



## Fostering Social Inclusion and Youth Leadership Through a Value-Centered Sports Mentoring Program: Insights from the BeHuman Project

José Antonio Ortí-Martínez<sup>1</sup>, María José Maciá-Andreu<sup>\*2,3</sup>, Pedro Pablo González-González<sup>2</sup>, Antonio Peñalver-Asensio<sup>2,3</sup> and Juan Alfonso García-Roca<sup>2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>UCAM Universidad Católica de Murcia, Facultad de Educación, Spain

<sup>2</sup>UCAM Universidad Católica de Murcia, Facultad de Deporte, Spain

<sup>3</sup>UCAM Universidad Católica de Murcia, Centro de Estudios Olímpicos, Spain

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### ABSTRACT

The BeHuman project was implemented with young people experiencing social vulnerability to promote social inclusion, human development, and leadership through sport and educational mentoring. The study employed a single-group pre-experimental design with a pre-test scale, complemented by qualitative interviews with participating educators. Instruments included a values questionnaire adapted from the Hall-Tonna model and a semi-structured interview with the mentors. The sample consisted of 14 adolescents (mean age =  $14.29 \pm 1.59$  years) and three educator-mentors. Quantitative findings showed a shift in participants' values from security and belonging (Stages I-II) towards initiative and relationship (Stage III), which correspond to more autonomous and collaborative leadership profiles in the Hall-Tonna framework. Responsibility, creativity, and loyalty values most frequently selected by the adolescents emerged as central to achieving the objectives of Stage III, focused on vocational development and the emergence of constructive leadership. Qualitatively, empathy, trust, and responsibility appeared as key mediators, shaping both mentors' leadership practices and the development of leadership capacities among the young people. The findings support the interpretation of sport as an axiological mediator and a "laboratory of citizenship", where structured value-based pedagogy and intentional mentoring accelerate socio-emotional maturation and foster the transfer of values such as respect, cooperation, justice, and inclusive leadership to everyday contexts. In conclusion, the Hall-Tonna model proved useful for interpreting these axiological and leadership-related transitions, and the BeHuman approach offers a replicable framework for values-based social inclusion and youth leadership development.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Sports participation is a powerful driver of youth development, supporting not only physical health but also psychological wellbeing, emotional growth, social skills, and a strong sense of identity and belonging. These benefits are most pronounced in supportive, team-oriented environments and are essential for holistic personal development [1,2,3]. Sport constitutes a privileged space for socialisation and the transmission of values, fostering processes of social inclusion and personal development among adolescents at risk [4,5]. Several studies have shown that physical activity can become a vehicle for value internalisation and socio-

emotional learning when implemented within an appropriate pedagogical framework [6,7,8,9].

The theoretical framework for this study is the Hall-Tonna model. From this perspective, values are defined as ideals and desires, but also as specific behaviours and meaningful expressions that give significance to life. They are reflected in the priorities individuals choose and consistently act upon [10].

Whenever individuals reflect upon their worldview, new value priorities emerge; these, in turn, nurture the will and desire to develop new skills. The acquisition of new skills leads to

\*Corresponding author

\*e-mail: mjmacia@ucam.edu  
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-6970-2743

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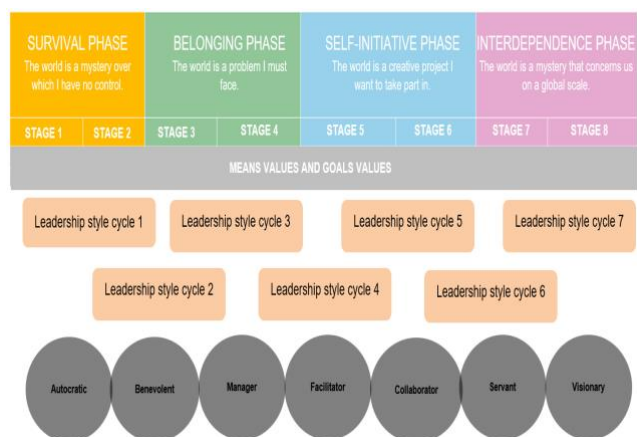
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behavioural changes and enables actions oriented towards value-driven conduct. Adult development is characterised by continuous growth in skills, whereby the individual's capacity for influence gradually expands through their actions [11, 12].

The Hall-Tonna model classifies 125 values into four stages of human development: survival, belonging, initiative, and interdependence. The transition from one stage to another reflects a progression towards more integrated states of autonomy, responsibility, and solidarity [13].

The Hall-Tonna model underscores the close relationship between leadership and values. Each leadership style is rooted in a particular worldview and is linked to different stages of individual development. Personal growth and leadership are intimately connected to the awareness of one's own values and the capacity to comprehend the context.

In the Hall-Tonna model, each of the seven developmental cycles represented on the map by the seven leadership styles located at the bottom (Fig. 1) entails the presence of priority values that culminate in a particular leadership style.



**Figure 1.** Values and Leadership Map of the Hall-Tonna Model

For instance, if an individual's value priorities are related to survival and self-preservation (Phase I, stage 1), they will be motivated and predisposed to seek ways to protect their territory and secure their position (autocratic leadership). Conversely, if the priorities are oriented towards growth and the creation of new formulas that enhance human dignity (Phase III, stage 6), then that leader will seek ways to increase the self-projection capabilities of those around them and adopt more collaborative styles (collaborative leadership), promoting the development of new leaders [11].

The distribution of values into cycles can help individuals recognize their value priorities and understand their leadership style. The priority values for each of the leadership styles are [13]:

**Autocratic:** Characterized by establishing power relationships, exercised in a dominant manner. This is neither a tolerant nor a collaborative style. The leader in this cycle values aspects such as self-protection and security. The priority values that determine the leader's vision and behaviors are: Security, Economy/Profit, Self-Preservation.

**Benevolent:** This leadership style is a transitional style. The individual views themselves as the only one capable of taking care of others, which leads to a leader who does not delegate and does not foster responsibility in those around them. The leader is concerned about people and listens to them, but in a paternalistic way. The priority values that determine the leader's vision and behaviors are: Self-Esteem, Obedience/Duty, Support for Others.

**Managerial:** The leader effectively acts as a dynamizer, relying on individuals who are loyal to the institution and capable of developing the activity entrusted to them. The priority values that determine the leader's vision and behaviors are: Competence/Trust, Economy/Success, Responsible Management.

**Facilitator:** Its principal characteristic is the absence of a concrete style, representing an evolutionary process that transitions from the Managerial leadership style to the Collaborative leadership style. The Facilitator leader views problems in a schismatic way; personal and group needs are not harmonized, leading the leader to opt for one or the other depending on the moment, without a determined pattern. The priority values that determine the leader's vision and behaviors are: Equality / Liberation, Service / Vocation, Decision / Initiative, Authority /Honesty, Adaptability / Flexibility.

**Collaborative:** The leader, who is undergoing an intensive process of discovering their own qualities, proposes collaborative learning. The central task of this leadership style is to ensure that all individuals can experience significant personal development, so that each person can share what they are learning with others. The Collaborative leader acts as an intermediary among peers and maintains a clear vision of innovation processes. The priority values that determine the leader's vision and behaviors are: Human Dignity, Faith / Risk / Vision, Justice, Ethical Commitment, Social Responsibility, Collaboration, Sharing / Listening / Trust.

**Servant:** The style that characterizes Servant Leadership is distinct from all previous ones, as it transforms the value of independence into interdependence. The servant leader takes into account that when followers operate with high

levels of trust in their performance, a creative and highly effective work network is created, which no individual could surpass on their own. The key is that servant leadership is always a team operation that allows the institution to grow through group learning by discovery (heuristic).

**Visionary:** The expression of this leadership style is founded on the interdependence among visionary leaders who enable others to lead, activate, relate, and work interconnectedly, thereby promoting globality and collaboration and enhancing the system's values. The institution is based on interdependent teams or organizations that are designed and unified by a common system of shared values (consensus). The value system at this level creates a positive global impact on people, societies, and the environment. The priority values that determine the leader's vision and behaviors are: Interdependence, Word (Fidelity/Integrity), Macroeconomics.

In the Hall-Tonna model, the Survival Phase (Phase I) is associated with an autocratic leadership style and an organization understood as a place simply for survival. Its key values revolve around economy and profit, food, warmth, and housing, and authority is perceived as entirely external.

The Belonging Phase (Phase II) is related to a more bureaucratic leadership, where a rigid hierarchy predominates. The individual seeks to be liked and supported by peers, values the security of prescribed rules, and understands the organization as a space to achieve approval and success, while authority remains external to them.

In the Initiative Phase (Phase III), leadership becomes more collaborative and oriented toward creative action. The individual integrates reason and emotion, experiences the organization as a project in which to actively participate, and values independence, innovation, sharing, and trust. Conflicts are resolved through tailored solutions, negotiated based on trust, and authority begins to shift inward to the person.

Finally, in the Interdependence Phase (Phase IV), leadership is conceived as interdependent and service-oriented. The organization is understood as a collaborative network, where the world is a mystery to be cared for, and the "I" transforms into a "we" focused on improving global quality of life. Key values are collaboration, interdependence, and shared commitment; conflicts are addressed by seeking new creative possibilities, and authority is primarily founded in one's own interiority (Hall, 2004).

The general objective of this research was to analyse how sport, when approached from an axiological perspective, can contribute to the human development of young people at risk. The

specific objectives were 1) To identify the priority values of the young participants, 2) To explore, from the educators' perspective, the learning experiences and values lived throughout the process, and 3) To interpret the results in light of the Hall-Tonna model, understanding values as mediators of social inclusion and personal maturation, and 4) To analyze the development of leadership among the young participants, interpreting how their personal and priority values, identified through the questionnaire and contextualized within the Hall-Tonna model, influence the consolidation of positive leadership styles throughout the social inclusion process.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was based on a mixed-methods approach, comprising a quantitative phase through a questionnaire completed by the young participants, and a qualitative phase involving semi-structured interviews with the educators/mentors responsible for implementing the programme. The research design and instruments were approved by the Ethics Committee of the organising institution (CE012501).

### 2.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 14 young participants, the majority of whom were female ( $n = 10$ ; 71.4%), with a mean age of  $14.29 \pm 1.59$  years at the time of participation in the programme. The inclusion criteria were as follows: 1) Being under 18 years of age at the time of acceptance into the programme, 2) Being in a situation of social vulnerability, 3) Being enrolled in the BeHuman programme through the corresponding managing association, and 4) Providing informed consent to participate in the study, granted by both the participant and their parents or legal guardian. Sampling was non-probabilistic and purposive, based on compliance with the aforementioned inclusion criteria.

In addition, three educator-mentors participated in the study. They were responsible for implementing the programme and were undergraduate students in Physical Activity and Sport Sciences, with prior training in leadership, communication, and activity adaptation. Their selection followed a non-probabilistic convenience sampling procedure, as they were enrolled at the organising institution and had voluntarily applied to take part in the programme.

## 2.2. Instruments and Materials

For the quantitative phase, an adaptation of the Hall-Tonna Values Questionnaire [13], was employed. The Hall-Tonna Inventory (HTINV) is a questionnaire comprising 125 items, each with five possible response options, the last of which is not identifiable with any specific value (“not pertinent at this time”). The alternatives are presented as statements. Each of the 125 values that form part of the model appears on four occasions throughout the 125 items of the questionnaire, always in relation to three other different values, thus requiring respondents to prioritise among the values presented to them [14]. Once all responses have been completed and processed, a profile is generated that identifies the individual’s values from among the 125 possible options.

In this study, a simplified version of the Hall-Tonna Inventory (HTINV) was used, that included forced-choice value items, organised according to the stages of the model (I–IV) and between medium and terminal values. Participants were asked to indicate the priority they assign to their values based on the behaviours associated with each of them [15].

For the qualitative phase, a brief semi-structured interview was conducted with the mentors. The first prompt asked participants to summarise, in six or seven lines, the most meaningful aspects of their learning experience in the project. The second prompt used a values map provided, asking mentors to select 8–10 terms that intuitively reflected their experience with the young people, and then another 8–10 terms representing desirable future directions for these participants. Two documents accompanied the task: the values map and a list of definitions for the 125 values. Participants were advised to consult the definitions only if needed, as doing so could be unnecessarily demanding [16].

## 2.3. Procedure

The process began with the selection of sports science students who volunteer to take on the role of mentors. These students must demonstrate a genuine interest in leading and guiding the young participants. Once selected, they received rigorous and specific training, designed by the project manager. This training covered several key aspects for successful mentoring, such as: 1) Teaching and leadership skills: Mentors learn to manage a group and lead physical activities effectively, 2) Effective communication and conflict management: They are taught to communicate

clearly with their peers and resolve any disagreements that may arise during activities and 3) Adapting activities: They are trained to adjust sports activities according to the skill level and needs of the secondary school students.

Once the educators/mentors' training was completed, a collaborative planning process for the sessions [17], was undertaken between the mentors and the project manager. This process included: 1) Activity design: the mentors collaborated to develop an activity plan that was inclusive and adaptable to all participants. The activities included sports such as basketball, ultimate frisbee, and unihockey, covering both technical skills and aspects related to teamwork and cooperation. 2) Setting learning objectives: each session was structured around clear objectives, such as developing physical skills, improving coordination, and strengthening values like respect and collaboration. 3) Project manager oversight: although the planning was done by sports science students, the project manager ensured that the activities were aligned with the content and overall objectives of the project.

The sessions included both technical and axiological objectives, focusing on values such as cooperation, inclusion, respect, and leadership, and were developed during the 2024/25 academic year, with physical activity sessions planned every two Fridays a month and with each session lasting 120 minutes. Each session was conducted under the guidance of mentors, who were responsible for organizing and leading each activity, from introduction to conclusion, while the project manager acted as supervisor and guide. The mentors applied the teaching techniques they had learned, ensuring that each participant felt included and had the opportunity to actively participate, regardless of their skill level.

Prior to the start of the intervention, and once the young participants were selected, the questionnaire adapted from the Hall-Tonna model was administered. Upon completion of the intervention, interviews were conducted with the educators/mentors to explore the values experienced and desired throughout the process.

## 2.4. Statistical analysis

For the quantitative questionnaire data, a descriptive analysis was conducted, including frequency and percentage. The analyses were carried out using SPSS v.27. For the qualitative phase, a descriptive-interpretative analysis was conducted on the interviews with the

educators/mentors, through triangulation of the emerging categories with the stages of the Hall-Tonna model.

### 3. RESULTS

The descriptive results of the questionnaire completed by the young participants in the programme are presented in Table 1.

The distinction between instrumental (means) values and terminal (goals) values is crucial for understanding the development of the young participants:

**Terminal (Goals) Values:** Values such as Security (42.9%), Loyalty (71.4%), Trust (57.1%), and Equality (50%) were highly selected. When chosen as the most important or representative, these items indicate the current life priorities of the young participants.

**Instrumental (Means) Values:** Values such as Responsibility (35.7% and 28.6%) and Education (21.4%), which typically serve as means to achieve higher-order goals (e.g., success or interdependence), showed a significant selection, serving as a positive indicator of progression towards more mature stages (Stage III).

**Table 1.** Instrumental and terminal values selected by the participants

Question	Instrumental and terminal values	f (%)
Which one do you feel most identified with at the present moment?	Self-esteem	2(14.3)
	Fun	5(35.7)
	Family	1(7.1)
	Security	6(42.9)
Which one do you feel most identified with at the present moment?	Trust	8(57.1)
	Human dignity	1(7.1)
	Service	3(21.4)
	Work	2(14.3)
Which one do you think is most important to you?	Personal development	3(21.4)
	Equality	7(50.0)
	Authenticity	4(28.6)
	Self-image	0(0.0)
Which one do you think is most important to you?	Art/beauty	4(28.6)
	Self-preservation	1(7.1)
	Justice/social order	9(64.3)
	Awe/fate	0(0.0)
Which one do you feel most represented by at present?	Congruence	1(7.1)
	Creativity	5(35.7)
	Education	3(21.4)
	Responsibility	5(35.7)
Which one do you feel most represented by at present?	Success	4(28.6)
	Responsibility	4(28.6)
	Lovability	5(35.7)
	Territory	1(7.1)
Which one do you feel most represented by at present?	Food/warmth/shelter	4(28.6)
	Control/order/discipline	2(14.3)
	Duty/obligation	4(28.6)
	Empathy	4(28.6)
In your opinion, which one is the most important in today's society?	Empathy	2(14.3)
	Innovation	1(7.1)
	Loyalty	10(71.4)
	Freedom	1(7.1)

Regarding the meaningful learning reported by the educators/mentors following the implementation of the programme, they agreed that the programme represents a high-potential resource for working with young people at risk of social exclusion. A shared conclusion was that sport, when combined with playful activities, fosters the establishment of relationships and enables effective

connection with the young participants. It was highlighted that sport serves as an effective means to make participants happy, help them feel valued, and promote emotional development and social inclusion.

Furthermore, the three educators/mentors experienced both personal and professional development, recognising that their role as mentors



is crucial and requires empathy, attentive listening, and genuine commitment, as well as the need to maintain stability and continuity in mentoring to achieve a meaningful impact on the young participants.

Concerning the values experienced during the programme, all three mentors identified Trust as central. Regarding the desirable values for the participants' future, personal and professional development was the value that reached consensus among the educators/mentors. This aligns with the values selected by the young participants. Values such as Survival (Security) and Belonging (Loyalty, Being Loved) already demonstrate an emerging profile oriented towards Initiative and Autonomy (Trust, Responsibility) and Social Justice (Justice/Social Order, Equality).

Regarding the evolution of youth leadership across the Hall-Tonna cycles. During the BeHuman Project intervention, the young participants demonstrated a transition from values centered on survival and belonging (security and loyalty) toward others more oriented toward initiative and autonomy (responsibility, creativity, social justice, and trust). This progression reflects the transition from Phases I and II (autocratic and benevolent) toward Phases III and IV (managerial, facilitator, collaborative), where leadership becomes more collaborative and focused on personal and communal development.

The results from the Hall-Tonna questionnaire show that: In the initial phases, leadership is predominantly autocratic, guided by values of self-protection and security. As they advance toward the Initiative phase, values of trust, responsibility, and creativity emerge, which are closely linked to the managerial and collaborative leadership styles. The increase in the selection of values such as social justice, equality, and human dignity reflects a shift toward collaborative and even servant forms of leadership, where contribution to the team and the promotion of new leaders take center stage.

Young individuals who emphasize values like interdependence and shared vision point toward the visionary style, characteristic of more advanced leadership cycles, where the group mission and social transformation are positioned as key objectives.

These results emphasise the importance of projects like BeHuman, since the aim of the intervention was precisely to facilitate the transition of values from Stages I-II to Stage III (Initiative), which focuses on vocational development and responsibility.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The observed shift in value priorities reflects a process of socio-emotional maturation, interpreted through the stages of the Hall-Tonna model. The young participants moved from focusing on protection and belonging values towards values of initiative and relational engagement, indicating that sport acted as an axiological mediator. Qualitative evidence reinforces this interpretation, as mentors identified empathy and responsibility as central learning outcomes. The role of values was not merely evaluative but structuring for the educational experience, confirming that human development can be understood as a progressive axiological process.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that sporting practice, when structured around intentional mentoring and a pedagogy of values, can accelerate developmental processes that might otherwise take longer to consolidate in other contexts. This approach also highlights that sport does not only support physical development, but serves as a "laboratory of citizenship", where participants practise respectful, cooperative, and just relationships, with direct transfer to everyday life [18,19].

The data provide evidence that, although values of security and loyalty remain present, the weighting of values such as responsibility, creativity, social justice, equality, and trust typical of the Initiative Phase (Phase III) of the Hall-Tonna model increases. This shift indicates a process of axiological maturation: the young people cease to focus solely on "being protected" to begin prioritizing "participating," "contributing," and "developing," which is consistent with the project's goals of inclusion and empowerment [20].

In parallel, the high selection of instrumental values like responsibility and education suggests that participants are beginning to perceive themselves as agents capable of charting personal and academic projects, and not merely as passive recipients of aid. This change in the hierarchy of values is key because it is associated with a greater perception of self-efficacy and a disposition to assume sustained commitments to their own growth and that of the group [21].

The interpretation of the results in light of the Hall-Tonna Values and Leadership Map indicates a transition from more self-centered leadership styles toward managerial and collaborative forms of leadership. In the initial phases, behaviors characteristic of the autocratic/benevolent cycle predominate, where the main concern is self-security, the search for approval, and dependence on external authority figures [22].

As the program advances, the prioritization of values such as trust, responsibility, creativity, social justice, and equality reflects the emergence of more collaborative leadership styles, capable of integrating self-initiative with concern for the group. Behaviors aligned with managerial and collaborative leadership are observed: task organization, peer support, active listening, and concern for universal participation, which aligns with Phase III of the model [23].

Sports mentorship creates scenarios in which young people not only "receive" leadership but actively exercise it: they coordinate teams, mediate conflicts, encourage more withdrawn peers, and make decisions that affect the group's functioning. These micro-experiences of leadership are supported by previously addressed values (empathy, responsibility, service, ethical commitment) and consolidate the idea that leading is not giving orders, but creating the conditions for everyone to participate [24].

This approach aligns with recent contributions on inclusive leadership and educational collaboration networks, which underscore the centrality of trust, co-responsibility, and shared vision in contexts of vulnerability. In the case of the BeHuman Project, the youth leadership that emerges is, above all, relational: it is defined by the capacity to forge bonds, sustain the group, and open participation opportunities to those who often remain on the margins [25].

Sports mentorship facilitated spaces for the real practice of leadership, in which the young people brought into play prioritized values such as responsibility and ethical commitment, not only in their individual development but also in the group dynamic. The Hall-Tonna model assisted participants and educators in identifying leadership styles and dominant behaviors according to the axiological phase, fostering self-reflection and awareness regarding the impact of their values on the construction of inclusive communities [26,27].

## 5. Conclusion

The BeHuman Project demonstrates that sport, framed within an educational mentoring model, is an effective tool for activating and consolidating values as mediators of human development in young people at risk. The Hall-Tonna model proved suitable for understanding and evaluating this transition, providing a replicable framework for other experiences of values-based social inclusion.

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## Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest is declared by the authors.

## Ethics Committee

The study protocol was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Catholic University of Murcia (CE012501; 31/01/2025).

## Author Contributions

Study Design, JAG-R, JAO-M, MJM-A, PPG-G; Data Collection, PPG-G, APA; Statistical Analysis, JAO-M, MJM-A, JAG-R; Data Interpretation, JAO-M, MJM-A, JAG-R; Manuscript Preparation, JAO-M, JAG-R, MJM-A; Literature Search, JAO-M, JAG-R, PPG-G. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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