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A qualitative investigation into the experience of neuro-linguistic programming

certification training among Japanese career consultants

Yasuhiro Kotera: Y.Kotera@derby.ac.uk, University of Derby, UK

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Abstract

Although the application of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) has been reported worldwide, its scientific investigation is limited. Career consulting is one of the fields where NLP has been increasingly applied in Japan. This study explored why career consultants undertake NLP training, and what they find most useful to their practice. Thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with six career consultants, who had attended NLP certification training, revealed that they wanted to learn action-oriented NLP-based coaching skills in addition to their active-listening-based counselling skills. NLP provided frameworks to lead their clients' thoughts efficiently, deepened their understanding of the human mind, and developed their attitude to understand others and themselves. The NLP skills found most useful were reframing and the Disney strategy.

Keywords: neuro-linguistic programming, career consulting, the Disney strategy, reframing, Japan

Introduction

NLP, a 'model of human experience and communication' (Bandler & Grinder, 1979, pp. i-ii), is an applied psychology to analyse and reproduce excellent behaviours. It was developed by Richard Bandler and John Grinder at University of California, Santa Cruz, in 1970 (Pishghadam & Shayesteh, 2014; Wake & Leighton, 2014), through closely examining communication patterns of psychotherapists such as Milton Erickson, Virginia Satir, and Frederick Perls (Tosey & Mathison, 2009). NLP is an approach based on creating a model that maps 'tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge' (Bostic St. Clair & Grinder, 2001, p. 271) to study how excellent individuals and organisations create their outstanding results (O'Connor & McDermott, 2001). NLP explores the structure of subjective experience by considering the subject's neurological processes (neuro), language (linguistic), and learned strategies (programming) (Dilts, Grinder, Bandler & DeLozier, 1980). Since its introduction, the use of NLP has spread rapidly worldwide (Karunaratne, 2010), and in a wide range of fields including psychotherapy, business, and education (Tosey, Mathison & Michelli, 2005; Zastrow, Dotson & Koch, 1987). This trend is no different in Japan. Since 2003, one of the original NLP organisations, the NLP Connection, certified 1,725 practitioners, 1,321 master practitioners, 373 trainer associates, and 40 trainers (C. Hall, personal communication, March 15, 2016), illustrating the growing popularity of NLP in Japan.

Despite its wide applications, however, scientific research in NLP is still underdeveloped (Dowlen, 1996; Pishghadam & Shayesteh, 2014; Thompson, Courtney & Dickson, 2002; Wake, 2011). A literature search using EBSCO yielded just 535 academic journal articles with the words 'neuro-linguistic programming'; by comparison 'mindfulness' yielded 32,235 articles at the

time of the study. Indeed, Witkowski (2010) noted in his criticism of NLP that while its founders conducted field observations, experiments, and theoretical deductions, they ignored empirical verification, critical to social psychology (Cialdini, 1980; Mortensen & Cialdini, 2010). This weakness was echoed by Sturt et al. (2012) who in their systematic review reported that there was insufficient evidence of the significant effects of NLP interventions on health-related outcomes because of the relatively poor quality and limited quantity of research. Thus, unsurprisingly, research in NLP training is limited. EBSCO searches using the words 'NLP training' and 'neuro-linguistic programming training' yielded 69 academic articles. Most of those articles, however, were about non-NLP training (e.g. mental health training) using NLP skills. The few studies that have examined the effects of NLP training have focused on: mental health (Sahebalzamani, 2014), self-efficacy and problem solving (Zamini, Nasab, & Hashemi, 2009), and communication skills (Günenç, Devebakan, & Doğan, 2015). None of these studies explored the experience of NLP training.

Career Consulting in Japan

Career consulting is a relatively new concept in Japanese society. Traditionally, Japanese companies had a lifetime employment approach, where employees worked at the same company until retirement. However, toward the end of the twentieth century, after the economic bubble burst, Japan has been characterised by significant socioeconomic changes, as well as diversification of individual value systems and career paths. The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) has pointed out that the existence of external and internal changes. The external changes include the rapid development of technology, which changes what is required for the same job more quickly and frequently, and the influence of Western employment

trends, whereby employees change their jobs more frequently. Gender equality is another notable external change (e.g. the Equal Employment Opportunity Law in 1986, and the Child-Care Leave Law in 1992). There have been more jobs for women; their working career has been getting longer; and their life-work patterns have become diversified. The internal changes relate to a change in workers' values, from being an obedient company employee to creating one's own career independently (MHLW, 2007a). Companies started to review their model of traditional lifetime employment, and individuals started to think of their own career, rather than rely on the company's decisions (Watanabe-Muraoka, Michitani, & Okada, 2009). For example, one of the largest consumer electronics firms in Japan, Matsushita Electric Industrial, Co. Ltd., changed the traditional lifetime employment in order to adapt to the needs of more diversified workforce (Senmatsu, 1999). Such shift from 'career in organisations' to 'career out of organisations' requires individuals to be better equipped with competencies in career development (Watanabe-Muraoka, 2007). The MHLW (2007b) survey reported that about 70% of full-time employees would like to plan their career development on their own.

Because of these changes, workers have increasingly recognised the need for support in their career development (Watanabe-Muraoka, Michitani, & Okada, 2009). Career education in Japan is implemented from elementary to high school (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2004), and career development support (e.g. internship, career guidance, individual counselling) has been introduced in more than 70% of the universities (Japan Student Services Organization, 2006). A qualification for a career consultant was developed in 2002, and the number of qualified career consultants 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. These movements illustrate that

the importance of career consulting in Japanese society will continue to increase in the future.

Career consulting is defined as a consultation and support to help clients design their professional life such that it is appropriate for them, and undertake job training to develop their professional competencies effectively (MHLW, 2007a). Thus, career consultants provide information, and offer psychological support to help clients achieve their ideal professional life (MHLW, 2007a). In the field of career guidance, personal responsibility for one's own career has been increasing recently. This has stimulated the need for more individual-oriented approaches such as life-design approaches (Savickas, 2010) or integral approaches (Zunker, 2002). 'Private logic' (Savickas, 2009) - how an individual constructs meaning and identity in their career subjectively - is central to today's career guidance. Therefore the focus tends to be on narrative truth rather than factual truth (West, 1996). For example in Japan, the job-card system was introduced by the government in 2008; it is a training programme to work through a set of worksheets to help individuals make their own career plans by deepening an understanding of themselves (MHLW, 2015). NLP also explores subjective experience, hence it could provide another avenue for development of the field of career guidance (Reid & West, 2011).

As certified NLP trainers, my colleagues and I have noticed that there have been more and more career consultants attending NLP certification training in recent years. These participants have often reported that this training was extremely helpful to their practice. However, to date no study has explored the experience of NLP training among Japanese career consultants.

Method

Design

The study entailed thematic analysis of in-depth qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted

with six qualified career consultants who had attended NLP Practitioner and Master Practitioner

certification training (NLP-PCT and NLP-MPCT) at least one year prior to the start of the

research (five women and one man; age range was 31-52 years, M = 44.8, SD = 7.9). On

average, the participants had completed NLP-MPCT 2.8 years prior to data collection. To be a

qualified career consultant in Japan, you need to complete 140 hours of training or its equivalent

work experience, and a written exam, which are approved by the MHLW. The 140-hour training

includes the social impact of career consulting, basic knowledge on how to conduct career

consulting, required skills, and advocacy of career consulting. The basic knowledge includes

career-development theories, counselling theories, mental health, labour market and laws; and

required skills cover counselling skills such as rapport-building and active-listening (Asano,

2013). The six career consultants all had had at least four years of career consulting practice

experience before undertaking the training. NLP-PCTs train the participants to internalise and

integrate NLP in their thinking and behaviour, and NLP-MPCTs primarily focus on the influence

they have on others (Hall, 1983).

Training

Both the NLP-PCT and NLP-MPCT training are usually provided for 10 days over two to three

months. NLP-PCT aims to enable participants to 'demonstrate a fundamental ability to utilise the

basic concepts, skills, processes/techniques and patterns of NLP' (Hall, 1983) by covering eight

areas of NLP: representational systems, rapport-building, anchoring, language patterns, outcome

framing, sub-modalities, strategies, and trance. After completing the NLP-PCT, participants are

allowed to move onto an NLP-MPCT training where they develop those skills further to conduct

purposeful multi-level communication and customised interventions, build and utilise states of

consciousness and physiology, and make conscious shifts in perspective, state and behaviour

(Hall, 1983). All the skills taught in the training entail theoretical understanding, demonstration by the trainer, and practice. In the course of the training, participants are required to produce five reports for reflection (Yamazaki, 2004, 2005).

Participants

In order to gather rich and varied data through in-depth semi-structured interviews, a small number of participants were chosen. Three NLP trainers in Japan were requested to approach experienced and qualified career consultants, who had completed certification training. Of the 10 career consultants who were approached, six agreed to have an hour-long interview on Skype. I conducted these interviews and introduced myself as a psychology researcher to limit biased responses. Two of the consultants mainly worked at job centres, four at universities, and all worked partly at companies, where the majority of consultants are employed (Asano, 2013). Another reason for limiting the sample size to six was that a point of saturation was reached after the six interviews were conducted, and it was felt that interviewing more participants would not necessarily add anything to the overall story (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Procedure and analysis

The Psychology Ethics Committee at the University of Derby approved this study. The questions in the interview schedule were based on the Helpful Aspects of Therapy Questionnaire (HAT: Llewelyn, 1988), which has been employed in numerous studies that examine the efficacy of training (e.g. Smith, 2011). The HAT built upon the questionnaire used by Bloch, Reibstein, Crouch, Holroyd, and Themen (1979) to measure therapeutic factors in group psychotherapy (Llewelyn, 1988). These questions were particularly useful for this study as they were simple and information could be solicited less intrusively. Also they allowed the interviewees to focus on the helpful events in the process of change (Elliott, 2012).

The interviews were conducted via Skype, and transcribed. The advantages of online interviews are that they are economical, geographically flexible, and user-friendly, while the challenges are potential time-lag or other technical problems, which could break the flow of conversation, and ethical issues (Saumure & Given, 2010). Each interview explored topics such as reasons why they decided to undertake NLP training, and whether and how NLP skills and concepts were useful to their practice. During the interviews, a meta-model, an NLP verbal model, was utilised to explore the deep structure of experience and to avoid misunderstandings between the interviewer and the interviewees (Bandler & Grinder, 1979).

To analyse the data, I subjected the data to thematic analysis because the analysis was not limited to any existing theoretical framework, and thematic analysis was appropriate for exploring this underdeveloped area (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis segments, categorises, summarises, and reconstructs the data in order to capture the important concepts and patterns of experience within the data. Thematic analysis produces a description of patterns of experience, and the common themes within them (Givens, 2008). The procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006) was followed. In order to create an investigator triangulation for transparency and coherency (Hales, 2010), a psychology researcher who was familiar with NLP training and a non-NLP-trained researcher reviewed the data extracts of each theme identified by me, and they reached an agreement on all themes. They also examined the translation from Japanese to English.

The steps in the thematic analysis were as follows:

1. Familiarisation

The interviews were transcribed to permit initial interpretation, which is key to qualitative data analysis (Bird, 2005). After transcribing, all the scripts were read and re-read in order to search

for patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2. Generating initial codes

Coding was then conducted to help organise the data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005), and as many codes as possible were created (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Twenty-four initial codes were produced: understanding the human mind, reframing, positive thinking, sponsorship, pacing, coaching ability, the Disney strategy, goal setting, the NLP Parts Party, resources, people are always doing their best, specificity, position change, self-control, SCORE model, neurological model, million model, we all have different maps, anchoring, sub-modality, timeline, positive feedback, re-imprinting, and flexibility.

3. Searching for themes

Next, the codes were sorted into potential themes. The mind-map method was employed with the purpose of viewing all the codes at the same time, and moving and connecting them freely (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The 24 codes were grouped into three themes: Understanding the human mind, flexibility and specificity.

4. Reviewing themes

Themes were refined by reviewing all the coded data extracts and themes for coherency and accuracy (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The data were organised into three types, addressing: (a) The purpose of undertaking the NLP training, (b) helpful NLP skills and (c) what it was about NLP they found most useful to their practice. The theme 'Specificity' was connected to the purpose of undertaking the NLP

training, 'Flexibility' was changed into 'Reframing' in order to describe the helpful NLP skills more specifically and 'Understanding the human mind' was connected to what it was about NLP that they found most useful.

5. Defining and naming themes

Next, the essence and the range of data captured by each theme were identified (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data extracts of 'Specificity' were reviewed, and it was found that they referred to the need for coaching skills. The participants perceived the active-listening-based counselling skills they had learned during their career consulting training were not sufficient to conduct effective sessions. This perception had made them look for additional skills to enhance their practice. The data extracts of 'Reframing' were reviewed, and it was found that there was another specific NLP skill that the participants mentioned as particularly useful: the Disney strategy. The data extracts of 'Understanding the human mind' were reviewed, and it was found that not only information-based understanding, but also an attitude to understand people was a key aspect for them. This resonates with the participants' emphasis on another NLP concept, namely sponsorship.

Results

Theme 1: The purpose of undertaking the NLP training.

All of the participants reported that they had undertaken the NLP training in order to enhance their career consulting practice. They desired to learn additional skills other than their active-listening-based counselling skills, which they had already learned in their career consulting training. Although they acknowledged the importance of active-listening skills, they felt that active-listening skills alone were not enough to conduct effective career consulting sessions.

Participant 1: I've experienced many cases where active-listening alone didn't produce good outcomes. .... In my experience, it is very important to suggest something to clients.

Participant 2: It is important to actively ask them questions to give the session a sense of direction. In counselling they say 'the answer is within you', and I agree with that, but at the same time, it would be great to have a specific framework to think through. NLP provides such a framework.

Participant 6: Acceptance, active-listening, and empathy are the basics of good listening in career consulting, but these, at the same time, are the limitation of current career consulting. ... You need some coaching skills additionally. By the time clients see you in a session, they already have thought as much as they can within their thinking framework. NLP provides me with coaching skills, which help my clients go beyond their thinking framework.

A number of participants discussed coaching and counselling skills. Participant 6 mentioned 'coaching skills'. Coaching skills were compared with counselling skills: while counselling was described as 'listen' to clients, coaching was described as 'actively ask them questions'. Participants referred to the difference between those skills in relation to specific frameworks that they used to help clients think about the options available to them.

Participant 3: Often my clients have time limits in their job-hunting, and being stuck is

detrimental. NLP, however, made me see my approach from different perspectives, and gave me a variety of different approaches to deal with diverse problems.

Participant 5: With counselling skills alone, it takes a long time to help clients get good results. … Counselling skills alone may work for clients who are eager to get a job. ... But my clients are NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) and *hikikomoris* (acute social withdrawals). Such an approach doesn't work for them. ... If I wait until they say or do something spontaneously, it will take forever.

These comments brought up an important issue for career consulting: time limit. As illustrated above, career consultants were aware of the need for their clients to get support and advice immediately.

Theme 2: Helpful NLP skills

Participants found two key NLP skills particularly useful to their practice: Reframing and the Disney strategy.

Reframing

Reframing is a skill to change the meaning of an experience by changing the conceptual viewpoint of a situation into another (O'Connor & McDermott, 2001; Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). The participants reported it was the most useful NLP skill to their practice.

Participant 2: Many of my clients have rigid internal rules such as 'I'm not worthy

because I don't have this qualification' or 'A successful applicant should be like this'. These rules stop them from thinking about their ideal outcomes. ... One of the NLP reframing skills, as-if frame, is very useful. I ask them to think about their future, as if those rules don't exist. … Reframing is also useful for myself.

Participant 4: Some of my clients are hikikomoris. They only see what they don't have. Reframing helps them start thinking about what they do have instead.

These comments related to reframing of their personal characteristics as positive; contents reframing (Bandler & Grinder, 1983).

Participant 5: Sometimes your career may seem stuck. But NLP's view of 'everything is a resource' enables my clients to think about their career hopefully instead of hopelessly.

Participant 3: In my experience, often what stops clients moving forward is fear of encountering something negative. In such situations, it is helpful to think from different perspectives. I cognitively knew that all the resources are useful in some context (one of the NLP presuppositions), but NLP gives me ways to feel it.

Participant 6: One of my clients had been rejected several times. She had started to fear job interviews, and see interviewers as her enemies. We used reframing to help her see interviews as a place where interviewers search for their work partners, instead of judge

her critically. After this session, she had a job interview and came back to me saying that she had a good conversation rather than an interview, which is a good sign.

These comments implied that context reframing, which considers a context where one presently, negatively perceived quality would be positive (Bandler & Grinder, 1983), is also useful in career consulting.

The Disney strategy

The Disney strategy was developed by an NLP trainer, Robert Dilts, from his analysis of Walt Disney's thinking strategy (Dilts, 1998). When creating a plan, Disney's team explored it from a number of different perceptual positions: the dreamer, the realist and the spoiler. Dilts made this into an NLP skill, naming it 'the Disney strategy'. The career consultants also found this skill useful. They used this skill to assist their clients in creating plans for their career and job-hunting.

Participant 2: My clients are mainly high school or university students. I found the dreamer position particularly useful, where they think about their goal as if anything is possible. ... This exercise helps them imagine what might be possible.

Participant 4: My clients are often in a younger generation. They are just excited to hear the name 'Disney'. ... The balance of these three positions is crucially important, and students (Participant 4's clients) learn so through practising this skill.

Theme 3: NLP gives people an attitude of understanding

The consultants found the most useful aspect of NLP to their practice was that it helped them see people, including themselves, with an attitude of understanding.

Participant 1: NLP helped me deepen my understanding of people's minds. ... This understanding made me stop my automatic self-criticism.

Participant 3: NLP gave me a variety of skills to get out from that ('stuckness'), and understanding of why we get stuck, and how we can move forward. … I began to be able to think how I feel what I feel, which helps me find solutions to my problems. … This stops my automatic self-criticism. Now I'm able to think what's causing my problems without criticising myself. … In my practice, I use counselling skills ... but I didn't know why these skills were important, or how they worked.... NLP enables me to think (instead of react) especially when these skills are not working for my client, and alter my behaviour accordingly.

Participant 5: I was able to understand why sponsorship was necessary to have great sessions. I deepened my understanding of the human mind a lot.

These statements described not only that they have gained more understanding about the human mind, but also that they have developed the attitude to understand their clients and themselves. In NLP this is called sponsorship, which was also mentioned by the participants.

Participant 4: In job-hunting, students' minds are vulnerable. They hear their peers got a job, while they failed. They start to doubt themselves. But sponsorship messages help them regain their morale and get mentally ready for their next job application.

Participant 5: It is imperative to have sponsorship when I see my clients. … Sponsorship is not only a must when I see my clients, but also when I see any relationship, including one with myself.

These statements depicted the importance of maintaining a belief in oneself.

Discussion

Three themes emerged from the analysis of interviews with six qualified career consultants after completion of twenty-day NLP certification training. They were the purpose of undertaking the NLP training (Theme 1), helpful NLP skills (Theme 2), and NLP gives people an attitude of understanding (Theme 3). Each theme will be discussed in turn.

Theme 1 highlighted the career consultants' learning needs for additional skills to their active-listening-based counselling skills, which they had already learned in their career consulting training. Active-listening is 'a state of mind that involves paying full and careful attention to the other person, avoiding premature judgment, reflecting understanding, clarifying information, summarising, and sharing' (Michael & Hoppe, 2006, p. 6), and based on unconditional respect for a client, and a belief in the client's abilities to grow, achieve, and know themselves (Hokkaido Government, 2002). In the skills pyramid model of career counselling (Ali & Graham, 1996), active-listening skills are the foundation, which understanding and interpretative skills are built upon. Active-listening skills are especially important in

contemporary career guidance where the life-design approaches are needed, as opposed to vocational matching paradigms of the early-twentieth century and development paradigms of the mid-twentieth century (Savickas, 2010). For example, attentive-listening is central in narrative approaches where career consultants attend to clients' subjective experiences and meaning-making (Reid & West, 2011) by just 'being' in the situation (Hansen & Amundson, 2009). Whilst acknowledging the importance of active-listening, the consultants emphasised the need for a more active approach: coaching.

Coaching is 'a collaborative process of facilitating a client's ability to self-direct learning and growth' (Stober & Parry, 2005, p. 14). Many of the assumptions of current coaching practice have come from NLP (McDermott & Jago, 2006), and NLP-based approach has been frequently applied in the growing coaching industry (Association for Coaching, 2006). As the consultants comparatively described coaching and counselling, one of the main differences between these two sets of skills is that coaching often employs more results- and action-focused skills, thus the pace is faster than counselling (Bluckert, 2005). This was expressed by the analogy that counsellors work by sitting down, whereas coaches work by standing up (Nevis, 1987).

The need for coaching skills illustrated a contextual challenge of career consulting. While counselling often takes place for a long time (Albee, 1992), clients in career consulting seek to be employed as soon as possible. Although brief counselling has been applied in the field of career guidance in the last few decades, the timeframe for this counselling, one to twenty sessions (Dryden & Feltham, 1992), can be still long for career clients. In addition, this counselling is not recommended for a working-class population (Dryden & Feltham, 1992), which is often seen in career consulting. Based on the participants' comments, the current career consulting programmes may benefit with the inclusion of NLP-based coaching skills for

producing more capable career consultants.

Theme 2 identified two specific NLP skills that the consultants found most useful to their practice: reframing and the Disney strategy. The consultants use two types of reframing to support their clients: contents reframing and context reframing. Contents reframing enables their clients to perceive their personal characteristics positively. It is understandable the consultants found it useful, because the meaning clients bring to their career behaviour and decisions is crucial in career guidance (Savickas, 2005). In narrative approaches, for example, reviewing their life context and identity to make sense of their experiences is key (McMahon & Watson, 2013). Context reframing helps clients take a different perspective to their context. A similar process can be seen in SocioDynamic Counselling (Peavy, 2008), where selves are re-organised in relation to the contexts. In sum, the consultants' uses of reframing were motivational (Valach & Young, 2002) and meaningful for helping clients find their narrative truth (Reid & West, 2011). That may explain why they found reframing particularly useful.

The consultants reported the Disney strategy was also most useful to their practice. In the Disney strategy, clients create the three positions in the room, and physically move to each position, in order to access one mode of thinking at a time for 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 order to make plans by considering the steps needed to achieve their dreams. Lastly, in the spoiler position, the clients keep their eyes down and tilt their head down, and look for any gaps in their dreams and plans, and between them. If the clients think their plans are unrealistic, they may return to the realist position to revise the plans so they are more realistic (Dilts, 1996). Using this skill, the consultants are able to help clients dream, plan, and review their career.

In Theme 3 participants described the way in which training helped them see people, including themselves, as the most useful aspect of NLP to their practice. This attitude, called sponsorship in NLP, relates to awakening potential within others by committing to support something that is already within a person or group (Dilts & DeLozier, 2000). This concept is usually taught at the end of an NLP-PCT, in order to emphasise that any skill would not be effective without a therapist intending to have sponsorship for their clients (Dilts, 2003). Clients in career consulting apply for jobs, and receive the results. Sometimes they receive good results; other times not. It is hard for clients to maintain confidence in, and hope for their success after several rejections. Therefore, a career consultant who sees their unique potential, and shows commitment to their growth, can support clients significantly. In modern career guidance, support at the identity level has been highlighted, as identity is considered as a meaning-making anchor (Oyserman, Elmore, & Smith, 2012), and informs one's career choices (McMahon & Watson, 2013). This may explain why sponsorship bears so much importance in their practice.

Additionally, participants were specifically asked if there is anything in the training that was not useful. Five of the participants reported nothing; one participant reported a problem-solving model, TOTE (test, operate, test, exit; Miller, Galanter, & Pribram, 2013), did not provide any specific intervention procedure.

Although the job-card system has been introduced in Japanese career guidance, interviews with 16 companies reported the system has not been successful (Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training [JILPT], 2013). Given Japanese people's collectivism, strengthening a sense of self in clients may be useful (Banda, 2014). For example, an Adlerian psychological approach could help (JILPT, 2016). However, what differentiates NLP from such approach is that NLP is a methodology; NLP instructs the procedure of the skills specifically, in order for

clients to experience their effects.

Conclusion

As the need for career support increases in Japan, its quality also needs to improve. This study explored why numerous career consultants undertake NLP training, and aspects of NLP they find useful to their practice. The findings suggest that career consultants felt that they could enhance their practice by learning additional skills over and above the active-listening-based counselling skills learned in their initial career consulting training. That was the primary reason why they had decided to undertake NLP training. In the perspective of the career consultants in this study, career consulting clients in Japan are pressured by a limited amount of time available, compared with counselling. Therefore, career consultants desired to learn coaching skills to lead their clients efficiently to be mentally ready for the next job application. NLP training provided such skills.

Among the skills learned in the NLP training, career consultants found reframing and the Disney strategy most useful. Reframing provides clients with different perspective on events, so that clients can feel positive toward their next job application. The Disney strategy helps clients create plans for their job-hunting. Career consultants reported NLP training deepened their understanding of the human mind, and developed their attitude to understand their clients and themselves more compassionately. This attitude is called sponsorship in NLP terms; commitment to bring out clients' potential to the fullest. It was reasonable that commitment such as sponsorship was evaluated as very helpful in career consulting practice, since clients often faced rejection from the jobs they have applied for.

These findings highlighted a number of areas that will be important for the developer of career consulting training to consider for its future enhancement. For example, NLP-based

coaching skills may be recommended as part of the training for career consultants.

There were three main limitations to this study. One was its small size, so the findings might lack generalisability. Though the in-depth investigation was possible because of its scale, further investigation with more participants would be valuable. Secondly, all the consultants who participated have invested in NLP, thus their perception might have been biased in favour of NLP. Thirdly, the findings are based on consultants' experiences of NLP, and not that of the clients. Exploring clients' experiences and perceptions empirically would be worth considering in future studies.

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