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Improving future work motivation by reflecting on past experiences

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This article proposed a psychological mechanism for improving future work motivation by reflecting on past experiences. Previous studies have claimed that future motivation is maintained by present self-affirmation and a future ideal, and have overlooked the effect of reflecting on past experiences. Rather, it has been claimed that reflecting on past experiences leads to overconfidence or anxiety, and impairs future motivation. In contrast, this article points out that people can maintain motivation through (1) imagining clearly their future ideal selves (setting goals), (2) reflecting on past experiences related to the ideal, and (3) acquiring lessons from the past. In a review of previous studies, we examined the process of reflecting on past experiences to improve future motivation. We showed that people with a clear ideal (goal) reflected on past experiences related to that ideal, and acquired lessons and mental rewards from the past, thus improving their motivation. A new mechanism for maintaining work motivation by reflecting on past experiences was presented, taking into consideration acquired lessons and mental rewards.

Key Words: motivation, reflecting on past experiences, present self-affirmation, future ideal selves, lessons

Business people must maintain their motivation to continue working and improving outcomes. Maintaining high motivation is one of the necessary conditions for creating future growth.

This study aimed to examine factors related to improving future work motivation. First, we propose a mechanism for improving motivation, focusing on future-oriented factors, as previous studies have argued. Then, we focus on past-oriented factors (reflecting on past experiences), which have not been emphasized in previous studies. Finally, we propose that reflecting on past experiences can improve future work motivation.

A theoretical framework for future-oriented factors that improve motivation

Motivation is maintained by positive feelings (e.g., Rosenberg, 1965). Given this, previous studies have suggested that present self-affirmation including self-confidence and self-efficacy is a necessary condition for achieving future motivation (e.g., Bandura, 1986).

Other studies have suggested that identifying needs and satisfying them represent one source of future motivation. For example, Maslow's (1943) theory holds that there are five categories of human needs: psychological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. This theory claims that people increase their motivation to satisfy these needs through identifying the kinds of needs most important to them.

Related to Maslow's theory, Alderfer (1972) proposed the ERG model, which includes three types of needs: existence, relatedness, and growth. In addition, McClelland (1961) proposed Achievement Motivation Theory, suggesting that degree of motivation depends on the tendency to struggle against one's own standards of excellence.

Therefore, previous studies have argued that people improve motivation by identifying their own needs and satisfying them as well as by consistently having a positive self-image and maintaining a proactive attitude.

Processes that improve motivation can be discussed from a future-oriented view. Specifically, people can improve their motivation by focusing on the future and imagining their ideal self by clearly identifying their own needs while retaining a consistently positive attitude.

For example, Locke and Latham (1984) proposed Goal-Setting Theory, which suggests the importance of setting goals as a method of identifying needs that lead to higher future motivation. This theory suggests that people feel aroused by setting goals and imagining their ideal self. Thus, future directions involving improved outcomes become clear, and their motivation is higher. Another study suggested that goals representing accomplishment (the reason for a challenge) and concrete and challenging content leads to higher motivation (Locke & Latham, 1990).

The VIE model also addresses the mechanism of improving motivation from a future-oriented viewpoint (e.g., Atkinson, 1958; Davidson, Suppes, & Siegel, 1957; Lewin, 1938;

Peak, 1955; Rotter, 1955; Tolman, 1959; Vroom, 1964). For example, Lawler (1973) proposed three factors as sources of motivation: expectancy (the strength of a person's belief about the degree to which a particular first-level outcome is the result of his or her actions), instrumentality (beliefs about the way in which performance and other first-level outcomes are related to second-level job outcomes), and valence (orientations that people hold with regard to outcomes). Specifically, VIE theory proposes that motivation is improved when (1) people believe that their behavior will lead to outcomes such as good job performance, (2) people believe that such outcomes will be rewarded, and (3) people value those rewards as things enabling them to attain their ideal self.

Therefore, previous studies have argued that people maintain motivation by consistently being positive, focusing on the future by identifying their needs, and imagining their ideal self while making their future direction clear beyond goal setting or anticipation of the future.

The effect on future work motivation of reflecting on past experiences

Previous studies have argued that sources of motivation are future-oriented beyond a consistent positive attitude, and that motivation can be destroyed by past-oriented factors.

For example, reflecting on past successful experiences can produce oversatisfaction (McMullen, 1997; Roese, 1997; Shelly, Taylor & Schneider, 1989) and prevent people from engaging in innovative behavior (Gino & Pisano, 2011). In addition, reflecting on past successes can lead to high-risk behavior that lacks planning and produces overconfidence (Hilary & Menzly, 2006), thus disturbing strategic and proactive behavior (Gino & Pisano, 2011).

Conversely, reflecting on past failures can lead to anxiety or hopelessness (Davis, Lehman, Wortman, Silver, & Thompson, 1995; Gilbar & Hevroni, 2007; Lecci et al., 1994; Wrosch, Baruer, Miller, & Lupien, 2007), cause trauma (Davis et al., 1995), and even lead to anxiety disorders (e.g., Kocovski, Endler, Rector, & Flett, 2005; Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000). Specifically, those with anxiety disorders focus more on past failures (Rachman, Gruter-Andrew, & Shafran, 2000) and lose

trust in others (Schwartz & Mccombs-Thomas, 1995). In addition, it is difficult for them to accept social support (Nolen-Hoeksema, Parker, & Larson, 1994).

However, reflecting on past experiences might lead to a proactive attitude or assist in maintaining future motivation. For example, previous studies argued that people use past experiences of accomplishing goals when they focus on the future and set goals for improving future motivation (Bandura, 1999). They also might use their past experiences as clues for judging whether their efforts will lead to future positive outcomes and have worth. Furthermore, according to equity theory (Adams, 1963, 1965), people tend to focus on others' performance and pay (treatment) when they judge whether their own performance has been fairly evaluated. Given this, people might focus on their own past performance and treatment as another way to judge whether they have been fairly treated.

Thus, past experiences might lead to maintaining future motivation when people use past strategies as tools for maintaining a stronger future-oriented view. Specifically, future motivation might be maintained by not only focusing on the future and imagining their ideal self but also by focusing on past experiences in an effort to invent future strategies.

This study proposes theoretical suggestions related to the process of work motivation by examining the effects of reflecting on past experiences.

The process of reflecting on past experiences improves future work motivation

We propose that the following three conditions are needed to improve motivation by reflecting on past experiences (as shown in Fig.1).

Imagining the future ideal self

The first condition is imagining the future ideal self. People with concrete future ideals try to find strategies for attaining the ideal and reflect on past experiences for using them to create new strategies.

For example, previous studies showed that people who imagine that they accomplish future tasks at high levels, or those who imagine they improve future outcomes by working

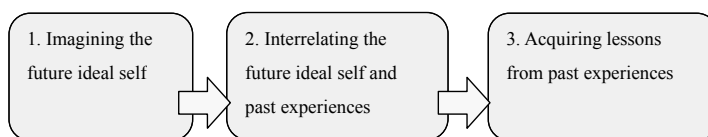


Fig.1 The process of reflecting on past experiences improves futures work motivation

proactively, are more likely to seek information and feedback from others (Grant & Ashford, 2008; McClelland, 1975). In another study, Bandura and Schunk (1981) gave 42 pages of mathematics homework to children who were not good at mathematics. They examined the difference in children's performance between two conditions: (1) when given a long-term abstract goal, "Please do your 42 pages of homework", or (2) when given a short-term concrete goal, "Please do 6 pages of homework at 7 different times". The results showed that children were able to see their accomplishments frequently and clearly when they received the short-term concrete goal. In addition, they tended to seek feedback from others and improved their performance.

Although these findings suggest that people who are conscious of their ideal self clearly tend to seek information and feedback from others, information and feedback are also produced by the past. An experiment by Markman, Gavanski, Sherman, and McMullen (1993) addresses this point.

Markman et al. (1993) asked participants to play a card game. After the game, half of the participants were told that they had one more chance to play the game. The other half were told that they had no chance to play again. The experimenters examined how much all of the participants reflected on the performance of the first game. The results showed that those who were told that they had one more chance to play reflected on their first performance more than those who had no chance to play again.

This suggests that people tend to reflect on past experiences when they are given another chance, leading to a focus on their future ideal self. Information or feedback as tools for creating new strategies can be sought from the past as well as from others.

Along this line of thinking, Tsumagari (2012b) examined the relationship between the clarity of the future ideal self and the frequency of reflecting on past experiences. Specifically, the relationship between clearly set short-term and long-term goals and the frequency of reflecting on past experiences was examined. Questionnaires were administered to 259 people employed in various sectors of business. The results showed that the frequency of reflecting on past successful experiences was greater when short-term goals were clearly set. In addition, when not only short-term but also long-term goals were clearly set, the frequency of reflecting on past successful experiences increased. However, the frequency of reflecting on past failures was greater only when short-term goals were set. These results suggest that people tend to reflect on past experiences when they make their future clear by setting short-term goals. In particular, setting both short-term and long-term goals promotes

reflecting on past successful experiences.

Interrelating the future ideal self and past experiences (past self)

The second condition for improving future motivation by reflecting on past experiences is to interrelate the future ideal self and past experiences as the past self. This can confirm or show a need to correct past strategies.

Specifically, reflecting on past successful experiences makes people aware that they are close to accomplishing their future ideal by confirming that past strategies were correct. Through this process, the possibility of accomplishing an ideal tends to be stronger (Epstude & Roese, 2008; McCrea, 2008) as does commitment to the ideal (Koo & Fishbach, 2008; Zhang, Fishbach, & Dhar, 2008). In addition, mental rewards including psychological safety and self-efficacy are acquired, so that the next challenge will be pursued (Bandura & Simon, 1977).

Conversely, past failure experiences alert people that they are far from accomplishing their future ideal. Therefore, they realize the necessity of correcting past strategies and reflecting more on them. In fact, previous studies argued that people struggle with problem solving related to self-actualization when they recognize the estrangement between the real self and future ideal self and know that their ideal will not be realized (Gilovich & Medvec, 1994; Oettingen, 2000). This might be because people often remember unactualized experiences (Zeigarnik, 1935), and the need for erasing negative feelings produced from the estrangement between the real and ideal (Markman, McMullen, & Elizaga, 2008) tends to be stronger (Bandura, 1986).

Negative feelings can have a positive effect on efforts expended on tasks, especially complex tasks (Bargh, Gollwitzer & Oettingen., 2011). This is because negative feelings lead to predicting problems on tasks through nervous tension and promotes proactive behavior for coping with them (Markman, Lindberg, Kray, & Galinsky, 2007; Oettingen & Mayer, 2002; Taylor, Pham, Rivkin, & Armor, 1998). In fact, Tamir (2009) showed that athletes and soldiers tend to maintain nervous tension through negative rather than positive moods.

Therefore, reflecting on past successes and failures promotes confirming or correcting strategies and maintains future motivation by comparing with an ideal.

On this point, Tsumagari & Furukawa (2010) examined whether people reflect on past experiences related to their future ideal. Questionnaires were administered to 259 people employed in various sectors of business. The results showed that people did engage in such reflection. In addition, they reflected on their past successes related to two thoughts: "My

ideal is almost attained” or “My ideal is far from being attained”. However, they reflected on their past failures by only thinking “My ideal is far from being attained”. This suggests that different features are involved in reflecting on past successes compared to past failures.

Acquiring lessons from past experiences

The third condition, which connects reflecting on past experiences and improving future motivation, is acquiring lessons from past experiences. Specifically, reflecting on past successes, which makes clear that the methods used were correct, confirms the lessons (success principles). Based on this process, mental rewards including confirmation of self-development are produced, and positive self-esteem, which is necessary for higher motivation, is maintained.

However, reflecting on past failures, which makes clear the necessity of correcting those methods, produces lessons (new success principles). Based on this process, methods are corrected, and the next challenge is promoted.

Previous studies argued that acquired lessons as success principles lead to continued motivation (Ellis & Davidi, 2005; Ellis, Mendel, & Nir, 2006; Morrison, 1993). For example, people approach tasks concentrating on acquired feedback as lessons from others (Salanova & Schaufeli, 2008). Extrinsic leadership including a supervisor's support (e.g., Ohly, Sonnentag, & Pluntke, 2006; Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006) and training intervention by an organization (Kirby, Kirby, & Lewis, 2002) might promote individual continued and creative challenge through promoting acquired feedback.

Acquired lessons can be helpful in maintaining motivation in two ways. First, such lessons can be useful hints for creating a clear future direction. Specifically, people can build their next strategy, using lessons as tools for making needed adjustments (Sheeran, Webb, & Gollwitzer, 2005). In addition, through acquired lessons, people can maintain cognitive resources during challenging tasks (Webb & Sheeran, 2003), cope with cognitive load efficiently (Brandstatter, Lengfelder, & Gollwitzer, 2001), and acquire important situational cues (Bayer, Achtziger, Gollwitzer, & Moskowitz, 2009). Furthermore, such lessons can produce self-efficacy and strong commitment to goals (Oettingen & Stephens, 2009).

Acquired lessons are also useful for avoiding mistakes during tasks. In fact, it is argued that people choose behavior suited to the situation by using lessons, even if they have to change their strategy or goals during the task (Henderson, Gollwitzer, & Oettingen, 2007). Taking this into account, people can clearly choose the next strategy, pursue the challenge consistently and efficiently, and improve the possibility of at-

taining their ideal.

Second, acquired lessons from past experiences can allow people to make sense of those experiences. These lessons have an important role in supporting the next challenge and future growth. When people realize this they see the value of such lessons. They can reduce mental load (Becker, 1971; Solomon, Greenberg, & Pyszczynski, 1991) and help individuals maintain better mental health (Updegraff, Cohen, Silver, & Holman, 2008) as well as reduce the possibility that past experiences are seen as traumatic or produce anxiety.

Thus, we propose that people achieve increased self-efficacy (Bayer & Gollwitzer, 2007) and maintain motivation by lessons acquired through reflecting on past success and failure experiences.

Consistent with this idea, Tsumagari (2012a) examined how lessons are acquired by reflecting on past experiences and how they lead to improved motivation, in addition to the effects of future-oriented factors (goal setting). Results from questionnaires administered to business people showed that people acquire lessons more from failure compared to success experiences. They also acquire mental rewards (satisfaction, confidence) from successes. In addition, they maintain higher motivation by acquiring mental rewards from past successes and lessons from past failures.

However, motivation after failure was affected by setting short-term goals and acquiring lessons from reflecting on failures. This effect was stronger when the effect of mental rewards from success was added. These results suggest that people should be concerned with learning lessons and developing strategies by reflecting on past experiences as sources of improving motivation.

General Discussion

This study examined the process of reflecting on past experiences, which can lead to maintaining future motivation. Based on the factors related to this process, we discuss the function of reflecting on past experiences and the mechanism of maintaining future motivation.

The function of reflecting on past experiences

Previous studies have shown that focusing on past experiences can have negative effects. For example, focusing on past successful experiences can produce overconfidence and disturb innovation. Focusing on past failure experiences can produce trauma and anxiety that prevents acceptance of social support. From this viewpoint, previous studies have proposed that in regard to future challenges, it is necessary to focus on oneself

at present, including having a positive attitude and identifying present needs, and not focus on the past. It has also been suggested that people should focus on the future and create a clear ideal self to make the present self stronger.

However, as discussed above, past experiences provide much information and feedback for actualizing the future ideal, such as strategies or success principles. It is possible that people with a clear future ideal tend to exert more effort toward attaining that ideal, and they actively reflect on past experiences to acquire the information and feedback from such experiences. Given this, past experiences can be efficiently used for maintaining future motivation through the process of reflecting. In the above section, we showed that people reflect on their past experiences when they are conscious of their future ideal self by setting goals.

The process of reflecting involves relating past experiences to the ideal self by consciously setting goals and acquiring lessons to confirm strategies and mental rewards that support positive attitudes. People tend to focus on past experiences by thinking about how well they attained their ideal or goals. They acquire lessons and mental rewards from the past and use them for the next challenge.

On this basis, in the above section, we showed that people consider success experiences as either almost attaining their ideal or being far from their ideal, and acquire lessons and mental rewards from them. Failure experiences are considered as being far from the ideal, and promote acquiring lessons.

Therefore, we propose that reflecting on both success and failure experiences function to produce lessons for future challenges. This function facilitates continued motivation, preventing people from experiencing trauma or anxiety by reflecting on the past, as previous studies have argued.

The mechanism related to reflection on past experiences that leads to maintaining motivation

In this section, we propose the mechanism related to maintaining future work motivation from two perspectives: future-oriented and past-oriented (reflecting on past experiences).

The effects of future-oriented factors on motivation.

Previous studies, as introduced above, have shown that work motivation is improved by focusing on one's future, given that self-affirmation, including confidence or efficacy, are maintained.

For example, setting goals or predicting the future makes people conscious of their own needs and can lead to strategies or scenarios of task accomplishment. Previous studies have shown that future-oriented factors are strongly linked to creat-

ing a positive attitude and improving future motivation.

The effects of past-oriented factors (reflecting on past experiences) on motivation.

Although previous studies argued that past experiences can exert negative effects on present positive attitudes, this study proposed that motivation is improved by reflecting on past experiences, based on three conditions. Those conditions are (1) people are clearly aware of their future ideal, (2) they relate their past self with their ideal self, and (3) they acquire lessons from the past. According to Tsumagari (2012a), past failures, leading to acquired lessons more than do successes, have a stronger effect on motivation, based on these three conditions.

However, we should note that reflecting on past experiences does not always promote acquiring lessons, as previous studies showed. This is because trauma or anxiety disorders caused by past experiences can be promoted by recognizing the estrangement between the past self and future ideal self (realizing that they are far from the ideal self). Thus, the process by which failure experiences lead to acquired lessons and the process by which failure experiences lead to trauma and anxiety disorders might be the same.

How can failure experiences that promote acquired lessons and improve motivation by showing people that are far from their ideal selves not lead to trauma or anxiety? We suggest that consistently reflecting on past successful experiences can be a method to address this issue.

Tsumagari (2012b) showed that acquiring lessons from past failures was promoted by acquiring lessons from past successes. This might be because reflecting on past successful experiences builds a learning climate by producing mental rewards and promoting acquired lessons while maintaining psychological safety related to success. Thus, it makes sense that acquiring lessons and overcoming weak points can result from reflecting on past failures.

Based on this viewpoint, reflecting on both past successes and failures can improve future work motivation more efficiently without leading to trauma or anxiety caused by focusing only on past failure experiences. To use both past success and failure experiences, people must experience both and confirm the importance of building self-affirmation from past successes. Future research should examine the strategy of achieving success by reflecting on failures, from the viewpoint of goal setting.

Mechanism of maintaining future work motivation.

Based on these findings together with previous findings, a

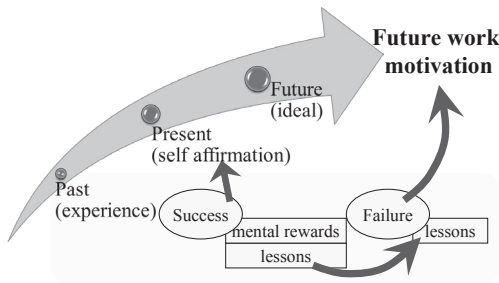


Fig.2 Mechanism of maintaining future work motivation

mechanism for maintaining and improving future work motivation is as follows (Fig.2). First, people should focus on their future, set their goals in anticipation, and imagine the ideal self clearly, on the condition that they build confidence and self-efficacy and maintain self-affirmation in the present. Through this process, they clearly identify their present needs and maintain future motivation.

They should also focus on past experiences when focusing on the future and imagining the ideal self. These experiences produce lessons and mental rewards related to the future ideal. In particular, people acquire lessons and mental rewards from past successes, and lessons from past failures.

Then, acquiring lessons from past failures leads to confirming or correcting strategies. It also improves present self-efficacy and satisfaction by adding acquired mental rewards from successes, thus improving future motivation. Although acquiring lessons from successful experiences does not lead to maintaining motivation directly, it prevents past failure experiences from causing trauma and anxiety, supports acquiring lessons, and improves future motivation obtained from reflecting on failures.

Therefore, future motivation is maintained by not only focusing on the future and imagining an ideal self based on present needs but also by reflecting on the past, on the condition that present self-affirmation is maintained. This suggests that people can improve their motivation by reflecting on past experiences on which they have spent significant efforts, even if they lose their ideal self or goals and cannot be sure of the future in uncertain circumstances.

Future Directions

Finally, we suggest the two following points for future research.

First, future studies should consider not only people's own experiences, as focused on in this study, but also others' experiences. For example, people might maintain higher motivation

by focusing on others as role models and acquiring lessons through learning about others' past experiences, for example, reading the biographies of great people. Future research should examine whether the process of reflecting on past experiences is different when reflecting on one's own experiences compared to reflecting on others' experiences.

Second, this study argued that reflecting on past experiences leads to higher future motivation when present self-affirmation including self-efficacy and self-esteem are maintained. This is because people whose self-esteem is low might be reluctant to relate past experiences with a future ideal self.

Kray, George, Liljenquist, Galinsky, Tetlock, and Roese (2010) discussed the effect of reflecting on "what might have been if more bad accidents had occurred" (downward counterfactual thinking; Roese, 1997). For example, if a person got a "B" after studying to get an "A", they could remain satisfied and self-affirmed by rethinking "I am lucky I didn't get a "C". However, this study did not examine whether this style of reflecting leads to improved motivation.

Future research should examine whether the process of reflecting on past experiences can be changed by the degree of present self-affirmation, and redesign the mechanism of improving motivation by reflecting on past experiences.

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付 録

和文タイトル

過去経験の振り返りが未来の意欲に与える影響の検討

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和文要約

本論文は、過去経験の振り返りが未来の意欲につながる心理メカニズムを理論的に考察したものである。従来の研究では、未来の課題に向かう意欲は、未来の理想の明確化と、現在の自己肯定感によって維持されるとされ、過去については看過されてきていた。そしてむしろ過去を振り返ることは、過信もしくは不安を引き起こし、未来の意欲を損ねる可能性が指摘されてきた。これに対して、本論文は、未来の理想（目標）が明確で、その理想と関連づけられる形で過去の振り返りがなされることで教訓が獲得され、それが意欲の維持や向上を生むと指摘した。従来の実証研究のレビューによって、人は理想（目標）を意識するほど過去を振り返ること、また理想と関連づけた成功経験や失敗経験の振り返りにより、それぞれ心理的報酬と教訓が獲得され、意欲の維持と向上につながることを裏づけている。意欲の維持メカニズムについて、現在と未来の視点で留まっていた従来の議論に、心理的報酬と教訓の獲得に着目することで、過去の振り返りが未来の意欲に結びつく可能性を示した。

キーワード：モチベーション、過去経験の振り返り、現在の自己肯定感、未来の理想、教訓