

Experiential Knowledge (EK) and the Cognitive Act

June 12, 2025

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Conference — Who knows what in mental health care?

Knowledge and the First-Person Perspective

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CHAPTER

12 Experiential Knowledge in Mental Health Care: A Coherent Concept? [Get access >](#)

Roy Dings, Derek W Strijbos

<https://doi.org/10.1093/9780191954856.003.0014> Pages 251–268
Published: May 2025

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Keywords: experiential knowledge, expertise-by-experience, experiential experts, lived experience, mental health care, epistemology, knowledge, know-how, acquaintance, generalizability

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JOURNAL ARTICLE

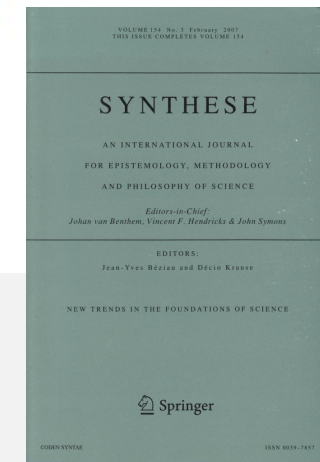
The cognitive act and the first-person perspective: an epistemology for constructive type theory

Maria van der Schaar

Synthese

Vol. 180, No. 3 (June 2011), pp. 391–417 (27 pages)

Published By: Springer Nature



Introduction (Dings & Strijbos 2025)

Experiential Knowledge in Mental Health Care (1/3)



Experts by Experience are involved in:

- policy development
- reorganisation of care treatments
- anti-stigma activities
- providing direct care and support to clients

The idea is that they have **unique** or **complementary knowledge**, called EK.

Experiential Knowledge in Mental Health Care (2/3)

A conceptually tangled-up mess

- embodied and shareable **Criteria for EK**
- gained by either experience or reflection
- different kinds of reflection:
 - what worked?
 - what did it mean?**Criteria for different kinds of EK**



Solution (Dings & Strijbos 2025)

Experiential Knowledge in Mental Health Care (3/3)



→ **Develop a taxonomy of EK**

- because of heterogenic use
- like an umbrella term

Quick Summary

Experiential Knowledge

Problem:

- very broad

Desired:

- taxonomy

Criteria:

- grounded in experience
- sharable
- gained by different kinds of reflection

Introduction

The Cognitive Act

A cognitive act is an act of understanding,
it is the moment the “penny drops”.

act of perception:

seeing the hawk flying

act of judgement:

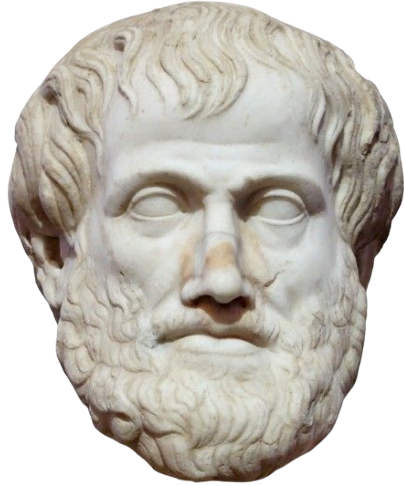
seeing *that* the hawk is flying

$$12 + 64 = 76$$



Maria van der Schaar

Active Knowledge versus Passive Knowledge

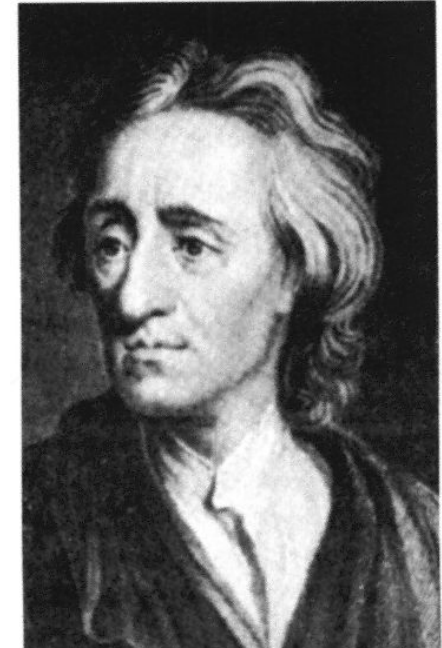


Aristotle

- two ways of 'being a knower'
- knowing as actuality or as potentiality
- actuality comes before potentiality

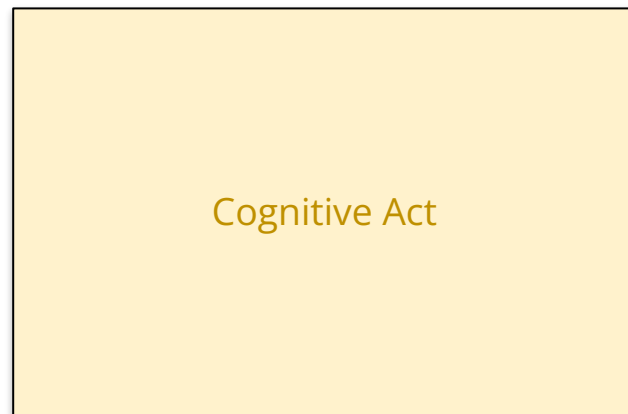
John Locke

- actual vs habitual knowledge
- perceptual act initiates state of knowing

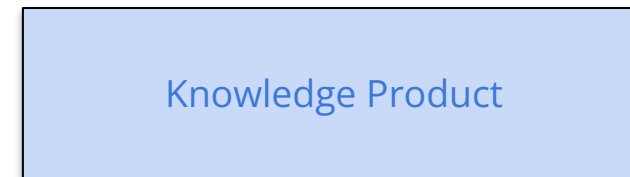
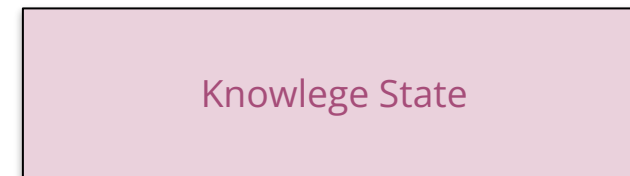


Cognitive Act initiates Passive Knowledge

Active Knowledge



Passive Knowledge



Maria van der Schaar

Different Kinds of Passive Knowledge (1/2)



Knowledge State

→ disposition to act in a specific way

- embodied
- know-how
- ability

result of a non-judgemental cognitive act

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Different Kinds of Passive Knowledge (2/2)



Knowledge Product

→ proposition stored in memory

- know-that
- shareable

result of an act of judgement or
act of understanding

Different types of cognitive act create different types of passive knowledge

Active Knowledge

Act of Perception

Act of Judgement

Passive Knowledge

Knowledge State

Knowledge Product



Quick Summery

Experiential Knowledge

Problem:

- very broad

Desired:

- taxonomy

Criteria:

- grounded in experience
- sharable
- gained by different kinds of reflection

vd Schaar distinctions

Active:

- cognitive act non-judgemental
- cognitive act judgemental

Passive:

- knowledge state
- knowledge product

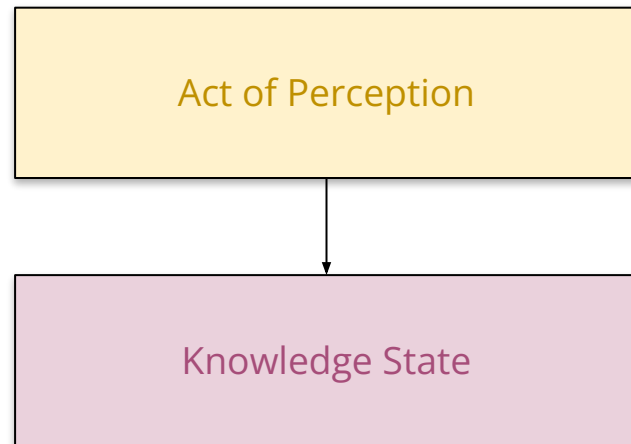
Relation:

- non-judgemental cognitive act → knowledge state
- judgemental cognitive act → knowledge product

Experiential Knowledge as Knowledge State?

What it is like to be depressed

1. perceiving the altered world when depressed
→ **non-judgemental cognitive act**



described as “lived experience”



✗ Not Experiential Knowledge

Grounded in Experience & Shareable

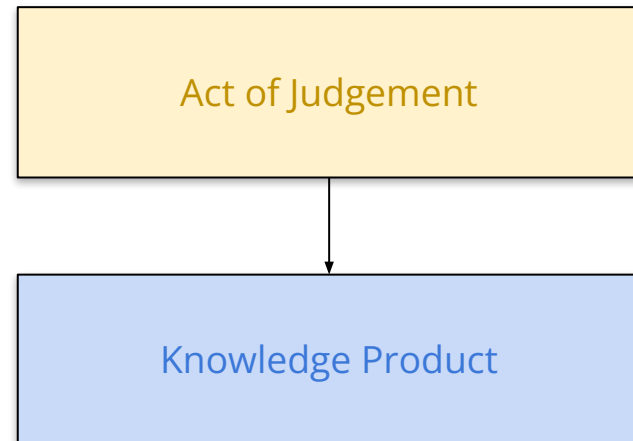
EK Taxonomy based on van der Schaars Distinctions

Description	Active Knowledge Type	Passive Knowledge Type	Chain of Knowledge Creation	EK?	Properties
lived experience	non-judgmental CA → perceptual	knowledge state	experience → cognitive act → knowledge state	✗	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- embodied- know-how- what it is like

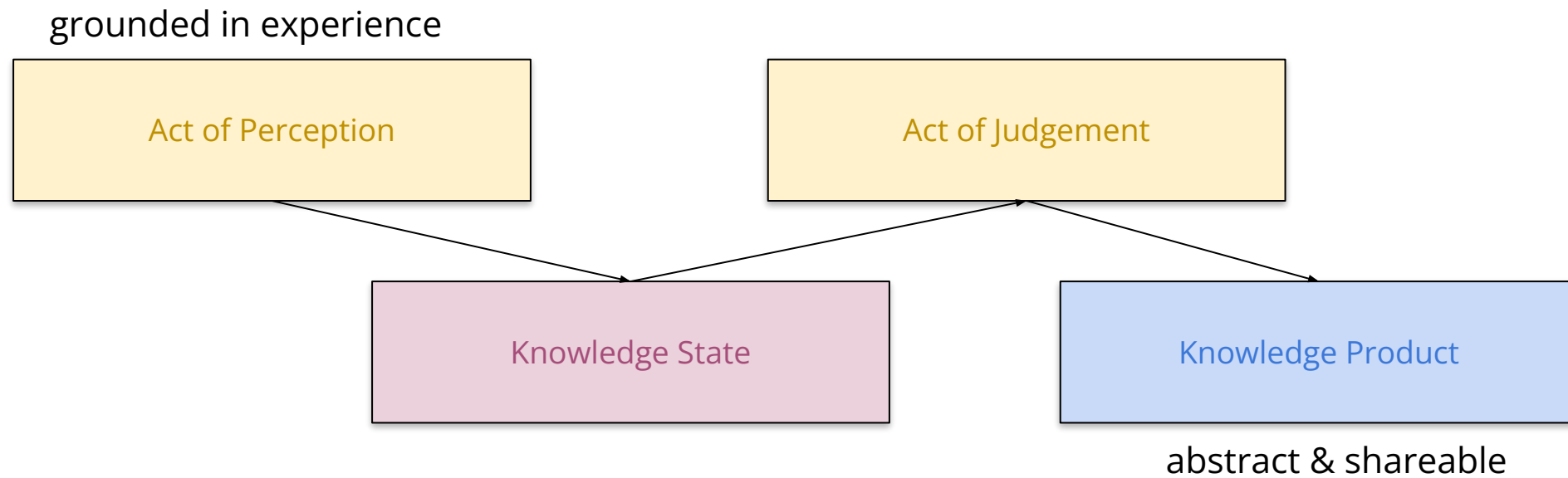
Experiential Knowledge as Knowledge Product? (1/3)

What *it is like* to be depressed (description of)

1. meaning making, story telling
→ **judgemental cognitive act**



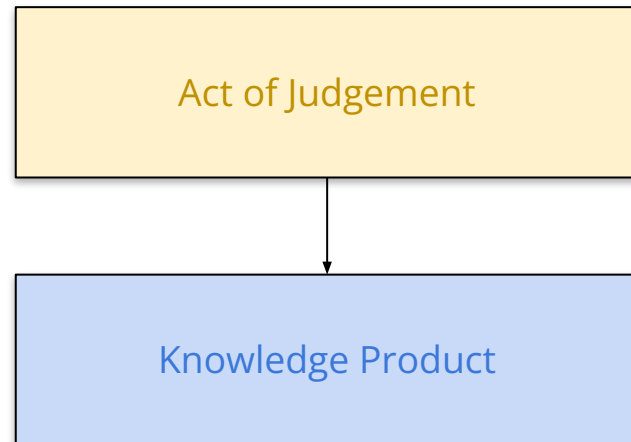
EK as Knowledge Product: chain of creation



Experiential Knowledge as Knowledge Product? (1/3)

What *it is like* to be depressed (description of)

1. meaning making, story telling
→ **judgemental cognitive act**



described as “narrative”



Experiential Knowledge

Grounded in Experience & Shareable

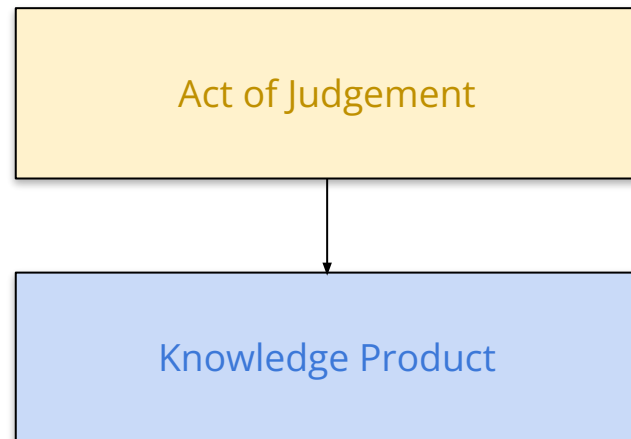
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narratives	judgemental CA → interpretation	knowledge product → narrative	experience → cognitive act → knowledge state → cognitive act → knowledge product	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- what it is like- some abstraction- subjective- shareable

Experiential Knowledge as Knowledge Product? (2/3)

What helps with depression

1. reflection (crisis/recovery plan, warning signs)
→ **judgemental cognitive act** (like research, find patterns)



described as “conclusions”
or “practical knowledge”



✓ Experiential Knowledge

Grounded in Experience & Shareable

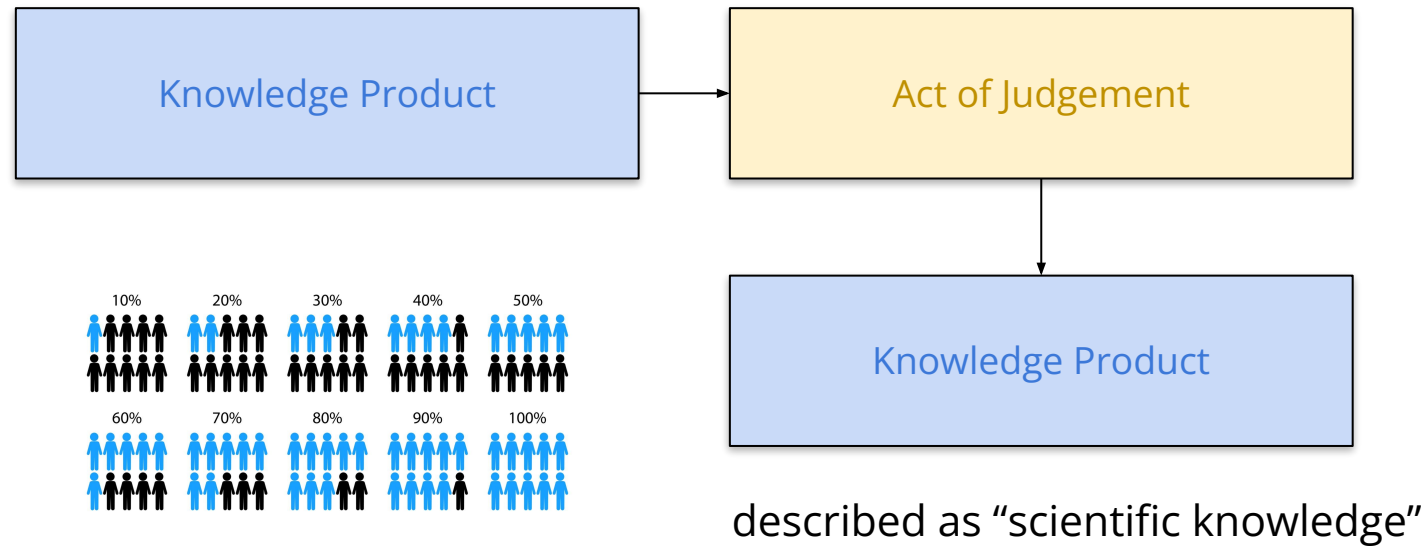
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narratives	judgemental CA → interpretation	knowledge product → narrative	experience → cognitive act → knowledge state → cognitive act → knowledge product	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- what it is like- some abstraction- subjective- shareable
practical knowledge	judgemental CA → systematic → reasoning	knowledge product → conclusions	experience → cognitive act → knowledge state → cognitive act → knowledge product	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- what helps- more abstraction- bit less subjective- shareable

Experiential Knowledge as Knowledge Product? (3/3)

What helps with depression

1. personal reports used in statistical research
→ **judgemental cognitive act** (further abstraction)



A blurred image of a statistical table with numbers, likely representing data used in research. The table has multiple columns and rows of numerical data, with some cells highlighted in yellow and blue.

on basis of another
knowledge product
not direct experience

✗ Not Experiential Knowledge

Grounded in Experience & Shareable

EK Taxonomy based on van der Schaars Distinctions

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practical knowledge	judgemental CA → systematic → reasoning	knowledge product → conclusions	experience → cognitive act → knowledge state → cognitive act → knowledge product	✓	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- what helps- more abstraction- bit less subjective- shareable
scientific knowledge	judgemental CA → demonstration	knowledge product	knowledge product → cognitive act → knowledge product	✗	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- know-that- very abstract- shareable

Thank You

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References

Dings, Roy, and Derek Strijbos. 2025. "Experiential knowledge in mental health care: A coherent concept?" In *Forms of Knowledge: Essays on the heterogeneity of knowledge and understanding*, edited by L. Campbell. Oxford University Press.

van der Schaar, Maria. 2011. "The cognitive act and the first-person perspective: an epistemology for constructive type theory." *Synthese* 180: 391–417.