

Enhancing Intuition: Focusing on Indirect Ways

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In this paper we look into the modes for enhancing intuition suggested in the literature. Our starting point is that although the various intuition-enhancing techniques often work, it is rarely clear why. In order to achieve better understanding, we make the first steps towards grouping indirect approaches to enhancing intuition; i.e. those techniques that do not directly make intuition better but help in making better use of intuition indirectly. We briefly touch upon the one direct way of enhancing intuition we know of, namely the master-apprentice relationship, but we do not examine it in detail here. We hope that grouping intuition enhancement techniques will help understanding them better as well as show where further methods are needed. In our paper we neither aim at comprehensive coverage of all intuition-enhancement techniques, nor at developing a decent classification. All we are doing here is making the tentative first steps on this road in order to obtain a proof of principle that a proper classification could be useful.

Intuition is a widely used ability amongst managers (Akinci & Sadler-Smith, 2012; Matzler et al., 2014; Mintzberg, 1976; Sinclair & Ashkanasy, 2005; Stierand & Dörfler, 2015). In this paper we conceptualize intuition solely as intuitive knowledge; our conceptualization covers both intuitive judgment and intuitive insight. (Dörfler & Ackermann, 2012; Sinclair, 2011) Whilst we focus on intuitive knowledge, we acknowledge the bodily effects (Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2007) and affective charges (e.g. Dane & Pratt, 2007) often accompanying intuitive knowledge (see also Dörfler & Szendrey, 2008).

The Features of Intuitive Knowledge

Conceptualizations of intuitive knowledge distinguish between the intuitive process (i.e. *intuiting*) and *intuition*, the outcome of the intuitive process. (Dane & Pratt, 2007; Osbeck, 2001) For intuition to be trustworthy, the intuitor requires a high level of expertise, meaning intuition only comes to the prepared mind and thus requires a great deal of prior work. (Mintzberg, 1989: 70) Therefore, we do not regard high level of expertise as a feature of intuition but rather as its antecedent. (Dane & Pratt, 2009; Kahneman & Klein, 2009) The literature suggests that intuitive thinking comprises six features (cf Dane & Pratt, 2007; Kahneman, 2003: 698; Sadler-Smith, 2008: 13) of which three apply to the process of intuiting and three to intuition.

Intuiting is *rapid* (or instantaneous), similar to guessing (Dane & Pratt, 2007: 40) which is “*frequently correct*” (Simon, 1983: 25) and can be described as a ‘leap’ by which the expert bypasses the analytical steps overcoming the limitations of attention and memory (Klein & Weick, 2000; Prietula & Simon, 1989: 121-122). It is a kind of “condensed expertise” (Weick, 1995: 88) that appears as if the process of analysis is “frozen into habit” (Simon, 1987: 63). Intuiting is also *spontaneous*, meaning that it does not require effort and cannot be produced at will. (Hadamard, 1954; Isaack, 1978: 918) Finally, intuiting is *alogical*, meaning that it does not necessarily contradict the rules of logic but also does not follow them (Barnard, 1938: 301 ff), because it is *arational* (Bergson, 1946; Popper, 1968; Rowan, 1986: 84) due to its informal, unstructured (Kahneman & Tversky, 1982: 124) and non-linear nature (Vance et al., 2007).

In turn, intuition is *tacit*, in that intuitors cannot give account of how they arrived at the results. Executives, therefore, often describe their intuitions as “professional judgment”, “gut instinct”, “inner voice”, or “hunch” (Hayashi, 2001: 60). Intuition is also *holistic* or *gestalt*, because it is concerned with the totality of a situation, the ‘big picture’ rather than its parts. (Miller & Ireland, 2005; Sinclair & Ashkanasy, 2005: 357) Finally, intuitors feel *confident* about their

intuitions whilst having no apparent reasons for this feeling in terms of evidence (Dean & Mihalasky, 1974).

Master-Apprentice Relationship: The Direct Way to Enhance Intuition

Scholarly research has very little to say about improving the quality of intuitions in direct ways. One of the few things that is known is that experience is necessary (Polányi, 1962: 69 ff) but not sufficient, because it does not automatically convert into expertise (Klein & Weick, 2000). There is, however, a very traditional form of learning, namely the master-apprentice relationship, which has been recognized to be exceptionally useful in achieving the highest levels of expertise (see e.g. Polányi, 1962: 69 ff for science; Prietula & Simon, 1989: 123 for management). We have explored the master apprenticeship elsewhere (Baracskaï et al., 2005; Dörfler & Eden, 2014; Dörfler & Stierand, 2009; e.g. Stierand, 2015; Stierand & Dörfler, 2015) and have argued that it seems to be the only known way of passing on tacit knowledge and thus the only direct way of enhancing intuition. However, it is still largely unclear how this exactly happens from a cognitive perspective.

Beyond the master-apprentice relationship, we found many helpful techniques in the literature, these, however, usually do not directly address intuition but some aspect related to intuition that indirectly help better use of intuition. These indirect modes work well together through synergies and they may also support the master-apprentice relationship. We are at a very early stage of developing coherent classification of techniques; all we have done we tried to pull together techniques that seemed to work in similar ways. We believe that there will be other categories than what we propose below, and some of the ones we suggest may disappear or break into two and so forth. All what we are trying to achieve here is to illustrate that a classification could be useful.

Creating an Intuition-Friendly Environment

It is often emphasized in the literature as well as in personal communication with intuitive people we have talked to that they need to hide the intuitive origins of their achievements and provide a post-rationalized analytical argument instead. Such environments discourage the use of intuition. Therefore, creating intuition-friendly environments at personal, interpersonal and organizational levels can make a great deal of difference. Agor (1984b) recommends techniques for improving the organizational environment, Sadler-Smith and Shefy (2007) emphasize the importance of promoting the development of intuition through feedback, and various other authors (e.g. Vaughan, 1979: 11 ff) suggest relaxation and meditation techniques. For example, it is well documented that reading poetry, enjoying art, music or extreme sports, sitting in the woods or consuming “*philosophical food*” (Agor, 1984a: 75) can help liberating the mind from ‘uninspiring’ problems and may foster intuitive and creative ways of thinking. The three levels together can help organizations to capitalize on the power of intuitive knowledge of their employees at the high level of expertise.

Increasing Awareness of Intuition

The second obstacle to benefitting from intuition is that the intuitors often do not notice or do not recognize their intuitions for what they are. Thus in the second group assign techniques help noticing and recognizing intuitions. Because of the somatic and affective characteristics of intuition (Sadler-Smith & Shefy, 2007), knowing our bodies and emotions better naturally increases awareness of intuition as we need to distinguishing intuition from other processes with very similar appearances. For instance, the somatic and emotional characteristics of fear and hope are not easily distinguishable from intuitions’. On personal level techniques of self-observation, reflection and keeping diaries can help (Cartwright, 2004; Goldberg, 1983: 193-

194; Vaughan, 1979: 205) and on interpersonal level discussing intuitive experiences with peers and persons of trust (e.g. Agor, 1984a: 66). At organizational level the supportive environment is necessary.

Acting Upon Intuition

Creating a supportive environment is likely to help intuition occur, better awareness will help to notice and understand intuitive leaps, but if we do not act upon this, all the rest is futile. This is the point when our relationship with our intuition is really put to test. It is easy to say that we trust our intuitions and it is not even too difficult talking about them to likeminded people. But when intuition happens, we can still delay the action, think it through again, check analytically ‘just in case’ and so forth – probably the worst thing for intuition is if it is not followed by action. There are no techniques suggested explicitly for improving *how* we can act upon intuition but many of the previously mentioned techniques also support action. An organizational environment that supports intuition also supports acting upon it. Reflecting helps learning from previous actions. Discussing it with peers provides examples as well as feedback, and poetry, art, philosophy may help achieving an actionable mindset.

Final Thoughts

Davenport and Prusak (2000: 11) suggest that “[...] *intuition is not mystical. It means we have so thoroughly learned the steps that they happen automatically, without conscious thought, and therefore at great speed*”. We believe that there is something mystical about intuition – and this mystical is our quest. But, even if not entirely understood, intuition is of great value; in the words of Mozart (quoted by Hong, 2006: 2): “*Nor do I hear in my imagination the parts successively, but I hear them, as it were, all at once (gleich alles zusammen).*”

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