



BMCC Center for Continuing Education & Workforce Development

Dec 2, 2011

# Intuitive Decision Making

**Misha Goussev, PhD**  
goussevm@yahoo.com

# What is Intuition?

## Is its Nature Internal or External?



Defining what intuition is can be quite difficult, as its nature is multi-dimensional and often transcends rational:

- The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1964) defines intuition as “immediate apprehension by the mind without reasoning, immediate apprehension by a sense, and immediate insight.”<sup>[1]</sup>
- Andrew Weil, in this book *The Natural Mind*, states, “Intuitive flashes are transient, spontaneous altered states of consciousness consisting of particular sensory experience or thoughts, coupled with strong emotional reactions”, and suggests that *intuition is an internal process of rational and analytic thought*.<sup>[2]</sup>
- Silvano Arieti, in his book *Creativity: The Magic Synthesis*, postulates that preconscious thoughts may spark creativity or intuitive insight and suggests that we transform these intuitions into visions, images, or words, so that they can be verbalized and acted upon.<sup>[3]</sup>
- Roberto Assagioli (1971) observes that intuition is “a synthetic function in the sense that it apprehends the totality of a given situation or psychological reality. It does not work from the part to the whole—but apprehends a totality directly in its living existence.”<sup>[4]</sup>
- Whatever the definition or the methods used, according to Abraham Maslow “**people who emphasized self-development are better equipped to apply their intuitive skills**”.<sup>[5]</sup>

OXFORD  
UNIVERSITY PRESS



---

<sup>[1]</sup> The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English. Oxford, England:Oxford University Press, 1964.

<sup>[2]</sup> Andrew Weil, *The Natural Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1972)

<sup>[3]</sup> Silvano Arieti, *Creativity: The Magic Synthesis* (New York: Basic Books, 1976)

<sup>[4]</sup> Assagioli R. *Psychosynthesis*. New York: Viking, 1971:27.

<sup>[5]</sup> Abraham H. Maslow, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (New York: Viking, 1971)

# Controlled Study: Electrophysiological Evidence of Intuition

THE JOURNAL OF ALTERNATIVE AND COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE

Volume 10, Number 1, 2004, pp. 133–143

Volume 10, Number 2, 2004, pp. 325–336

© Mary Ann Liebert, Inc.

## Electrophysiological Evidence of Intuition:

### Part 1. The Surprising Role of the Heart

### Part 2. A System-Wide Process?

ROLLIN McC RATY, Ph.D., MIKE ATKINSON, and RAYMOND TREVOR BRADLEY, Ph.D.

**Objectives:** This study aims to contribute to a scientific understanding of intuition, a process by which information normally outside the range of conscious awareness is perceived by the body's psychophysiological systems. The initial objective, presented in two empirical papers (Part 1 and Part 2), was to replicate and extend the results of previous experiments demonstrating that the body can respond to an emotionally arousing stimulus [4 to 7] seconds before it is actually experienced.

**Design:** The study used a counterbalanced crossover design, in which 30 calm and 15 emotionally arousing pictures were presented to 26 participants under two experimental conditions: a baseline condition of "normal" psychophysiological function and a condition of physiological coherence. Primary measures included: skin conductance, the electroencephalogram (EEG), and the electrocardiogram (ECG). These measures were used to investigate where and when in the brain and body intuitive information is processed.

**Results:** The main findings presented here are: (1) surprisingly, both the heart and brain appear to receive and respond to intuitive information; (2) even more surprisingly, there is compelling evidence that the heart appears to receive intuitive information before the brain.

**Conclusions:** Overall, our data suggest that the heart and brain, together, are involved in receiving, processing, and decoding intuitive information. On the basis of these results and those of other research, it would thus appear that intuitive perception is a system-wide process in which both the heart and brain (and possibly other bodily systems) play a critical role. Once the prestimulus information is received in the psychophysiological systems, it appears to be processed in the same way as conventional sensory input. **This study presents compelling evidence that the body's perceptual apparatus is continuously scanning the future.**

# Intuitive Decision Making (IDM): What Is It?

## Analytical Decision Making: Weighing Pros and Cons

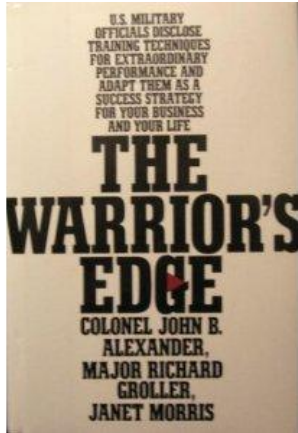
Historically, analytical decision making prevailed over the intuitive approaches in the West for quite some time. In 1772 Benjamin Franklin described his own method for reasoning out complex problems in his letter to his nephew Joseph Priestley: "Divide a sheet of paper in half and make an exhaustive list of pros and cons. Then, over a couple of days, weigh the pros and cons, and when a pro and con seem of equal weight, strike them both out. What is left in the balance is the best answer." Herbert Wray in his *Newsweek* article "*Less (Information) is More*" argues that such "balance sheet" calculation is still taught today as the most logical and systematic method for dealing with many of life's complexities: "Kids are counseled to choose colleges and careers this way, and managers similarly deliberate the pros and cons in important business decisions; some people are even methodical in matters of the heart."

## Recognizing the Role of Intuition in Decision Making

But things appear to be changing recently and the intuitive decision making modalities are beginning to be recognized on par with their traditional analytical counterparts. A growing number of researchers and psychologists, Wray writes, "are questioning the soundness of Franklin's method, and its modern iterations, including data-heavy calculations by increasingly powerful computers". The questions are more along the line of what we understand as 'intuition' and how we apply it. And there are many views and approaches.

- **Extrasensory perception** (sensing the future)
- **Building on experience** (leveraging the subconscious)
- **Focusing on the main** (identifying the most important driver)
- **Recognizing Patterns** (36 strategies / 64 patterns of change)

# Intuitive Decision Making: Extrasensory Perception (sensing the future)



*The Warrior's Edge*, written by US Military officials and published in 1990, takes the notion of intuition as an ability to sense the future a step further by sharing examples of people demonstrating a sense of "knowing" beyond any rational explanation: "There have been many cases of soldiers who handed their comrades a letter, saying, 'This is my last battle; be sure my wife gets this.'

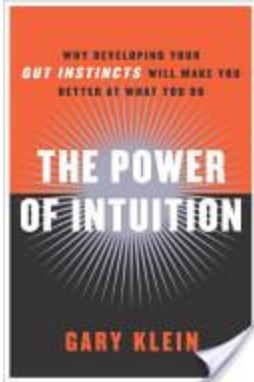
In addition to the literature on combat fatalities, a body of evidence exists indicating that people 'know', at least unconsciously, when they are about to die" or, on a brighter note, "just knowing" nothing would happen to them. Even though the authors of the book do not discredit the notion of intuition based on experience, they were also open to the possibilities of alternative ways of receiving critical information in some cases such as such as extrasensory perception.

The IDM approach presented and practiced by the authors is focused on achieving the mental and physical state of inner 'knowing' based on personal experiences of making correct decisions on intuition rather than analysis and recreating it when you next need a creative response. The state allows one's subconscious to communicate ideas and information, which may not be received otherwise.

The important aspect of the method, the authors warn, is to be able to **set aside negativity and skepticism, which can impact one's ability to perceive personal intuitive processes.**

Colonel John B. Alexander, Major Richard Groller, Janet Morris, *The Warrior's Edge*, p.115 (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1990)

# Intuitive Decision Making: Building on Experience (leveraging the subconscious)



Gary Klein, the author of the book *The Power of Intuition* and one of the leading experts on intuitive decision making in the West states that his research led him to conclusion that we are all intuitive decision makers, regardless of our occupation or experience.

U.S. Marine Corps, which sponsored Klein's research, formally embraced the concept in 1995 and even introduced the term "intuitive decision making" (IDM) in their manual on command and control, comparing it favorably with analytical decision making. Klein learned through his research that "***intuition is a natural and direct outgrowth of experience***" and defines intuition as "the way we translate our experience into action".

According to Klein, intuitive decision making is the ability to detect *patterns* and based on available *clues* and then map them to typical *action scripts*, of course, unconsciously. This process further relies on the ability to evaluate the action scripts via *mental simulation* of the *mental models* of how things work.

In his research work with firefighters Klein discovered that they were evaluating the course of action by consciously *imagining* what would happen when they carried it out. They build a picture of what they expect, and they watch this picture once, sometimes several times: "We called this process 'mental simulation' because decision makers are simulating and envisioning a scenario – playing out in their heads what they expect would happen if they implemented the decision in a particular case.", Klein explains.

# Intuitive Decision Making: Focusing on the Main (identifying the most important driver)

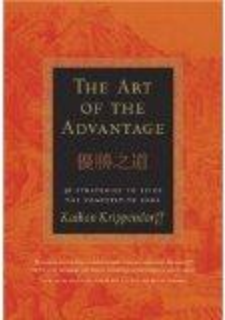


One of the leading challengers in the dogma of the decision making physiologist Gerd Gigerenzer, of the Max Planck Institute in Germany has demonstrated in the laboratory that *focusing only on the most important* piece of information makes us more effective decision makers.

For example, if there are 10 pieces of information that we may consider taking into account but one is clearly more important than the others, then that one piece of information is often enough to make a choice. We don't need the rest, as other details just complicate things and waste time.

Gigerenzer presents a convincing body of evidence for the power of hunches over laborious data crunching in his new book *Gut Feelings: The Intelligence of the Unconscious*

# Intuitive Decision Making: Recognizing Patterns (36 strategies)



One of the innovative thinkers in the field of business strategy, Kaihan Krippendorff, introduces a fundamentally new approach to expanding creativity and competitiveness in his book *The Art of the Advantage*. Krippendorff bases his research on the applications of the ancient Chinese text *The 36 Stratagems*, effectively a catalog of time-tested patterns, in the context of modern strategy-making.

Kaihan's findings confirm that "[a]t the appropriate level of abstraction, **a limited number of patterns compose all competitive interactions**. The same patterns are at work in nature, war, politics, business, or any other competitive arena."<sup>[1]</sup> Krippendorff further illustrates that patterns, not logic, are the basis of human cognition.

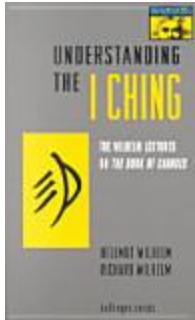
Similarly to Klein's findings, Krippendorff demonstrates that it is the ability to recognize patterns that makes us the intuitive decision makers. The principle difference to keep in mind, however, is that it may take one a life-time to build a catalog of patterns based on personal experience, while the catalog of the time-tested patterns is available for contemplation to all at any time.

---

[1] Kaihan Krippendorff, AnaMaria Rivera, *Building Creative Strategies with Patterns* (Harvard Business Review, America Latina, 2004)



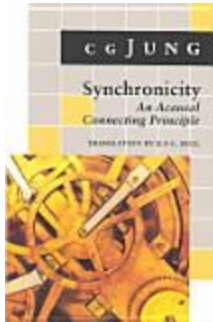
# Intuitive Decision Making: Recognizing Patterns (64 patterns of change)



The *I Ching*, the ancient Chinese *Classic of Change*, offers us yet another view on intuition and its applications: the ability to grasp a situation holistically. According to C. J. Jung, the *I Ching* “is **the intuitive technique for grasping the total situation**, which is so characteristic of China. Unlike the Greek-trained Western mind, the Chinese mind does not aim at grasping details for their own sake, but at a view which sees the details as part of a whole.”

Just as in the case of the strategic possibilities conveyed in *The 36 Stratagems*, ancient Chinese also understood and empirically validated the existence of systemic patterns behind the ever changing nature of reality (64 in number). They recognized that any change is not a random event, but rather a product of the forces and human dynamics whose symptoms might have been neglected or misunderstood and the outcome of which could have been predicted with some degree of certainty. They also recognized that one may never have all required information, but instead can be trained to “see” or *intuitively perceive* the total situation based on characteristics of a certain pattern and then fill in the missing details as appropriate.

Refer to a separate lecture on the *I Ching* as a tool for intuitive decision making on [www.SpiritEye.com](http://www.SpiritEye.com) (*Navigating Change and Uncertainty*).



---

C.G. Jung, translated by R. F. C. Hull, *Synchronicity* (Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, 1973)  
Brian Browne Walker, *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1992)