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Neural correlates of cognitive processes: Mapping the mind in action.

Lukas Fischer*

Department of Neurophysiology, University of Heidelberg, Germany.

***Correspondence to:** Lukas Fischer, Department of Neurophysiology, University of Heidelberg, Germany, E-mail: l.fischer@heidelberg.edu

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Introduction

Cognitive processes such as attention, memory, language, and decision-making are essential to human behavior and mental functioning. These processes arise from the complex interplay of neural activity distributed across multiple brain regions. Advances in neuroimaging techniques, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), electroencephalography (EEG), and positron emission tomography (PET), have allowed researchers to identify the specific neural circuits and brain structures involved in these processes. Understanding the neural correlates of cognition not only deepens our comprehension of the mind but also provides the groundwork for interventions in neurological and psychiatric conditions [1].

Attention, one of the most fundamental cognitive functions, is mediated by a distributed network that includes the prefrontal cortex, parietal lobes, and thalamus. These regions coordinate to enable the selection and prioritization of sensory information. Sustained attention engages the right frontal and parietal cortex, while selective attention activates both dorsal and ventral attention networks. In contrast, memory involves the hippocampus, medial temporal lobe structures, and the prefrontal cortex. Working memory specifically recruits the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and posterior parietal cortex, supporting the temporary storage and manipulation of information essential for reasoning and problem-solving [2].

Language processing activates a constellation of neural areas predominantly located in the left hemisphere of the brain. Broca's area, situated in the left inferior frontal gyrus, is associated with speech production and syntactic processing, while Wernicke's area in the superior temporal gyrus contributes to language comprehension. The arcuate fasciculus, a white matter tract connecting these regions, plays a vital role in integrating expressive and receptive language functions. Meanwhile, decision-making processes engage the orbitofrontal cortex, anterior cingulate cortex, and amygdala—structures responsible for evaluating risks, rewards, and emotional salience, thereby guiding adaptive choices in dynamic environments [3].

Recent research highlights the importance of brain connectivity in understanding cognition. Rather than operating in isolation, cognitive functions are underpinned by dynamic networks that interact both temporally and spatially. The default mode network (DMN), for instance, is active during internally

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focused thought such as daydreaming or recalling autobiographical memories. The central executive network (CEN) supports goal-directed tasks requiring attention and working memory, while the salience network (SN) mediates the switching between the DMN and CEN in response to relevant stimuli. Abnormalities in these networks have been linked to various disorders, including ADHD, schizophrenia, and depression, emphasizing the need to consider both regional activation and interregional connectivity in cognitive neuroscience [4].

Understanding the neural correlates of cognition also has significant translational value. In clinical settings, mapping cognitive functions onto brain structures aids in diagnosing and treating disorders such as Alzheimer's disease, stroke, and traumatic brain injury. For example, atrophy in the hippocampus is a hallmark of early Alzheimer's, while damage to the prefrontal cortex may result in impaired executive functioning. Furthermore, cognitive training and neurofeedback techniques aim to enhance specific cognitive abilities by targeting corresponding brain areas. Emerging technologies such as brain-computer interfaces and neuromodulation therapies like transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) and deep brain stimulation (DBS) are also being explored as tools to modulate neural activity and improve cognitive outcomes [5].

Conclusion

The investigation of neural correlates of cognitive processes reveals the intricate architecture of the human brain and its capacity for complex thought, learning, and decision-making. Through neuroimaging and electrophysiological methods, researchers have begun to uncover the pathways and networks that support mental operations. This knowledge not only enhances our scientific understanding but also informs interventions aimed at preserving and restoring cognitive function across various neurological and psychiatric contexts.

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