



## Learning: Views of Knowledge

### Views of Knowledge

**Stage 1** *View of knowledge:* Knowledge is assumed to exist absolutely and concretely; it is not understood as an abstraction. It can be obtained with certainty by direct observation.

*Concept of justification:* Beliefs need no justification because there is assumed to be an absolute correspondence between what is believed to be true and what is true. Alternate beliefs are not perceived.

*"I know what I have seen."*

**Stage 2** *View of knowledge:* Knowledge is assumed to be absolutely certain or certain but not immediately available. Knowledge can be obtained directly through the senses (as in direct observation) or via authority figures.

*Concept of justification:* Beliefs are unexamined and unjustified or justified by their correspondence with the beliefs of an authority figure (such as a teacher or parent). Most issues are assumed to have a right answer, so there is little or no conflict in making decisions about disputed issues.

*"If it is on the news, it has to be true."*

**Stage 3** *View of knowledge:* Knowledge is assumed to be absolutely certain or temporarily uncertain. In areas of temporary uncertainty, only personal beliefs can be known until absolute knowledge is obtained. In areas of absolute certainty, knowledge is obtained from authorities.

*Concept of justification:* In areas in which certain answers exist, beliefs are justified by reference to authorities' views. In areas in which answers do not exist, beliefs are defended as personal opinion because the link between evidence and beliefs is unclear. *"When there is evidence that people can give to convince everybody one way or another, then it will be knowledge; until then, it is just a guess."*

**Stage 4** *View of knowledge:* Knowledge is uncertain and knowledge claims are idiosyncratic to the individual because situational variables (such as incorrect reporting of data, data lost over time, or disparities in access to information) dictate that knowing always involves an element of ambiguity.

*Concept of justification:* Beliefs are justified by giving reasons and using evidence, but the arguments and choice of evidence are idiosyncratic (e.g., choosing evidence that fits an established belief).

*"I would be more inclined to believe evolution if they had proof. It is just like the pyramids: I do not think we will ever know. Who are you going to ask? No one was there."*

**Stage 5** *View of knowledge:* Knowledge is contextual and subjective because it is filtered through a person's perceptions and criteria for judgment. Only interpretations of evidence, events, or issues may be known.

*Concept of justification:* Beliefs are justified within a particular context by means of the rules of inquiry for that context and by context-specific interpretations of evidence. Specific beliefs are assumed to be context specific or are balanced against other interpretations, which complicates (and sometimes delays) conclusions.

*"People think differently and so they attack the problem differently. Other theories could be as true as my own, but based on different evidence."*

**Stage 6 View of knowledge:** Knowledge is constructed into individual conclusions about ill-structured problems on the basis of information from a variety of sources. Interpretations that are based on evaluations of evidence across contexts and on the evaluated opinions of reputable others can be known.

*Concept of justification:* Beliefs are justified by comparing evidence and opinion from different perspectives on an issue or across different contexts and by constructing solutions that are evaluated by criteria such as the weight of the evidence, the utility of the solution, or the pragmatic need for action. *"It is very difficult in this life to be sure. There are degrees of sureness. You come to a point at which you are sure enough for a personal stance on the issue."*

**Stage 7 View of knowledge:** Knowledge is the outcome of a process of reasonable inquiry in which solutions to ill-structured problems are constructed. The adequacy of those solutions is evaluated in terms of what is most reasonable or probable according to the current evidence, and it is reevaluated when relevant new evidence, perspectives, or tools of inquiry become available.

*Concept of justification:* Beliefs are justified probabilistically on the basis of a variety of interpretive considerations, such as the weight of the evidence, the explanatory value of the interpretations, the risk of erroneous conclusions, consequences of alternative judgments, and the interrelations of these factors. Conclusions are defended as representing the most complete, plausible, or compelling understanding of an issue on the basis of the available evidence. *"One can judge an argument by how well thought-out the positions are, what kinds of reasoning and evidence are used to support it, and how consistent the way one argues on this topic is as compared with how one argues on other topics."*

From *Developing Reflective Judgment* (p. 14–15), by P. M. King and K. S. Kitchener, 1994, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Copyright 1994 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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