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Precognition: An Echo from the Future. Exploring the Interplay of Intelligence, Personality, and Belief Systems

Swati Ashwin
Assistant Professor in Psychology, New Delhi, India.

Abstract: *Precognition, the alleged ability to acquire information about future events beyond conventional sensory means, remains one of the most intriguing and controversial topics in psychological science. Researchers have long debated the role of individual differences in predicting precognitive performance, focusing on cognitive abilities, personality traits, and belief systems. While intelligence may contribute to the cognitive resources required to engage with precognitive tasks, evidence suggests it is not a decisive predictor. Personality traits, particularly openness to experience and extraversion, appear to influence susceptibility to anomalous perceptions, while belief in the paranormal consistently predicts enhanced performance in precognition tasks. This article synthesizes empirical studies on these psychological correlates, proposes an integrative model in which cognitive, dispositional, and attitudinal factors interact, and critically examines methodological challenges that have complicated the field.*

Keywords*:* precognition, intelligence, personality, paranormal belief, anomalous cognition, psi

I. INTRODUCTION

We are living in a wide, wild world. Sometimes as human beings we fail to explain many phenomenal occurrences in the world. The mysteries of this universe are beyond our comprehension and humans have always managed to be the eye of the tornado rather than being caught in one. The magical yet mysterious world of prophecy – foretelling the future has always caught our interest. When using the word prophecy, we cannot turn a blind eye to the famous or infamous prophecies of Michel de Nostredame through his best-known book Les Propheties, allegedly predicting the future. How did he do it? Was he good at pattern recognition, was it his extra sensory perception at its best or was he a time traveller? Why is it that some of us can foresee an impending doom, also called as premonition or have a regular episode of "déjà vu", feeling of seeing and being in the same situation before. Parapsychology has helped us to open up to this unknown world of precognition. The study of precognition sits at the crossroads of psychology, parapsychology, and philosophy. Defined as knowledge of future events that cannot be inferred through ordinary channels, precognition raises fundamental questions about time, causality, and consciousness. Historically, anecdotal accounts of foresight have fascinated humans, from prophetic dreams to intuitive hunches, yet establishing scientific evidence has proven challenging. Empirical investigations have produced small but measurable effects in laboratory conditions, though replication and interpretive consistency remain problematic (Storm, Tressoldi, & Di Risio, 2010).

A central concern in contemporary research is understanding why some individuals exhibit precognitive experiences while others do not. Intelligence, personality, and belief systems have emerged as key psychological factors potentially influencing performance on precognitive tasks. Intelligence is theorized to facilitate the cognitive processing required to detect subtle patterns and manage uncertainty. Personality traits, especially openness to experience and extraversion, may promote receptivity to unusual perceptual experiences. Belief in paranormal phenomena, operationalized through frameworks such as the sheep–goat distinction, can shape expectations, motivation, and interpretive frameworks, potentially enhancing precognitive performance (Lawrence, 1993; Thalbourne, 1994).

This article reviews existing peer-reviewed literature examining these variables, evaluates the consistency of findings, and integrates them into a conceptual framework. The goal is to provide a comprehensive understanding of how cognitive, dispositional, and attitudinal factors collectively influence precognition.

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Intelligence and Precognition

Intelligence has traditionally been considered a potential predictor of precognition due to its association with pattern recognition, working memory, and attentional control. The hypothesis is that individuals with higher cognitive capacity are better equipped to process ambiguous information and respond accurately under uncertain conditions. Early forced-choice ESP experiments often included tasks requiring memory, attention, or rapid decision-making, which inadvertently favoured individuals with higher intelligence scores.

Despite these theoretical assumptions, meta-analytic evidence paints a more nuanced picture. Zdrenka and Wilson (2017) analysed data across numerous forced-choice precognition studies and found minimal correlation between intelligence and psi performance. While some studies reported weak positive associations, these were inconsistent and often failed to replicate. Furthermore, intelligence-related advantages appeared more related to task comprehension and attention management rather than the core precognitive phenomenon itself.

Research into the cognitive underpinnings of precognition suggests that intelligence may influence the *efficiency* of task engagement rather than the ability to access anomalous information. For instance, a highly intelligent sceptic may perform poorly if cognitive scepticism suppresses intuitive impressions, whereas a moderately intelligent believer may perform better due to attentional openness and positive expectancy (Kennedy, 2016). Thus, intelligence provides necessary cognitive scaffolding but is insufficient on its own as a predictor of precognition.

Personality Traits and Precognition

Personality traits offer a more robust explanation for individual differences in precognition. Openness to experience, one of the Big Five personality dimensions, consistently correlates with enhanced receptivity to unusual experiences and imaginative thought processes. Individuals high in openness are more likely to entertain unconventional ideas and engage with ambiguous or subtle cues, qualities that appear conducive to precognitive awareness (Zdrenka & Wilson, 2017).

Extraversion, another trait implicated in precognitive susceptibility, may facilitate attentional engagement and heightened arousal levels, potentially amplifying sensitivity to subtle signals. Thalbourne (1994) found that individuals classified as "sheep," those who believe in paranormal phenomena, scored higher on extraversion than sceptics ("goats"), suggesting that sociability and positive engagement with the environment may increase precognitive performance.

Other personality constructs, such as schizotypy, also appear relevant. Schizotypal traits reflect a tendency toward unusual perceptual experiences, magical thinking, and intuitive cognition without necessarily implying psychopathology. Studies indicate that higher schizotypy scores correlate with increased self-reported precognitive experiences, highlighting the importance of dispositional openness to anomalous phenomena (Thalbourne, 1994).

More recent research has explored interactions between personality traits and environmental factors. Le (2022) examined the effects of gender and paranormal belief on precognitive task performance. The study revealed that individuals with strong paranormal beliefs performed better, with female participants showing slightly higher accuracy in specific tasks. These findings suggest that personality interacts with other psychological factors, including belief systems, to shape precognitive outcomes.

Belief Systems and Precognition

Belief in the paranormal emerges as the most consistent predictor of precognitive performance. The sheep–goat paradigm, first articulated by Schmeidler and later quantified through meta-analysis, demonstrates that believers (sheep) perform better in psi tasks than sceptics (goats), who may perform at or below chance levels (Lawrence, 1993). This effect has been replicated across forced-choice and free-response experiments, supporting the idea that belief frameworks actively shape precognitive performance.

Psychological mechanisms underlying this effect include expectancy, motivation, and attentional focus. Believers approach tasks with openness and engagement, increasing attention to subtle cues. Sceptics may resist intuitive impressions, inadvertently suppressing performance and producing psi-missing, where observed outcomes fall below chance levels (Watt & Wiseman, 2002).

Additionally, belief systems may serve adaptive psychological functions. Greenaway, Louis, and Hornsey (2013) demonstrated that belief in precognition can restore perceived control under conditions of uncertainty or stress. Similarly,

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Cameron (2020) observed that individuals with histories of childhood trauma reported more frequent precognitive experiences, suggesting that these experiences may provide a sense of agency or coping strategy in navigating future uncertainties.

These findings underscore that belief is not merely a passive variable but actively shapes both perception and performance in precognition tasks. Belief structures serve as interpretive frameworks that filter, validate, and enhance anomalous perceptions.

Integrative Model: Intelligence, Personality, and Belief

Considering the empirical evidence, a tripartite model emerges in which precognition results from the interaction of cognitive capacity, personality traits, and belief systems. Intelligence provides the necessary cognitive infrastructure for engaging with complex tasks and sustaining attention. Personality traits, particularly openness and extraversion, enhance receptivity to subtle or ambiguous cues. Belief systems supply interpretive frameworks that validate precognitive impressions, motivate engagement, and influence expectancy effects.

This integrative perspective helps reconcile inconsistencies in prior findings. For example, a highly intelligent sceptic may fail to perform in precognition tasks due to rigid analytical processing, whereas a moderately intelligent, highly open believer may perform successfully. Similarly, individuals with high openness but low belief may notice subtle cues but fail to interpret them as meaningful.

Recent work extends this model to contemporary contexts. Lee et al. (2024) found that belief in AI predictions about personal outcomes correlated with belief in astrology and personality-based forecasts, suggesting that interpretive belief frameworks—whether technological or mystical—modulate receptivity to future-oriented information. These results further support the notion that belief systems are central to shaping precognitive performance.

Methodological Considerations

Despite intriguing patterns, the field of precognition faces significant methodological challenges:

- **Small effect sizes:** Most meta-analyses report modest effects (Storm et al., 2010), increasing vulnerability to statistical noise and Type I/II errors.
- **Expectancy effects:** Believers' positive expectations and sceptics' resistance can skew results. Controlling for such expectancy effects is critical for valid inference.
- **Task confounds:** Forced-choice paradigms often conflate intelligence with psi performance, while free-response tasks introduce subjectivity. Task design must carefully balance cognitive load and ecological validity.
- **Replication and publication bias:** Many high-profile studies have faced replication failures, highlighting the need for preregistration, transparent methodologies, and open data. Registered reports have been proposed as a solution to mitigate publication bias (Wiseman, Watt, & Kornbrot, 2019).
- **Complex interactions:** Few studies utilize multivariate models to capture interactions between intelligence, personality, and belief. Structural equation modelling and longitudinal designs are needed to clarify mediating and moderating relationships.

By addressing these methodological challenges, researchers can better assess the validity and mechanisms of precognition, while minimizing the influence of confounding variables.

II. CONCLUSION

Research indicates that precognition cannot be adequately explained by intelligence alone. While cognitive capacity supports task engagement, personality traits like openness and extraversion, along with belief in the paranormal, more consistently predict performance. Belief systems act as interpretive frameworks that validate and guide attention to precognitive cues, while personality disposes individuals to be receptive to anomalous information.

The integrative model proposed here situates precognition at the intersection of cognition, disposition, and belief, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding individual differences. Future research should employ

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preregistered, multivariate, and methodologically rigorous designs to test this model and advance scientific understanding of precognition.

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