

Application of My Systems of Career Influences (Adolescent) in Japan: Reflection processes and responses among college students

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of the qualitative career assessment tool, “My Systems of Career Influences (Adolescent)” in Japan and future challenges. We conducted seven career education sessions using the MSCI with 19 Japanese college students. In a questionnaire survey administered to the students after these sessions, the average score for the “Significance of MSCI” (7-point scale) was 5.58 (*SD*: .84), indicating that the tool can be effectively applied to college students in Japan. Two challenges were identified with regard to its application in Japan: 1) Identifying the factors that make it difficult to recognize the influences at the Environmental-Societal Level and developing support approaches; and 2) Developing support approaches that take into account the mindsets of Japanese adolescents, who, in comparison with their peers in other countries, tend to feel less optimistic about their future and feel that they have less control over their lives.

1. Introduction

The My Systems of Career Influences (hereafter, “MSCI”) is a qualitative career assessment tool developed by Australian researchers McMahon, Patton, and Watson. Grounded in the “Systems Theory Framework of career development”^{[1][2]}, the MSCI was developed over four years after completing three stages of international trials.^{[3][4][5][6]} Two versions—adolescent and adult—have been developed, and it can be applied in a wide range of contexts, including individual, group, and classroom settings.

Participants/students can work on the questions prepared in the 24-page writable MSCI Workbook to reflect on their MSCI in stages. The MSCI diagram, which is visualized as a concentric chart after completing a series of activities, is designed to plot influences at different levels including, from inside to outside, the Individual Level (Layer 1: ability, personality, aptitude, interests, values, etc.), Social

Level (Layer 2: family, friends, educational institutions, workplace, media, etc.), Environmental-Societal Level (Layer 3: the area one lives, historical trends and changes, political and socio-economic status, labor market, etc.), and Time perspectives (Layer 4: present, past, future).

The MSCI Workbook is arranged in a way to promote progressive reflection on one’s career. “Thinking about who I am” (p. 7) represents an Individual-Level reflection and is designed to organize an individual’s endogenous influences, such as one’s interests and personality, gender, health, culture, etc. “Thinking about the people around me” (p. 9) represents a Social-Level reflection and is designed to organize influences such as family, friends, media, etc. “Thinking about society and the environment” (p. 11) represents an Environmental-Societal Level reflection and is designed to organize economic support, local area, public transportation, etc. “Thinking about my

past, present and future” (p. 13) represents a Time-perspective reflection and is designed to organize past role models, future lifestyles, etc. Each of these four sections shows a concentric chart and examples of influences. Students write down their influences in the margins outside the chart and mark the most important influence with an asterisk (*). Finally, in “Representing my system of career influences” (p. 15), all influences are integrated into a single concentric diagram.

The MSCI is effective for career education and counseling at schools.^[7] The tool’s effects in transforming and rebuilding career stories of economically, racially, or geographically disadvantaged adolescents have also been reported.^{[8][9][10][11]} The MSCI has thus far been translated into Dutch, French, German, Icelandic, Italian, and Cantonese and is being studied.^[12] However, since there have been no reports from Japan, it is necessary to examine its applicability in the context of Japanese culture. This study conducts the MSCI (Adolescent) using college students in Japan to identify the characteristics of the reflection processes and influences and to consider future challenges.

2. Methods

2.1. Subjects and methods

In this study, we conducted seven career education sessions using the MSCI with 19 Japanese college students who were enrolled in the undergraduate course “Theories of Career Development”, taught by the author. Sessions were facilitated by the author (specializing in clinical psychology and career psychology). In addition, two graduate students who were enrolled in the Certified Clinical Psychologist and the Certified Public Psychologist training programs attended each session as teaching assistants.

The materials to be analyzed were completed MSCI diagrams, the description of the experience provided after each session (open-ended answers), and an ex-post questionnaire (7-point scales). The Grounded Theory method^[13] was used for qualitative data analysis.

Prior to the study, permission to use the MSCI was obtained in writing from McMahon (the original author) and other copyright holders. Consent for the use of the data for research was obtained from the students in person and in writing by the author after completing the seven sessions. It was thoroughly explained to the students that consent to this study would have no impact on their grades and that they would not be penalized even if they declined to give their consent. Data from the 19 individuals who consented were used.

2.2. Outline of MSCI sessions

In this exercise, we translated and used the adolescent versions of the workbook^[14] and Facilitator’s Guide (hereafter, “Guide”)^[15]. The MSCI was conducted by adding two activities and case studies that are recommended in the Guide in addition to creating the graph (Table 1). Some activities were also modified/augmented to improve facilitation. Specifically, in Phase 1 (“Session 1” in the Guide), which is the introductory stage of the MSCI, Session 1 worked on “My Passport”. In Case Study 1 Dougie (Session 2), in addition to completing the activities listed in the workbook, we added and completed an activity to identify and chronologically list Dougie’s decision making. Students drew Dougie’s MSCI diagram on the blackboard and shared it with the whole group. The same activities were carried out in Case Study 2 Caitlin (Session 3).

In Phase 2 (“Session 2” in the Guide), the stage at which the MSCI diagram is to be drawn, we created an environment where students could focus on their individual work (Session 4) and added an activity, “Tell staff about ‘me’” (Session 5). In this activity, the facilitator or a teaching assistant would go to the student as he or she finishes drawing the diagram to have a one-on-one dialogue. In preparation for this activity, the facilitator and two teaching assistants structured the questions and procedure and the direction of the dialogue in advance.

Table1 Additional activities in this exercise and improvement in facilitation

Guide's option 2	Phase	Additional activities recommended in the Guide	Improvement in facilitation
(a) Session 1	Phase 1	# 1 · My passport	"A single kanji character that represents me"
		# 2 · Case Study1: Dougie	Record decision making chronologically MSCI diagram drawing Paired/group activities, whole-group sharing
		# 3 · Case Study2: Caitlin	Presentation of MSCI diagram Paired/group activities, whole-group sharing
(b) Session 2	Phase 2	# 4	Creating an environment to focus on individual work
		# 5	Session: Tell staff about "me"
(c) Session 3	Phase 3	# 6 · Action planning	Session: Tell other students about "me" Paired/group activities, whole-group sharing
		# 7	Session: Scrutinizing influences Paired/group activities, whole-group sharing

In Phase 3 ("Session 3" in the Guide), where students reflect on the MSCI, we added the activity "Action planning", and put it before "My action plan" (p. 21). We also incorporated an activity to describe one's MSCI to others (Session 6). Additionally, the next session had an activity to further scrutinize the MSCI chart based on the experience of talking about it to others (Session 7). Specifically, students engaged in an activity in which they documented the interaction between influences by considering whether a particular influence was positive or negative in nature for them.

Thus, career education in this exercise was conducted using the standard protocol for the MSCI as the basis, with additional activities in the introductory phase (Phase 1) and the reflection phase (Phase 3). As a result, this study completed seven 90-minute sessions (630 minutes in total) for MSCI activities.

3. Results

3.1. Reflection processes of the students

The results of a qualitative analysis of the students' reflection processes were as follows. Students experienced <getting to learn from others' perspectives> in Phase 1 (Sessions 1-3), which is designed to improve their readiness to draw the diagram. In Phase 2 (Sessions 4-5), students experienced <searching "inside" and discovering "outside"> through the creation of the MSCI diagram. In Phase 3 (Sessions 6-7), in which students explained their MSCI diagrams to others, they experienced <reconstructing "who I am" through dialogue>. The details of this qualitative examination are reported in a separate paper.^[16]

3.2. Influences expressed by students

An analysis of the contents of their MSCI diagrams

revealed that the Individual Level received the largest number of answers, with a tendency to see fewer answers as we move toward outer layers to the Social Level and the Environmental-Societal Level. When we counted the number of influences explicitly reported by students in their diagrams as positive (+) and negative (-), we had 22 influences for the Individual Level (16 positive and six negative) (Table 2), 22 for the Social Level (20 positive and two negative) (Table 3), and 15 for the Environmental-Societal Level (nine positive and

six negative) (Table 4). Of the 59 influences, 45 (76.3%) were positive, indicating that the instances of negative influences were few. In particular, many students reported that “I can’t think of any environmental-societal influences.”

3.3. Significance of MSCJ sessions

A survey was conducted upon completing all sessions. When students were asked to rate the question, “How meaningful were the MSCJ activities to you?”,

Table2 Individual Level: Influences expressed for “Thinking about who I am”

Positive influences (16)	Negative influences (6)
I like to listen to/am good at listening to people	Not very assertive
I can talk to anyone	Sensitive
Good listener	Too attentive to others
I make friends with children easily	I always adjust myself to others > I am underappreciated
Social	I tend to avoid things I can't do
Ambitious	I don't like people
I like to help others	
Coward	
I tend to think a lot about myself and what's going on around me (I like to think)	
I'm honest with myself	
I tend to get absorbed in things I like/am interested in	
I want to become better at understanding people's feelings	
I have fun when I can entertain other people	
I want time for my hobbies	
I like to cook	
I'm good with my hands	

Table3 Social Level: Influences expressed for “Thinking about the people around me”

Positive influences (20)	Negative influences (2)
My parents want me to find a stable job	Not enough support from my parents
My parents are financially stable*	My parents are financially stable*
My parents allow me to do what I like	
My parents are worried about me	
Expectations from my parents	
My parents and friends supported me to do what I wanted to do	
Mother	
Mother (various work)	
My mother and I think in the same way, and I seek her advice a lot	
My friend is positive about everything	
other	
My friend gets absorbed in things s/he is interested in	
My friends and upper classmates who are studying to become psychologists	
I can make friends with upper classmates easily	
Homeroom teacher from my Jr. high school 3rd grade	
I admire my coach's way of thinking and way of life	
My dance teacher	
Professors with counseling experience	
The chefs I saw on TV and cartoons were cool	
Maintaining relationships with my coach and other members after I retire	

* Reported by students as both a positive and negative influence.

Table4 Environmental-Societal Level: Influences expressed for “Thinking about society and the environment”

Positive influences (9)	Negative influences (6)
Many of the psychology courses offered by the university are in clinical psychology	Outside the prefecture > Costly
My university allows students to study what they want to study	Current environment > good transportation, many universities, living away from my family
Many jobs are in restaurants	Poor public transportation
I was able to cook food in my part-time job	Poor public transportation in my hometown
There was a cooking school nearby	High costs of attending graduate school
Graduate school is expensive but my parents are willing to support me	My parents are financially supporting me, but I don't want to depend on them in the future
Career path choice (civil servant if I'm going back to hometown; at a company if I remain in Fukuoka)	
Hometown > Save money by living with parents	
The town of Tosu	

using a 7-point scale ranging from “Not meaningful at all” (1) to “Highly meaningful” (7), the average was 5.58 (*SD*: .84). The breakdown of the responses from the 19 individuals was: three individuals rated 7 points, six individuals rated 6 points, nine individuals rated 5 points, and one individual rated 4 points.

4. Discussion

4.1. Characteristics of reflection processes and responses among Japanese college students

The career education using the MSCSI provided the following three unique reflection processes to the students.^[16] In Phase 1 (the stage to improve readiness to draw the diagram), students experienced <getting to learn from others' perspectives>. At this stage, students had their first opportunity to reflect on “my career” from the perspectives of others, which appeared to have helped them recognize the importance of understanding how one is seen by other people. In Phase 2 (the stage for progressive drawing of the MSCSI graph), students experienced <searching “inside” and discovering “outside”>. At this stage, students began to become conscious of the influences from “outside” while feeling anxious and confused about exploring unfamiliar domains for the first time. In Phase 3 (the stage to scrutinize the MSCSI diagram), students experienced <reconstructing “who I am” through dialogue>. At this stage, students became accustomed

to dialogues with others and were becoming more capable of verbalizing their experiences effortlessly. As a result of telling others about “me” and receiving feedback from them, students made additional discoveries. This in turn allowed students to develop deeper understandings of who “I” am, the influences and their interactions within which “I” exist, and the ways in which they are impacted by them. Thus, the career education using the MSCSI appeared to have the effects of encouraging students to engage in dialogues with others and facilitating the reconstruction of “who I am.”

Next, the reflections students expressed in their MSCSI diagrams had the following characteristics. In Phase 2, the number of answers provided by the students was greatest for the Individual Level, with a tendency to see fewer answers as we move toward the outer layers to the Social Level and the Environmental-Societal Level. It is especially notable that there were many students who reported that “I can't think of any environmental-societal influences.” In fact, many students were not able to provide answers for the Environmental-Societal Level without receiving various types of assistance from the facilitator, such as demonstrations and suggestions. Although the assistance provided by the facilitator promoted the students' reflection processes, the number of their answers in the MSCSI diagrams was still low in the final

stage. Furthermore, the responses expressed by them did not contain those influences that reflect socio-economic conditions as seen in a previous study^[17], suggesting that those college students in Japan had difficulty conjuring up such influences. However, gaps caused by social circumstances do exist in Japanese society, such as those in employment opportunities and access to public transportation; these are likely to influence one's career decisions. Thus, the ways in which we understand and approach the Environmental-Societal-Level influences in the social context of Japan must be examined in the future.

4.2. Culturally-specific improvement in facilitation

Next, we review the improvement related to facilitation that was applied in this exercise. In "My Passport" carried out in the beginning of Phase 1, we augmented the steps provided in the Guide with "a single kanji character that represents me." "Kanji" are logograms used in countries including China and Japan. It is a system of writing in which each character carries specific meanings, allowing its users to cast cultural nuances and one's emotions and images onto the characters. In this activity, students were expected to turn to one's internal traits to search for the "kanji character that represents me" and identify a single character that fits the criteria. Students selected kanji such as "忙," "温," and "広" to tell others about their roots and personality. This exercise appeared to have helped them warm up for subsequent activities. When conducting the activities prepared in the Guide, it would be effective to refine the instructions and incorporate activities that take into consideration the country's culture. In the two case studies, students' understanding of "influences" was strengthened by having them draw the MSCI diagram on the blackboard and carry out an activity to rearrange the decision-making sequence. These activities helped the students question their own system of career influence that was constructed from an "I" point of view; they experienced the beginning of a change. The students seemed to have improved their readiness to draw the

MSCI diagram based on these Phase 1 experiences.

When drawing the diagram in Phase 2, creating a quiet environment to work individually was effective in promoting the reflection process. Regarding the order in which to draw the diagram, some students reported that it would be easier to work on concentric circles that combine all influences rather than working as instructed in the workbook. In addition, as a way to make an improvement unique to this particular exercise, we incorporated a paired activity in which the facilitator or one of the two teaching assistants would have an individual dialogue with each student who completed his or her individual diagram activity to further promote reflection. Guided primarily by Carl Rogers' active listening attitude, the facilitator and teaching assistants engaged in dialogues that were designed to facilitate storytelling by the diagram's creator. Specifically, the facilitator asked the following questions in this order to promote reflection: 1) What are your current goals (perspectives for the future)?; 2) How are your individual-, social-, and environmental-societal-level influences mapped in relation to these goals?; and 3) What are the most powerful influences in each layer? The facilitator and teaching assistants communicated to the student what they felt and the questions they had when listening to the student's story and other potential influences; they then prompted the student to think about the feedback and verbalize his or her reaction. In this activity, we used verbalization to encourage students to experience "confirming the self who is integrated in the concentric circles" and "starting to recognize external influences and the interaction between influences"^[16].

In the activity in Phase 3 to tell others about "me," creating an active and safe atmosphere when carrying out paired and group activities was effective in promoting the reflection process. The paired role playing in this activity worked effectively by strictly structuring the roles of the "speaker" and "listener." First, the speaker was asked to talk about his or her MSCI diagram for four minutes. The listener was then asked to provide feedback for two minutes regarding

the questions: “What did you think about when you listened to the story of the speaker?” and, in particular, “Which part of the story do you think represented the speaker most genuinely?” The activity was strictly timed by the facilitator. After completing one session, we switched the roles and carried out the paired activity again. This was followed by four-person group activities and a whole-group sharing session. Given that Japanese people generally tend to be more reserved about expressing themselves, structured role-playing appears to have been effective in stimulating interactions.

4.3. Future challenges

Based on this study, we can point to two challenges for the future. First, it is important to clarify the characteristics of the MSCI diagram in Japan. In this study, students tended to find it easier to write down those influences concerning one’s inner self (Individual-Level influences), but as they moved toward outer layers, they found it more difficult to think of influences. In particular, those influences in the Environmental-Societal Level encompassed perspectives that were unfamiliar to many Japanese college students. Reflection on and verbalization of these influences required a significant amount of assistance. However, it should be taken into account that all of the participants were undergraduate students majoring in social sciences in general, and education and clinical psychology in particular. That is, the characteristics of the 19 participants who constituted the sample of this exercise were such that they might already be disposed to pay attention to their inner self but be less interested in the circumstances in the outside world. It is therefore necessary to investigate adolescents whose attributes share little with the focus of this study, such as students in other faculties and departments. If Japanese culture indeed tends to make it difficult for people to recognize Environmental-Societal-Level influences, we also need to examine the ways in which we can explore this theme.

Second, we need to develop methods of support that take into account the mindsets of Japanese adolescents and their social context. This aspect was not adequately addressed in the present study. As an example of international comparisons related to Japanese adolescents, a comparative study of seven countries conducted by the Cabinet Office of Japan^[18] reported that 61.6% of Japanese adolescents said that “I’m hopeful about my future”, which was the lowest of the countries surveyed; in contrast, the figures in the other six countries were between 80% and 90%. According to a comparative study in World Values Survey^[19], the average score of the responses among Japanese adolescents to the question, “How much freedom of choice and control you feel [sic] you have over the way your life turns out?” was 6.11 on a 10-point scale (*SD*: 2.06, up to 29), which was lower than the score in India, 6.98 (*SD*: 2.11, up to 29), where the sense of control over one’s life might be expected to be low due to the effects of the caste system^[19]. Furthermore, international comparative studies in psychology suggested that Japanese people in general, not just adolescents, have lower scores in psychological variables, such as “optimism”^[20] and “self-esteem”^{[21][22]}. Thus, it is possible that Japanese people have mindsets that differ from other countries, negatively impacting career development. With respect to this issue, the evaluation of the influences identified in this exercise found that there were more positive than negative answers. One possibility is that we are dealing with issues that reside deep inside an individual, which may not be easily accessible in a classroom setting. In the future, this needs to be examined by comparing it to participants’ responses when conducting the MSCI in group or individual settings.

Finally, the social context in which Japanese adolescents are situated should be briefly mentioned. Since the second half of the 20th century, Japan has maintained security conditions and educational infrastructure that are stable vis-à-vis the rest of the world. Elementary and lower-secondary education is compulsory, while approximately 98% of students who

finish compulsory education go on to upper-secondary school. The average age of new entrants into tertiary education (short-cycle tertiary programs and bachelor's programs) is 18 years old, which is relatively young compared to OECD countries, while the first-time entry rate into tertiary education is 77%^[23]; consequently, it is very common for students to enter tertiary education soon after their graduation from upper-secondary school. However, career education in Japan tends to be confined to simple internship or guidance that is biased toward "passing the exam" (by matching academic test scores to university rankings, a practice resembling the Trait and Factor Theory)^[24]. It is not uncommon for students to enter university without a sense of purpose. As a result, one of the key functions played by the higher education institutions in Japan is to provide a period of "soul-searching." In spite of this, the amount of education for improving career development is not sufficient.

This author believes that we urgently need to develop career support approaches for those Japanese adolescents who do not have a clear sense of purpose for the future, who cannot be hopeful about their future, or who do not have confidence in themselves, despite their materially-favorable environment. In Japanese society, where many people experience a prolonged period of what Erik H. Erikson termed "psychosocial moratorium", this career development challenge is likely to be relevant to individuals in their 20s and 30s as well. The MSCI has promising potential to inspire Japanese adolescents as this tool visualizes a person's subjective "My Systems of Career Influences," assists verbalization, and allows participants to reconstruct their MSCI with others. The examination of these approaches is also an important challenge as it connects career to psychotherapy.

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Additional note

Parts of this paper that are related to the qualitative analysis of the students' experience have been reported in Sakamoto (2020)^[16]. This paper added data concerning the responses of the students' reflections to the findings from the earlier study and examined them together. The primary contribution of this paper is to suggest ways to improve the facilitation, such as cultural considerations, and identifying future challenges. This study was supported in part by funding from the Central Research Institute, Fukuoka University (Topic No.: 197202).

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Abstract (Japanese)

本研究の目的は、質的キャリア・アセスメントツール ‘My Systems of Career Influences (Adolescent)’の日本における有効性と今後の課題を検討することであった。日本の大学生 19 名を対象に、MSCI を用いたキャリア教育を 7 セッション実施した。セッション終了後、受講生に質問紙調査を行ったところ、MSCI の意義は 7 ポイントスケールで平均 5.58 (standard deviation .84) であり、日本の大学生の適用の有効性が示された。今後は、環境 - 社会レベルの影響を認識しづらい青年や自分の人生に対するコントロール感の低い青年の心性を明らかにし、支援アプローチを開発することが課題である。

Key words: 質的キャリア・アセスメント, 私のキャリア影響システム (My Systems of Career Influences), 日本人, 青年期, キャリア教育

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