
Situated Conceptualization

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One way of construing brain organization is as a collection of systems that processes the components of a situation in parallel, including its setting, agents, objects, actions, and internal states. In a given situation, each situational component is conceptualized individually, as when components of eating in a kitchen are conceptualized as *kitchen* (setting), *diner* (agent), *food* (food), *chewing* (action), and *hunger* (internal state). In turn, configural concepts integrate these individual conceptualizations into larger structures that conceptualize the larger situation, such as *eating* and *meal*. From this perspective, a situated conceptualization is a distributed record of conceptual processing in a given situation, across all the relevant component systems. On later occasions, a situated conceptualization can become active to simulate the respective situation in its absence (e.g., activating a situated conceptualization to simulate *eating*). From this perspective, the concept that represents a category, such as *kitchen* or *eating*, is the collection of situated conceptualizations that has accumulated from processing the category across situations, similar to exemplar theories. The utility of situated conceptualization as a general theoretical construct is illustrated for situated action, social embodiment, and social mirroring, along with the central role of part-whole inference. Findings from three neuroimaging experiments suggest that situated conceptualization is the mechanism that produces emotion. Findings from a behavioral experiment similarly illustrate the potential of situated conceptualization for understanding stress. Implications for the construct of frames are explored. One possibility is that frames are theoretical tools—not cognitive representations—that summarize shared structure across a related set of situated conceptualizations. Another possibility is that a frame is an exemplar taking the form of a situated conceptualization.