

Disney strategy for Japanese university students' career guidance: a mixed methods pilot study

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The Disney strategy, a neuro-linguistic programming skill, has been reported to be useful for career guidance by qualified career consultants in Japan. This mixed methods pilot study aimed to examine the effects and the experience of using this strategy for career guidance in Japanese students. Six students responded to four job-search-related scales at pre-training and post-training, and were interviewed. Students' self-esteem and job-search self-efficacy increased significantly in the short-term. Thematic analysis of the interviews revealed three key experiential features: body movement; clear vision; and positive emotions. These promising findings suggest the Disney strategy should be examined in larger, longitudinal studies.

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Introduction

Career guidance is increasingly important in Japan. A qualification for career consultants was developed in 2002, and their number has been increasing in recent years (2006: 43,000; 2008: 53,000; 2012: 81,000; Asano, 2013). In April 2016, this qualification was recognised nationally, and accredited by the government. In higher education, almost all universities in Japan (97%) provide career guidance (Watanabe 2013).

At the end of the 20th century, Japan underwent great socio-economic changes including the revision of a lifetime employment approach and diversification of individuals' careers (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare [MHLW] 2007a). Because of these changes,

individuals needed to be equipped with competencies in career development, in order to adapt to the shift from 'career in organisations' to 'career out of organisations' (Watanabe-Muraoka 2007): 70% of full-time employees reported they want to plan their own career development (MHLW 2007b). These changes delineated the need for support in people's own career development (Watanabe-Muraoka, Michitani, & Okada 2009).

In higher education, although career guidance was introduced at almost all Japanese universities (Watanabe 2013), it has some recognised problems (Adachi 2004). While the rate of students who obtain a full-time permanent employment has been relatively high (70% in 2014), about 20% of students have no employment at all (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology 2014). Even though the majority of students indicate they are in full-time permanent employment, 30% of them will have left that job within three years (MHLW 2015). To counter these problems, the Japanese government developed policies including attempts to increase the number of career counsellors in higher education (Mochizuki, 2015).

Recent research on career guidance has emphasised personal responsibility for one's own career. More individual-oriented approaches such as the life-design approaches (Savickas 2010) or integral approaches (Zunker 2002) have been applied to practice. 'Private logic' (Savickas 2009), how an individual constructs meaning and identity in their career subjectively, is essential in career guidance. Therefore the practitioner's focus tends to be on narrative truth rather than factual truth (West 1996). This trend

suits neuro-linguistic programming, NLP, as it focuses on subjective experience (Alder 2002; O'Connor & McDermott 2001).

Factors affect job-search quality

Recently the quality of job-search has been scientifically investigated, because it has become more common in today's rapidly changing job market (Côté, Saks & Zikic 2006; Manroop & Richardson 2015; Saks 2006). Job-search refers to information gathering for potential job opportunities, obtaining and comparing offered jobs, and choosing the best from the offered jobs (Barber, Daly, Giannantonio & Philips 1994). The quality of job-search relates to proximal outcomes (invitation to job interviews and offers) and distal outcomes (employment and its quality) (van Hooft, Born, Taris, van der Flier & Blonk 2004; Saks 2005; Schwab, Rynes & Aldag 1987).

Self-esteem has been related to the quality of job-search (Holmstrom, Russell & Clare 2013). Specifically, self-esteem has been associated with individuals' social skills (Berger 1955; Rosenberg 1965) and work behaviour (Korman 1970). Without high self-esteem, job seekers may not believe they have the skills or quality the employer wants, so may reduce their effort. Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy and Shalhoop (2006) reported that self-esteem was a crucial psychological antecedent of self-efficacy and the success of job-search. Ellis and Taylor's study (1983) of 86 university students found that self-esteem was significantly related to number of offers, acceptance of a position, and intended length of tenure.

One of the most studied job-search constructs is job-search self-efficacy (JSSE; Saks, Zikic & Koen 2015). JSSE is the belief that one can take necessary job-search behaviors and get employed (Saks & Ashforth 1999). Saks' study (2006) with 225 recent university graduates revealed that JSSE was a significant predictor of interviews, offers, employment status, and personality-job fit. Brown et al.'s study (2006) with 180 university students reported that JSSE was associated with proactiveness, job-search effort, behaviour, and outcome. These studies illustrate JSSE is related to the job-search success.

Both job-search intensity and clarity (JSI and JSC) are also related to the success of job-search. JSI refers to how frequently they engage in behaviors that are aimed for employment (Saks 2006). JSC is defined as the degree of clarity in job seekers' job-search objectives and the type of career, work, or job they are aspired to obtain (Wanberg, Hough & Song 2002). Unsurprisingly, JSC and JSI are positively correlated with one another (Côté et al. 2006). A high level of JSC leads a job seeker to focus on his/her job-search more (Wanberg et al. 2002), and to have clearer goals, which support his/her motivation (Côté et al. 2006). Côté et al.'s study (2006) of 123 university students found that JSC predicted JSI, which in turn was related to number of invitation to interviews, offers received, and jobs obtained.

Despite these promising findings, studies exploring interventions to enhance these factors have been limited and focus on self-reported outcomes. For example, a behaviour-modelling workshop enhanced general self-efficacy among unemployed people (Eden & Aviram 1993).

NLP application into career consultation

Commonly, career consultants are trained to offer advice and counselling, and much of their training uses a counselling framework (MHLW 2007a). Anecdotally, NLP has been applied to career consulting recently, particularly in Japan (Kotera 2017); NLP is an applied psychology used to study excellence through subjective experience (Alder 2002; O'Connor & McDermott 2001). Although only one study has focused on NLP in qualified career consultants to date, the Disney strategy was reported to be the most useful among the Japanese consultants (Kotera 2017). Indeed, some of the career consultants reported they already taught this skill to university students as part of the university career module. The Disney strategy, developed by an NLP trainer, Robert Dilts, was modelled from Walt Disney's thinking strategy (Dilts 1998). When creating a plan to achieve his dream, Disney and his colleagues examined it from three different perceptual positions; the dreamer, realist and spoiler. Dilts made this process into an NLP skill, 'the

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'Disney strategy'. The career consultants noted this three-position-system was one of the strengths of this skill, as their clients often took only one position to think about their career. By examining their career from the three positions, the clients are able to think about their career more holistically (Kotera 2017). In that study, qualified career consultants identified that the Disney strategy was one of the most useful skills to their clients. Given that no study has examined the effectiveness of the Disney strategy and the promising results reported, the first aim of this study was to examine the effects of the Disney strategy in career guidance for Japanese students. The second aim of this study was to explore the clients' experience of the Disney strategy. In order to analyse in an enriched and elaborated manner, mixed methods were employed (Greene, Caracelli & Graham 1989).

Method

Study design

A convergent mixed methods design, collecting qualitative and quantitative data concurrently, was

employed (Creswell 2014): online scales before and after training, with an in-depth, semi-structured, individual interview after training. Quantitative analysis addresses the first aim of this study, to examine the effects, and qualitative analysis corresponds to the second aim of this study, to explore the experience of the Disney strategy. The online scales were used to examine the levels of the Japanese university students' self-esteem, JSSE, JSI, and JSC. The interviews were conducted via Skype with the first author, who was not involved in training. Throughout the study, the first author was introduced to the students as a psychology researcher, instead of an NLP trainer, to limit biased responses. Ethics approval was obtained from the university research ethics committee.

Participants and trainers

Participants were recruited by a non-profit organisation that supported university students in career guidance. Seven Japanese students aged 18 years or older attended the career training, and six of them agreed to participate in the study. They had not previously learned NLP. The demographic information of the six participants is in Table 1.



Table 1. Demographics of the participants

	Gender	Age (years)	Major	Year*
Participant 1	F	20	Economics	2
Participant 2	M	20	Intelligence and Information	3
Participant 3	F	20	Clinical psychology	3
Participant 4	M	21	Business	3
Participant 5	F	22	Global and Regional Studies	4
Participant 6	M	20	Economics	2

* Bachelor's programmes in Japan consist of four years.

Two trainers provided the training together: Trainer 1 was a qualified career consultant and NLP master practitioner, who has been supporting university students' career for fifteen years; Trainer 2 was a certified NLP trainer, and has fifteen years of career consulting experience.

Training

The training comprised one six-hour long session, and began with the introduction of NLP and the Disney strategy, followed by an explanation of each perceptual position, and practice of the Disney strategy. The training contents were reviewed and approved by two certified NLP trainers.

In the Disney strategy, clients create these positions in the room, and physically move to each position to focus on one thinking pattern at a time for approximately five to ten minutes. In the dreamer position, the clients hold their head and eyes up and dream as if nothing was impossible. Next, the clients move to the realist position, and turn their face and eyes straight ahead. In this position, they plan by thinking about what steps need to be taken in order to achieve their dreams. Finally, in the spoiler position, the clients keep their eyes down and tilt their head down, and, in that position, search for any gaps in their dreams and plans, and between them. If the clients consider their plans not to be realistic, they move back to the realist position to reconsider the plans they have made in order to make new plans that are more realistic; alternatively, they may subtly revise their plans to resolve any gaps (Dilts 1996).

Questionnaires

For the quantitative analysis, the university students were asked to complete the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), Job-Search Self-Efficacy Scale (JSSES), Job-Search Intensity Scale (JSIS), and Job-Search Clarity Scale (JSCS). The validity and reliability of the Japanese version of RSES have been confirmed (Mimura & Griffiths 2007). The rest of the scales were translated into Japanese by the first author and two other psychology master's degree holders who were Japanese-English bilinguals, through back-translation and a meeting to ensure the original meaning was captured in the Japanese version.

RSES is a ten-item scale to measure students' self-esteem (Rosenberg 1965). Items include 'On the whole, I am satisfied with myself'. Students rate how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement on a four-point Likert scale ranging from '1' being 'Strongly disagree' and '4' being 'Strongly agree'. Items 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 are reverse-scored. The internal consistency of the scale was high (.77 to .88).

JSSES (Vinokur, Price & Schul 1995) measures students' job-search self-efficacy: their confidence in successfully performing job-search activities (Saks 2005). Students rate 20 items on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from '1' being 'very poorly' to '7' being 'very well'; for example, 'Giving the best impression of yourself in a

job interview'. The internal consistency of the scale was acceptable (.71).

The updated version of JSIS (Wanberg et al. 2002, adapted from Blau 1993) is a ten-item scale, in which students rate on a five-point Likert scale indicating how many times they had performed the various search activities over the past two weeks: from '0' being 'never' to '5' being 'very often (ten times)'. The ten items include 'Used the Internet to locate job openings'. JSIS has good internal consistency (.82).

JSCS is a four-item scale with good internal consistency (.82; Wanberg et al. 2002). Items include 'I have a clear idea of the type of job that I want to find'. The response choices were adapted from the two choices of 'agree' or 'disagree' to a five-point Likert scale: '0' being 'strongly disagree' to '4' being 'strongly agree', in order to know the degree of their job-search clarity.

Qualitative analysis

Semi-structured interviews were conducted online and transcribed by the first author. The advantages of online interview include being economical and geographically flexible, while the challenges include technical problems and ethical issues (Saumure & Given 2010). To counter these challenges, the quality of video and audio was examined before the interview questions, and the approved ethical procedures were followed. Each interview explored topics such as reasons for attending the training, the perceptual position they found the most familiar with and useful to their career guidance, and what part of the Disney strategy they found the most helpful for their career guidance.

The interview questions were adapted from the Helpful Aspects of Therapy Questionnaire (HAT; Llewelyn 1988), as HAT has been used in various studies to evaluate the experience of training (e.g. Smith 2011). These questions are simple, elicit information less intrusively, and allow interviewees to focus on the helpful aspects of training (Elliott 2012).

Thematic analysis was used because of its appropriateness to explore this underdeveloped area (Braun & Clarke 2006). Thematic analysis apprehends

the important concepts and patterns of experience within data by segmenting, categorising, summarising, and reconstructing a dataset. This analysis allows researchers to describe these patterns and common themes within them (Givens 2008). The procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006) was followed: familiarising; generating codes; searching for themes;

reviewing themes; and defining and naming themes. An investigator triangulation (Hales 2010) was employed for transparency and coherency, by having an NLP researcher and non-NLP researcher review the data extracts of each theme made by the authors. They also examined the first author's translation from Japanese to English.



Results

Quantitative analysis

Data analysis, primarily paired t-tests (after assumptions were checked), was performed with SPSS version 23.

The results of the quantitative analysis are described in Table 2. There was a significant increase in self-esteem and JSSE from pre-training to post-training. In contrast, there were no differences in JSI and JSC between pre-training and post-training.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of each scale at pre-training and post-training

Scale (Range)	Pre	Post		
	M	SD	M	SD
S-EM (10-40)	13.67 ^a	5.09	19.00 ^a	2.10
JSSE (20-140)	53.67 ^a	12.80	70.80 ^a	10.89
JSI (0-50)	23.50	10.71	20.40	7.30
JSC (0-16)	8.67	3.44	8.83	2.93

S-EM = self-esteem, JSSE = job-search self-efficacy, JSI = job-search intensity, JSC = job-search clarity.

Superscript (a) indicates there is a significant difference between the two groups.

Qualitative analysis

First, students' purpose of attendance, and most familiar and useful positions were summarised (see Table 3). Students who reported they were familiar with the realist position found the dreamer the most useful, and vice versa. Many students described they had chosen to take the training to clarify their future vision.

Table 3. Purpose of attendance, most familiar and useful position of participants

	Purpose of attendance	Most familiar	Most useful
Participant 1	Find the centre of my life	Realist	Dreamer
Participant 2	Make a vision for the future	Realist	Realist
Participant 3	Be positive about my job-search	Dreamer	Realist
Participant 4	Have a clear plan to achieve my dream	Dreamer	Realist
Participant 5	Clarify what I want to do in my life	Dreamer	Realist
Participant 6	Make a vision for the future	Realist	Dreamer

Three themes emerged from students' experience of the Disney strategy: body movement, clear vision, and positive emotions.

Body movement

Although it was new to the students, all of them found the body movement very useful. The Disney strategy entails various body movements including walking to each position, and making the postures. These helped the students focus on one thinking mode at a time.

Participant 2: I found the body movement in the realist position most useful... This really helped me tap into my planning mode. Also physically being in the realist position helped me focus on planning.

Participant 3: I found the Disney strategy dynamic. I moved to each position, made the poses, and responded to the questions. We did this process a couple of times to sink the whole thing in our body.

Students reported that by using the body movement, they were able to imagine their dream and milestones more in-detail. This enhanced their motivation in job-search, and students were hopeful that their motivation would last long.

Clear vision

All of the students mentioned that the Disney strategy helped them have a clear vision. For example, Participant 1 described she was able to dream as if nothing was impossible in the dreamer position. Participant 5 described how the Disney strategy helped her focus on the future.

Participant 1: It was most useful to me to be in the dreamer position, and think about what I really want from my life as if nothing was impossible... This process of verbalisation and visualisation clarified what I want to do.

Participant 5: What I want to do in the future became clearer. I really didn't have time to work on it until the training: I didn't have time to dream, make plans for the dream, and review them.

Students noted the following parts of the Disney strategy helped them have a clear vision: dreaming as if nothing was impossible; dreaming with five-sensory information; dreaming with specific contexts; backward planning; milestones; the order of thinking modes

(dream, plan, then review critically). Of the three positions, the dreamer position was described as being most related to a clear vision.

Positive emotions

Though four students reflected that they used to perceive job-search as stressful, all of them reported their perception of job-search has become more positive. This accords with the quantitative data indicating that JSSE increased.

Participant 4: I feel confident and excited about my job-search now... I had been stuck with ways to achieve my dream, but the realist position helped me come up with steps to achieve it.

Participant 6: My view on job-search is not stress-based any more, and now it's pleasure-based... The dreamer position helped me think of my dreams, and experience the pleasure I will feel by achieving them.

The emotions or feelings students experienced during the Disney strategy were: hope, confidence, excitement, curiosity, happiness, self-acceptance, courage, balanced, stable, committed, safe, motivated, less stress and anxiety. A variety of positive emotions were experienced.

Discussion

This study examined the effects and experience of the Disney strategy for career guidance of Japanese university students. The Disney strategy enhanced students' self-esteem and JSSE from pre-training to post-training significantly. Students decided to undertake the training to clarify their vision, and found having both the dreamer and realist positions useful. The body movement was another notable experiential feature of the Disney strategy, which helped the students have a clear vision and positive emotions for job-search.

All of the students reported body movement helped to access each thinking mode. This supports findings from previous studies where different postures created different thoughts (Petty, Wells, Heesacker,

Brock & Cacioppo 1983; Wilson & Peper 2004). Thus, the body movement might have helped the students envision clearly and have positive emotions, including self-esteem and self-efficacy. The relationship of these themes should be examined in future studies.

There were no significant difference in JSI and JSC between pre-training and post-training. This may be explained by the quality of the participated students. They were the students who had registered themselves to a career support organisation, and decided to attend a six-hour session of training on a Saturday. Their scores in these scales were already high at pre-training; ceiling effects might explain the lack of significant changes. Also the items in JSI focus on the external behaviours, such as looking at ads on newspaper or using the internet to find job opportunities, which are unlikely to have changed over the 6-hour session. As the students reported, the brief effects we have observed of the Disney strategy seemed to lie in the internal: self-esteem and self-efficacy.

There were several limitations in this study. The sample size was small, and the participant recruitment was opportunity sampling, which may have created bias. The time span of this study was very short, changes from pre-training to post-training; longitudinal studies are needed. Moreover, controlled or comparative groups would be helpful in elucidating causality in addition to understanding whether changes are sustained. As JSIS and JSCS were developed in the western countries, some of the items in these scales might not be appropriate for Japanese students. In Japan, students start job-search and start working at the same times. Therefore, items such as Item 7 of the JSIS, 'Sent a resume to a possible employer or turned in a job application', may not apply to them. It would be worthwhile to conduct this study with students in the West.

The Disney strategy, a dynamic NLP skill, helped Japanese university students have a clear vision and positive emotions for their job-search, including self-esteem and JSSE. Further investigation of this strategy for career guidance needs to be conducted, with the aim of establishing a new approach to counter today's job-search problems. Indeed, it may be useful to test the use of embodied turn-taking, such as the Disney

strategy, in the classroom as well as specific career workshops.

The practitioners all said they would use the approach with university students to improve the quality of their career learning and development.

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