

**Mini Review**

Volume 7 Issue 5 - December 2017  
DOI: 10.19080/PBSIJ.2017.07.555724

Psychol Behav Sci Int J

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# Web of Concepts Critical to Today's World Epistemological Beliefs Cognitive Flexibility and Balance



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**Submission:** November 11, 2017; **Published:** December 01, 2017

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## Introduction

Although there are many cognitive and affective variables critical to the world today, I would like to focus on web of three major concepts that seem particularly pertinent today. These major concepts are epistemological beliefs (beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning), cognitive flexibility (adapting thinking in response to situational demands, and balance (regulating thinking by using the full spectrum of epistemological a beliefs and cognitive flexibility). When viewed as web, they function in a complex, integrated symphony to help individuals regulate their thinking and actions in an ever changing world. William Perry [1] studied beliefs about the nature of knowledge and learning in the late 1950s. Their influences remain important in the world today.

We live in a world in which fact, fiction, reflection, and careless speech can travel through cyberspace in a split second to anyone in the world who is digitally connected. Any falsehood, any bully comment, and any fake news can destroy careers, confuse voters, mislead decisions, or lead to suicide. How do we arm ourselves with the psychological, cognitive, and emotional armor to discern what information should be considered or believed; and what information that should be disputed or ignored? And when does information become knowledge? Epistemological beliefs can contribute to our armor. For example, some of these beliefs include: beliefs about the certainty of knowledge (ranging from absolute versus evolving), the source of knowledge (ranging from simple observation or handed by authority to multi-sourced), and the structure of knowledge (ranging from an unorganized accumulation of facts to or an integrated well-structured or ill-structured configuration) [2].

At the most basic level, many researchers would propose that the inundation of information from sources of varying levels of credibility needs to be filtered through the beliefs that

knowledge comes from multiple sources (and cross-checked), highly integrated, and assumed to be evolving in nature [3]. However, this proposition is inadequate in itself. So we build our hypothetical web with a second factor that is critical to the application of epistemological beliefs in the process on acquiring and applying knowledge, namely cognitive flexibility. Cognitive flexibility has been defined as the propensity to change one's thinking and problem solving when faced with situational demands. The key components of cognitive flexibility and the epistemological belief that supports that component include: (a) being vigilant to sense a need for change- supported by belief in evolving knowledge; (b) engaging in change -supported by belief in complex knowledge; (c) monitoring the appropriateness of change -- supported by belief in multi-sources and cross validation; (d) continuing vigilance to update changes -- supported by belief in evolving knowledge [3,4]. Cognitive flexibility is critical in a world that is changing, in a society that is diverse, and in a digital world that rapidly raises our awareness of new and diverse global cognition.

The third factor to consider in the web of essential concepts is balance. It is not assumed that beliefs that knowledge is complex, evolving, and multi-sourced are the only form of situation-appropriate thinking. There are times when simple, expeditious conclusions serve us best (a car is about to hit you, get out of the way). There are times when resisting change helps us avoid the whiplash of in decisiveness (inability to make a decision) [3]. The most elusive factor then is the balance of cognitive flexibility and aspect of epistemological beliefs. Researchers [5,6] have clearly called for a more reasoned view of cognitive flexibility. They asserted that to assume certain adaptive strategies are appropriate for all situations is a fallacy. What is really needed is flexibility that is regulated by situational demands. Although balance may be illusive, cognitive flexibility

may be uncomfortable, and epistemological beliefs may be ill-defined, they nevertheless are critical in our fast-paced global society. Virtually all fields of expertise can benefit from deeper understanding of this web of concepts. It only remains for many of us to work collaboratively (and perhaps competitively) to investigate and understand the inner workings of this web.

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DOI: [10.19080/PBSIJ.2017.07.555724](https://doi.org/10.19080/PBSIJ.2017.07.555724)

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