

4 Value Scale (VS)

The Value Scale is the most easily understood part of the EEBD since virtually everyone has “likes” and “dislikes” and can readily identify preferences (favorite color, favorite music, good, better, best, etc.). Abraham Maslow referred to these preferences as “wants”, noting that we typically place all of them in a hierarchy. Nevertheless, this hierarchy is dynamic, and our wants change daily. We want variety in the food we eat, the clothes we wear, etc. This dynamic aspect has its roots in Gestalt psychology with the concept of “progressive formation and destruction of perceptual gestalts”.

Victor S. Johnston extended Maslow’s idea into a viable and compelling mechanism of the mind to direct all brained creatures toward what is beneficial and away from what is detrimental. Johnston claimed that every memory (or neural circuit) has a value called a “hedonic tone”, an idea which has its roots in the research of Wilder Penfield in the 1950s. This hedonic tone provides a “value” or “weight” for each memory. With such weighting, the brain now has a prioritizing mechanism for making decisions by competing them based upon relative weights (values). For any collection of mental ideas (or coalition of neural circuits), the emotional “weights”, both positive and negative, would add up and tip the scale of behavior either toward (seek) or away (avoid) from whatever presents itself in the environment.

This weighting would entail more than just food and clothes, music and friends - even behaviors would be marked. Higher used behaviors would carry more weight than lesser used ones. Your style of thinking, your personality, how you form sentences – all would be painted with emotion and incorporated into your thinking. This idea has its roots in Bernard J. Baars’ Global Workspace Theory.