Resting-state cognition is associated with resting-state network activation

D. Stoffers¹,², A. Diaz¹, A. Den Braber³, D. Van ‘t Ent³, D.I. Boomser³, H.D. Mansvelder³, E.J.C. De Geus³, E.J.W. Van Someren² & K. Linkenkaer-Hansen¹

Introduction

The human brain generates complex patterns of activity and cognition during wakeful rest, but the question is: how are they related?

In 2008, we developed a self-report Resting-State Questionnaire (RSQ) of 50 five-point Likert items for rating feelings and thoughts during the classical eyes-closed resting-state (RS) condition.¹ Here, we investigate links between cognition and brain activity during the resting state using the RSQ and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI).

Methods

68 participants underwent RS-fMRI twice. Immediately after each session they completed the RSQ while still in the bore.

- Philips Intera 3T MRI machine with 8-channel head coil.
- 2 blocks of 140 volumes RS-fMRI (axial, TR 2200 ms, TE 30 ms, flip angle 80°, 2.75 mm isotropic with 10% inter-slice gap) separated by 30 minutes of task-based fMRI.
- Instructions: “Please relax, lie still with eyes closed and try not to fall asleep”.
- RSQ scores analysed using PCA with VARIMAX rotation.
- MRI data analysed with FSL using standard pre-processing.
- ICA with PCA-driven dimensionality reduction on temporally concatenated fMRI data to identify large-scale patterns of functional connectivity within the full group.²
- Dual-regression to determine scan-specific temporal dynamics and associated spatial maps.³
- Spatial maps divided into 2 groups for each RSQ factor; scores below vs. above the median.
- Non-parametric voxel-wise analysis of differences between groups (5,000 permutations, TFCE, p < 0.05 FWE-corrected).)

Results

The participants reported no problems remembering or rating their thoughts and feelings on the RSQ (Fig. 1A).

The data revealed large and often stable inter-individual differences in the quality and content of thoughts and feelings during RS-fMRI (Fig. 1B to F).

PCA identified 5 different RSQ factors with high loadings for items pertaining to feelings (e.g. item in panel B), self projection (C), self reflection (D), sleepiness (E) or discontinuity of mind (F).

ICA identified 21 components, of which 10 represent well-known RS networks of brain regions with temporally correlated BOLD signals (Fig. 2).⁴

Surprisingly, we found that high scores on ‘self projection’ were associated with less functional connectivity in posterior parts of the default mode ⁵, executive and left fronto-parietal networks when compared to low scores (Fig. 3A).

In contrast, high scores on ‘discontinuity of mind’ were associated with more connectivity within the default mode network, and less connectivity in the executive and fronto-striatal networks (Fig. 3B). Functional connectivity differences could also be demonstrated for the other three RSQ factors (not illustrated).

Conclusion

Individual variation in RS cognition is associated with differential activation of resting-state networks. The RSQ could prove useful for shedding light on functional implications of genetic or disease-related variation in RS brain activity.

References