

Running Head: INTUITION – A WAY OF KNOWING

Intuition – A Way of Knowing
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"Intuition is just the things we've learned without realizing we've learned them. And sometimes they're useful. Sometimes they're maladaptive." Seymour Epstein

Introduction

Many people will make comments regarding an action they took, saying that it was a "gut instinct" that caused them to respond in that way. When asked "why" they responded in that manner, they are unable to explain their action. People experience these "feelings" in relation to a variety of experiences, such as meeting new people, house hunting, making business decisions, or deciding to change plans. These insights swim to the surface of one's attention and ask us then to do something (Mahoney, 2006). Most people do not regularly share their gut feelings, however after 9-11, many media reports discussed people describing "feelings they felt" or "gut instincts" as a reason they were not where they should have been that morning. We heard stories about people deciding to cancel plane trips at the last minute, or making changes in their normal routine that kept them from being at the office when the planes hit. What do we call these "gut feelings"? Where do these feelings come from? Are these feelings valid and something we should trust?

Investigating these feelings can be somewhat difficult because researchers have used different terms to describe the wide variety of processes and experiences that provide a person with these feelings. Some terms that have been used are "right brain thinking", "gut feelings", a "hunch", "sixth sense", or an "impression". In this essay the term intuition will be used to discuss these feelings. The term intuition comes from the Late Latin word *intuitio* which is the act of contemplating, from the Latin *intuēri* which means to look at, or contemplate. The term intuition is not a new term, its origin is from the 15th century, however according to Sarah Mahoney (2006) intuition has become an

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American obsession since Malcolm Gladwell's book *Blink* was published. In the book, Gladwell (2005) investigates instinct or as he describes it, thinking without thinking. Merriam-Webster defines intuition as quick and ready insight; an immediate apprehension or cognition; knowledge or conviction gained by intuition. According to Hodgkinson, Langan-Fox & Sadler-Smith (2008) intuition is the result of the way our brains store, process, and retrieve information on a subconscious level. David G. Myers, defines intuition as "the capacity for direct knowledge and immediate insight, without any observation or reason," (Mahoney, 2006).

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Comment: He certainly did raise our awareness of intuition as useful to our conceptions of knowledge...after centuries of it being acknowledged and then ignored.

A Chronological History of Intuition

Ancient Times

The concept of intuition can be traced back to ancient times when seers and oracles made predictions about the future of the community, or provided insights into the past or present. The early Greeks and Romans considered intuitive knowledge to be valid and supersede rational conclusions (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 5). Plato's *Republic* is filled with ideas derived not from concrete experience but from Plato's intuitions concerning ultimate reality. The entire philosophical school of idealism that flows from Plato is based on the notion that intuition is a reliable source of knowledge (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 6). Aristotle, Plato's disciple, realized that unless some knowledge was known without proof, reasoning would involve an endless amount of proofs. He stated that "scientific knowledge and intuition are always true and that no other thought except intuition is more accurate than scientific knowledge" (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 7). The Cynics in the 4th century believed that knowledge of what is morally good is directly apprehended by intuition, and that each person has an instinctive sense of what is right

(Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 9). Epicurus stated that humans were equipped with an additional physical sense which he called “anticipation”. The term anticipation is thought to be closely linked to intuition, and provides people with knowledge to evaluate life’s experiences (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 9 & 10).

Middle Ages through the 19th Century

During the Middle Ages, theologians used the term intuition to “describe an ineffable mystical experience of identification with God” (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 11). Augustine and Aquinas among others wrote of nonrational spiritual revelations, which were a product of contemplation rather than a distinct way of knowing that could be considered intuitive experiences (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 11). Rene Descartes wrote that rational intuition was the only way to gain certain knowledge. He stated that it is God’s revelation which illuminates one’s soul and allows one to gain intuitive knowledge. This view is along the lines of “medieval scholastics and is out of character with the rigorous mathematical system he developed” (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 13). He also states that the intellect is able to perform two distinct operations, inducting and deducting. Inductive knowledge is immediate, self-evident and no reasoning is involved (Woudenberg, Roeser, & Rood, 2005, p. 15 & 18). Benedict Spinoza viewed knowledge in three categories: intuition, apprehension, and rational thought. He said that intuition was the process or experience that lay beyond systematic rational analysis (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 13). John Locke stated that intuitive knowledge was characterized by immediate knowledge that did not involve reasoning and had a high level of certainty (Woudenberg et al., 2005, p. 19). Immanuel Kant, a German philosopher, did the most to shape and clarify the meaning and importance of intuition. He drew upon Platonic

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Comment: Anticipation requires a mix of previous, experiential knowledge mixed with an uncertainty of what is coming. As such, we try to intuit what might happen.

notions of intuition and truth to help formulate his own theory of intuition. He defined intuition as a “nonrational recognition and awareness of individual entities” (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 14). Some have tried to discredit Kant’s notions of intuition because his views were based on the world view whose only geometry was Euclidean and when non-Euclidean geometry evolved in the 19th century they claimed his arguments lost their validity. However others have stated that in the world that Kant knew, his intuitive conclusions were valid (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p.14). At the end of the 19th century, Henri Bergson stated that intuition precedes intellect, and that people use their intuition to gain a deeper understanding of reality than they can obtain from just analyzing data (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 21).

20th Century

The 20th century psychologist C.G. Jung, a disciple of Freud, was the first to articulate the fact that intuition operates in an unconscious manner. He divided intuition into two forms, objective (a conscious perception of facts) and subjective (a perception of unconscious facts) (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 25). William James’ work *Principles of Psychology* investigated four major themes: the mind/body problem, instinct, consciousness, and the will. According to Robbie Davis-Floyed and P. Sven Arvidson (1997), James has been cited as the groundbreaking figure in the discipline of intuition. (p. xii) Eric Berne, an American psychiatrist during the 1950’s and 60’s used the term “clinical intuition” to describe an unconscious source of knowledge which is based on experience and acquired through the senses. Berne was concerned with the feelings of the intuiter, and emphasized the idea that the intuiter does not know “how” he knows something, but reacts in such a way that his actions reflect knowledge (Noddings &

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Comment: Nicely done, Dani. You’ve shown how people build upon the ideas of others and every once in a while, someone goes back centuries and unearths again an old idea in a new context.

Shore, 1984, p. 27). Berne used the term intuitive mood to describe a state of alertness and receptiveness where intuitive thinking is encouraged and the perceptive ego is not engaged. He realized that through practice one can sharpen their intuition and that ones' intuition is fatigable (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 28). Benedetto Croce recognized the expressive and creative aspect of intuition. He realized that people use two forms of knowledge to reveal what is real, the intuitive (through the imagination) and the logical (intellect and systematic analyzation) (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 29). Edmund Husserl insisted that phenomena must be investigated as it was directly experienced. He realized that intuition can provide knowledge not encountered through other experience, which raised the status of intuitive experiences to be equal with other sources of knowledge (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 30). Alfred North Whitehead constructed a theory of knowledge, which involved three stages, romance, precision and generalization, with intuition taking place in the romance stage, which is reminiscent of Epicurus' anticipations (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 32). Bertrand Lord Russell, a colleague of Whitehead, used mathematical set theory to look at intuition and realized that some of our intuitions may in fact be contradictory (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 32). Max Wertheimer wrote about "seeing the light", a spontaneous nonrational understanding, or intuition, when working on mathematical problems. Wertheimer interviewed Einstein for *Productive Thinking*, and Einstein stated that he often received sudden flashes of light which helped him arrive at his revolutionary concepts of the universe. Later, he worked out the mathematics of his theories (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 35). Jerome Bruner states, in *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand*, that "intuition implies the act of grasping the meaning, significance, or structure of a problem without explicit reliance on

the analytic apparatus of one's craft" (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 37). R. Buckminster Fuller believed intuition to be a source of truth and a principal tool of humankind in all endeavors. He saw intuition as the key to humanity's scientific discoveries, and recognized that many of the major scientific breakthroughs from the time of ancient Greece onward were the result of what he identified as intuitive insights (Noddings & Shore, 1984, p. 37). Hodgkinson et al., (2008) state that intuition is a real psychological phenomenon which needs further study to help us harness its potential.

Intuition

How does one go about making decisions? Gladwell (2005) states that there are two distinct strategies people use to make decisions. The first, involves the conscious, which allows one to think about what they have learned and then use this knowledge to come up with an answer. He says that this strategy is logical and definitive. The second strategy, intuition, is fast and is not based on weighing every ounce of evidence. It happens before any conscious thought takes place; the brain performs a series of calculations that result in a feeling which some people choose to act upon. All a person is aware of is a general feeling that something is right or wrong (p. 10). The term thin-slicing is used to describe the process one's brain goes through in a rapid amount of time which results in the intuition they perceive. A person's unconscious looks at the situation in front of them, draws on past experiences, internal and external cues and tries to find patterns within the situation or behavior, allowing the unconscious to get rid of irrelevant information and focus in on what really matters (Gladwell, 2005, p. 23 & 34). The ability to thin slice is central to a person's ability to function, and happens without their awareness. People thin slice when they meet new people, or notice a strange person

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Comment: We may not know what to do when it comes to trusting someone's intuition, but the reality is that we've never been able to dismiss it and what it tells us.

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walking towards them. Gladwell (2005) states that we thin-slice because we have to, and we rely on this ability because there are a lot of situations where careful attention to details of a very thin slice, even for no more than a second or two, can tell us an awful lot. (p. 44) Hodgkinson et al., (2008) have discovered that “people usually experience true intuition when they are under severe time pressure or in a situation of information overload or acute danger, where conscious analysis of the situation may be difficult or impossible.”

How does one study intuition? Robbie Davis-Floyd and P. Seven Arvidson (1997) state that intuition is a personal topic that can not be looked at in a detached way. They believe that intuition must be experienced and analyzed in order for academic exploration to do it justice. The research on intuition uses the narrative way of knowing to report how people use intuition (p. xi). When someone explains their intuition, they use their story to show others what they experienced and how it was something new and different for them.

Without one's acceptance of narratives as a way of knowing, it would be difficult to understand intuition.

As Berne stated, typically people are unable to state how they know to act or behave in a certain fashion, they just know that they know. The part of the brain that leaps to these conclusions is called the adaptive unconscious and research in this area is beginning to take off within the field of psychology (Gladwell, 2005, p. 11). The adaptive unconscious works like a supercomputer quickly and quietly processing the data people need to function, without their knowledge (Gladwell, 2005 p. 11). “The adaptive unconscious does an excellent job of sizing up the world, warning people of danger, setting goals, and initiating action in a sophisticated and efficient manner (Gladwell,

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Comment: Especially in the early stages of inquiry. By that I mean, we're lacking theories that inform our methods, so people rely on exploratory methods, e.g. narrative, to find out how people explain the phenomenon.

2005, p. 12).” Sharon Franquemont, cites work conducted by neurologist Antonio Damasio that the frontal lobe is the area of our brain where this rapid work is being conducted (i-intuit, retrieved 27 April 2008). Damasio's research suggests that intuitions occur through somatic markers, which are chemically based records of a person's emotional history encoded in their frontal lobe (Franquemont, 2006). Some people are suspicious of this rapid cognition because society has been conditioned to assume that the quality of a decision is based on how much time a person spends making it (Gladwell, 2005 p. 13). Researchers at Leeds say these intuitions are real and people should take their hunches seriously (Hodgkinson et al., 2008). If intuitions are gained from somatic markers like Damasio states, then people need to learn how to better develop their intuition.

According to Gladwell (2005) people can train their intuition to be educated and controlled (p.15). He states that “the power of knowing, in the first two seconds, is not a gift given magically to a fortunate few. It is an ability we can all cultivate for ourselves” (Gladwell, 2005, p. 16). To train one's intuition, it helps to have knowledge and experiences in a broad range of topics, a period where conscious contemplation of the problem is suspended, followed by a period of verification. One will typically receive intuitions during the suspension of conscious contemplation (Monsay, 1997, p. 117). Mahoney (2006) lists four ways to improve intuition: play with it, laugh at your mistakes, settle down, and get a second opinion. She recommends listening to movies with the sound off to try and determine what is happening as a way to play with intuition. She says that by laughing at our mistaken intuitions we activate the prefrontal cortex, where intuition takes place, and the laughter may help recalibrate the brain's errors. Getting a

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Comment: An example of making using positivist practices, in this case, for something nonpositive.

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Comment: This is what I mean about your generation having to mind what people are saying about how the brain works.

second opinion allows us to see if our intuition is similar to a trusted friend's. She goes on to suggest that through spending time in meditation, quiet prayer, or deep breathing, a person settles down, which allows them to listen better to their intuitions. This also may help to quiet the left brain which is more logical and analytical and allow creativity in the right brain an opportunity to take over. Intuition is closely linked to the creative process, and is cultivated by periods where conscious attention is turned off and by one's participation in a creative activity (Monsay, 1997 p. 105). Another possible way to cultivate intuition is through keeping a journal to write down thoughts, impressions and dreams (Franquemont, 2006).

There is a problem with relying on intuition, it is imperfect, and sometimes mistakes are made. One of Gladwell's focuses in his book *Blink* is to help readers identify and understand reasons they are led astray (p. 15). Bunge agrees that due to the rapid inferences that lead to ones intuition there is the possibility of the intuition being inaccurate (as cited in Monsay, 1997 p. 107). There are a variety of reasons people can be led astray, such as not being very good at picking up flaws in the evidence, says Gilovich (as cited in Greer, 2005, p. 58). Another reason is having too much knowledge in one particular area which can cause people to be blinded by their knowledge.

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Comment: Imagine people who live their lives relying more on intuition. We have a very hard time imaging how they get things done.

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Comment: And this is what positivist science tries to overcome...being blinded by intuition. However, what we've realized is that science can have similar effects on us. As we've talked all methods reveal some things and hide others.

Summary

Is one thought process better than the other? Hodgkinson et al., (2008) makes the statement that people need both conscious and non-conscious thought processes, but it is unlikely one is better than the other. One can not leave their subconscious, which is always active, behind as they go about their daily lives however they can chose to listen to it or not. The key according to Hayward (1997) is "joining intellect and intuition, head

and heart, mind and body” (p. ix) and learning how to calm the inner chatter and listen to the voice of intuition (p. x). As a left brained person, I shy away from anything involving creativity. Prior to making a decision I need to acquire as much information as possible. Even after I have acquired all the information, I have a hard time making decisions for fear of not doing something right or getting something wrong. Making a decision based solely on my intuition is difficult to imagine. How could I trust an idea that just pops into my head? Where is the evidence to prove that this is a good choice? Trusting this idea would be emotional suicide (for me). The anxiety level would be felt through the pounding of my chest and sweaty palms. Typically I want to see all of my options before deciding what to do. I have found myself unable to make decisions because I feel that there is probably more information out there that I have not gathered, so fear sets in, and I tend to make no decision at all. A classic example of this is my desire to journal. I have read every book I could find on the process, but fear led me to feel that I would not do it right, so I never started. I see Hayward’s point that there needs to be a balance between using our conscious and unconscious thought processes. The tools that I found to help develop one’s intuition will be extremely helpful to me as I look to develop this skill. The most difficult obstacles I will need to tackle in order to follow my instincts will be not listening to fear, nurturing my creative side, and learning to slow and have periods of quiet. Being a talkative person with familiar people, I will need to learn to test my intuitions out on friends to see their responses before attempting to step out and follow through on my intuition. Hodgkinson et al., (2008) also states that if we never listen to our intuition and we do not step out believing it is correct, we will never know if it is correct. I need to follow the words of the old Nike commercial and “Just Do It”!

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Comment: This may be more than a lack of trust in intuition...but I leave that to you to wrestle with.

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Comment: Or at least all the options you see...(sorry)

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Comment: So, you have a fear of mistakes, eh?

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Comment: This may be the only option, and when it doesn't work, "just do" the next thing.

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[Very good, Dani. It's very clear from your writing style that people who rely on intuition might not be playing with a full deck. They'll tell you that there are no wrong decisions, just ones that need to be adjusted all along the way. As someone who is steeped in positivism, I know your discomfort with this, but I envy their flexibility to respond. A](#)