The difference in foresight using the scanning method between experts and non-experts

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1. Introduction

Although prediction of the future is highly important in product manufacturing or service provision, it is a highly difficult task. How, then, can people make insightful projections about the future? In the present study, we discussed one support method for thinking about the near future, the scanning method, and examined factors that produce differences in the projection of the future.

The scanning method is a support method for thinking about the near future. In the scanning method, one tries to generate scenarios about near-future social situations (10–15 years later). According to Loveridge (2008), the scanning method was originally developed by Stanford Research Institute. Aguilar (1967), Fahey and King (1977), and Mueller and Smith (1984) discussed an elementary procedure for the scanning method. Since then, various procedures have been developed (e.g., Ansoff, 1975; Lesca, 2013; Loveridge, 2008; Mueller and Smith, 1984; Stoffels, 1994). In the present study, we used the following two-stage procedure based on previous studies (Washida, 2007; Washida et al., 2009). In the first phase (scanning phase), an individual briefly read (scanned) 150–200 newspaper, magazine, or webpage news articles (see Fig. 1 for an example) describing new technology, the latest customs, fashion, social change, value system transition, or emerging social problems. After scanning all of the articles, the individual completed a scenario generation sheet. In this phase, s/he was asked to generate scenarios about near-future social situations based on the scanned articles. S/he was required to provide a title for the scenario, IDs and keywords for articles referenced when generating the scenario, and a detailed summary of the scenario (the scenario generation sheet is shown in Fig. 2). Previous studies have discussed the efficacy of the scanning method and scenario generation for strategy planning, such as improvement of generated scenarios (Washida, 2007; Washida et al., 2009), reduction of cognitive bias, and increase of confidence and flexibility in strategy planning (Meissner and Wulf, 2013; Phadnis et al., 2015; Wright and Goodwin, 2009). As Phadnis et al. (2015) pointed out, few empirical studies have been conducted on the scanning method. Although the scanning method can improve generation of near-future scenarios, there are individual differences.

In the present study, we examined this issue by comparing the scanning method between experts and non-experts. Experts were

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individuals who worked as consultants and used the scanning method daily. Non-experts were individuals with no prior scanning method experience. Differences in scenario generation between these two groups would reflect important factors related to difference in foresight. In particular, as described above, the scanning method and scenario generation can lead to reduction of cognitive bias and increase of confidence and flexibility in strategy planning (Meissner and Wulf, 2013; Phadnis et al., 2015; Wright and Goodwin, 2009). Hence, experts in the scanning method and scenario generation may be more immune to various cognitive biases and more confident and flexible in scenario generation than non-experts. However, previous studies have not examined detailed factors that produce differences between experts and non-experts in the scanning method and scenario generation. For example, although the literature on how cognitive or contextual factors affect creativity is large (e.g., Amabile, 1979; Förster et al., 2004; Friedman and Förster, 2001; Galinsky and Moskowitz, 2000; Maddux and Galinsky, 2009; Markman et al., 2007; Sternberg, 1999), few studies have been conducted in the context of scanning method and scenario generation.

Then, what is the difference in generating scenarios using the scanning method between experts and non-experts? There may be differences in both or one of the two phases of the scanning method. For the scanning phase, we examined differences in subjective impressions for articles between experts and non-experts. Brown et al. (1998), and Nijstad and Stroebe (2006) claimed that the knowledge accessed when generating ideas plays an important role in generating creative
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