

Anxiety and Perceptual-Motor Performance: From Brain to Behaviour

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When it is important to do well, anxiety about the consequences of failure can sometimes cause individuals to perform poorly. This concerns cognitive performance (e.g., taking an important exam) as well as perceptual-motor performance (e.g., sport competition; driving your car in busy traffic). Current perspectives explaining the impact of anxiety on perceptual-motor performance are scattered but largely highlight increased attention towards skill execution, which causes performers to 'overthink' their actions and revert to conscious as opposed to proceduralized control of movement. In this contribution I will take a process-based approach to human movement and argue how basic neurophysiological processes triggered by anxiety bring about a cascade of responses which – beyond mere skill execution – influence the perception, selection, and realization of action possibilities (affordance control).

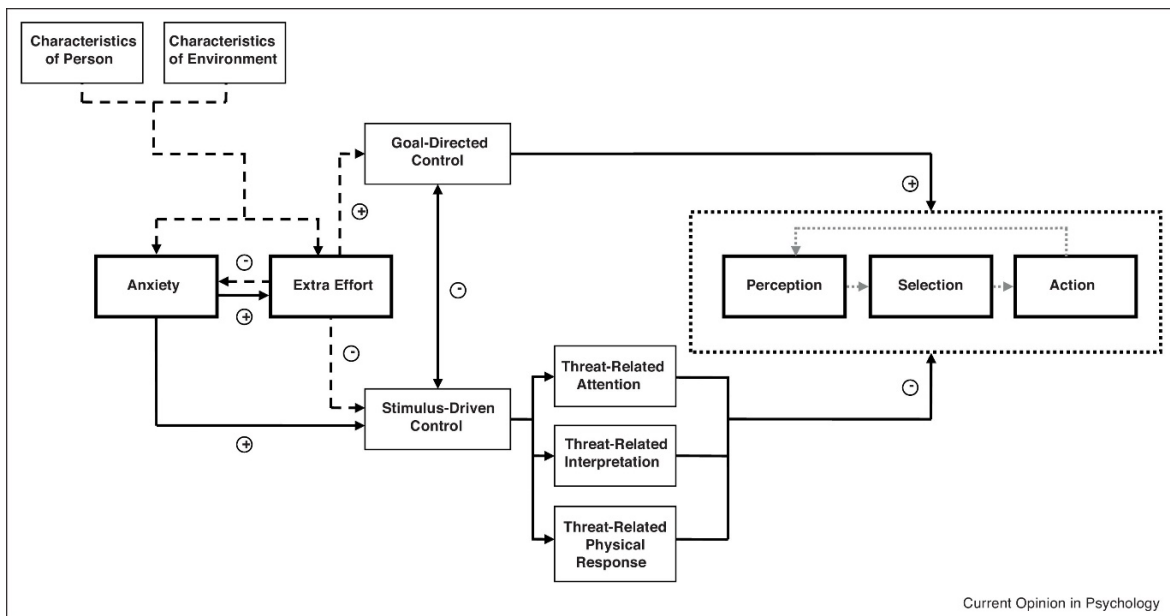


Figure 1. The integrated model of anxiety and perceptual-motor performance (from: Nieuwenhuys & Oudejans, 2017. Anxiety and performance: perceptual-motor behaviour in high-pressure contexts. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 16, 28-33)

Using the integrated model of anxiety and perceptual-motor performance as a conceptual framework (Nieuwenhuys & Oudejans, 2012; 2017; Figure 1), I will discuss recent empirical work and emphasize the value of a holistic process-based approach for error analysis, prevention, and the development of interventions that aim to improve individuals' performance in those situations where it counts the most.