

Notes on Time & Space Navigation

Based on a BAPT workshop by Carol Parkes, 2006

A few years ago, BAPT hosted a number of excellent one-day and half-day workshops. This one I went to by Carol Parkes had some really excellent content, and ideas which were new to me. This is a summary of what I can remember (from her notes and mine) to hang on to the learning. Perhaps she'll put it into a book, one day! The workshop is a lot more fun than this article, but hopefully it will give you a flavour of what we learned.

These notes are directed at NPs¹. As we know, any type can learn any skill – and we do – but the degree of stretch will determine how much energy we have to put into it. So a person with NJ preferences may find they can work with variations of the traditional approach, without too much difficulty. And a person with SP preferences may have as much trouble as NPs. This article is a collection of thoughts that people of every type may find holds some useful ideas to integrate into how they work, or how they expect others to work.

The starting point of the thinking is that the normal approach to 'time management' and 'organisation' tends to come from the mindset of SJ preferences. After all, it's what comes naturally to those preferences, and it works well – for them. And they feel it should work well for all of us. Those of us with NP preferences, however, often try to adopt these SJ practices and end up stressed out, or feel like we are failing, because it goes so much against the grain of how we naturally work.

I think this is beautifully reflected in Carol's title – the SJ approach is about how we manage our time and environment; "The process of dealing with or controlling things or people". The NP approach is now we 'navigate' it – "The process or activity of accurately ascertaining one's position and planning and following a route" to find our way through a task like we do through life.

Comparison

Here is a comparative list of some key differences in approach:

SJ – traditional time management

NP – navigate your way

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| • Do one thing at a time | ➔ | Too boring! |
| | | • Keep generating possibilities |
| | | • Do more than one thing at a time |
| • Don't play until your work is finished | ➔ | • Build in play breaks throughout |
| • Finish what you start | ➔ | • Dump stuff that's no longer relevant to your big picture |
| • Write ordered lists and stick to them | ➔ | • Use Post-Its |
| | | • Use ad-hoc lists for inspiration when needed |
| | | • Ordered lists often equal 'failed SJ' feeling |
| • Use a filing cabinet | ➔ | • Out of sight = out of mind |

- Have a clean, tidy desk
 - Decide on your deadline and work steadily towards it
- ➔
- Have to see everything
 - Use see-through filing/organisation
- ➔
- Have a **fun and engaging** desk
 - Use kid's stuff
 - Build in time for "the zone" at the end
 - Gather resources at the beginning for work in zone at the end

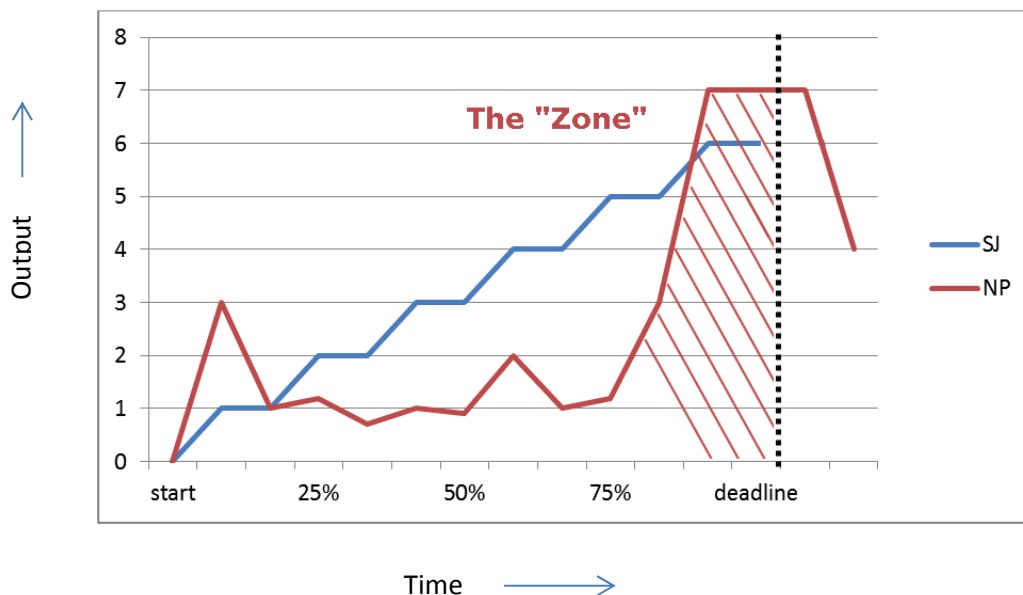
Navigating projects

This was the big insight for me, personally – the different ways we perceive time. Time for NPs is a bit like Dr Who's Tardis – it looks *SMALL* from the outside but inside it is a *MASSIVE* place with all sorts of interesting potentials in it!

So – NPs think they can fill this *SMALL* space with **loads** of stuff. But it is completely unrealistic, and we never seem to learn that it's not possible!

For the SJ approach, time happens one slice at a time, and you use it and plan it one slice at a time. To compare with the Tardis, they see a *SMALL* police box on the outside and assume a *SMALL* space on the inside – and don't even begin to imagine how much they can get into it. And... they think you are crazy for thinking you can do so much in such a small space.

One possible reason for this perception is illustrated in the graph below:



When one approaches a project from the perspective of SJ preferences, one divides up the time and the work into manageable chunks, and works through them step-by-step. Output increases steadily with time. This brings the individual to the deadline (or a bit earlier) with all the work complete.

An NP approach, on the other hand, often begins with an initial burst of enthusiasm. Then, in their parallel-processing world, the project vies for attention with all the other things that are going on. When they realise the deadline is looming, they have a burst of productivity. The amount a P can do

in the last-minute energy peak is phenomenal! They can really get 'in the zone' and be at peak creativity and peak productivity.

However, there can be problems with this approach:

- a) That level of creativity and productivity generally only occurs under real time pressure. It is not the usual level of output for most of the rest of the time – but they can get lulled into thinking it **is** possible **all** the time.
- b) When in the zone, practical issues can impede productivity, like not having the materials one needs to do the task. Or unforeseen issues arise.
- c) Project managers might not be aware of this way of working, and expect regular interim deliverables without actually requesting them.

Here is a way that NPs can work with their natural approach and de-risk it at the same time:

- a) Recognise the pattern of their enthusiasm, and understand its impact on their work.
- b) During that initial enthusiasm stage, they can 'get their ducks in a row' – work out what resources they will need, for example, and get things rolling on them so that everything is ready for their later creative drive.
- c) Negotiate with the project manager (even if it's you!) concerning any vital progress reports, and plan them in as interim milestones. Each of those milestones will have their own pattern of initial enthusiasm and 'Zone' output to handle in NP terms, while giving the project manager the check on progress they need from their (probably) SJ perspective.

Post-It Note Perpetual Planning for NPs

The role of Post-Its

The invention of Post-It notes has been an amazing advantage for some of us. We can make a hurried note of something, and then stick it where it needs to be. It can be replaced with another or removed, when complete. They come in different shapes, sizes and colours, which could help bring some order to the potential chaos of how we use them. Their colour and variety livens up our work space. And they can be moved about, flexible as our lives need them to be!

It is also true that some of us remember something because we have physically written it down, and can recall seeing it in context – how it is written, where it is placed, what colour it is. So even without looking at it again, we find it easier to remember it.

Carol has developed a useful planning approach that uses Post-Its, with these aims:

- To be able to see the big picture, then break it down into smaller chunks
- To be able to link that big picture with our values and identity
- To be flexible, so we can change things around easily
- To move away from black-and-white vertical lists
- Operate a fun, creative system that doesn't feel like a 'failed STJ'
- To navigate time and space on the seas of our true selves, rather than 'manage' it

Getting the big picture

Imagine your life in 5 or 10 years. How old will you be then? Imagine yourself at that age, and what is going on in your life at that moment.

Chunking up and down

Chunks are the important way we not get overwhelmed by our big picture. Choose four or five categories that represent the major chunks of your future life (which may or may not be true of your current life). For example:

- Work/business
- Home/domestic
- Heart and soul/spirituality
- Creativity/fun/leisure/friends

Use whatever categories make the most sense for you and your life. Then decide on a colour and a shape to represent each one (constrained, of course, by what you can get hold of!)

Visualising the future

On an A1 board, use your defined categories and capture your life ***as if it is happening now or recently***. Just go with it – play – don't judge what you write or decide what is or is not possible. You can change it and add to it – **BUT DON'T DILUTE IT!** – even if it doesn't make sense right now.

Checking your vision – is it all there? Is it congruent?

Look over what you've done, and ask yourself these questions and any others you can think of.

- What does your heart/values tell you about what you've written?
- What does your heart/values tell you is missing and should be there as well?
- What would you regret not having done, if you were on your deathbed? Mark these items with a star on the Post-It)
- What do you notice are the major differences between what you have written and what your life is like now? Make a note of these differences, the 'gap'.
- What other questions do you need to ask yourself?
- What additional aspects therefore need to be added in to your Post-It picture?

You may also want to add pictures, photos, drawings, quotes, poems etc to this big picture plan, to give it more meaning and significance for you.

How did you get there? Tell a long lost friend.

Imagine that you are meeting up with a dear friend whom you haven't seen for all those years. You invite them for tea/coffee/drinks and they are dying to hear all that has happened to you in the interim.

Tell your friend what happened to you and how you got to where you are now. Either tell a person now as if they were that friend, or else write it down by yourself. First:

- 1) Describe the future '**now**', your life aged ___ and the other person asks questions about it.
- 2) Then explain **how you got there**, what was the process.

These are potential prompt questions for your 'long lost friend' to use, but feel free to add to them. REMEMBER: Keep the questions open and 'clean' – the long lost friend mustn't impose their ideas of

what should be on the person doing this exercise. (In the workshop, we each played this role for each other.)

Where you are now:

- Why is that important to you?
- What did that give you?
- How do you feel about that?
- Do you sleep well at night now?
- How are you still growing?
- How are your needs (mental/social/spiritual) being met now?
- When will you next need to do a future planning session? For what length of time?

How you got there:

- What made you do that?
- What did you do or arrange in order for that to happen?
- What, over the last __ years, do you feel most happy about?
- How did other people help you to get here?
- If someone else wanted to do what you've done, what are the two biggest lessons you have learned that you now know – what would you tell them?

Shaping a plan

Once you have your picture of the future clear in your mind, and have filled it out with the answers to these questions, the next step is to shape the path forward.

- 1) **What will you have to do in the next year?** Starting with a sheet of A1 or A2 card, use Post-Its with the same colour/shape categories as you worked out earlier, to show what you will need to have done by this time next year.
- 2) **What will you have to do in the next month?** Use A3 card for this step, with Post-Its.
- 3) **What will you have to do next week?** Again, A3 card and Post-Its.
- 4) **What will you have to do today?** A3 or A4 card for your Post-Its.

How do you see time?ⁱⁱ

We have all constructed a 'model' of time in our heads. That construct varies from person to person. We don't all 'do time' in the same way. It can be helpful to map out how we do it.

Ways in which we can represent time in our head:

- **Location and direction** – where is past, present and future?
- **Size** – eg does the future look bigger or smaller than the past?
- **Brightness** – are there bits that are bright vs bits that are dim?
- **Clarity** – how clear or blurry is it?
- **Colour** – do you see things in your mind in black and white or in colour?
- **Movement** – it is still, or moving?
- **Where are you** – are you 'in it', as if it is happening to you, or are you outside watching it?

Location and direction are obviously very important when we are writing down plans and diaries. It helps to have a system of planning that fits with the way you see time. For a lot of people, the past is located on the left or behind them, and the future is on the right or in front of them.

Understandably, a pre-prepared system of planning that does not fit your own location of time or time line will never feel right for you. Therefore, make one that is congruent for you.

You might also want to play around with different time lines – try them on – how does it feel?

Discover your way of seeing time

This is an exercise ideally done with another person to take you through the steps.

- 1) Think of something you have done all your life – eg brushing teeth, showering, breakfast etc
- 2) Stand up, close your eyes, and try to get a clear memory of image of this activity –
 - a. When you were very young, for example 5 years old
 - b. When you were at an age between then and now (decide what age)
 - c. You, at the age you are now
 - d. At a time in the future between now and when you are very old
 - e. When you are very old

At each stage, tell your partner where you are seeing this image – point to where it is. Your partner should note this down on a piece of paper.

If all the ‘pictures’ seem to be stacked in front of each other, is there anything else that is different about them – size, brightness, clarity etc.

Then look at the plot of time with your partner and discuss. You may find that, for you, time moves from behind you to in front, or from left to right, or in a circle around you or a spiral, or all in the same space but different sizes or degrees of colour/clarity. Explore how it works for you.

Build your navigation system

So often for NPs it is a matter of ‘out of sight, out of mind.’ We use visual clues to remind us of where things are or what to do. So things accumulate on our desk, table or kitchen counter (or all three!) because if we put them away we know we will forget something vital.

A great help with these things are transparent storage options, including clear plastic pockets, envelopes, boxes, and so on. You might have pin boards or magnetic white boards. Use shelves and racks rather than a filing cabinet (unless you really don’t need to remember it!). Find a space on the wall for your ‘big picture’ plan to refer to and work with, or store in an open A0 art portfolio.

Consider a way of coding how you store things, for example colours that link with the ones you chose for Post-It categories, positioning to relate to how you see time. Be creative; use what you’ve learned about yourself earlier in this article.

Think about how your mind does time. How will you do a calendar/diary/planner? How might it look if you designed something that worked the way your mind works? If ‘the future’ is where you expect it to be, you may find being prepared for it so much easier!

Hints and tips – but make up your own!!

See the big picture

- Keep the big picture visible – don't hide it away in a book/drawer/cupboard
- Keep your 5-10 yr plan easily visible to you and look at it daily
- Keep reminding yourself who you are and why you are doing what you are doing

BUT...

Don't get overwhelmed by it!

- Take refuge in chunks! – chunk things down to manageable bits and reward yourself for each chunk done
- Try the 90 minute rule – one hour is not quite enough, two hours is off-putting – so try 90-minute chunks of time

Make it creative and fun!

- Use colours
- Use kids' stuff eg stickers/pictures/textures
- Use circles/shapes – not just black/white or vertical/horizontal

BUT...

Make it simple / easy / usable

- Make the most frequently-used things accessible/ easy to reach (you will not use if it needs too much effort to get !)
- Bunch things together according to function or ease-of-use – eg tea, coffee, sugar & cups all near the kettle and taps
- Make categories/groups that make sense to you and reflect how you generally operate
- Don't think you will stick to a too-elaborate system even if it is really creative and even if you think you will turn over a new leaf! If it isn't realistically aligned with your everyday life & habits, you won't sustain it.

Make it flexible/adaptable

- Use Post-Its and move them about
- Don't write another vertical list again if you don't want to!
- Keep reviewing how your system is serving you and adapt accordingly – you are not a slave to it.

BUT...

Make sure you do it!

- Make sure you make a date with yourself every day to review and plan according to you big picture
- Be kind to yourself and realistic – therefore do the most difficult and taxing things at the time of day when you feel most resourced and most fresh
- Beware of 'Tardis time traps'
- Beware of the amazing ability of NPs to come up with all sorts of convincing, creative and distracting reasons not to do something they don't feel like doing! Try to use that creativity to make whatever it is you are avoiding more fun and compelling.

Get smug about your achievements and reward yourself

- Put the 'Done It' ticked Post-Its in a book to show the extent of what you've achieved
- Think about all sorts of creative rewards and treats to give yourself along the way – according to time available and size of outcome. From small 5min treats to half-hour ones to even bigger. *Make yourself a creative menu of rewards in each size category.*

BUT...

Never, never, never let yourself feel like a failed SJ

- Just accept that you are different, and just as effective at managing yourself!
- Give away all those SJ time management books to all your SJ friends!

ⁱ **NP** and **SJ** are references to those with psychological preferences for Intuition and Perception (NP) as compared to Sensing and Judging (SJ). These are references to the psychological type theory popularised by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). A brief description of the two groups of types follow:

NP – These types use **Extraverted Intuition** (Ne) either as their first or second function. Ne notices possibilities, connections, the bigger picture, new ways of doing things. More inclined to go with the flow and seldom in a straight line, changing course as new opportunities arise, and tending to feel constrained by detailed plans and commitment. NP types include ENTP, ENFP, INTP, INFP.

SJ – These types use **Introverted Sensing** (Si) either as their first or second function. Si tends to naturally pay close attention to details, and work through a task in a step-by-step manner, preferably one they have already learned. They are more comfortable when they have a plan and rules to follow, in keeping with tradition and authority. SJ types include ISTJ, ISFJ, ENTJ, ESFJ.

ⁱⁱ The information in the section 'How do you see time?' Carol credits with thanks to John Seymour Associates, Ltd.