

# LAY THEORIES OF EXPERTISE: REVEALING THE ROOTS OF EXPERT RECOGNITION






## 1 OVERVIEW

The “lay theory” is one of the oldest concepts in psychology. My research delves into lay theories of expertise, exploring how people perceive and recognise experts and expertise.



## 2 MAPPING

We identified several intuitive and widespread lay theories of expertise. The most common is the 'epistemic' lay theory, which  views exceptional knowledge as the hallmark of expertise. Other prominent theories include the 'practical' lay theory,  which associates expertise with problem-solving and results, and the 'developmental' lay theory, which emphasizes the role of specialised training and education. 



## 3 DISCOVERY

We also identified a relatively rare perspective we term the 'Socratic' lay theory of expertise. One survey response illustrates this well:

*“Being an expert at something is knowing and acknowledging the fact that you don’t know anything even if you know what is there to know about that field and then coming to [a] humble realization that you’ll always be a student and there is a lot more to learn.”*



## 4 RESULTS

Our experiments showed that even simple videos can significantly influence people’s lay theories (at least temporarily), and affect who someone deems an “expert”. For example, participants who watched our short video on the Socratic lay theory were more confident in and more likely to recommend a humble expert, compared to those who watched the practical lay theory video.

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