

The New Age Complimenting the Digital Age: Using Hypnosis, NLP and Time Line Therapy™ Techniques to Reduce Negative Emotions among People Involved With Information Technology

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Abstract

Although the amount of interaction with computers is increasing in the current digital age, humans are still facing emotional problems at work. This research looks at the effectiveness of new age techniques such as Hypnosis, Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Time Line Therapy™ (TLT) in getting over, or reducing the intensity of negative emotions attached to memories of stressful events in the past among people involved with information technology (IT). This experimental research involved 20 test subjects from the IT department of various organisations and 32 control group subjects. Statistical T-Tests revealed that with the test group, there were significant reductions in intensity levels of negative emotions after undergoing the procedures compared with before, with all three methods. There were no significant changes in the control group.

Keywords: Negative emotions, information technology, Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), Hypnosis, Time Line Therapy™ techniques

Introduction

The digital world may give someone the impression that humans are becoming very much like computers – rational and unemotional. However, despite the advances in technology, humans appear to be still grappling with their emotional problems. The need to sift through huge amounts of digital information can be taxing to some and work pressures can cause people to behave unreasonably and cause problems to themselves and others. In this digital age, new age techniques such as hypnosis, Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and Time Line Therapy™ (TLT) are offered as a means of coping with the hectic pace of life. However, there appears to be no reported research that examined hypnosis along with other techniques such as NLP and TLT in a single study among IT personnel. One particular technique in NLP usually referred to as the “dissociative technique”, has some similarities with

hypnosis. Similarly, TLT techniques require the subject to go into a hypnotic trance as part of the process. TLT techniques are however much more structured than the dissociative technique in NLP and hypnosis. The research question addressed in this study is: “Are techniques in Hypnosis, TLT and NLP effective in reducing the intensity of negative emotions as a result of recalling memories of stressful events?”

Thus, the objective of this study is to examine the outcomes of a very structured process of TLT, with a lesser structured process of NLP, and a relatively unstructured process of progressive muscle relaxation and mental imagery techniques in hypnosis in reducing the intensity of negative emotions (such as anger and sadness) attached to memories of stressful events. Hypnosis has obtained a lot of credibility and support through experimental research which will be

described under the heading of literature review. NLP, on the other hand, received a lot of criticism in the 80's especially by Sharpley (1984) who attempted to debunk it by reporting the results of experiments which suggest that NLP does not work. On the other hand, the results in those studies may have been due to use of flawed methodologies, such as using researchers who were not properly certified in NLP. This research, on the contrary, will use a certified trainer of NLP. Finally, TLT has so far escaped the attention of academics and therefore this research will contribute to existing knowledge.

Literature Review

Hypnosis and Memories of Stressful Events

A search on the Web of Science data base did not reveal any studies on hypnosis that have focussed specifically on how to get rid of the negative emotions attached to memories of stressful events although much has been written about the usefulness of hypnosis in medical and hypnosis journals. For example, hypnosis has been shown to reduce blood pressure and mild hypertension (Gay, 2007), and improve the immune system of the body (Neuman, 2005; Kiecolt-Glaser, Marucha, Atkinson and Glaser, 2001; Gruzelier, Smith, Nagy and Henderson, 2001). Elkins, Jensen and Patterson (2007) reviewed thirteen studies that investigated the use of hypnosis for the treatment of chronic pain and found that hypnosis interventions consistently produce significant decreases in pain. In an experiment that involved having normal subjects submerge their hands in hot, circulating water, brain scans showed that the pain signals changed dramatically depending on what type of hypnotic suggestion they were given – even though the stimulus stayed the same (Manzer, 2003). When one is using hypnosis to reduce pain, one is actually acting on networks of brain areas that are involved in the experience of pain (Smith, 2003). An array of mind-body therapies (e.g. imagery, hypnosis and relaxation) when employed pre-surgically can improve recovery time and reduce pain following

surgical procedures (Astin, 2004). We have a lot more control over our pain than most of us realize (Manzer, 2003). If one can use hypnosis to reduce the experience of pain in the present, arguably one can use hypnosis to remove negative emotions attached to memories from the past.

Time Line Therapy™ Techniques

Although, there is abundant evidence on the value of hypnosis, there appears to be no reported studies on the effectiveness of another set of techniques called Time Line Therapy™ (TLT) developed by James and Woodsmall (1988) even though they were taught to thousands of people all over the world. The main purpose of using TLT techniques is to systematically remove all major negative emotions attached to all memories from the past. It does not remove the memories themselves, just the emotions that are attached to them. It also does not prevent the subject from feeling those emotions in the future because there may be times when having those emotions are appropriate. Usually, the first two negative emotions that are attended to are anger and sadness. Anger is the first because it is a stimulant that often causes harm to others.

Sadness is next because it is a depressant and an emotion that causes harm to self (James and Woodsmall, 1988). According to James and Woodsmall (1988) every person stores all of his/her memories chronologically in a line (not necessarily a straight line) and this time line has a particular location and orientation in relation to his/her body. Briefly stated, TLT techniques requires the subjects to first of all elicit the location and orientation of their time line, float above it, and remove all the negative emotions (for example anger), attached to all memories from the past, starting from the first experience the subject felt that emotion.

Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP)

Another technique examined in this research is that in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP). NLP was developed in 1975 by Richard Bandler, a mathematician

and John Grinder, a linguist. According to them, NLP has been clinically demonstrated as a powerful technology for engineering change (Bandler and Grinder, 1979; Grinder and Bandler, 1981). However, Sharpley (1984) reports that the amount of published data supporting NLP as a viable model for therapeutic change is minimal. A search in the Web of Science database revealed no reported studies on NLP from 1985 until today.

One of the objectives of the research is also to provide empirical support for Einspruch and Forman (1985). There have been many previous research (cited in Einspruch and Forman, 1985), that have attempted to debunk NLP. However, these studies are rather dated. Einspruch and Forman (1985) also defended NLP and instead, attacked previous research stating that such “failed” research used flawed methodologies such as using researchers who are not properly certified in NLP. As such, the aforementioned criticised research had experiments that resulted in the outcomes of the test groups not proven to be any different from that of the control groups.

Einspruch and Forman (1985) revealed that all of the 39 empirical studies reviewed failed to provide adequate investigator training. For example, in Dowd and Hingst’s (1983) study, students who had no experience as therapists were trained in four 90-minute sessions (i.e. a total of 6 hours, in contrast to a Practitioner Certification course that is 130 hours!). This does not provide enough time to develop mastery of the NLP framework.

Objectives

Although fairly recent research such as Ashok and Santhakumar (2002) have reported the benefits of using NLP at work, there is no such experimental research that simultaneously investigated, in a single study, the effectiveness of using hypnosis, TLT and NLP as a means of reducing the intensity of negative emotions attached to memories of stressful events among people whose work predominantly involved IT.

Thus, this is the first and main objective of this research. The results of the test groups were compared with a control group. The second objective of this study is to address the issues raised in Einspruch and Forman (1985) - namely about the lack of qualification and experience of researchers conducting experiments. The researcher/author in the current study is a certified trainer of hypnosis, TLT and NLP.

It is worthwhile to point out that while Einspruch and Forman (1985) defended NLP, they themselves failed to conduct experiments to show the contrary. As mentioned earlier, a search on the Web of Science database failed to reveal any reported studies on NLP after 1985 and this justifies this research to be done. The researcher/author is not only a Practitioner and Master Practitioner, but also a certified trainer of hypnosis, TLT and NLP attached with the American Board of Hypnosis, the TLT Association and the American Board of NLP respectively. The researcher/author has over two years of related experience since graduating as a Trainer. He also holds a PhD in work psychology and has over nine years of post-doctoral experience.

Method

Participants

Respondents in the test group were twenty participants of the seminar/workshop conducted in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, entitled “Empower yourself through NLP, TLT and Hypnosis”. The sessions were identical and were conducted personally by the researcher. All the respondents selected for analyses in this study were predominantly involved with computers and information technology at work. Although the researcher played the role of both facilitator and researcher, objective scoring was used so as to minimise researcher bias - respondents filled out the questionnaires themselves and their scores were directly entered into the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) program without any transformation whatsoever by the researcher. The

participants also verbally consented to participating in this research and subsequently filled out all the questionnaires.

The control group comprised entirely of thirty-two part-time post-graduate students at a University who were all working people (mostly executives) and of roughly the same mean age as the test group, i.e. 38 years. The age range in the control group was 28 to 47 years, but the age range in the test group was wider, i.e. 22 to 61 years.

Coincidentally, the test groups also had some students from the same course at the same university. They are also similar in terms of gender composition (i.e. 17 males and 15 females in the test groups and also 17 males and 15 females in the control group). In terms of number of test groups and control groups, this research is superior to others (1 test person and no control group in Ewin, 2004; 8 female patients and no control group in Keefer and Keshavarzian, 2007; and 22 test groups and 22 control groups in Shakibaei, Harandi, Gholamrezaei, Samoei and Salehi, 2008).

Materials

The intensity of negative emotions as a result of recollection of stressful events were measured using a single numerical scale from 1 to 10 - 10 being the most intense and 1 being the total absence of such feelings. Similar scales were used for hypnosis, NLP and TLT procedures. These scales were adapted from the study by Shakibaei et al (2008) where they used to measure pain using a one-item self-report numeric rating scale ranging from 0 to 5 (0 for no pain, and 5 for worst possible pain).

However, the scale in the current research ranged from 1 to 10 in order to increase the sensitivity of the scale. Instructions and explanations were given to the participants on how to indicate their scores on the scale. Participants were also told to be as honest as possible when indicating their scores.

Procedure

The session started on the morning of the first day with hypnosis. Participants were required to recall past stressful events and then indicate the intensity of the negative emotions (from one to ten) prior to the activity. Then, progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) techniques were taught to the participants along with mental imagery of pleasant surroundings. Participants were invited to imagine themselves floating on a cool stream in a pleasant forest and finally landing on a beautiful beach by the sea. The process was accompanied by the relevant sounds of nature played on a sound system.

During this time the participants were asked to gauge their level of intensity of negative emotions. Then, the participants were gradually brought back to full consciousness. Immediately thereafter, the participants were again asked to indicate their scores on the questionnaire. Participants were told to record one score for how intense they felt during the hypnotic procedure, one during, and another after they were brought back to full consciousness.

The NLP session was conducted during the afternoon of the first day. The participants were asked to remember an event that they still felt upset about. They were asked to remember it vividly and associate themselves into the memory i.e. see through the first person view by looking through their own eyes and not seeing their body in the picture. They were asked to indicate the level of intensity of negative emotions when associating into the memory. Then, they were taught the dissociative technique i.e. see through the third person view. Then, they were asked to change the "submodalities" of the mental picture by changing it from colour to black-and-white, reducing the clarity and size and gradually pushing the picture further and further away from them. After that, the participants were told to record their score i.e. how intense they felt about the stressful event.

The TLT session was conducted during most of the second day. During the morning, the researcher explained the theory, basis and techniques in TLT. Then, the procedures were done during the afternoon as follows: participants were required to first of all recall one stressful event in which they felt the most anger. Participants were asked to record the intensity level of anger. Subsequently they were taught the process of TLT and a group induction was performed on them to release the anger on all events from the past including the most significant event. Respondents were then asked to record the level of emotional intensity of anger after the TLT process. The same was repeated for the negative emotion of sadness.

Respondents in the control group recorded the intensity of negative emotions as a result of recalling stressful events in the past once, then a second time twenty minutes later. They were not taught any of the techniques aforesaid but listened to a talk on the topic of leadership. The talk was conducted by the researcher who did his best to ensure that the talk was as neutral as possible i.e. neither stressful nor relaxing.

Results

For the test groups, paired sample t-tests were performed using SPSS to assess the changes in intensity levels of negative emotions before and after participating in the techniques in hypnosis, TLT and NLP. There were significant reductions in intensity levels for all three techniques. No such change was recorded among the control group. The average score for the participants in the test group before being taught the hypnotic techniques was 5.70 (see Table 2). The average score during was 3.90. T-test showed that the differences were significant at the 0.01 level. Participants reported being very relaxed during the progressive relaxation and mental imagery exercises. The average score of the participants after hypnosis was 3.15. T-tests showed that there were no significant differences in the scores during, compared with after the hypnotic induction, indicating that the relaxing effects of hypnotism continued to work even after the participants came out of trance.

Table 1: Gender of Test Group

	Frequency	Percent
Male	15	75
Female	5	25
Total	20	100

Table 2: Test Group Mean Scores

	First measurement taken before the procedure	Measurement taken during the procedure	Measurement taken within 5 minutes after the procedure	Sig
Hypnosis	5.70	3.90	3.15	.000
NLP	7.35	No measurement taken	3.05	.000
TLT - Anger	6.15	No measurement taken	1.15	.000
TLT - Sadness	6.85	No measurement taken	1.80	.000

The average score for the participants in the test group before being taught the NLP techniques was 7.35 (see Table 2). The reason why this score was high was

probably because the participants were told to not only recall, but to also associate into the memory (i.e. see from a first person view) and give a score for the

intensity of the negative emotions. Subsequently, they were taught the dissociative technique (i.e. see from a third person view) and also make the picture small, blurred, far away and black and white. The average score in terms of intensity of negative emotions after doing the NLP techniques was 3.05. T-tests showed that the differences were significant at the 0.01 level.

In relation to TLT, the average score of the participants for anger before being taught the technique was 6.15 (see Table 2). The average score after TLT was 1.15. T-tests showed that the differences were significant at the 0.01 level.

In relation to TLT, the average score of the participants for sadness before being taught the technique was 6.85. The average score after was 1.80. T-tests showed that the differences were significant at the 0.01 level.

Although it is acknowledged that there are some differences in the applications of the

techniques, it can be observed that the average score of the participants after the procedure, were lower for TLT compared with hypnosis and NLP. In fact, James and Woodsmall (1988) prescribes that in TLT, negative emotions are to be completely removed from the past. In their world view, there is nothing ecological about holding on to negative emotions from the past.

The same view is adopted in this research with respect to TLT, as well as NLP and Hypnotherapy. As mentioned earlier, many of the participants were able to remove their anger and sadness completely from the past. For the rest, they were not able to do so. A follow-up group interview was done on these people and the common reason cited was that they preferred a one-on-one session rather than a group induction and that there was one major event that they were not able to resolve completely.

No significant changes in the scores of the control group were recorded. The average scores for the control group were reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Control Group Scores

	First measurement	Second measurement taken 20 minutes later
Hypnosis	5.47	5.47
NLP	5.56	5.56
TLT - Anger	5.53	5.53
TLT - Sadness	6.28	6.28

Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of hypnosis, TLT and NLP in reducing the intensity of negative emotions such as anger and sadness when recalling a memory of a stressful event. The sample consisted of 20 individuals in the test groups and 32 individuals in the control group. Measurements were taken before and after each of the procedures. The absence of changes in the control group in this study and the fact that there were significant reduction in the intensity levels in the test groups suggest that it is the techniques in hypnosis, TLT and NLP that

are effective and are responsible for these changes. TLT techniques resulted in the greatest reduction in intensity levels, followed by NLP, then Hypnosis.

However, some finer distinctions can be made here. For instance, hypnosis has been shown in this study to be useful to get people to relax their mind and body and to simply provide a distraction or change of focus (but not really releasing the emotion). On the other hand, TLT is effective in removing specific negative emotions such as anger, attached to all memories from the past. Although forgiveness can sometimes happen prior to

letting go of the negative emotion, the more important pre-requisite is the positive learning / lessons gained from the event (James and Woodsmall, 1988). The NLP dissociative technique is useful to take the "sting" caused by memories of stressful events from the past simply by changing the submodalities or the characteristics of the mental picture. Thus, although each of these techniques can be used to reduce the intensity of the negative emotions in memories generally, the way in which each of these techniques operates is different. Additionally, TLT and NLP can also be viewed as complimentary rather than competing models with hypnosis.

Another interesting issue raised in this research is that some participants have reported preference for one-to-one sessions rather than group sessions. This was certainly true for TLT and hypnosis. Some participants commented that both processes took too long and their mind wandered. Others said that they wanted to take a longer time. Thus, the group sessions could not accommodate the different preferences of individuals. In fact, one of the participants who was not able to remove sadness at all during the procedure was subsequently able to remove them entirely when she signed up for the practitioner certification course and repeated the procedure, but on a one-on-one basis with the researcher. However, due to time constraints, TLT procedure was done on a group rather than on a one-on-one basis. The view taken in this research is that TLT can be done in groups, as the creators of TLT have done so in their introductory public seminars.

The managerial implication of this study is that even in the current digital age, people should be treated as people and not as computers. Despite the current heavy usage of and reliance on modern information technology, people of today are not much different from those in the past as far as emotional problems are concerned – they continue to be plagued by negative emotions and benefit from learning new age techniques such as NLP, TLT and Hypnotherapy, designed to manage those emotions. Fortunately, the

rise of the digital age has been matched with the rise of new age techniques in managing the mind and body and the two apparently different worlds can complement one another. In future, managers can incorporate Hypnosis, NLP and TLT in the trainings they have for themselves and their staff.

The limitation of this study is the lack of randomization of the test groups – most of them were self-selected as most of them chose to attend the seminar wherein the research was conducted. These were probably the most hypnotizable. Another limitation is that there is no way of knowing whether the reductions in the intensity of emotions as a result of recalling stressful events are permanent or temporary. In fact, according to James and Woodsmall (1988) if the entire gestalt of a negative emotion (for example anger) is not gone, then, the results may indeed be temporary. Future research should take the form of a longitudinal study spread over a year and measurements can be taken in one, three, six months, and one year into the future. Also, for the purposes of this paper, only those people whose work involved IT were chosen. More research should be conducted with test subjects with different occupations. Lastly, data were obtained through self-report instruments. The limitations that apply to self-report questionnaires, such as compliance bias, have the potential to be present in this research, just as it has the potential to be present in all other research using self-report measures.

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