
Personal value systems and motivations of successful serial entrepreneurs

Susan Rushworth* and Murray Gillin

Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship
Swinburne University of Technology
P.O. Box 218, Hawthorn VIC 3122, Australia
E-mail: srushworth@swin.edu.au
E-mail: mgillin@swin.edu.au
*Corresponding author

Abstract: Transcripts of interviews with both serial entrepreneurs (ten) and non-serial entrepreneurs (two) were examined for evidence of the entrepreneurs' personal value systems and for evidence that these values were enacted in their businesses. Values identified were divided into interpersonal (relating to others) and personal (relating to the individual). Interpersonal values dominated the value systems of the non-serial entrepreneurs, suggesting that serial and non-serial entrepreneurs might have different types of value systems. Personal values were more likely to be carried over into business activities and were less compatible with building enduring organisations, suggesting that such organisations were unlikely to be founded by serial entrepreneurs. Both conclusions are highly tentative because of the small number of non-serial entrepreneurs in the sample.

Keywords: personal values; business values; motivations; serial entrepreneurs.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Rushworth, S. and Gillin, M. (2006) 'Personal value systems and motivations of successful serial entrepreneurs', *Int. J. Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp.106–122.

Biographical notes: Susan Rushworth came to academic research after 14 years of working in the IT field for a multinational oil company. From 2000 to 2003, she was co-researcher with Professor Kevin Hindle on the Australian arm of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor project and coauthor of all four annual reports published during that period. She is currently Lecturer and PhD student at the Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship and is conducting research on the topic of values and business growth.

Murray Gillin is Professor Emeritus and Acting Academic Leader in the Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship at Swinburne University of Technology. He currently supervises eight PhD students seeking to understand the role of intuition, intentionality and spiritual intelligence in decision-making strategies of both serial and corporate entrepreneurs.

1 Introduction: background

This paper demonstrates that research data has value beyond the original purpose for which it was collected. It arises from an opportunity to use interview transcripts collected by one researcher as source material for another researcher, working on a related domain.

The interviews were conducted for research on decision-making processes in serial entrepreneurs – that is entrepreneurs who had founded at least two businesses. Eleven entrepreneurs were interviewed. All, but one, were based around Cambridge, UK and part of a network of technology entrepreneurs. One was based in Norwich, UK. Although the target group was serial entrepreneurs, one of the 11 was still on his first business, but was included because of his similar technical background to the others and involvement in the technology network.

The interview protocol contained a question on personal value or belief systems guiding decision-making: “Do you have some *belief system, values or spiritual dimension* to your decision-making that may give some sense of surety about the business path you chose to take?”

The interview transcripts, therefore, potentially revealed insights into the personal values of the entrepreneurs and how (or indeed whether) they applied their personal values to the businesses they created.

James Collins and Jerry Porras studied companies that had achieved outstanding success over a long period of time. Their findings were published in 1994 under the title ‘Built to last’. They observed that a distinctive feature of these long-living, successful companies was the existence of a ‘core ideology’ consisting of a ‘core purpose’ – a reason for being in business that went beyond profit and any transient business opportunity – and a small number (three to six) of ‘core values’ – guiding principles according to which business was conducted.

They offered the following definitions to business practitioners (Collins and Porras 1994,p.73):

“Core values: The organization’s essential and enduring tenets – a small set of general guiding principles; not to be confused with specific cultural or operating practices; not to be compromised for financial gain or short-term expediency.”

“Core purpose: The organization’s fundamental reasons for existence beyond just making money – a perpetual guiding star on the horizon; not to be confused with specific goals or business strategies.”

Collins and Porras further observed that the core values and purpose were developed quite early in the history of the company (at least before it grew very large) and were derived from the personal values of the founder(s). The latter observation was unsurprising. ‘Core ideology’ is a particularly strong form of organisational culture. Edgar Schein, who has written extensively on organisational culture, observed that the founder, by force of personality, initially shaped the culture of their organisation. But that culture, he argued, would not be fully developed until the young organisation had faced a few crises of growth and survival and had developed strategies for coping (Schein, 1983). Thus, in a situation where the founder moved on to another venture before the organisation was very old, then the founder’s influence on culture might be expected to be diminished.

It might be argued that serial entrepreneurs, by definition, do not 'build to last'. They build a company, get it to the point of stability (or failure) and move on to a new venture. Do they care whether the company lasts after their departure? Do serial entrepreneurs perhaps have value systems that are not oriented towards the long-term? Or do they still aim to create something of lasting value, but under the stewardship of others? And if they do not stay involved in the company for the long haul, is there evidence that they try to embed, within the organisations they found, their personal values about how and why business should be conducted?

The set of 11 interviews provided the opportunity to investigate these questions and to examine whether there were any consistent patterns of personal value systems among the serial entrepreneurs.

2 Values and motivation

In 'The Nature of Human Values', Rokeach (1973, chap.1) defined a 'value' as a special type of belief, which he described as prescriptive/proscriptive. That is, the means or end of an action is judged to be desirable/undesirable. Referring back to his earlier work on beliefs (Rokeach, 1968), it therefore follows that a value possessed the three properties common to all beliefs: cognitive, affective and behavioural. A value is a *cognition* about the desirable. A value is *affective* in the sense that a person can feel emotional about it. A value has a *behavioural* component in the sense that it may influence action.

Values may refer to a desirable mode of conduct (means-based or instrumental) or a desirable end-state (ends-based or terminal). Each type of value has two sub-types, based on whether the value has a personal or interpersonal focus. Terminal values may be personal (*e.g.*, peace of mind, personal prosperity) or social (*e.g.*, world peace, justice for all). Instrumental values may be moral values or competence values (sometimes referred to as self-actualisation values). Violation of a moral value leads to feelings of guilt about wrongdoing, whereas violation of a competence value leads to feelings of shame about personal inadequacy.

With the above in mind, it appears that 'core values' and 'core purpose', as defined by Collins and Porras, are both types of values as defined by Rokeach. 'Core values' are examples of instrumental values, in that they guide actions. 'Core purpose' is an example of a terminal value, in that it refers to a desired end state. Digging deeper into subtypes, 'core values' are moral rather than competence values, though the morality they define is internal to the company and not necessarily derived from the national culture in which that company operates (Collins and Porras, 1994, p.8). 'Core purpose' is a social value rather than a personal one, since it describes a desired end state that goes beyond the individual. Thus, the values associated with a 'core ideology' are values of an interpersonal type.

This suggests that unless an entrepreneur's values system included values of an interpersonal nature – that is: terminal, 'social' values and/or instrumental, 'moral' values – they would be unlikely to develop a 'core ideology' in any company that they founded.

When it comes to motivation, however, terminal values of the ‘personal’ type are clearly important. If a person aspires to have peace of mind, they are less likely to be attracted to the uncertainty of a new venture, than is a person who aspires to have a life of excitement. Similarly, if it is important to an individual that they have a high degree of competence in a particular skill, or mastery of a way of behaviour, then they will be motivated by opportunities that allow them to develop or display that skill or mastery.

It is not possible to assess the nature or even existence of a ‘core ideology’ in the companies founded by any individual entrepreneur based on the brief and incomplete information contained in the interview transcripts. The intended unit of analysis for which those interviews were designed was the entrepreneur, not the companies they founded. Thus, in seeking to understand more about the values and motivations of serial entrepreneurs, all types of values described above should be included in the analysis.

3 Methodology

For comparison purposes, an interview with an entrepreneur who was *not* a serial entrepreneur (he had started one business, which he was still running 20 years later) was added to the data set. This interview was conducted according to a different protocol, but covered topics similar to the other 11 interviews.

Coding of interview content was carried out using the Nvivo™ software tool, which provides flexibility in the coding process and the ability to interrogate the coded passages in many different ways.

No preexisting coding scheme for values was used. The approach chosen was to examine the interview transcripts to see what values emerged, to craft a coding scheme from this first pass and refine it if detailed coding revealed any deficiencies. The flexibility of the Nvivo™ software makes this approach possible.

The first step was to print out the interview transcripts and examine them manually. The set of transcripts was examined twice. Firstly, statements indicating ‘interpersonal’ values – those that related to desirable outcomes or modes of behaviour from the perspective of the external community or environment – were identified and highlighted. These were the type of values that would potentially underlie a ‘core ideology’. Secondly, statements indicating ‘personal’ values – those that related to desirable outcomes or modes of behaviour from the individual’s self-centred perspective – were identified and highlighted. These values provided an indication of what motivated the entrepreneurs.

The highlighted passages were then coded in Nvivo™ as ‘interpersonal’ or ‘personal’ values. This made it possible to extract all passages relating to each type of value and examine them for common themes, which then provided the basis for a coding scheme. Separate coding schemes were developed for ‘interpersonal’ and ‘personal’ values and set up in Nvivo™. Each interview was then coded according to each of the two coding schemes. This provided a profile of value systems of both interpersonal and personal nature across the set of interviewees.

Identification of value systems of entrepreneurs did not, however, necessarily mean that those values were enacted in the types of businesses they created or the way in which they operated their businesses. So all passages coded as statements of values were further examined to see whether they related to a business context or not. All statements relating to a business context were then coded according to the same two coding schemes developed above.

The final result, therefore, was four ‘nodes’ (high-level categories), each with its own ‘sub-tree’ (coding scheme) recording:

- 1 interpersonal values in general
- 2 personal values in general
- 3 interpersonal values in a business context
- 4 personal values in a business context.

An attempt was made to map the coding schemes developed above to the values contained in the Rokeach value survey (Rokeach, 1973,p.28,pp.357–361). However, this proved difficult and not very fruitful. For example, it was very hard to match some values that emerged from the interview content as important themes to any of the values in Rokeach’s survey. An example was ‘Giving back’ – putting some of the gains from entrepreneurial ventures back into the community so that others could benefit. This value was specifically addressed in the interview protocol and so, was prominent in the coding scheme. However, the closest match in the Rokeach survey was being ‘helpful’, which was much broader and did not capture the meaning very precisely. This exercise was therefore abandoned. The Rokeach value survey was developed more than 30 years ago and, though widely used for many years, had also been criticised as being open to multiple interpretations (e.g., Gibbins and Walker, 2001).

Figure 1 Example of Nvivo™ matrix search

Matrix Table	1: ID = AB1	2: ID = AB2	3: ID = AH	4: ID = AZ	5: ID = GM	6: ID = HH	7: ID = JA	8: ID = JB	9: ID = JL	10: ID = NB	11: ID = PD	12: ID = NS
1:(1 7) Excellence	2	0	0	3	0	1	0	0	0	2	0	1
2:(1 8) Collaboration-teamwork	2	0	0	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1
3:(1 9) Serving others	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0
4:(1 10) Ethics and integrity	1	0	0	3	3	0	0	1	0	1	0	6
5:(1 3) Valuing people	3	1	0	3	0	0	1	1	0	1	4	10
6:(1 2) Developing people	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
7:(1 1) Respecting people	4	1	0	2	3	0	0	2	0	2	4	13
8:(1 6) Reducing disadvantage	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
9:(1 5) Giving back	3	1	2	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	2
10:(1 4) Improving the world	4	2	1	2	1	1	0	5	0	2	9	0

Using the search facilities of Nvivo™, it was possible to map a profile of each individual entrepreneur against each value defined in the coding scheme in a matrix format, where each ‘cell’ showed the number of coded passages for an individual entrepreneur and an individual value. This allowed an easy visual comparison of the differences in profile

between individuals. An example of this matrix is provided in Figure 1. The matrix contents were exported to text files and imported into Excel to allow charts to be constructed illustrating the patterns observed.

4 Results

4.1 Values identified

The coding schemes for interpersonal and personal values are shown in Tables 1 and 2 respectively. The number of entrepreneurs expressing each of the values identified are shown in Table 3 (interpersonal values) and Table 4 (personal values). Two groups of three themes were apparent in the interpersonal values (the first six listed in Table 1), which we have christened ‘people’ and ‘a better world’. Ten of the 12 interviewees held values concerning people. As measured by the number of individual statements across all interviews, ‘respecting people’ was the most strongly held. Many of the statements referred to being honest with people, neither lying to them nor concealing information from them. For example:

“...when you’ve got to confront a whole factory full of people with a message from Chicago that if you do not decrease your costs by 30% you are all shut down, and my managers would say you cannot tell people anything like that, it will get out in the papers and I say well if I want people to respond to this challenge, I better tell them the truth. If I do not tell them the truth, they will not respect me and they will not respond.”

‘Valuing people’ was next strongest, which included recognising the importance of ‘human capital’ to entrepreneurial ventures, but also covered valuing of diversity of personalities and not just tolerating, but enjoying working with people who were different from you. Underlying it all for many of the interviewees was a fundamental liking for humankind. As one interviewee put it: “I just get on well with people. I like people. I would be a very sad person if I was left alone on a desert island”.

Table 1 Coding scheme for interpersonal values

<i>Value</i>	<i>Description</i>
Respecting people	Treating people honestly and fairly – as you would wish to be treated yourself
Developing people	Helping people to reach their full potential
Valuing people	Valuing different personalities and skills and recognising the importance of human capital
Improving the world	Making a positive impact locally or on a global scale
Giving back	Sharing your wealth and skills so others can benefit from your success
Reducing disadvantage	Working to minimise or eliminate disadvantage
Excellence	Striving for excellence and finishing what you start as well as you can
Collaboration/teamwork	Achievement through working with other individuals or organisations
Serving others	Working for others benefit rather than your own
Integrity	Being true to your values at all times

Table 2 Coding scheme for personal values

<i>Values</i>	<i>Description</i>
Autonomy, independence	Desire to be free to do what you want to do the way you want to do it
Variety, change	Thriving on new roles, new skills, new ventures
Creating something new	Creating something that wasn't there before
Impact	Making a difference
Challenge	Taking on tasks others think are impossible
Comfort zone	Sticking to what you know you can do well
Fun, personal passion	Having fun, taking a light-hearted approach, pursuing a personal passion
Manageable risk	Taking on risks you can influence or live with the downside
Fulfilment	Personal fulfilment in what you do
Money is secondary	Wanting money for what it can do for you rather than as an end in itself
Buzz, excitement	More than fun – being addicted to the 'high' of constant activity and change
Solving problems	Finding solutions to problems
Financial security	Freedom from financial worry

Table 3 Number of entrepreneurs expressing each interpersonal value

<i>Value</i>	<i>Count</i>
Respecting people	8
Developing people	6
Valuing people	8
Improving the world	9
Giving back	8
Reducing disadvantage	4
Excellence	5
Collaboration/teamwork	4
Serving others	1
Ethics and integrity	6

The third sub-theme, 'developing people' was about helping others to achieve their full potential. For example:

"I really felt it was important that I pass that on to other people who are considering and perfectly capable of setting up their own businesses. So to that extent I am directly putting it back into the community by trying to inspire other would-be entrepreneurs, people who are, to my mind, stopping themselves from being entrepreneurs unnecessarily."

Table 4 Number of entrepreneurs expressing each personal value

<i>Value</i>	<i>Count</i>
Autonomy, independence	10
Variety, change	5
Creating something new	4
Impact	2
Challenge	5
Comfort zone	2
Fun, personal passion	9
Manageable risk, acceptable risk	3
Fulfilment	2
Money is secondary	5
Buzz, excitement	4
Solving problems	2
Financial security	1

The other strong theme category, ‘a better world’ concerned the desire to improve people’s lives in various ways. This category covered three themes: ‘improving the world’ (finding ways to make life easier, more comfortable or more sustainable, locally or globally); ‘giving back’ (making contributions to the community so that others can benefit from your success); ‘reducing disadvantage’ (addressing disadvantage so that everyone has the opportunity to achieve what you have achieved). Some examples:

“...we did all share this belief in micro processors having a great impact on humanity and it would change our lives. So in a way, we also felt a certain degree of responsibility of doing the right thing by our punters.”

“I’ve been incredibly fortunate in the opportunities that I’ve had and I think that a lot of it has been opportunity, it has also been a lot of work and part of it has also been luck but it has helped me to get to where I am now and I do think that it is important to give back on a couple of different levels. Part of it is financial but also it is time. It could be time for volunteering as well as sharing in experiences...”

“I am also involved with the Princes Trust, which was started by Prince Charles. They raise money to help disadvantaged young people start businesses, not high tech businesses usually – people down in the dumps, a small amount of money, get them started and mentor them. [Various other entrepreneurs] have given a lot of time and energy to the Prince’s Trust because we believe that it is something important, these people deserve their chance.”

Another value that was held by at least half the interviewees was ‘Integrity’. This was about behaving ethically and being true to one’s values at all times. This value was strongly associated with ‘respecting people’ in that every interviewee who expressed ‘integrity’ as a value also valued ‘respecting people’. Two quotes illustrate this value clearly:

“I think that I have a core ethical code by which I run my business and how I treat everyone – all of my employees, my business partners, my investors and for that matter also my parents and my spouse. So it is not something that is limited just to one side of my life and it is fundamentally about being fair, about doing what is right and being firm in negotiating but not screwing someone over...”

“...it got to the point where I was just no longer prepared to make that compromise and I felt that ... I could not live with myself by saying to a client, I think you need my team of six people when what I really felt in my heart was all they needed was some help, coaching and support to enable them to solve their own problems, which is why I got out of big consulting, so that I could stick and be true to my own values.”

As the second quote illustrated, ‘integrity’ was a strong enough value to be a reason in its own right for starting a business. This was the case for the interviewee quoted above and it was also clearly a strong motivation for one other interviewee. Interestingly, these two were the non-serial entrepreneurs in the sample. However, integrity was also clearly important to four out of the ten serial entrepreneurs.

So far as personal values were concerned – the ‘self-interested’ values – two values stood out. One was the desire for autonomy or independence, shared by 10 out of 12 interviewees (see Table 4). This took the form of a need to be your own boss, to do things your own way or to be financially independent so as to be able to choose work on what interested you rather than what paid the bills:

“I tried everything else, came to the conclusion that I did not enjoy working for other people.”

“So the model continued working to the point now that I funded myself, and gave myself an endowment in the University, so that I should never have to apply for a grant ever again.”

The other, shared by 9 out of 12 interviewees, was having fun. This ranged from a light-hearted approach to life and work, to pursuing a personal passion. Almost all the statements about this value applied to a business context. Clearly the interviewees predominantly found their business activities engaging and enjoyable.

“If I like the product and I like the people and I think I am going to have a lot of fun and I am not going to lose a huge amount of money, I think I can protect my downside, then I will give it a go.”

“A friend of mine said he had this idea and this man has said that he would be willing to fund it, do you want to come start it up with me and it sounded like fun.”

“Property has been a lifelong passion in all its different shapes and forms.”

Closely related to, but going beyond mere ‘fun’, was the ‘high’ of being caught up in the frantic pace and chaos of an entrepreneurial venture. Some people found this almost addictive. Other widely held values included the need for variety and the need for challenge. Several interviewees were clearly motivated by proving doubters wrong. The fact that others didn’t believe in a project made them more determined to make it happen.

Creating something new or making an impact was also a significant personal value. Many interviewees gained fulfilment through creating organisations or introducing products or services that would not have existed without their personal input.

Financial prosperity did not emerge as a strong motivating value. Money was clearly important, but when it was mentioned, it played a secondary role – usually either to ‘fun’ or to ‘autonomy’:

“Provided that I am confident that I am going to have a blast doing it, then the money actually plays a secondary role.”

“You’ve got the financial front on one hand but if it doesn’t really grab my imagination and I don’t just get it immediately, then even if it looks like it could be a huge money spinner I am probably not going to go for it because I realise it is still going to take an enormous amount of effort and I depend on my imagination being sparked off to put in there.”

“I think money is still very much the motivation in terms of wanting to have the independence to be able to continue to do new things. Not money just for its own sake, more for the opportunity it allows you to do different things.”

In common with observations made by many entrepreneurship researchers (*e.g.*, Timmons and Spinelli, 2004), entrepreneurs were attracted to manageable risks with an acceptable downside. They weighed up risk against reward, but as one interviewee noted, they tended to be less pessimistic about the downside:

“One thing I have noticed, and most people get wrong, is they never properly evaluate conditions of a risk equation. What they do not evaluate are the benefits you get from failure, they only look at the negatives. You often get benefits from failures. And they do not look at the upside. They never evaluate it right.”

A couple of interviewees made statements that indicated they had started operating inside their comfort zone rather than pushing the boundaries or exploring new technical frontiers. The impression conveyed was of having lost the passion that initially fired them to seek out new challenges, and instead relying on what they knew they could do well and would keep them comfortable. It did not appear to be a case of needing financial security. Only one interviewee expressed financial security as a value and this was the non-serial entrepreneur, who had founded and run his business for 20 years.

It was interesting to observe that one interviewee did not express *any* interpersonal values and expressed only two personal values – and those, by very brief statements (“I get bored easily”, “It looked like fun and it was an opportunity”). This interviewee seemed to be at pains to give the impression that he was not motivated by anything other than good commercial sense (not money – there was no indication that accumulating a lot of personal wealth was important). For example, in response to a question about giving back to the community, he said: “I don’t believe in altruism – except for lemmings”. And yet, one of the other interviewees happened to mention (many of the interviewees knew each other) that this individual contributed his time to a charitable organisation aimed at giving young, disadvantaged people a start in business. This individual seemed to be at pains to convey himself as a hard-headed businessman, giving the impression he believed that any non-commercial motivation was somehow shameful or weak.

4.2 Values in business

There are two main points of interest here:

- 1 For each individual entrepreneur, to what extent do their individual values carry over into their business activities?
- 2 For each individual value identified, how often is it carried over into business activities?

Using the search facilities of Nvivo™, it was possible to map individual entrepreneurs against individual values and count the number of references by each individual to each value – either in general, or in a business context. These figures were extracted to Excel and used to generate graphs, which illustrated the degree of overlap. Figure 2 shows the extent to which interpersonal values carried over into the business context for each individual entrepreneur. Figure 3 shows the same for each individual value. Figure 4 and Figure 5 present the same information for personal values. In Figure 2 and Figure 4, the cross-hatched columns represent the non-serial entrepreneur who was interviewed according to a different protocol (identified as ‘NS’).

For both value types, it can be seen that there was a strong crossover of an individual’s values into their business ventures. However, the crossover was noticeably stronger for personal values than it was for interpersonal values.

Three interpersonal values emerged as being less likely to be enacted in a business context: ‘Reducing disadvantage’, ‘Giving back’ and ‘Improving the world’. In the case of the values ‘reducing disadvantage’ and ‘giving back’, many interviewees indicated that this was something they did outside of their business, through participating in charity work, mentoring or philanthropic activity, for example. At least one interviewee, however, had founded businesses for the specific purpose of ‘giving back’.

Figure 2 Interpersonal values enacted in business – by individual

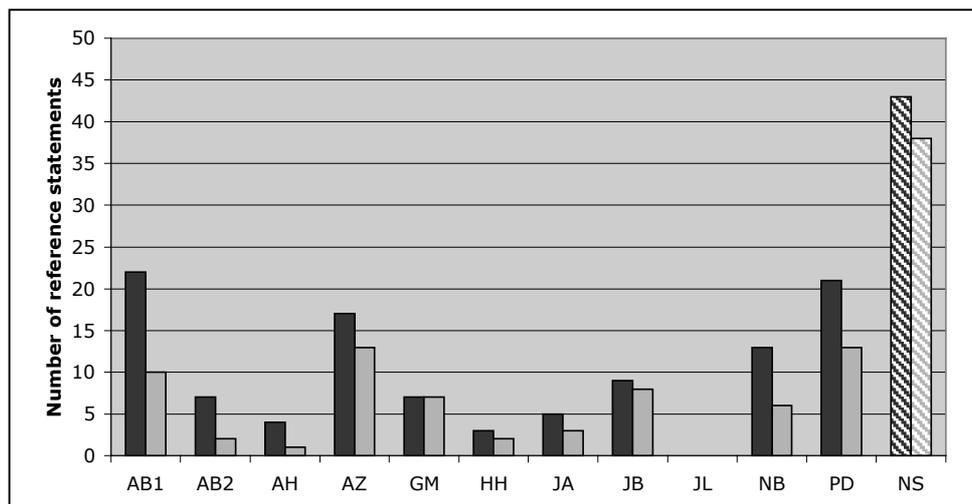


Figure 3 Interpersonal values enacted in business – by value

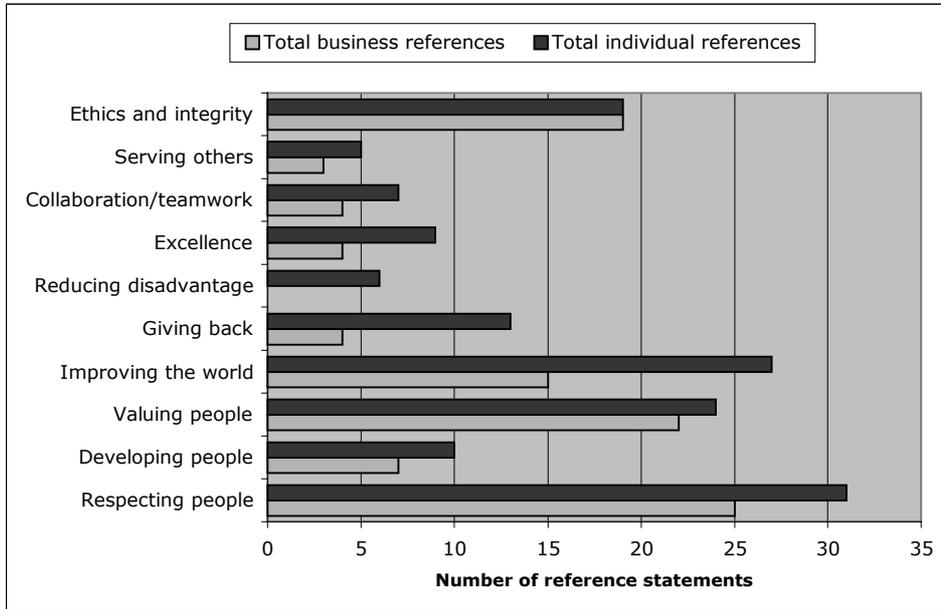


Figure 4 Personal values enacted in business – by individual

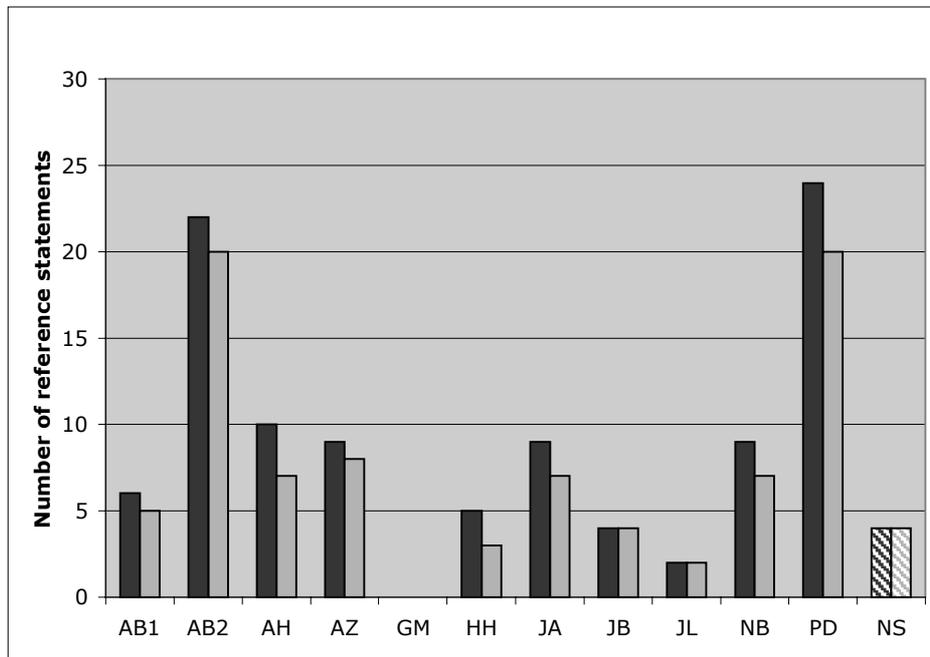
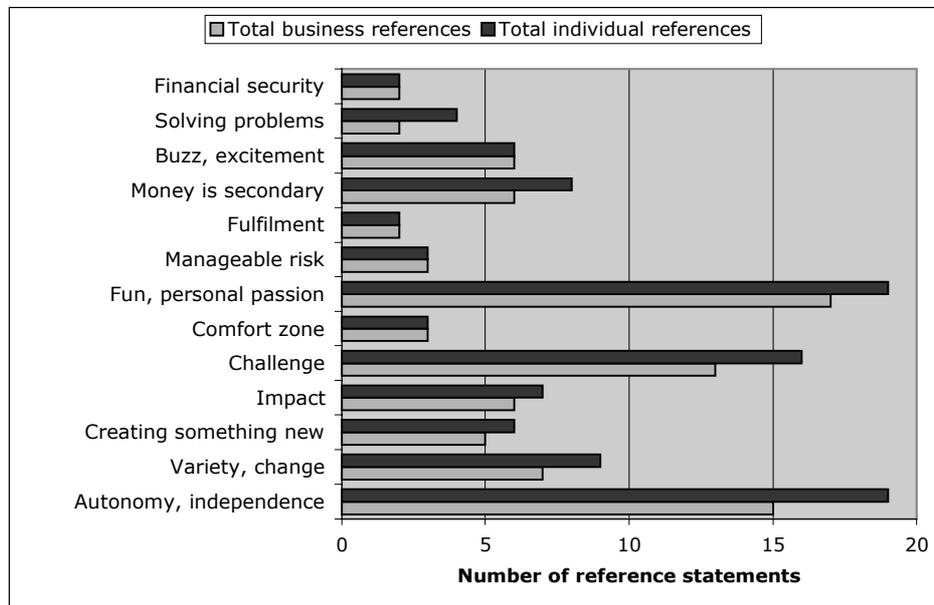


Figure 5 Personal values enacted in business – by value

Many statements that were coded as ‘improving the world’ were about the importance of having a society that worked (fair, clean, law-abiding) and that encouraged achievement (investment in education, establishing centres of excellence) and were made in a general rather than a business context. Thus, the number of statements gives a slightly misleading picture. Of those interviewees holding this value, seven out of nine also enacted it in their business activities. Overall, there was a strong consensus about business activities having a positive impact on society.

‘Developing people’ was, for some interviewees, confined to mentoring activities outside of their business, while for others, it was clearly core to the way they conducted their businesses.

Four of the entrepreneurs interviewed (‘AZ’, ‘GM’, ‘JB’ and ‘NS’) showed a particularly high crossover of interpersonal values into business activities. This group included both the non-serial entrepreneurs (‘GM’ and ‘NS’). Three of these four (‘AZ’ was the exception) made little reference to personal values (none at all in the case of ‘GM’), indicating that their value system was outward-focused – that is, towards the external community, rather than towards themselves. In one case (‘JB’), this outward-orientation was somewhat blurred, because of a strongly stated belief that benefit to the community would come through his own self-fulfilment.

As noted above, the carry over of personal values into the business context was more consistent than with interpersonal values. Based on the number of statements referring to specific personal values, the values most likely to be reflected in business activities of these entrepreneurs were: ‘fun’, ‘autonomy’ and ‘challenge’.

4.3 Serial and non-serial entrepreneurs

Although there were only two non-serial entrepreneurs in the sample, a comparison of the values held by serial and non-serial entrepreneurs proved interesting, as illustrated by Table 5 (interpersonal values) and Table 6 (personal values). Almost all the values referred to by the two non-serial entrepreneurs were interpersonal values. One of the two did not refer to any personal values. The other referred to two and one of these was ‘financial security’, a value not shared by any of the serial entrepreneurs.

Table 5 Comparison of interpersonal values: serial and non-serial entrepreneurs

Values	Count serial (n = 10)	Count non-serial (n = 2)	Percent serial (%)	Percent non-serial (%)
Respecting people	6	2	60	100
Developing people	5	1	50	50
Valuing people	7	1	70	50
Improving the world	8	1	80	50
Giving back	7	1	70	50
Reducing disadvantage	3	1	30	50
Excellence	4	1	40	50
Collaboration/teamwork	3	1	30	50
Serving others	1	0	10	0
Integrity	4	2	40	100

Table 6 Comparison of personal values: serial and non-serial entrepreneurs

Values	Count serial (n = 10)	Count non-serial (n=2)	Percent serial (%)	Percent non-serial (%)
Autonomy, independence	9	1	90	50
Variety, change	5	0	50	0
Creating something new	4	0	40	0
Impact	2	0	20	0
Challenge	5	0	50	0
Comfort zone	2	0	20	0
Fun, personal passion	9	0	90	0
Manageable risk, acceptable risk	3	0	30	0
Fulfilment	2	0	20	0
Money is secondary	5	0	50	0
Buzz, excitement	4	0	40	0
Solving problems	2	0	20	0
Financial security	0	1	0	50

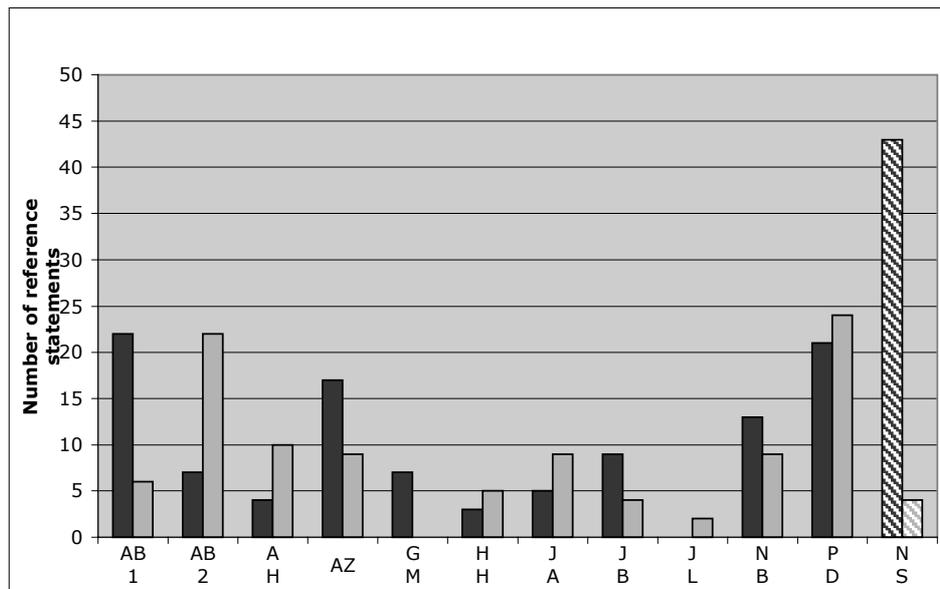
Both non-serial entrepreneurs valued 'respecting people' and 'integrity'. These were valued by 60% and 40%, respectively, of serial entrepreneurs.

Interpersonal values dominated the value systems for the two non-serial entrepreneurs, but they were also dominant – or at least prominent – for several of the serial entrepreneurs. Only five of the ten serial entrepreneurs talked more about personal than interpersonal values (six if you include the one who was reluctant to talk about values at all) and for two of these, the difference was small.

5 Discussion and implications

The value systems of the entrepreneurs interviewed varied considerably. Figure 6 shows the number of statements referring to interpersonal and personal values by each individual entrepreneur. The extent to which individuals talked about values and the balance between interpersonal and personal values varied widely. However, the results above do indicate some common themes.

Figure 6 References to interpersonal and personal values by individual entrepreneurs



Firstly, all but one of the serial entrepreneurs did express some outward-focused (interpersonal) values. There was a common consensus on the importance of business activities having a positive impact on society. There was a strong belief (these were almost all technology entrepreneurs) that technology was a force for good in the world and this appeared to be a strong motivation for establishing businesses to disseminate new technology.

There was also a common consensus that people deserved to be treated with respect and that they were one of the most important factors in business success. Thus, for the most part, the serial entrepreneurs did have value systems that were compatible with a 'core ideology' as defined by Collins and Porras in 'Built to last'.

There was also a fairly consistent pattern of serial entrepreneurs enacting their interpersonal values through the way they conducted the businesses they founded, particularly in the way they behaved towards the people they employed and those they partnered with in business.

However, when it comes to the motivation systems of these entrepreneurs – the personal values that drive them to create and build businesses – there are serious questions about compatibility with building enduring organisations with an enduring 'core ideology'. The top four personal values were:

- 1 autonomy
- 2 fun
- 3 variety
- 4 challenge.

Autonomy is not necessarily incompatible – Bill Gates' personal wealth through building Microsoft into one of the world's biggest companies gives him the freedom to pursue projects that interest him personally (though it is uncertain whether Microsoft will be Gates' eventual departure). Fun, variety and challenge, however, suggest that the entrepreneur is likely to move on when their business ventures cease to offer these factors. The need for 'variety' and 'challenge' in particular, would seem likely to encourage the entrepreneur to move on to new ventures.

The interviews with serial entrepreneurs did not indicate that creating an enduring organisation was important to them. Not one interviewee talked about wanting their children to join them in business, for example. Only one made a reference to creating a lasting organisation. Thus, there was little or no evidence to support the idea that serial entrepreneurs might seek to create an enduring organisation under the stewardship of others.

Schein argued that the values founders model by: 1. how they behave; and 2. what they pay attention to, are two of the most important influences on the development of an organisation's culture (Schein, 1983,p.22). That being so, a founder who always has a weather eye open for the next interesting opportunity is unlikely to instil a culture where longevity is valued.

The usefulness of this study is obviously limited by the lack of an adequate comparison group of non-serial entrepreneurs. The two such entrepreneurs present in the sample of 12 did appear to have distinctly different value systems from the serial entrepreneurs, but without more interviews with non-serial entrepreneurs, it is not possible to determine whether this is a pattern or an aberration.

The authors would, however, tentatively suggest that serial entrepreneurs have different value systems from non-serial entrepreneurs and that enduring organisations are unlikely to be founded by serial entrepreneurs.

References

- Collins, J.C. and Porras, J.I. (1994) *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, 2002 Paperback Edition, London: Random House.
- Gibbins, K. and Walker, I. (2001) 'Multiple interpretations of the Rokeach Value Survey', *The Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 133, No. 6, pp.797–805.
- Rokeach, M. (1973) *The Nature of Human Values*, New York: Free Press.
- Rokeach, M. (1968) *Beliefs, Attitudes and Values*, San Francisco: Jossey Bass.
- Schein, E. (1983) 'The role of the founder in creating organizational culture', *Organizational Dynamics*, Summer.
- Timmons, J.A. and Spinelli, S. (2004) *New Venture Creation: Entrepreneurship for the 21st Century*, 6th edition, New York: McGraw-Hill/Irwin.