



## **Gut Feel in Managers: A Study of the Use of the Intuitive Hunch Method for Accurate Intuition**

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**Abstract:** *Intuition or gut feel is defined as a direct way of knowing the reality through an increased awareness. While current literature discusses the evidence of intuition in managerial decision making as well as reflects on the nature of intuition itself, a gap exists in the absence of reliable methods to develop intuition in leaders and managers. This paper presents the results of the use of the Intuitive Hunch Method to develop intuition in 376 managers and leaders. The results showed that for those who practiced regularly, this method benefited them by enabling recognition of intuition from other thoughts thereby leading to accurate intuition. Further, participants reported that the accurate intuitive insights facilitated day to day management, data error detection, colleagues motive identification and increased relationship satisfaction.*

**Keywords:** *Intuition, gut feel, intuitive decisions, Intuitive Hunch Method, IHM, developing intuition, recognizing intuition, intuition in management, intuition developer tool.*

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### **Introduction**

The last two decades have seen an onslaught of change in every sector of business. Managers today face decisions in areas ranging from finance to communications with no precedents to guide them. Uncertainties, in combination with competitive pressures and information overload, place unusual demands on managerial capability. Reinforcing managers' ability to make sound decisions in difficult situations is a major focus of management research. This has been heightened by the recent onslaught of the covid-19 virus pandemic resulting in sudden changes in the very manner in which business are run coupled with problems on logistics, sudden employee unavailability, low morale and high levels of stress.

A ray of hope is offered by intuitive decision making which can help managers in a variety of situations- managing information overload, dealing with unpredictability, pattern recognition and problem solving, dealing with conflict, visioning and strategizing (Hayashi, 2001; Lank, 1995). According to Harvard researcher Jagdish Parikh (1996), in a survey of over 13,000 business executives from nine countries, managers attributed 80 percent of their business success to intuition and more than 70 percent believed that intuition is also important in R & D efforts.

Snyder (2019) describes how managers, business owners and entrepreneurs tap into their intuition, ignoring the more rational or "data driven" alternatives, using gut feel instead. Klein (2003) observes that an increasing number of top-level executives, including CEOs, openly admit to using intuition in decision-making. Dane and Pratt (2007) similarly concur that intuition has been seen as critical in differentiating between successful top executives and lower level managers.



### **Understanding intuition**

Intuition has been described in common jargon as ‘expert judgement’, ‘gut instinct’, ‘inner voice’, ‘hunch’ (Hayashi, 2001) as well as unconscious pattern recognition (Kennedy and Patterson, 2012). Table 1 below places these and other perspectives in the form of definitions enabling ease of comparison.

**Table 1. Perspectives on Intuition**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Alternative Definitions of Intuition</b>
Westcott (1968)	Awareness of things perceived below threshold of conscious perception.
Claxton (1980)	As a knowing without knowing why.
Agor (1986)	A way of knowing to ‘foresee’ the correct path.
Epstein (1996)	The working of the experiential system (integration of past experiences).
Hayashi (2001)	Vague feeling of knowing something without knowing exactly how or why.
Hodgkinson (2008)	A psychological phenomenon resulting from the way our brains store, process and retrieve information on a subconscious level.
Smith (2008)	Rapid, affectively charged judgments arrived at without conscious awareness of the reasoning processes involved.
Kennedy & Patterson (2012)	Unconscious situational pattern recognition.
Mayer & Maree (2017)	Intuition is defined as a form of knowledge which materialises as awareness of thoughts, feelings and physical sensations.

The authors of the present paper define intuition as a direct way of knowing the reality through an increased awareness. In this paper, ‘intuition’ will come to hold the meaning as defined by the authors.

Gut feel is also an intuition with an additional qualification that the intuition is expressed physically as an inexplicable feeling in the gut or abdomen area. In the case of intuition warning an individual, gut feeling usually is felt as a tightness or wringing feeling in the intestines. It is interesting to note that studies linking intuitive knowledge to the gastro-intestinal area of the abdomen have positive significance by measuring abdomen impulses through electro-gastrogram (EGG) experiments (Radin and Schlitz, 2005).

Some individuals may experience intuition with the gut expression whereas others may experience it without such a gut feel. In this paper, the authors use ‘gut feel’ and ‘intuition’ interchangeably, making no distinction, as both are essentially intuition.

### **Developing Intuition**

There is a rampant opinion amongst the public that intuition is an ability that people are born with as a ‘gift’. This raises the question- ‘Can intuition be developed like any other skill?’ The authors conduct workshops to develop intuition and their practical experience with numerous managers and people from other vocations demonstrates that intuition can definitely be developed and is not limited to people with the ‘gift’.

Another relevant question in this context is ‘are there individuals who are unable to develop



reliable intuition?’ Just as in other vocations or athletics, there are people who do not develop intuition primarily due to lack of practice. Intuition is similar to weight lifting or swimming. Swimming is an innate ability in humans- so it is with intuition. However, both can be left undeveloped and under-developed. If a person does not learn and practice swimming, he or she can drown in the river. The same applies to intuitive ability. Without practice and without the ability to recognize intuition from other thoughts, intuition is at best a guesstimate! Guesstimates can be very wrong and few would wholly rely on them. True intuition is never wrong.

A number of meditations and visualisations exist claiming to develop intuition. Mehta (2010) describes a ‘light meditation’ which involves visualizing and walking into a star of light. Kramer describes repeating a mantra such as OM to enable feeling/listening to the inner vibrations of gently rushing wind or water. Gawain (2010) describes a visualization of going deep underground and meeting a wise friend. Others describe ways to be receptive to intuition. Day (1997) describes seven steps: opening (open to new possibilities), noticing, pretending (allowing our mind to be creative), trusting, reporting (making note), interpreting (understanding the meaning) and integrating (into life).

Meditations, visualizations and creating a conducive atmosphere can be helpful, no doubt, but they are in themselves not methods of intuition. An analogy of aerobic exercising and swimming would be relevant here. Exercise can be useful to build strength to support and learn swimming, but it is not swimming. Similarly, meditations, visualizations and steps to open up can support intuition but are not intuition methods in themselves. An intuition method must directly trigger intuition at will and ensure a way to recognize the output is accurate intuition. The rest can be a supporting system.

### **The Intuitive Hunch Method**

The evidence supporting the existence and use of intuition for successful decisions leads to the need of whether a reliable way exists to develop intuition in managers. While the literature in published journals have been discussing the nature of intuition, its definitions, perspectives and applications; a literature gap exists on the way to develop intuition in individuals.

For any skill that is useful to enhance performance, scientific methods and systems are developed to help practitioners become experts in the skill. Frequently, skill development is divided into well-defined steps to attain mastery. In the case of intuition, however, it is unfortunate that the mass of published work is concentrating on the phenomenon of intuition but with negligible work on developing intuition itself.

To address this need and to facilitate the use of intuition in leaders and managers, the authors developed the Intuitive Hunch Method (IHM). The method is simple and does not need meditation or healing or tarot or crystals or instruments. Since intuition is an innate ability, the IHM is based on this and does not require any external means. The main advantage of the method lies in its accuracy and reliability. However, the development of accurate intuition takes practice and time.

The benefit of working with a reliable step by step method is that it the practitioner can identify where exactly improvement is required as well as have access to a tangible means to move forward. Since intuition is a very subtle phenomenon it is easy to fall prey to misconceptions and skepticism.

The Intuitive Hunch Method is divided in three phases- eliciting the intuitive hunch, recognizing it with certainty and learning to let go of unwanted thoughts, emotions, fears and desires. An intuitive hunch is a small piece of true information accessed directly and spontaneously through increased awareness. Through an initial intuitive hunch, more and more correct information can be accessed as required to complete the entire picture.

The cornerstone to accurate intuition lies in its recognition. The single biggest obstacle to



relying on intuition is when the practitioner identifies his or her own fear, other feelings or desires with intuition leading to 'wrong intuition'. 'Wrong intuition' or 'false intuition' is a misnomer as by definition intuition is a way of knowing, it can never be wrong. The error lies in misjudging other thoughts to be intuition and labelling them as intuition. For instance, if someone has suffered an incident and circumstances similar to the incident prevail- he or she may feel a warning. This warning is usually more from a sense of fear rather than a genuine intuition or premonition. This mislabeling has resulted in a lot of skepticism and doubt on whether intuition can be always be correct. The same holds true for desire. Many times people confuse the excitement and feelings of inspiration as intuition whereas they are only their own deep desires and not true intuition. When such individuals face consequent failure, the blame is laid on intuition rather than on a lack of recognition and practice.

The second phase of the IHM enables practitioners to recognize intuition from other thoughts. This is a great leap as it provides the needed confidence to only act on true intuition and to know which thoughts are masquerading as intuition. This results in transformation of the practitioner. Even if true intuition is mixed with other thoughts, if it can be recognized and separated, it will bring forth true knowledge. True and correct intuitive knowledge in the face of uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity and change can give the direction and vision that leaders need to guide their people and organisations.

The third phase of the IHM relates to learning a simple and powerful technique of letting go. The human mind is susceptible to experiencing lagged effects of emotions resulting in bias and suppression of intuition. This implies that any thoughts of fear or desire cause the relevant emotions to remain in the mind even after the thought has left conscious awareness. This causes a mood resulting in bias or colouring of perception. The ability to let go completely helps to clear the mental fog enabling the first two phases of the IHM to work efficiently.

### **Methodology**

'Be Intuitive' workshops were conducted by the authors with CEOs, founders of business startups, managers, and management students to develop their intuition using the Intuitive Hunch Method (IHM). Workshops were conducted in both formats: group as well as one-to-one. A total of 376 individuals have been taught the Intuitive Hunch Method in 14 workshops and of which 67 were taught on one-to-one basis.

To reliably check intuition accuracy, a simple online tool was created through coding. This online tool, Intuition Developer, sources copyright free images that have been camera clicked. Initially the images are hidden by a blank frame to enable intuitive sensing using the IHM. After intuitive sensing of the tone and contents, the image is revealed. Another simple tool used to develop data intuition is the Bitcoin Intuition Tool which throws up yesterday's bitcoin price index (BPI) and requests for prediction of upward or downward movement in current BPI.

For research analysis it was deemed that 10 consecutive recognition hits on blind image trials of the Intuition Developer tool were considered to be an achievement of intuition recognition in the presence of a trained witness.

After delivery of the IHM, a three-month support was provided to ensure completion of intuition recognition and let go phases. Those who were able to do both successfully were recommended to use intuition in their daily life decisions for smaller decisions initially and later for the more important ones. After six months they were contacted for intuition impact assessment on various aspects of their lives.

### **Results: Managerial Experience with the Use of the IHM**

The intuition impact assessment of successful cases (see methodology) revealed a number of positive results. Participants reported a jump in satisfaction from relationships as their ability



to gauge the situation became accurate (77%). They reported office relationships especially improved as they could instinctively know when to keep silent, when to push for requests and when to accept. A few participants in data analysis and data science profiles reported they were able to point out errors in large segments of data intuitively (37%).

Participants at the top level management reported ease of work flow and decisions as they used intuition in their daily schedules and planning (94%). They also reported a very high sensitivity towards new contracts, instinctively recognizing which to avoid (82%). Further, intuitive recognition of 'motives' (95%) as well as 'likelihood of task completion' (82%) of individuals around them enhanced their ability to influence and get work done. Enhanced visioning and strategizing were also reported but their success or failure are difficult to confirm in short time periods and therefore not considered in the current analysis. The following paragraphs turn to the efficacy of learning to apply the IHM by participants and lessons thereof.

It was found that learning to recognise intuition and learning to let go were best learnt in the one-to-one format as participants received immediate guidance and felt more open to share their fears and obstacles. Learning to elicit intuition was found to be equally effective in both one-to-one and group formats.

Before learning the IHM, a strong majority of individuals (96%) had experienced intuition at some point in their lives and a common issue (84%) was that such intuition would happen involuntarily and seemingly randomly. This may be called as 'random intuition'. The first phase of the IHM helps to elicit intuition enabling them to rise above random intuition and call upon or use intuition at will, when needed.

As different forms of meditation have become prevalent today, a number of workshop participants had been meditating regularly (78%). With regards to eliciting intuition it was observed that there was no difference between meditators and those without meditation experience. Both categories are equally responsive to the first phase and can trigger intuition. This is an interesting outcome that meditators do not have any extra advantage in eliciting or triggering intuition-- contrary to popular opinion.

In respect of the recognition phase, it was found that most meditators (87%) were able to recognise between intuition and other thoughts within one month of daily practice. However, very few of the remaining (11%) could recognise intuition accurately in the first month of practice. These non-meditators took an average of two months to achieve consecutive recognition hits. (It will be prudent to note here that 10 consecutive recognition hits on blind image trials were taken to be a measure of recognition of intuition). A large number of participants did not practice regularly and were excluded from these results (approximately 53%).

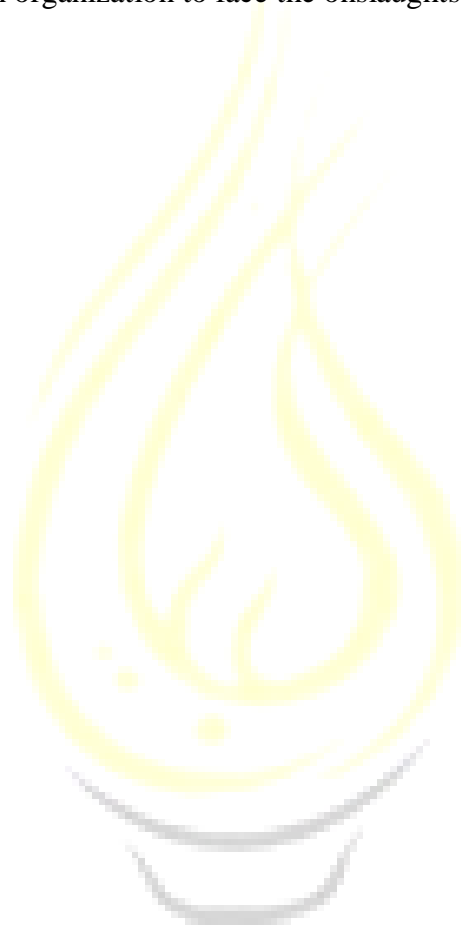
It was also seen that more than two thirds of those who did not practice regularly (72%), irrespective of whether they were meditators or not, could never achieve recognition. This is an unfortunate and dangerous phenomenon as these people learnt to elicit intuition yet could not recognise it. Mistaking fear for intuition can result in crippled decisions and loss of opportunities whereas mistaking fancy or wishful thinking for intuition can result in unwarranted risk taking and rash decisions.

It may be prudent to mention here that intuitive decision making does not imply that rational decisions were not taken by the participants. The IHM enables individuals to recognise intuitive insights and complements a structured and rational approach to decision taking. Intuitive insights can be used for fact checking, selecting amongst available alternatives (derived rationally) and deciding on the broad direction to be taken. A powerful decision is where both intuition and rational analysis dance together in the same direction, complementing each other.



## **Conclusion**

In the face of uncertainty, ambiguity and complexity, intuition is a powerful tool to complement rational system of decision making. Managerial evidence across the world is testament to improved leadership and decision making by integrating intuition in daily workplace decisions. The use of the Intuitive Hunch Method enabled managers and leaders to learn and use intuition for accurate decisions provided they practiced sufficiently to be able to recognize and distinguish it from other thoughts. This method may be used in future to harness the true managerial efficiency of an organization to face the onslaughts of changing circumstances.



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