

Where Does Knowledge Originate From?

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Knowledge is like a mighty river; it draws its waters from diverse sources. Varied knowledge sources combine forming streams of consciousness, rivers of thought. This essay examines three knowledge base sources: (1) personally acquired knowledge; (2) created knowledge; and (3) borrowed knowledge. Each of these is important in its own right and these knowledge bases often are intermingled when complex issues are wrestled with.

Personal knowledge originates within the individual. We observe events, actions, and people; experience emotions, event consequences, and social interactions; draw personal inferences from incomplete data and make conclusions from what we perceive to be more complete data; and enjoy inspirational insights from time to time. Others will never know what our personal knowledge repertoire is unless we disclose to others what we know.

Created knowledge is that produced by individuals that would not exist without our efforts. Such new knowledge as: scientific experiment results, statistical analysis output; elicited interview information; or telephone, mail, or face-to-face questionnaire results are typical created data bases. Not all created knowledge is anticipated at the start. Unexpected results often arise and surprise us. Many results from creative endeavors go unnoticed, only partially interpreted, or are left unreported due to observer indifference. Results of experiments, interviews, or questionnaires must be observed, recognized, judged as important and recorded to be known by others.

Borrowed knowledge includes compilations created, recorded, and discovered by others. These include such sources as: books, magazines, newspapers, journals, research reports, microforms, dissertations, diaries, pamphlets, films, audio recordings, videotapes and computer data base output. Any information, inference, experience, observation, or experiment made by another and reported or recorded by another falls into this category and must ethically be documented when used. Others' work must be credited by future users. You cannot claim another's work as your own whether in part or in whole. Putting others' work into your own words or quoting it directly without telling others where it came from is plagiarism, an offense likely to get you into serious trouble and likely to make others distrust you in the future.

We often combine knowledge forms to understand, verify, or expand upon our understanding of our world. Such combinations as: (magazine information + experiment results + insight); (book claims + questionnaire insights + experiences) are typical knowledge mixtures that help us understand and contribute to new knowledge. Knowledge comes with hard work, not by waiting for it to come to us.