

BELIEFS AND BEHAVIOR, AN ANCIENT PERSPECTIVE AND MODERN APPLICATION

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ABSTRACT

The paper describes an experiential exercise, which has the participants examine their beliefs, attitudes and behaviors, and how tolerant they are to the beliefs of others. It starts by briefly describing the beliefs in the gods of ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt. It discusses and provides an example of the relationship amongst beliefs, values, attitudes, intended behaviors and actual behaviors. An exercise is provided that asks students to specify a belief they have and relate it to their attitudes and behavior. Working in small groups classmates determine the extent they accept the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of others as legitimate and the degree to which they agree with them. These are discussed in relation to tolerance to others and implications for work and society.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this exercise are multifold. One is to have the students reflect upon the origins and perhaps the validity of their beliefs and how those beliefs influence attitudes and behaviors. Another is to learn about the beliefs of others in the class. A third objective is to increase the acceptance or tolerance of beliefs different from one's own. This is in conjunction with learning the relationship between beliefs, values, attitudes, intended behaviors and behaviors.

INTRODUCTION (BRIEF LECTURE)

In ancient Greece, Zeus was the god of heaven. In ancient Rome his name became Jupiter. For over a thousand years the ancient Greeks and then the Romans considered him the dominant god and believed in the powers of an array of gods. The original Olympic Games were dedicated to Zeus and huge temples and statues were built to honor him. Zeus' brother, Poseidon, also known as Neptune by the Romans, was given dominion over the seas by Zeus and was considered god of the seas. Accordingly, temples were built to him, statues were made of him and he was prayed to regarding matters relating to the sea.

Athena was the daughter of Zeus alone, springing forth from his head fully armed. She was a goddess of war and of wisdom and of crafts. She was the patron goddess of Athens, whom the city was named in honor of and for whom the Pantheon was built on the Acropolis overlooking Athens. Statues and temples were created throughout

Greece and the Roman Empire to worship the gods and sacrifices were made when beseeching or honoring the gods. These practices lasted for over a thousand years.

In ancient Egypt Ra or Re was the first and most important of the Egyptian gods. He/She was believed to have been created from chaos and became the sun god. The kings, known as Pharaohs, were believed to be the son of Ra and were worshipped as a living god. This belief helped to legitimize the absolute rule of the Pharaoh. Based upon this belief people did what the Pharaoh commanded, from the building of the pyramids to whatever was sought. The Pharaohs and the belief in their divinity existed for well over two thousand years. (Gill, 2007)

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BELIEFS, VALUES, ATTITUDES, INTENDED BEHAVIORS AND ACTUAL BEHAVIORS

Today, research indicates that our beliefs and values shape our attitudes, which cause us to have intentions to behave in certain ways and that we are likely to behave in a way consistent with those intentions. (Jones and Gerard, 1967; Johns and Saks, 2007)

Note the relationship among beliefs, values, attitudes, intended behaviors and actual behaviors in the following example.

- Assume, as many do, that an individual believes the following:
- Belief: The bible is the word of God and therefore correct. It is therefore true that the world was created in six days and God created man and woman on the sixth day.
- Value: I prefer (value) associating with others that share my beliefs.
- Attitude: I don't like those that disagree with my belief in the bible and those who believe in evolution.
- Intended Behavior: I am not going to have my children exposed to the teaching of evolution.
- Behavior: I am home schooling my children.

How many of you accept that it is legitimate for someone to hold the belief that this person does?

How many of you accept that it is legitimate for someone to hold the attitude that this person does?

How many of you accept that it is legitimate for someone to behave in the way this person does?

EXERCISE – INDIVIDUAL TASK

Consider your beliefs and attitudes. Individuals should record the following:

One belief that you hold that you think is not shared by everyone else in this class.

This should be a belief that you are willing to share with others in the class. An example of a belief likely to be commonly held by everyone is that one needs air to live. This is NOT the type of belief you are to record. You may want to consider a belief relating to politics, religion, sex, relationships, ethics or whatever you think others may view differently. Record the following.

What is the belief?

What is the basis for your belief? That is, why do you believe this?

How does this belief influence your attitude toward anything or anyone?

What behaviors do you engage in based upon this belief?

EXERCISE – GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL TASK

INSTRUCTIONS TO STUDENTS

Discuss your beliefs, attitudes and behaviors in small groups. While each person is speaking record each person's belief, attitude and behavior. Do this by creating a list with first the belief, then the attitude and then behavior. Present this in list form in the following manner, leaving room to the left of the listing of the belief, attitude and behavior. Do not put your name or the names of the others on this page. Record the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors in the order presented, including your own. Your objective is to accurately understand and record what each person is saying. You will then indicate the extent you accept that belief, attitude and behavior as legitimate and the extent to which you agree. You will be using a five-point scale ranging from strongly accept as legitimate (5) to strongly reject (1) and another five-point scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). You will have a maximum of five (5) minutes for each person to present his or her belief, attitude and behavior and for the others to record this information and the extent they accept and agree. Manage your time.

NOTES TO PROFESSOR

Alternatively a form could be provided, RECORDING OF RESPONSES, as follows. If a form is used to facilitate the recording of the responses, then the rating information

and instructions contained in the INDIVIDUAL TASK section of this paper could be included on the reverse side of the page.

Group sizes of five are recommended. Manage the time by announcing that they have a total of twenty-five minutes to complete the task. This assumes that there are five members per group and that each person has five minutes. After four minutes announce that four minutes have past and that they have one minute remaining to record the belief, attitude and behavior of the person currently speaking. After another minute instruct them to stop the discussion and move onto the next person in their group if they have not already done so. This should be done for each five-minute segment. The purpose of this is to limit the intensity of the discussion as well as to manage the time. It is possible that some of the students' beliefs, attitudes and/or behaviors will upset some of the others. This needs to be monitored. Should you hear particularly loud discussions, you may want to move closer to that group and be obvious that you are monitoring them.

You should be willing and able to intervene in the small group discussions and to stop a discussion, or argument. This may be done by pointing out that the objective is to understand what the other person is saying to record it and to indicate the extent you agree with and accept as legitimate their beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. You may also remind them that the objective is not to challenge, disagree with or tell the person that he or she is wrong. If you do not think you would be able to intervene in this way, you may not want to conduct this exercise.

This exercise has the participants examining their beliefs, attitudes and behaviors and contrasting them with those of others. The objective is to have the participants be more accepting of others' beliefs when they are different than their own. If as the Professor you cannot accept the legitimacy of others to hold beliefs that you disagree with, then it may not be appropriate for you to conduct this exercise.

RECORDING OF RESPONSES

Record the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors in the order presented, including your own. **Do NOT** record your name or the names of the person holding the other beliefs, attitudes and behaviors.

Accept As Agree
Legitimate With

Belief:

Attitude:

Behavior:

Accept As Agree
Legitimate With

Belief:

Attitude:

Behavior:

Accept As Agree
Legitimate With

Belief:

Attitude:

Behavior:

Accept As Agree
Legitimate With

Belief:

Attitude:

Behavior:

Accept As Agree
Legitimate With

Belief:

Attitude:

Behavior:

Accept As Agree
Legitimate With

Belief:

Attitude:

Behavior:

INDIVIDUAL TASK

To what extent do you accept the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of those reported by those in your group? The acceptance of others views means that you think it is legitimate for him or her to have the beliefs, attitudes and to behave in the way he or she reported. It does not mean that you agree with them.

To the left of each person's belief, attitude and behavior record the extent you accept that person's views. The degree to which you accept a belief, attitude or behavior may vary. That is you may accept as legitimate a belief, but not accept a behavior that is associated with that belief. Please use the following scale.

Accept as Legitimate

5 – I strongly accept the legitimacy of this belief, attitude or behavior.

4 – I accept the legitimacy of this belief, attitude or behavior.

3 – Neutral – I neither accept nor reject the legitimacy of this belief, attitude or behavior.

2 – I reject the legitimacy of this belief, attitude or behavior.

1 – I strongly reject the legitimacy of this belief, attitude or behavior

After completing this add a second number to the right of the numbers you just entered and indicate the degree to which you agree with the beliefs, attitudes and behavior of each person. Please use the following scale.

Agreement

5 – I strongly agree with this belief, attitude or behavior.

4 – I agree with this belief, attitude or behavior.

3 – Neutral – I neither agree nor disagree with this belief, attitude or behavior.

2 – I disagree with this belief, attitude or behavior.

1 – I strongly disagree with this belief, attitude or behavior.

SUBMISSION OF ASSESSMENTS AND CLASS DISCUSSION

The individual write-ups are collected. The following discussion questions may be asked:

Did anyone hear a belief, attitude or behavior which they did not fully agree with?

Without saying whose belief, attitude or behavior it is, what was said that you do not fully agree with?

Note: these responses may be used later as examples when discussing the answers to the other discussion questions.

How many of you carefully listened to fully understand the beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of those you disagreed with?

How many of you started to judge others and stopped really listening to understand the other's views?

Note: these responses may be used to discuss the importance of listening to understand; particularly when we disagree with the person we are communicating with.

Review your scores regarding the beliefs of others. How many of you scored 1 or 2, that is, rejected the legitimacy of another's beliefs? For those that scored a 1 or 2 how many also scored a 1 or 2 and disagreed with that belief?

If you do not agree with the belief, is it logical to think that belief is legitimate?

Does this depend upon how this belief relates to your core values?

What are the implications of this?

Note: these responses may be used to discuss the difficulty people may have in accepting that others have the right to hold beliefs different than their own.

Review your scores regarding the behaviors of others. How many of you rejected (scored 1 or 2) the legitimacy for someone to behave in ways you disagreed with (scored 1 or 2)?

What are the implications of accepting as legitimate the beliefs of another (you scored 4 or 5 on the legitimacy of the belief) with whom you disagree (you scored 1 or 2, disagreeing with the belief) and rejecting behaviors consistent with those beliefs (you scored 1 or 2 disagreeing with the behavior)?

What implications can we draw from this about tolerance of those who hold views different than our own?

What are the implications of this for working with others?

What are the implications of this for society?

Note: these responses may be used to discuss the distinction between accepting as legitimate others' beliefs, but not accepting behaviors that they perceive to be in conflict with their own beliefs and values.

DEBRIEFING

In the following class the numerical results of the acceptance and agreement of each others' beliefs, attitudes and behaviors is provided. The differences between the acceptance and agreement figures are highlighted. These results are related to the discussion held in the previous class.

The objective is to have students be more open to accepting others' beliefs and attitudes as legitimate when they are different than their own. The distinction is made, however, between accepting different beliefs and accepting behaviors of others that contradict one's own values.

REFERENCES

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