

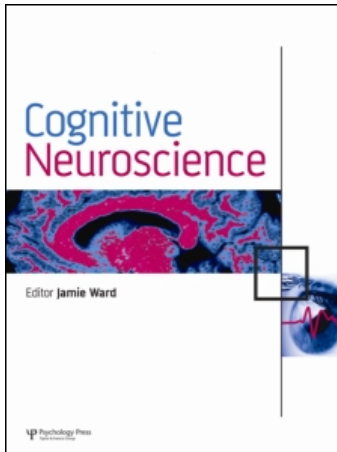
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Does the PFC model of analogy account for decision making, problem solving, reasoning, flexibility, adaptability, and even creativity?

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functions as a domain-general, biasing mechanism that sculpts the representational response space (Frith, 2000), focusing attention on certain aspects or features of a representation during analogical reasoning, while ignoring others. Such a conceptualization of the PFC may allow for explicit predictions regarding the extent of the involvement of this region depending on the type of analogical reasoning. According to this approach, PFC might be involved in analogies that are based on strong preexisting knowledge of abstract structural relationships in the source and target domains. In such cases, biasing the response space would allow for focus only on the relevant aspects of these relationships for a successful analogical mapping between the source and target domains. In contrast, PFC regions may not be involved to the same extent for analogies that are not based on explicit preexisting knowledge and which—if successful—might lead to new discoveries. In such cases, biasing the response space may be counterproductive, given that one may not know in advance which relationships will become of optimal behavioral relevance (see Chrysikou & Thompson-Schill, in press; Thompson-Schill, Ramscar, & Chrysikou, 2009).

We argue that such an approach to PFC offers a neural framework for analogical reasoning that is able to account for both types of analogy, which may further our understanding of analogical transfer (or its failure) in real-life circumstances.

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Does the PFC model of analogy account for decision making, problem solving, reasoning, flexibility, adaptability, and even creativity?

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Abstract: From everyday cognition to scientific discovery, analogical processes play an important role: bringing connection, integration, and interrelation of information. Recently, a PFC model of analogy has been proposed to explain many cognitive processes and integrate general functional properties of PFC. We argue here that analogical processes do not suffice to explain the cognitive processes and functions of PFC. Moreover the model does not satisfactorily integrate specific explanatory mechanisms required for the different processes involved. Its relevance would be improved if fewer cognitive phenomena were considered and more specific predictions and explanations about those processes were stated.

Speed proposes a novel PFC model of analogical processing. This model explains analogical processes as a progressive integration from posterior to more anterior areas of PFC, during which the information processing increases in abstractness and complexity. The frontostriatal circuits would bring the basis for analogy formation and persistence, sustained by learning and prediction of reward/punishment. The model is discussed in relation to other approaches to PFC and also to several processes involved, such as explicit and implicit processing, long vs. short-term representations, and cognitive control. More importantly, this model is presented as a useful tool for integrating the multiple functions of PFC in order to understand complex behaviors, such as decision making, problem solving, reasoning, flexibility, adaptability, and even creativity.

In spite of the main merit of this work, which lies in an effort to integrate the different roles of PFC and the analogical processes in order to understand complex behaviors, there are several caveats that raise doubts about the model's usefulness.

Although analogy would be a very important factor in wide-ranging cognitive processes, it is hard to imagine how a general cognitive skill such as analogy could be enough to explain as many cognitive processes as proposed by Speed. Would the same analogical model explain decision making, reasoning, creativity, and other very disparate processes? How is it possible for such a model to achieve this goal? Is there an identical neuronal substrate for all these cognitive processes? No precise description or insight on these main issues can be found in the paper. In the same vein, those complex

cognitive skills usually involve a conjugation of several processes (e.g., decision making can engage reversal learning and inhibition, risk-taking, emotion, executive function, and working memory, and some of those skills are known to be processed in other areas than the PFC; Dunn, Dalgleish, & Lawrence, 2006). No clear pathways that explain the sufficiency of analogy to account for such disparate cognitive processes are addressed in the PFC analogy model.

Moreover, the model doesn't sufficiently specify the kinds of analogies involved in such cognitive processes. Even though analogical explanation, analogical description, and analogical reasoning share a common characteristic (all make use of analogies), the kinds of information they provide are substantially different (Copi, 1994; Gamut, 1991). In fact, in spite of the well-known relevance of analogical reasoning in cognitive processes such as decision making or problem solving, the paper seems to specifically focus on analogical explanation and description. This is also apparent in the examples provided by the author.

Today it is widely accepted that complex cognition recruits large and relatively specific networks, including but also going beyond the PFC, and with very detailed cognitive properties. This is especially relevant when considering decision making (Frith & Singer, 2008), reasoning (Reijneveld, Ponten, Berendse, & Stam, 2007), creativity (Yeats & Yeats, 2007), or problem solving (Unterrainer & Owen, 2006). The proposed model does not fit as an explanatory mechanism of the neurocognitive functions required to address such different cognitive and neurophysiological processes. If no specific behavioral or neurophysiological predictions can be stated for each cognitive phenomenon addressed by this model, the extreme extension of the phenomena considered by the model becomes an enormous difficulty instead of being advantageous over alternative PFC explanations.

In brief, although Speed's proposal is novel and interesting, it sounds too ambitious and at the same time lacks the wide range of model predictions and explanations expected to account for such a variety of phenomena. Possibly, a model improvement would consist in a less ambitious range of cognitive phenomena and, simultaneously, the development of a more specific set of predictions and explanations.

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What role for the anterior cingulate in analogical reasoning?

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Abstract: While prefrontal and frontal cortex of the brain are well documented to mediate many executive functions, including creativity, flexibility, and adaptability, the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) is known to be involved in error detection and conflict resolution, and is crucial to reward-based learning. A case is made for the notion that any neural model of analogical reasoning must incorporate the critical (and specialized) contributions of the ACC.

In her target article, Ann Speed does an admirable job of outlining a model designed to capture the neural circuitry underlying analogical reasoning in the brain. In particular, she suggests that different neurons along the anterior-posterior axis of the prefrontal cortex (PFC) are differentially sensitive to the abstractness and relatedness of the informational components comprising analogies, and that the persistence of the representations used for analogy solution is mediated by fronto-parietal neural circuits that are sensitive to environmental consequences (i.e., their potential for success/reward or failure/punishment).

One aspect of the model that seems to have been overlooked, however, is the engagement of the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) during higher-order cognition. Note that considerable research is being done on this brain region (Brodmann area 32 and others), which has revealed a crucial role both anatomically and behaviorally for the ACC in the performance of a variety of higher-order cognitive tasks: contributions that would presumably extend to the analogical reasoning process.

At the anatomical level it is well documented that bilateral premotor and dorsolateral PFC are highly interconnected and that each of these regions projects directly to the ACC, which in turn is highly interconnected with virtually all other frontal areas of the brain (Petrides & Pandya, 1999). Moreover at the behavioral level, the ACC is known to mediate and facilitate the online monitoring of performance primarily through error checking and conflict resolution

cortices as a function of responses to subordinate (e.g., individual representations of the number 1), ordinate (e.g., the concept of the number 1), and superordinate (e.g., the concept of prime numbers, real numbers, integers, etc.) stimuli in progressively more complex problems could test this hypothesis.

Regarding the location of semantic knowledge representation question raised by Badre, an area of research that seems lacking in the PFC literature is in the development of knowledge: from childhood to adult (which exists in the analogy literature to an extent, e.g., Crone et al., 2009), from novice to expert, and from immediately post-injury to years out. Such analysis could be very instructive, and should complement the many snapshots of functioning we have now. For example, Sylvester & Shimamura (2002) examine the semantic categorization abilities of several frontal patients who average 11 years post-injury. They found that patients group common animals in the same way that an uninjured age-controlled group does. However, if the current theory is correct, 11 years is plenty of time for patients to have reacquired these categorical representations in undamaged areas of PFC. Thus, testing to see whether this categorization changes over time post-injury could be instructive.

Badre also raises the issue that striatal circuits may not be necessary for the development of relational

knowledge. However, one finding from the education literature is that the way knowledge is learned in the classroom (i.e., by being told) can produce “inert” knowledge. That is, while the student may be able to restate the concept, he is unable to transfer it to a novel situation or problem (Bransford, Sherwood, Vye, & Rieser, 1986; Smith, Ford, & Kozlowski, 1997). Imaging studies comparing semantic knowledge that can only be restated vs. semantic knowledge that can be transferred analogically will elucidate whether the type of knowledge addressed by the current proposal is different from that discussed by Badre.

There are certainly many empirical data to collect in order to determine the viability of the current proposal. However, this account does raise some important questions for current theoretical perspectives regarding the physical mechanisms underlying those proposals. As I have argued elsewhere (Speed, 2008), there is a need to pay increasing attention to the actual physical mechanisms that underlie theoretical accounts of PFC function (see also, Hazy, Frank, & O’Reilly, 2006; O’Reilly & Frank, 2006). Irrespective of the ultimate fate of the current proposal, I hope that empirical tests pitting it against other perspectives, and additional physiologically based computational modeling efforts, will result in a more complete understanding of the physical mechanisms underlying PFC function.

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