead them to a better understanding of and commitment to the SDGs.

Conclusions

This study has been undertaken as an initial step to measure the knowledge and interest of a group of university students about the SDGs. Through a previously tested questionnaire, a certain initial knowledge of the students on the subject has been observed, although in some of the aspects such as responsibility or content they show certain doubts. In general, the students are interested in receiving training on what the SDGs are and what their role may be in this global initiative of the UN, although they have not clearly defined themselves as to the convenience of this task being carried out within the university field.

The clear signs of interest, together with the doubts about whether the university environment is the best place to advance, will give rise to a future study in which these same students receive training pills on the SDGs, in order to be able to measure the variation of knowledge and interest of the students from the initial image shown in this article.

The limitations in terms of the size of the population sample mean that this study cannot be extrapolated to the general university population, although it will serve as the basis for a particular comparative study (before and after the training pills) on the knowledge and interest of students for the SDGs.

For this reason, as future work, it is proposed to export this experience to other subjects and academic courses, taking into account the improvement proposals of the students.

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