

How can you discover yourselves during job-hunting process?

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Abstract

Through an analysis of the log of university students' job-hunting processes, this study has found out the following: (1) The self-discovery process characterized as concept articulation is sometimes observed in the mental world of students during job-hunting. (2) Such concept articulation can lead them to find their own identity and therefore help them succeed in job-hunting. The authors have been working on studies focusing on human mental process in our everyday life on the subject of shopping behavior. The findings have shown that creative thinking process can be observed not only in expert tasks covered by traditional creativity support studies but also in our everyday activities such as buying clothes and therefore that the framework of creativity support studies can be applied to our everyday activities as well. The cases presented in this study suggest that creative thinking process is observed also in job-hunting as another everyday activity. Therefore, the framework of creativity support studies can be applied to the support for job-hunters' thinking process as well.

Keywords: concept articulation, creative thinking, decision-making, job-hunting

1. Introduction

Since a long time ago, Japan has been referred to as being in an economic recession. "Missing ten years" is a common discreditable phrase used to describe this situation. Consequently, the employment rate of new graduates of universities and high schools has decreased, and there is an increasing number of young part-time jobbers. The author has a several year's experience working for a women's university and, during this time has seen its undergraduates having growing difficulty in their job-hunting process. The teaching staff were supposed to support them, however, as a matter of fact, they didn't know what is effective for that purpose. With this as a trigger, the authors have decided to have an interview with them about their job-hunting and log their activities, and

have been working on it since January of 2002. Leaving general matters, such as guidance on vocational qualification tests and conveyance of know-how to succeed in interviews, to experts in that domain, we have chosen to capture each individual student's job hunting in a microscopic way. We observe that some students can get an official job offer relatively soon regardless of the difficulty in finding employment, and others cannot for a long time. In spite of the same affiliation and the similar capabilities, their job-hunting processes have ended with greatly different results. This can hardly be attributed to the difference in personal capability. In addition, some students can hardly convince themselves of a job offer obtained as a result of compromise, and others can be more positive toward job hunting after they have found another goal different from an initial one. With an interest in how the student's activity and thinking process is different by person, the authors have worked on a microscopic observation of thinking process [8]. Its findings may provide a trigger to know the approach and/or attitude to suitable job-hunting process for an individual person.

This paper describes the concept-articulation characteristics observed in the job-hunting students' self-discovery process based on the female students' job-hunting log obtained, and discusses their effects.

2. Collection and Analysis of Activity Log

2.1. Interviewing

This study aims at observing the thinking process of job-hunting female students. This first requires them to externalize their own thinking about job-hunting process. Therefore, group discussions by several students were conducted as a first step, however, it turned out to be often difficult to collect the protocol reflecting their actual thinking, due to inevitable differences between what they say and what they actually think, which is because classmates are rivals in their job-hunting. In addition, many students are influenced by the ambient atmosphere to get into line

with others' opinions (at least on the surface) during a session, therefore, the group discussion can hardly be expected to serve our purpose of observing personal thinking in a microscopic way. So, this study has chosen to have an individual interview with each student in job-hunting to log what they say and analyze the content.

Interviews (data collection) started in January of 2002. The first batch of investigations were targeted at eight third-year students in Kawamura Gakuen Women's University as of January of 2002 and conducted in January, April, July, and October. All the subjects for the first batch graduated from the university in March of 2003, and six out of them had already got a job lined up during the investigations (by the end of October of 2002). The method used for the first batch of investigations was simple in that only listening to and logging what the subjects say were conducted every time. This paper primarily discusses the finding from an analysis of job-hunting log for eight subjects in the first batch.

2.2. Cases Collected and Analysis of Them

The log of interviews with the subjects about their job-hunting, collected as mentioned above, was used to analyze the transition of their thinking process during job-hunting and the trigger, if any, that led them to make a decision and/or to change their mind-set and/or to discover themselves. The first to third interview logs with a certain subject (herein called "Ms. A") is used to describe the result below. Due to limitations of space, only a part of the log is included here.

* The excerpt from the first interview (conducted in January of 2002):

- I want to work for a company in Marunouchi business district, because female office workers who walk jauntily in the area look a treat. Marunouchi district seems to me like a town for career women, as I often see in TV dramas. I want to wear a business suit and walk like them.
- Because only a few general office employees are recruited as permanent staff recently, I will apply for a main career-track position, but I think being a general office employee is OK with me if it gives me a challenges.
- I don't know exactly what a challenging job is, but anyway, I want to be a high-powered employee. I think I will do any assignment.
- Judging from my personality, I think I will want to quit immediately when I no longer like my company or boss. So, I want to work for a company with a comfortable atmosphere. If I like a

location itself named "company", I may be able to break my neck even if I dislike my boss or some of my colleagues.

* The excerpt from the second interview (conducted in April of 2002):

- I think I cannot get an official job offer unless I make a certain degree of compromise, but also think I will feel relieved and stop job-hunting once I have gotten an offer, so I'm not too eager to make a compromise.
- I feel a yearning to work for a company in Marunouchi district, although it seems difficult for me. Nevertheless, I want to work in a downtown like Shinjuku and Toranomon.
- Recently, I'm coming to think that I want to work in cosmetics or grocery industries. Since companies belonging to that industry manufacture and sell what I want to buy, I think working for such a company is a challenge to me.
- Planning or development job seems interesting to me. I think it is more challenging than a clerical job.
- Though I think sales and marketing job is also challenging, it is mostly an outside job, and thus requires physical strength. I think I will be like a up-and-coming career woman if I can show a good performance in that line of work.

* The excerpt from the third interview (conducted in July of 2002):

- Recently, I'm mainly visiting companies in toy and food (snack in particular) industries for an interview, because those companies deal in goods of interest to me.
- I myself think that I'm better suited for career in planning, but several inter-viewers in different companies said that I may be well suited for sales and marketing job. Since it was said not once but in multiple times, that might be the case. Sales and marketing job is challenging and cool if I can show a good performance.
- Not too large companies seem good to me because they are likely to provide me with opportunities for experiencing a variety of jobs. I'm not sure if I will work for the company for a long time to come, but working there promises to pay dividends.
- Currently, I have two companies that I could get to the interview by. I might well decide to join either one of the two if it gives me an official job offer.

The first interview was yet at a stage where Ms. A could talk about her dream, and the log content also shows that she has a yearning for an imaginary career woman who walks jauntily in Marunouchi business

district and looks cool. It can be perceived that a location of “Marunouchi” and “challenging job” is strongly connected with an image of being “cool”, however, what a “challenging job” is actually like is vague. At the second interview when a period of time has elapsed since she virtually started job-hunting, she seems to be faced with the harsh realities. In addition, several occurrences of the word “compromise” in the log content shows that she feels the necessity of compromise. While it can be perceived that she still sticks to the work location (Marunouchi district), she has started thinking specifically the content (i.e., line of business or line of work) of a “challenging job”, which remained vague in the first interview. At the first interview, she was sticking to an idea that “the location named Marunouchi is important”, but had awaked to the truth that the challenging job content is more important” in the second interview. This means that changes occurred in the subject’s viewpoint between the first and second interviews, which can be viewed as a kind of leap occurring in the subject’s mental world (Fig. 1). At the third interview, the concept of “challenging job content” had been made even clearer.

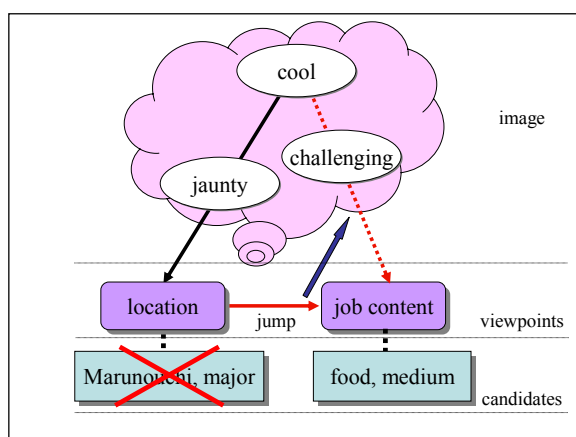


Figure 1. Changes in the subject’s mental world

3. Creative Thinking Observed in Job-hunting Process

In the case presented in a previous section, the subject was initially seeking a place of employment that allows her to realize her image of being “cool”, and sticking to an idea that “the location named Marunouchi is important” for that purpose, however, changes in her viewpoint caused her to awake to the truth that “the challenging job content is more important”. This can be viewed as a kind of leap occurring in the subject’s mental world (Fig. 1). The

authors call such leap that occurs in individual person’s mental world “mental leap”, which is almost synonymous with a conventional concept with the same name used in cognitive science researches. Mental leap can provide a person who sticks to a certain viewpoint and consequently has bogged down in a certain thought with an opportunity for getting away from such a local minimum. Mental leap plays an important role in realizing creative thinking process.

The phenomenon of mental leap prompting creative thinking has been presented by conventional creativity support studies, however, the case shown in Fig. 1 illustrates that mental leap can occur during job-hunting to develop creative thinking process. Although only a few cases have yet been collected and analyzed, the fact that a phenomenon called “mental leap” also occurs in university students’ job-hunting is of great interest.

Conventional creativity support studies have been focusing on specialized activities such as designing and paper writing [3][9][10], whereas the authors have been working on a study targeted at thinking process in everyday activities such as purchasing clothes [8]. Specifically, our focus has been on the interaction to support purchasing activity by a customer who only has a vague image and/or concept of their needs. This study collected purchasing activity cases in the real-world shops, analyzed communication between the customer and the salesclerk, and examined how the communication changes the customer’s mental world. The findings obtained as a consequence of this study are that making a purchasing decision requires concept articulation of a customer who has only a vague image of desired products and that “unexpected reaction” made by a salesclerk in a timely manner can often cause the customer’s mental leap and thereby prompt their concept articulation in decision-making process by such a customer [8].

For example, Fig. 2 illustrates how salesclerk’s unexpected reaction causes changes in customer’s mental world. In this example, the customer is looking for a longer jacket and thinks the current candidate B is “too short”. The salesclerk judges from the context of conversation that the customer’s true goal (i.e. sense of values) is to “show herself in good shape”, and then points out to the customer that “the balance is more important than the length in presenting a good shape”. That is, the salesclerk presents the customer with a different viewpoint (balance) than her current one (length). In consequence, the customer’s viewpoint is changed into balance. The customer understands that a shorter and well-balanced jacket is suitable for presenting a good shape and changes her desired item (i.e. search goal) into a shorter jacket. The customer, in turn, evaluates the current candidate under

consideration to be “good” (and finally buys it). In this case, a new viewpoint obtained of “balance” triggers the customer to know her own hidden requirement that “she wants to show herself in good shape”, succeeding in concept articulation of her desired item.

Comparing Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, both overlap each other in that a change of the actor’s viewpoint has a great effect on their subsequent thinking process. A change of their viewpoint causes nonlinear changes in their mental world and thereby leads them to a shift of preference on or impression of the goods or companies under consideration. And, if the nonlinear changes have led to desirable concept articulation, the customer can make a satisfactory choice on goods to buy, and the job-hunter who has been feeling a compelling compromise can make a satisfactory decision on place of employment.

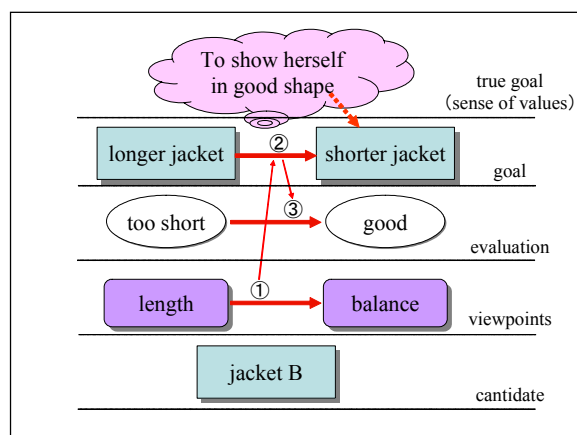


Figure 2. Changes in the customer’s mental world through the interaction with the salesclerk

4. Conclusion

The authors have collected female students’ job-hunting log and analyzed their thinking process. The findings obtained are as follows: (1) The self-discovery process characterized as concept articulation is sometimes observed in the mental world of students during job-hunting, and (2) Such concept articulation can lead them to find their own identity and therefore help them succeed in job-hunting. This paper has described the findings, presenting an actual case.

Not a few job-hunters are forced to continue their activity for a long time and/or make a compromise on employment conditions. This is definitely a bitter experience for them, however, this process with much frustration for compromise involved may, on the contrary, provide them with an opportunity for concept articulation. Hopefully, job-hunters who have

only vague concept or requirements will take advantage of an interaction process called “job-hunting” to lead to self-discovery. Those who could successfully do concept articulation (i.e. self-searching or self-discovery) during job-hunting are expected to be able to address their job aspiringly with higher motivation, even if they work for a company that doesn’t match their initial wishes.

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