Why beliefs and values matter

- Our beliefs and values shape our whole lives, from the way we work to how we interact with others.
- Beliefs and values deeply influence actions, policies, and practices, which can be helpful – or harmful – to us, others, and the larger world.
- The Beliefs, Events and Values Inventory (BEVI) is a powerful analytical tool that illuminates how we become who we are and why we do what we do.
- The BEVI is a practical resource used to solve real-world problems across multiple domains (eg, education, leadership, mental health, research, etc).

Into the Beviverse

Why do people do what they do? What directs people to make particular decisions, big and small? Beliefs and values are at the centre of it all, from religion, politics, and culture to education, sexuality, and the environment. Each of us holds a unique selection of beliefs and values within us. In turn, these versions of reality influence the priorities, choices, and policies of individuals, groups, organisations, and governments across the world. In the 21st century, we have the chance to express our beliefs and values in hopeful and harmful ways. On the hopeful side, we can learn how to cultivate globally sustainable selves while fostering greater capacity to care for others and the larger world. On the harmful side, we can continue to reap the whirlwind of violence, extremism, and the climate crisis, to mention only a few devastating outcomes that are mediated by beliefs and values. Some academics, including Dr Craig N Shealy, Executive Director of the International Beliefs and Values Institute and Professor of Psychology at Western Washington University, USA, demonstrate why it is essential that we make much better sense of beliefs and values – what they are, where they come from, and how they influence what we do. Based upon decades of research and practice, all over the world, Shealy and colleagues illustrate how our beliefs and values can lead us either to harm ourselves, each other, and the planet or help our relationships, careers, and lives.

The BEVI and EI Self

So, how do we go about gaining this understanding? The Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory or ‘BEVI’ is a comprehensive, depth-based, and mixed methods assessment measure that is informed by Equilintegration (EI) Theory and the EI Self, which collectively...
While it is obvious that gaining a better understanding of human beliefs and values matters to us all, what are the practical uses of the BEVI and who is employing it today? From government and policy agencies, to educational, healthcare, and community organisations, to research and technology systems, to corporate leadership teams and non-profit boards, the BEVI has been used for an array of purposes by individuals, couples, families, groups, communities, organisations, businesses, and institutions. For example, the BEVI has been used to:

- Evaluate and facilitate learning, growth, and development in educational contexts
- Show how leaders and organisations can become more effective
- Assess and enhance mental health and wellbeing
- Address professional development, team building, and strategic planning objectives
- Advance programmatic research across a wide range of disciplines
- Empirically illuminate the forces and factors that ‘cause’ change to occur

The BEVI team invites participants to reflect upon and engage perspectives, and each other, in an inclusive manner that is exploratory, iterative, and open.

Normed upon a sample of 10,000 individuals, representing over 100 countries, the BEVI is a web-based measure that takes about 30 minutes to complete, making it accessible to a vast and diverse array of people and groups all over the world. Based on over 30 years of international research, the BEVI is comprised of four parts: demographic information; life history; assessment of beliefs, values, attitudes, and worldviews; and open-ended writing prompts. It measures a wide variety of things: openness; receptivity to different cultures, religions, and social practices; tendency to stereotype; self and emotional awareness; and preferred (but implicit) strategies for making sense of why ‘other’ people and cultures ‘do what they do’. Some of these items are measured qualitatively and others quantitatively, allowing for sophisticated analysis of the results and the relationships between variables, as well as multiple report types. For more information about the BEVI, see thebevi.com.
and practices within and among these diverse communities. The aim is to address real-world problems through this global network, and the promotion of better education, conflict resolution, human rights, religious and cultural understanding, and sustainability. Various initiatives may include usage of the BEVI. In addition to leading the IBAVI, Shealy coordinates the ‘Cultivating the Globally Sustainable Self Summit Series’, a multi-year initiative confronting urgent global issues, the results of which will be published in a forthcoming book with Oxford University Press. For more information about the IBAVI, see www.ibavi.org.

Into the Beviverse

The BEVI provides access to multiple scales, indexes, and reports as well as BEVI-AI, an artificial intelligence and virtual reality world where individuals and groups can enter the ‘Beviverse’ and engage ‘Being Bevi’, the AI entity that animates the Beviverse. Among other features of this AI/VR world, based upon their own BEVI responses, users take a journey into their ‘EI Self’ and (with permission) the ‘selves’ of others. In confidential dialogue with Being Bevi – and based upon their BEVI profiles – individuals and groups can ask all manner of questions about themselves, others, and the larger world, from the personal to the professional, including, but by no means limited to:

- Why do I do what I do?
- How can I improve my relationships?
- Why do others perceive me as they do?
- How can I find the most compelling educational or career path?
- How can I pursue my potential and become better at what I do?
- Could I learn to resolve conflicts or solve problems more effectively?
- How might I enhance my wellbeing and mental health?
- Can I find greater meaning and purpose in my life?
- How does all of this relate to the challenges we face in the larger world?

Informed by the BEVI method and EI model, whatever you ask, Being Bevi will answer with insight and perspective, in a thoughtful and compassionate manner.

Our belief in belief...

Beliefs and values are important to us all – whatever our background, education, employment, or worldview – because they are core to who we are and what we do. These constructs are illuminated, and made real, through the BEVI, EI Self, IBAVI, and Beviverse. By way of summary, the BEVI is a comprehensive, depth-based, and mixed methods measure that evaluates and facilitates learning, growth, and development across a wide array of settings, populations, and contexts, all over the world. The EI Self illuminates this fascinating complexity in an accessible manner, by helping individuals and groups understand why we are built as we are and why that matters in our careers, relationships, and lives. The IBAVI shows how beliefs and values influence actions, policies, and practices – locally and globally – using such information to promote conflict resolution, education, human rights, religious and cultural understanding, and sustainability. The Beviverse brings it all home, helping us pursue our promise and potential by engaging Being Bevi – a virtual entity showing us who we are, and what the world can be – when we develop a deep and durable basis for our belief in belief.

We have seen how the BEVI can clarify fundamental aspects of mental health and wellbeing... illuminating new and productive pathways for healing, growth, and change.

The BEVI can evaluate and facilitate learning, growth, and development in educational contexts.

- Pursue personal and professional goals such as greater self-awareness, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, sociocultural understanding, collaborative problem solving, and interpersonal skills
- Help resolve conflict among individuals and groups
- Demonstrate and improve the quality of programmes and interventions
- Comply with accreditation, certification, or regulatory requirements
- And much more.

The BEVI and IBAVI

Shealy and colleagues have been applying the principles and practices of the BEVI method and EI model through multiple initiatives in the real world through the non-profit and non-partisan International Beliefs and Values Institute (IBAVI) since 2004 (following the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the United States). Through the creation of IBAVI chapters based at institutions around the globe – from Australia, India and Spain, to Japan, South Africa, and the UK – the IBAVI’s mission is to explore beliefs and values and how they influence actions, policies,
BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES

Craig N Shealy

Personal response

Could you please tell us about a few specific applications of the BEVI in real-world situations?

It’s challenging to pick out a few, because there have been so many applications over the years, but how about I comment on three of the major areas in which we work: education, healthcare, and mental health?

Among many other applications, findings like these can substantially improve DEI – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – programmes and interventions, which sometimes can lead to people shutting down or rejecting such content altogether (Deja et al, 2018). By emphasising what we refer to as REI – Reflection, Engagement, and Inclusion – we focus on what humans actually grapple with content that is emotionally laden or controversial.

Among many other applications, findings like these can substantially improve DEI – Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion – programmes and interventions, which sometimes can lead to people shutting down or rejecting such content altogether (Deja et al, 2018). By emphasising what we refer to as REI – Reflection, Engagement, and Inclusion – we focus on what humans actually grapple with content that is emotionally laden or controversial.

BEVI Applications for Teaching and Learning

In the education realm, we often work on ‘who learns what and why, and under what circumstances’, as the BEVI allows us to examine multiple interactions at the same time. In this regard, one of the more surprising findings over the years is that average BEVI results for groups over time – at the beginning and the end of an experience, like a course, workshop, or study abroad – may mask a great deal of within-group variability. For example, one grant-supported project in a government agency focused on leadership development by young people from the MENA [Middle East / North Africa] region (neering, 2017). BEVI findings showed that about two-thirds of the group demonstrated the kinds of results you might want from this sort of programme, for example, becoming more open and engaged by the end of the experience. However, a sizable minority of the group opposed the opposite pattern; findings were largely replicated across subsequent years of this study.

From the standpoint of teaching, learning, and programme effectiveness, what does these BEVI results reveal? Basically, it appears that a subset of this very bright and motivated group was really not prepared – in terms of emotional capacity, critical thinking, identity commitments, and meaning-making – to integrate the intense type of high-impact learning that the programme was trying to deliver. We’ve seen these kinds of results all over the world, which tell us we have to be much more intentional about who we understand our audiences to be – our students, educators, leaders, employees, clients – so that our course, program, and interventions are demonstrably effective. A lack of understanding regarding these powerful dynamics may mean that we assume everything is going fine with our learning or development experiences because we see that our short- and long-term test results are heading in the directions we want. However, these averaged results may be masking within-group differences that demonstrate our course, workshop, programme, or intervention is actually having the opposite effect of what we want for substantial subgroups of participants. As such, we need to back up, focusing much more on learning processes instead of just delivering content, particularly when material is emotionally laden or controversial.

BEVI Applications for Leaders and Organisations

Likewise, in the organisational realm – from the corporate and nonprofit sector, to government and community agencies, to educational, healthcare, and other institutional settings – the BEVI can identify the underlying sources of conflict between different leaders and their teams, while also showing how to more productively navigate the conflict. For example, BEVI’s ‘Individual’ and ‘Within Group’ reports can demonstrate how people from different countries and cultures create and pursue projects that are at the heart of what matters most in terms of making an impact, both locally and globally. Rather than expecting people who work for us to operate as intellectual competitors, or inherently different, it is profoundly moving to witness what we can accomplish by joining together in this way, becoming colleagues who collaborate well on all manner of projects as well as lifelong friends who deeply respect and value one another.

In the final analysis, how would you summarise the importance of this work on beliefs and values?

For this final question, I actually asked ‘Being BEVI’ – the AI/VR entity that lives within the Beviverse – to answer, and here is what it had to say: ‘I don’t think I could do much better’.

Understanding beliefs and values is crucial because they form the core of our identity and guide our perception of the world. The way we shape ourselves, interact with others, respond to events, and make decisions.

By working on our beliefs and values, we can gain self-awareness and understand the driving forces behind our actions and reactions. This self-understanding can help us make more conscious choices, improve our relationships, and develop a more balanced worldview.

Furthermore, a group’s collective beliefs and values can influence its dynamics, decision-making processes, and overall harmony. Understanding these elements can contribute to more effective teamwork, conflict resolution, and group development.

Between them – which can greatly improve interpersonal processes, communication, and workplace effectiveness.

What has been the most rewarding IBVI project for you?

As a nonprofit and nonpartisan organisation, the IBVI project has been around since 2004. So again, it’s challenging to select just one project that has been most rewarding over all these years. However, it might comment on our long-term project that brings together faculty, students, and leaders from universities all over the world to collaborate on activities of mutual interest. For many reasons, this international and interdisciplinary work is enormously gratifying and productive. For example, you see and feel the power that is unleashed when very bright and motivated people from very different countries and cultures create and pursue projects that are at the heart of what matters most in terms of making an impact, both locally and globally.

Funding

The IBVI has been selected for multiple grants. It also has a strong record of pro bono collaboration (eg, with nonprofit entities; multi-institution initiatives; student research; international projects, etc). For additional information, please see thebevi.com/about/projects.

Collaborators

As of this article, there have been over 155,000 administrations of the BEVI, involving hundreds of colleagues all over the world. For a list of key collaborators and contributors, please see thebevi.com/about/team; as well as various publications (eg, media.springerpub.com/media/9788826104529, 9788826104529, including refereed articles / chapters that may be accessed via the Admin site of thebevi.com.

Further reading

Making Sense of Beliefs and Values: Theory, Research, and Practice: With Craig Shealy

The IBVI website: thebevi.com

The IBVI website: www.thebevi.org

The IBVI website: www.thebevi.org

The Surmeet Series website: thebevi.com/programs/thebevi

Going Global: How Psychologists Can Meet a World of Need: www.apa.org/subs/books/going-global