

Recent Movements in Japan concerning Career Guidance and Future Tasks

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I. Concept of Career Guidance, Applied Fields and their Nature

1. The Concept of Career Guidance and Three Fields of Application

The concept of career guidance, which was developed in the United States, was introduced in Japan after World War II. It has clearly taken root as a system, and has been applied in three fields – school education, job placement and vocational ability development. This section outlines the concept and nature of career guidance in these spheres.

(1) Career Counseling at School

The School Education Law specifies career guidance as one of the objectives of school education. More specifically, it states that junior high schools must ensure that their students develop basic knowledge and skills related to the vocations required in society, an attitude of respect for working life, and the ability to choose their future careers in accordance with their individual personalities (Clause 1-2, Article 36 of the Law). High schools must similarly see that their students make decisions concerning their future career paths based on awareness of their own obligation to society and in accordance with their own personalities, develop their knowledge and education, and acquire specialized skills (Clause 1-2, Article 42 of the Law).

The specific content of career guidance for students is stipulated in the curriculum guidelines and guidelines for career guidance published by the Education Ministry.

The current general, established definition of career guidance at schools, which used to be called “vocational guidance,” is stated in the “guidelines for career guidance at junior high and high schools – guidance for students starting their working life right after graduation (1987)”. Career guidance at schools is a process whereby teachers give guidance and assistance to students systematically and continuously on the basis of information concerning individuals and their intentions concerning future courses by introducing former experiences and discussions so that students themselves can make decisions and plan their future careers, find work or go on to higher education

and cultivate their ability to make progress so as to adapt themselves to their future life.

This belief has been consistently reflected in a series of revisions in similar curriculum guidelines. More specifically, these include within activities as a whole in school education the improvement of the mechanism of guidance at school, education concerning possible and desirable life styles, and improvements in career education.

(2) Vocational Guidance in the Employment Security Administration

The Employment Measures Law, which is a basic law concerning employment policy, has a provision concerning guidance for job seekers and explains the grounds for it as follows: “By providing job seekers with employment information and the results of occupational surveys, research and the like, and by providing job seekers with guidance based on such materials with respect to the kinds of work, places of employment and other matters concerning the nature of those seeking workers and necessary skills and the like, the employment placement agencies shall make efforts to promote the selection by job seekers of employment suited to their aptitude, ability, experience, level of skill, etc., and thereby to positively achieve freedom of choice of employment (Article 13 of the Employment Measures Law).

In line with this, the Employment Security Law, which regulates specific procedures and so forth of career guidance, stipulates the object of the guidance as follows: “the Public Employment Security Offices shall perform vocational guidance for the physically or mentally handicapped, those seeking to enter employment for the first time and others in need of special guidance with regard to obtaining employment (Article 22 of the Employment Security Law). Here, the law defines “vocational guidance” as guidance to those persons seeking to obtain jobs that, through practical training, courses, directions, advice, the provision of information and other methods, facilitates their choice of jobs compatible with their capabilities and increases their adaptability to those jobs (Article 4-4 of the Employment Security Law).

Although vocational guidance is currently provided not solely by the public employment security offices, but also by (free and paid) private job placement agencies, recruitment agencies and various other public and private agencies specializing in providing general and vocational guidance and job placement have always been considered as basic devices for the government to adjust labor supply and demand, and since World War II the government has

constantly been installing various related organizations and systems, updating their approaches, strengthening their functions, and actively undertaking various steps that view such vocational guidance and job placement services as the essential part of governmental measures.

(3) Career Consulting in Vocational Ability Development

The Human Resources Development Promotion Law, which is a basic law concerning vocational ability development, defines the basic concept of development and improvement of the worker's ability necessary for a job as follows: "... human resources development and vocational ability evaluations shall be conducted in close relation with each other. In this context, vocational ability evaluations shall be implemented in such a manner that the human resources of each worker may be valued properly by the chances of training, working experiences in business and the stage of skillfulness reached" (Article 3-2 of the Human Resources Development Promotion Law).

To meet this requirement, the law stipulates that employers shall provide workers with career consulting. This "career consulting" is defined in the 7th Basic Plan for Human Resources Development as "counseling provided at the request of workers to enable them to design their own vocational life in accordance with their aptitude, work experience and so on, and thus to make decisions concerning jobs and develop their own vocational ability through, for example, participating in job training courses." More specifically, it refers to the activities of employers who provide employees with information, counseling and various other types of assistance for their career development.

In providing assistance for the formation of the workers' career, the public and private sectors jointly engage in the following activities: developing the current assistance systems; improving the scheme for provision of information; establishing criteria for the mechanism of ability evaluation; and securing opportunities for job education and training. The nature of career consulting that employers offer to their workers is, literally, one type of career guidance for workers.

2. The Consistent Features of Career Guidance

Career guidance is definable in various ways, but in this article is defined in accordance with the features commonly observed in various types of guidance provided in educational, employment and industrial circles, as: a process whereby assistance is given to individuals so that they can make

decisions for themselves concerning jobs and career paths, prepare themselves for the job-search process and eventually find employment and start working, realize their self-image, and grow and develop their abilities. This process goes on throughout the worker's lifetime and includes activities to help an individual or a group of individuals face the problems and conflicts that may arise during this process.

So, what specific kinds of supportive processes are included in career guidance? As I see it, judging from previous studies and action taken in the past in Japan and elsewhere, concepts recognized in educational, labor and industrial circles in Japan and other factors, career guidance includes the following six elements:

- (i) Self-understanding: helping the subjects to understand themselves in relation to career paths, professions, and career building
- (ii) Understanding of vocations: helping them understand the types and natures of career paths, professions, and career routes
- (iii) Enlightening experience: encouraging them to "try" before making a choice or decision
- (iv) Counseling: counseling them in making a choice or decision, or in resolving problems and conflicts
- (v) Moving into action: assisting them to put into action their choices and decisions on whether to proceed to higher education or seek employment, or a career route
- (vi) Follow-up guidance and assistance for adaptation: evaluating guidance and counseling provided in the past, and helping them cultivate adaptability, achieve personal growth, and develop their abilities.

Counseling is provided by different methods based on different theories, and counseling given in accordance with the abovementioned six types of guidance is career counseling. This is called "career education at school" if addressed to pupils and students, "vocational guidance" if addressed to job seekers, and "career consulting" if given to individuals who are actually employed.

II. New Moves related to Career Guidance in Recent Years

This chapter gives an account of selected recent moves directly related to career guidance for students, job seekers and workers, and analyzes the current state of affairs.

1. Encouragement of Career Education at School

In December 1999, the Central Education Council published a report on “improvement in the connections between primary and junior high school education, and high school education,” in which the council suggested that it is necessary to conduct career education (education to instill in children desirable views on vocation, working life, and knowledge and skills concerning particular jobs; understand their own personalities; and acquire the ability to decide their own career paths voluntarily) from the primary school stage, while keeping in step with their growth.”

Conversely, in January 2004, the Council of Cooperation for a Comprehensive Survey and Study of the Promotion of Career Education within in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) gave a detailed account of the necessity of career education, the significance and nature of career education, the basic direction and steps to promote career education, development of the necessary conditions for career education, and so on. The council in its account emphasizes that both the traditional career guidance for students and vocational education together constitute the core of career education.

As shown in the increase in the number of “freeters” and “NEETs,” young people are not forging adequate views on vocation and working life during the transitional period from school to the workplace, and lack or are slow in acquiring the social skills and ability to construct proper personal relationships with others. Career education can help with these problems by systematically and continuously providing young people as early as the primary school level with opportunities to acquire proper views on vocations and working life, together with social skills.

The first specific step is to present the framework for a program to foster desirable views on vocations and working life.

In 2002, MEXT (via the National Institute for Education Policy Research) published a “framework for a learning program to foster views on vocations and working life,” and called for the educational field to implement it at various levels. The program defines elementary school as the stage where the foundations for seeking and choosing career paths are shaped; lower secondary school as the stage where students are required to seek for and provisionally choose realistic career paths; and upper secondary school as the stage where students are required to seek out and tentatively experience realistic career

paths in preparation for entering adult society, and aims systematically and continuously at training pupils and students concerning four particular abilities in accordance with their stages of growth – (i) ability in forming human relations; (ii) ability in making use of information; (iii) ability in future planning; and (iv) ability in decision-making. Modeled after the “career education” conducted in the United States. In the 1970s, it was newly created program taking into account the current state of social, economic and educational affairs in Japan.

The second step is to put the program into practice in actual fields of education.

In 2004, MEXT launched the “Project to Promote a New Plan for Career Education”, designating 45 regions across the country as special regions for the promotion of career education, where the program is now activated. The implementation of the program has also stimulated discussion of the new ideal of school education, which is now required to be associated with the mechanism of students’ transition to adult society; employment policy; and cooperation with enterprises.

The third step is to further enrich integrated study classes at school.

Integrated study classes, launched in schools in 1998 (in 1999 at high schools), when the official curriculum guidelines were revised, are designed to reflect individual localities so as to provide students with unique education together with opportunities to acquire a strong will to live and the ability to adjust themselves to changing surroundings. Curriculum guidelines revised in 2003 advocate the further improvement of this course. Providing students with opportunities to experience nature, participate in volunteer activities, and visit companies and experience practical training in workplaces forms the core of the course, and thus is identical with career guidance.

This section has highlighted the present situation of career education among various new developments seen in school education. The author believes that the basic concept and approach is in accord with one of the legally defined “objectives of education” (in Articles 36 and 42 of the School Education Law): “to return to the starting point of career guidance at school and to promote such guidance afresh.”

2. The Action Plan for Young People's Independence and Readiness to Challenge Difficulties

In June 2003, in its "Basic Policy for Economic and Financial Management and Structural Reform", the government formulated an "Action Plan for Young People's Independence and Readiness to Challenge Difficulties." Since then, MEXT, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, and the Cabinet Office have jointly taken various positive measures in regards to this.

Young people in the present day suffer from a lack of appropriate skills and unstable employment, as seen in the high unemployment rate, an increasing number of NEETs and freeters, the high rate of people who quit their job, and the regional gaps in the job markets for young people. This may well undermine competitiveness in society as a whole and lead to social instability. The plan was launched as a national project to reverse the recent trend of increased unemployment among young people by stimulating their will to work and heightening the vocational independence of all who are motivated.

Its principles are (i) to reform educational, human resource and employment systems; (ii) to direct all feasible policies intensively towards human resource measures; and (iii) to call on business circles to take action voluntarily through three basic approaches, namely (i) strengthening interaction among their policies; (ii) respecting initiatives and diversification of individual regions; and (iii) making use of the strengths of the private sector.

Most of the specific steps to be taken under the plan are devoted to the systematic provision of career guidance using a variety of approaches, and the subsequent development of appropriate systems and schemes, as summarized below:

(1) Assistance in career development and job-search activities for students at school until they become settled in their workplace:

- (i) Promotion of education concerning proposed career, preliminary experience in proposed jobs, etc. (forging appropriate views on particular vocations and working life through organized, systematic provision of work experience for children as early as primary school)
- (ii) Adoption of a human resource development system (Japanese-style dual system) whereby working practices and education are closely linked (a system for fostering mature working individuals, whereby, for

example, trainees in practice work three days a week and attend training courses two days a week)

- (iii) One-on-one assistance by job-finding advisors
- (iv) Training of experts specializing in job counseling for young people (career consultants for young people), and their allocation to various areas

(2) Improvement of the labor market for young people:

- (i) Development of varied job-placement systems corresponding to the diversification of job-search methods (i.e., commonly accepted hiring throughout the year, active use of trial hiring, etc.)
- (ii) Clarification of the qualifications that firms require of young workers
- (iii) Development of a mechanism whereby the practical capabilities of new graduates and other young people are appropriately assessed and officially approved

(3) Enhancement of the abilities of young people and the expansion of employment choices:

- (i) Development of educational programs at universities, graduate schools, technical schools and various other educational institutes for the retraining of mature persons
- (ii) Strengthening of the training of highly specialized professionals by encouraging the establishment of graduate schools for them
- (iii) Any steps that will contribute to improvements in the quality of university education (advanced human resource development, on-the-job entrepreneurial education)

(4) Creation of job opportunities for young people:

- (i) Large-scale training of those people who wish to become entrepreneurs (provision of comprehensive assistance to would-be entrepreneurs and practical internship opportunities at local venture firms for business-startups)
- (ii) Intensive training of young workers who will be able to contribute immediately to their companies (systemization of abilities required and development of criteria for their assessment, practical curriculums and learning materials for human resources in high demand – in, for example, information technology, technical management, business rehabilitation, etc.)
- (iii) Expansion of new business markets with particular reference to the service sector

Currently, the Action Plan for Young People's Independence and Readiness to Challenge Difficulties is being carried out as an intensive measure in line with educational, employment and economic policies; it is schoolteachers, the staff of job placement agencies, counselors, and career consultants of the public and private sectors that actually put the plan into practice. In reality, what is provided is career guidance. No dramatic results can be expected from the plan simply by making budget allocation to create an organization or build facilities. The author believes that top priority should be given to nurturing those people who have an established philosophy, knowledge and experience concerning working life, and are able to lead young people in their career development.

3. Assistance for job seekers at the Public Employment Security Offices in accordance with the individuals' circumstances

The Public Employment Security Offices (*Hellowork* offices) are a national administrative body established under the provisions of the Employment Security Law, providing job placement and career guidance services; information concerning industries and employment; employment management services; and services pertaining to the procedures and payment of employment insurance benefits. Among these, the job placement and career guidance services are recognized as the core operation of the office.

The method of providing services over the counter and the basic concept of the *Hellowork* offices were substantially revised in 1975 and again later when the Japanese economy was hard hit by the oil shock. *Hellowork* offices across the nation made various efforts to improve services, and as a result they currently offer, via the medium of expert staff, job introduction services matched to the job seeker. The features of the new concept of *Hellowork* offices can be summarized into three aspects, which are:

- (i) Separation of job placement services and services related to employment insurance payments: different sections or groups of staff members take responsibility for the job placement and career guidance services that require expertise in career guidance and counseling, and services related to employment insurance
- (ii) Job placement services according to type of job seeker: the method of providing services over the counter and the content of the services are clearly distinguished among different types and needs of job seekers, so

that carefully differentiated services can be provided

- (iii) Such job introduction and career guidance are provided via highly advanced specialists (career guidance officers) only. On the other hand, other specialists (employment officers) are in charge of service provision to employers. At the same time, a training system for these specialists is to be strengthened in line with their specialties.

In 2004, new guidelines for job introduction were drawn up, though the traditional, basic stance was maintained. These new guidelines were launched to take into account the changing relationship of labor supply and demand in the Japanese industry over thirty years, and to deal with changes in the outlook and needs of job seekers and firms looking for workers as well as the increase in and growing complexity of information. Among the new features of the guidelines, this section sheds light on and gives an account of the aspects closely linked to the theme of the paper, “counseling and assistance in accordance with the circumstances of job seekers.”

The latest revision, while continuing to put special emphasis as before on respect for self-decision by job seekers, provision of counseling services concerning work and specialized assistance, is swiftly and thoroughly aimed at providing more varied and accurate services until he or she has found a job or solved their problems. This is based on flexible judgments and in accordance with the job seeker’s particular situation

The specific flow of service provision can be summarized as follows (refer also to the Table):

- (i) Sorting of job seekers at the time they visit a *Hellowork* office (for the first time);
- (ii) Providing the basic knowledge required for job-seeking activities, and an account of the services offered by the *Hellowork* offices (making use of leaflets, etc.)
- (iii) Determination of the nature of the assistance to be given, and acceptance of applications for assistance in job-seeking activities, or creation of a serial number for individual job seekers
- (iv) Provision of actual assistance services: conducting personal interviews and so forth, pinpointing problems that make it difficult for the job seekers to find employment, and providing appropriate assistance in solving associated problems
- (v) Providing outplacement services: assisting job seekers who reveal no

particular problems in the process of assistance to find employment
(vi) Providing specific advice for the preparation of job applications; reviewing of curriculum vitae, work experience records and so on; gathering of information on firms; holding mock interviews and so forth

(vii) Job placement

(viii) Monitoring the results of job-seeking activities, and follow-up

The latest revision has expanded the scope of the services to include not only individual-targeted services, but also services corresponding to changes in the situation of each job seeker during the process of counseling, personal counseling, group work, seminars and various others. Meanwhile, concerning elderly persons, persons with disabilities and various other job seekers who need special assistance, the nature of career guidance has remained the same as before, that is focusing on heightening the employability of such job seekers, development of job openings, assistance to successful job seekers in adapting to the workplace, assistance via the casework method, and so on.

4. Strengthening of the Adjustment of Labor Supply and Demand via Collaboration of the Public and Private Sectors

The system of labor supply and demand adjustment in Japan comprises the Public Employment Security Offices (including schools assigned to engage partially in the duties of the Public Employment Security Office), paid job placement agencies, free job placement agencies (schools, special public corporations, local public organizations, etc.), worker dispatching and supplying agencies, and ordinary job advertisements.

Job placement services – both paid and free – have been available for certain occupations since the enactment of the Employment Security Law; however, in 1999 the law was revised to permit job placement services in almost all job categories other than certain fields (harbor transportation, construction, etc.). In addition, since 2004 a series of deregulation measures have been put into effect as shown below:

- (i) Certain types of public bodies (chambers of commerce and industry, societies of commerce and industry, Japan Agricultural Cooperatives, etc.) are authorized to engage in free job placement services provided they provide prior notification.
- (ii) Local public bodies are authorized to engage in free job placement

services provided they provide prior notification.

(iii) Permission is now given to business proprietors, rather than individual business establishments.

(iv) Regulations related to simultaneous engagements in other businesses have been relaxed, and the guarantee system has been abolished.

The worker dispatching business was established as a new labor supply-demand adjustment system in 1986, when the Worker Dispatching Law was enacted in order to ensure proper operation of the business and establishment of suitable working environments for dispatched workers. Since then, the system has been revised repeatedly, extending the range of occupations where worker dispatching is permitted.

In 2004, the following steps were taken to relax regulations and protect workers.

(i) The maximum contract length for dispatched workers was extended from one year to three years.

(ii) Employers are now obliged to make an employment agreement if they wish to continue hiring dispatched workers after the maximum contract period is over.

(iii) If a business establishment intends to hire a worker for a certain post that has already been held by a dispatched worker for more than three years, and if the duties of the post are not subject to restriction on the maximum contract length, it must give priority to that dispatched worker in filling the post.

(iv) Employers are now allowed to have dispatched workers engage in manufacturing work.

(v) The procedure pertaining to permission and reports now centers on business proprietors, rather than individual business establishments.

(vi) The legal status of dispatched workers must be clarified, and workers currently dispatched are now able to make use of job placement services before the contract term for the current dispatch comes to an end.

These developments show that the public and private sectors are making efforts to play their respective roles effectively and appropriately, bringing into play their own vitality and originality as entities adjusting labor supply and demand. This has generated the following effects in recent years:

(i) Strengthening of the role of the Public Employment Security Offices in

providing information: a comprehensive job information system whereby *Hellowork* offices across the country are linked online; “*Hellowork* Internet information”; “*Shigoto* (jobs) information on the Net”; self-conducted job searching used by computer; Industrial Employment Information Centers; “*Hellowork* information plazas,” and so forth.

- (ii) Joint promotion by the public and private sectors of counseling and assistance: allocation and effective use of job-searching advisors and other experts; implementation of career consulting; implementation of job-searching seminars; provision of opportunities to experience work environments, such as a trial employment scheme for young workers; the Japanese-style dual system; a “Young Job Spot,” and so on.

From a social and economic viewpoint, the trend towards strengthening public and private collaboration in the labor supply-and-demand adjustment mechanism is a consequence of a recent series of deregulations that have facilitated the shift from “public to private.” What is important here is the fact that the specific nature of the deregulations is closely associated with the roles and partnership of the public and private sectors in job placement, vocational guidance and career guidance.

5. Implementation of Career Consulting in Vocational Ability Development

With the outlook of workers diversifying, labor mobility intensifying, and the methods of corporate human resource management changing, employers have been called on to commit themselves more closely to the career development of workers. Accordingly, as stated above, the Human Resources Development Promotion Law was revised in 2001 to stipulate that employers must provide their employees with career consulting. Career consulting in this context is defined as “counseling provided upon the request of workers so that they can plan their vocational life in accordance with their aptitude and work experience, choosing a job and developing their vocational ability in an effective manner by, for example, attending training courses.” The specific nature of career consulting is exactly identical to that of career counseling at school and vocational guidance conducted within the framework of the job introduction services. According to the author, the difference among them lies in to whom such counseling is addressed: pupils and students, job seekers, or those who are actually employed. In other words, career consulting is a

combination for workers of career guidance and counseling.

Then, what is it that must employers do concerning the career development of workers? A “guideline on measures that employers should take” (notification from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare) stipulates this as shown below:

- (i) Career consulting (that is, provision of information, counseling, and assistance concerning the content of jobs, the required abilities, the positioning of human resources, human resource development, etc.)
- (ii) Consideration of the positioning of workers and other matters pertaining to employment management (securing of opportunities for them to gain experience in business, provision of opportunities and jobs that enable workers to demonstrate their potential, etc.)
- (iii) Granting paid leave for education and training, and various other types of leave (clear statement in labor contracts and working rules; technical skill examinations to be conducted upon request of workers and in accordance with their aptitudes; various kinds of leave, such as leave for career consulting)
- (iv) Securing the time for workers to receive education and training (changes in the starting / ending time of office hours, restrictions on overtime, etc.)
- (v) Others (appropriate designation and use of promoters of vocational ability development, effective use of subsidies, information provision to job seekers, etc.)

Concerning the career consultants in charge of assistance in the career development of workers, questions immediately arise about what they should know and can do, how to nurture them, and what qualifications to require of them. In line with this, in 2002 the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare launched an examination scheme for the assessment of competency as career consultants. The ministry designates private organizations to take responsibility for the examination, training and authorizing of official career consultants so as to increase the number of such consultants to 50,000 in five years. For this scheme, “details of criteria in the examination for assessment of competency as career consultant” have been drawn up as follows:

I. Understanding of the social significance of career consulting

1. Awareness of social and economic trends and the necessity of assistance in career formation

2. Role and positioning of career consulting
3. Scope of duties (general duties, confidentiality obligation, and ethics) of career consulting

II. Basic knowledge and skills necessary for career consulting

1. Basic knowledge (theory of career consulting, personality theory, understanding of and information concerning work, information concerning ability development, employment management, labor market, labor-related laws and regulations, mental health, life stages, handling of crucial junctures)
2. Basic skills (their necessity, creation of career sheets, counseling skills, group-counseling skills, management of counseling process)

III. Skills necessary in process of actually conducting career consulting

1. Setting the scope of counseling (understanding by counselors of physical backgrounds, rapport with clients, proactive career formation, target setting, clarification of the scope of services)
2. Assistance in self-understanding (self-analysis and understanding, skills in assessing subjects)
3. Assistance in understanding job (effective use of information concerning individual professions, the labor market, up-to-date technology)
4. Assistance in having enlightening experiences
5. Assistance in decision-making (creation of a career plan, specific target setting, ability development)
6. Assistance in the implementation of strategies (motivation, management of strategy implementation)
7. Assistance in adaptation to a new job
8. Overview of the counseling process (conclusion and assessment of counseling)

IV. Ability in conducting efficient career consulting

1. Making society aware of the importance of career formation
2. Recognition of networks (importance of networks, formulation of network, experts to refer to, introduction to experts in different fields)
3. Self-training and supervision (necessity of self-training and acceptance of supervision)

A glance at the contents of career consulting shows that the term “career

consulting” that is used in Japan is exactly the same as “career guidance and counseling for workers” commonly used elsewhere in the world.

III. Future Tasks for Promotion of Career Guidance

1. Integration of Career Guidance and Counseling

The previous sections have shown that in Japan career guidance is provided at school as “career guidance for students,” at organizations responsible for labor adjustment as “vocational guidance,” and in the framework of vocational ability development as “career consulting.” Each type of guidance has its own legal grounds and a clear definition. However, the nature of career guidance is shared by all of them, the essence being that all provide services related to six points – self-understanding, understanding of vocations, enlightening experience, counseling, implementation of own strategies, and follow-ups. These are generally called the six services of career guidance.

Incidentally, the questions of which among the six services take priority, and whether all of them should be given attention in career guidance depend on the situation and needs of individual subjects. However, counseling as such is indispensable for all subjects. In any case, services other than counseling such as those related to self-understanding, understanding of vocations, enlightening experience, implementation of own strategies, and follow-ups are all provided for within the sphere of counseling services.

With rapid progress in information technology, assessment tools for self-understanding, information for helping to understand vocations, the medium of information provision, and tools for searching for information are now systematically computerized. At the same time, guidance is provided more frequently by means of computer simulation and visual images. This trend is observable worldwide, and is not itself something that should be criticized as a sign that the world is heading towards an information-oriented society. Nevertheless, guidance tools are, after all, no more than tools. The important thing is to make full use of them in counseling services. It is important to integrate all the elements – interpretation of the findings of counseling, explanation to subjects, acceptance of the findings by clients, and implementation of measures designed in accordance with counseling – into the process of the services.

Therefore, those people using these guidance tools should be qualified as counselors who are prepared to listen to clients. In the meantime, there are

various kinds of theories and approaches concerning counseling, such as those of an emotional, cognitive, and behavioral approaches. However, the author believes that a comprehensive approach is most effective in career counseling due to its special features, which are shown below:

- (i) The emphasis of counseling is placed on assistance in achieving better adaptation and growth, and development of individuals, rather than on removing problems or providing remedies for such problems
- (ii) Counseling is aimed at achieving specific objectives, such as decisions to progress to higher education or find employment, career formation, and so forth.
- (iii) Counseling follows a systematic approach: self-acceptance, understanding of problems, setting of targets, decision on and execution of strategies, and assessment by the counselor and client
- (iv) Counseling is provided without adhering to any particular counseling theory or approach, but rather relying more on a compromising, comprehensive method
- (v) Counseling is closely linked to, or integrated with guidance
- (vi) Counseling is provided together with consultation, coordination and education

Those placed in charge of guidance must be career counselors with highly advanced specialties, rather than simple counselors. Furthermore, it is a crucial task for educational, administrative and industrial circles to launch a system whereby such career counselors are properly trained and progressively improve their qualities.

2. Improvement of the Quality of Persons in charge of Career Guidance, and Effective Methods of making such Guidance Widely Available

The second task concerns, on the one hand, how to improve the quality of persons responsible for career guidance – counselors engaging in career counseling at school, vocational guidance at organizations adjusting labor supply and demand, and career consulting at firms; and on the other hand, how to make society aware of such career guidance and counseling.

Currently in Japan there is no official certification system for counselors in the same manner as that for doctors and lawyers who are required to pass the relevant national examinations and thus are authorized to monopolize such duties. Of course, schoolteachers and civil servants engaged in duties at the

Public Employment Security Offices are officially qualified professionals; however, in a broader sense they are qualified as specialists in school education and employment administration respectively, and are not especially trained and qualified as counselors. The qualification for career consultants for private firms mentioned earlier is based on a private certification system whereby the private agency provides training and conducts examinations in accordance with detailed guidelines set by the government. This has a substantial impact on the maintenance and improvement of the quality of those who are engaged in career guidance and counseling, and in turn on their social comments and the dissemination of their effect.

This section will now, by confining itself to career consulting at private firms, list unsolved problems with reference to annual reports published in recent years by study groups established in the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, in the hope that this will help to highlight the kind of problems that remain.

(1) Survey Research on Abilities and Other Factors that are Essential for Implementation of Career Consulting (2002):

Essential abilities are classified in a system. The report cites as future tasks the following: (i) effective use of the system; (ii) questions related to the level of abilities; (iii) classification of abilities in terms of particular fields; and (iv) the necessity of constant reviews of the system.

(2) Survey Research on Examinations for Career Consultants (2002):

Items for use as criteria for the examination, standard curriculum, and procedures to be taken by organizations responsible for the examination have been determined. A scheme for the training of career consultants and the qualification examination were launched by the private sector on the basis of this report. Future tasks pertaining to this report include: (i) the targeted level of career consultants according to the training program (standard level); (ii) development of specific curriculums; (iii) maintenance and improvement of the quality of qualified consultants as per the examination; (iv) scheme for updating the qualifications; (v) training of persons in charge of making questions for the examination and judges of the examination; and (vi) the necessity for constant review of examination questions.

(3) Study on Effective Methods for Expanding the Use of Career Consulting (2003):

The study clarifies the mechanism of the role of career consultants, the

abilities required to conduct standard career consulting and to supervise career consultants, the nature of training programs for career consultants, the necessity for maintenance of quality in the examination to assess the level of ability, and support for career consultants. Future tasks cited in this report are: (i) promotion at the initiative of the private sector; (ii) coordination and classification of joint work conducted by individual examination organizations; (iii) establishment of a council comprising organizations in charge of the training program of career consultants and their qualifying examination; (iv) training of supervisors of career consultants, and collaboration with universities and graduate schools in training supervisors.

(4) Study on the Improvement of Qualifications of Career Consultants (2004):

The study clarifies the role, required abilities and training methods of supervisors of career consultants, classifying ability in supervision into four elements: ability in conducting career consulting; ability in group facilitation; ability in training consultants; and ability in approaching organizations. Future tasks cited in the study are how to clarify and specify methods of increasing the number of career consultants and deepening their experience.

(5) Panel on Securing Qualification as Career Consultants (2004):

The panel proposes establishing a liaison conference comprising organizations in charge of the training program of career consultants and their qualifying examination to consider a backup system for trained career consultants and the maintenance of their quality.

(6) Study Group on Career Consulting for Young People (2004):

The study group presents requirements for conducting career consulting for young persons, together with specific examples of model curriculums and additional model curriculums. The future tasks cited are (i) consistency with the standard curriculum; (ii) development of techniques for career counseling for young people; and (iii) the necessity of constant revision of the requirements.

(7) Survey Research on Experienced Career Consultants (2005):

This examines the definition of experienced career consultants, the ideal model, and their characteristics with specific case studies, and presents them as pointers for less experienced career consultants. Future tasks cited are: (i) activities to make the public familiar with the idea of experienced career consultants and to enlighten career consultants; (ii) incorporation of “special

that the best step to be taken is for schools, firms, households and local communities, as well as the government in its employment policy, to provide more career guidance and counseling services, and for all those responsible to cooperate with one another while focusing on this issue.

Obviously, the decline in “human power” can be halted through career guidance and counseling in the fact that it is far more attributable to various macro factors, such as society and economy, laws and institutional framework, administrative organizations and their operation, and culture and social climate. Nevertheless, it is the persons providing career guidance and counseling, as well as the individuals themselves, who will raise the levels of “human power”.

In line with this, the following matters are cited as tasks for various circles in present-day Japan – education, employment policy, industry (firms), households and local communities. Only tasks involving career guidance and those closely related to such guidance are outlined here. (According to the Cabinet Office, Study Group on Strategy for Human Power, 2003, partially modified.)

(1) School education: Establishment of schools that are open to society and quality education to satisfy various needs, such as:

(i) active promotion of career education; (ii) diversification of paths to higher education and revision of the entrance examination system; (iii) strengthening of incentives for university students to study; (iv) introduction of learning topics relevant to social life; (v) strengthening of collaboration between high school and university; (vi) provision of information helping appropriate decision making on career paths; and (vii) establishment of schools with particular unique features and highly specialized technical schools

(2) Employment policy: establishment of working environments enabling workers to bring their human power into play, including the following:

(i) comprehensive assistance for young people in finding employment (establishment of “career centers” in various regions); (ii) an expansion in employment opportunities for young people (dispatching young workers to firms and “trial employment” with an eye to their being hired on a regular basis in the future); (iii) assistance in starting businesses (information centers, network for human resource assistance); and (iv) assistance in career development (career consulting system, reform of the ability assessment scheme)

features of experienced career consultants” into the training program and assessment of career consultants; (iii) development of a system whereby internships, supervision and training are provided under a partnership of public and private sectors; (iv) improvement of networks enabling career consultants to refer to appropriate experts; and (v) methods of assessing career consultants (whether to exclude unqualified persons or to recognize the exceptionally able).

3. Collaboration among School Education, Employment Administration, Industry, Households and Local Communities

The third task is for career education at school, vocational guidance provided by the employment administrative agencies, career consulting in the private sector, and education at home and in local communities to share the same beliefs and cooperate with one another within the shared framework. The author believes that, essentially, their collaboration points to the implementation of career guidance and counseling.

It has been argued in recent years that people, in particular young people, in Japan have lost some of their “human power” and their enthusiasm for learning and working hard. The “human power” is definable as a general, spiritual toughness in living as a member of society or an independent individual. For example, this decline in “human power” is observable in the following:

- (i) The fall in basic scholastic standards and will to learn: some surveys show that only 20 – 40 percent of pupils like to study, and that some 40 – 60 percent do not understand classroom lessons
- (ii) Lack of special knowledge and skills as seen in the fact that around 60 percent of firms claim that newly hired employees lack sufficient skills and techniques, and show lower abilities in writing and theoretical ways of thinking and communication compared to ten years ago
- (iii) A fall in the eagerness of young people to work and participate in activities in local communities, as seen in an increase in the number of NEETs, freeters and those who quit their jobs within a short time span
- (iv) A fall in the eagerness to achieve objectives

Numerous attempts have been made by academics to highlight the factors behind this decline in “human power.” However, this paper is not concerned with the causes, but rather with the remedy for the decline. The author believes

(3) Industry and firms: reduction in labor mismatch via cooperation between industrial circles and schools as follows:

(i) clarification of demand for specific workers; (ii) assessment and treatment (clarification of requirements and provision of various career paths); (iii) nurturing of independent-minded workers; (iv) participation of firms in career education; (v) participation of firms in integrated classes at schools; (vi) dispatch of corporate personnel to schools

(4) Households and local communities: active participation in education through the following ways:

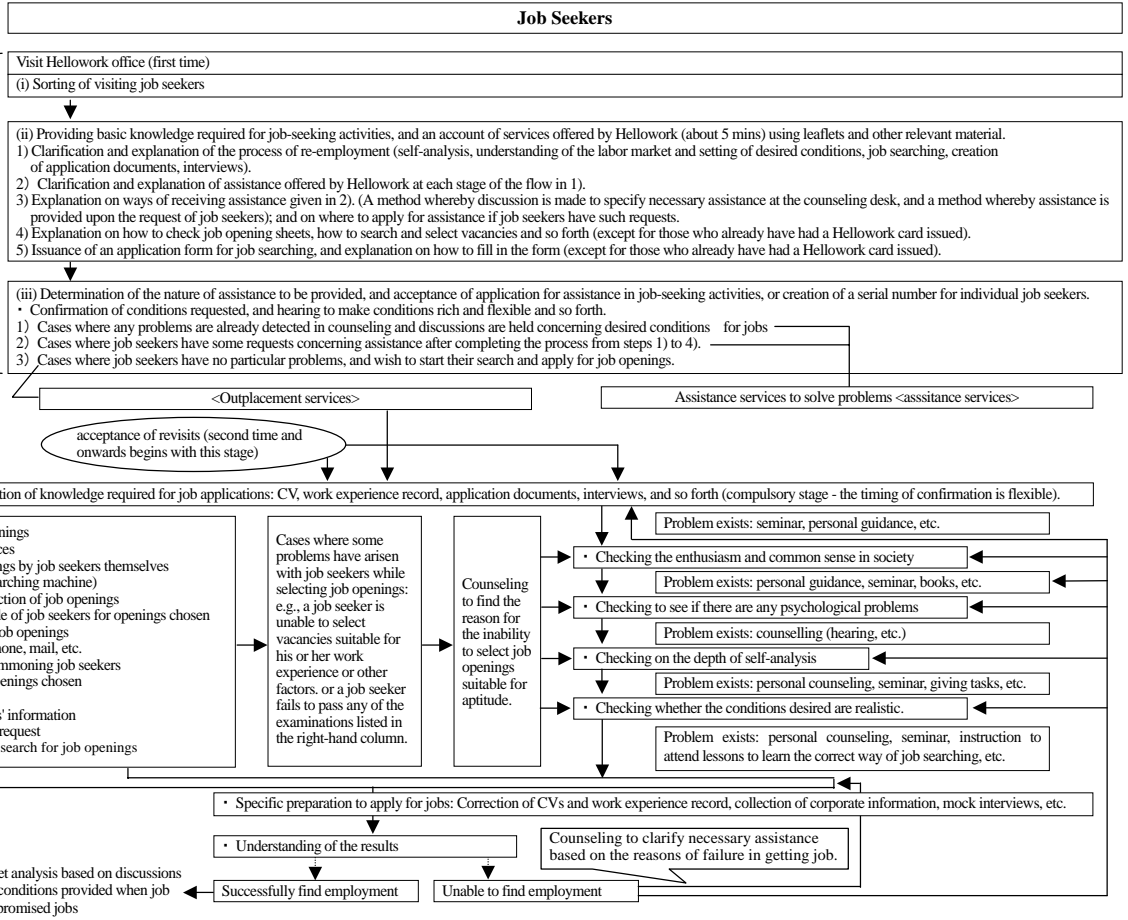
(i) assistance in home education (understanding of the basic rules for citizens and the meaning of working); (ii) active participation in school and local activities (participation in PTA, events on campus, volunteer activities); (iii) development of working environments that facilitate home education (leaving the office on time, paid holidays, “family-friendly” corporate management); (iv) assistance for activities in local communities; and (v) participation of children in local educational programs.

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- Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare; *Ippan Shokugyo Shokai Gyomu Toriatsukai Yoryo* (Guidelines for General Job Placement Businesses), 2004.
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- Kimura, Shu. *Sangyokai ni okeru Career Consulting no Naiyo to Kongo no Kadai* (Career Consulting in the Industrial World: its Nature and Future Problems), Nihon Rodo Kenkyu Zasshi, No. 517, 2003.

Flow of Services for Job Seekers

Every job seeker must go through steps (i) - (iii), when he or she visits their local Hellowork office for the first time (recipients of unemployment benefits are also eligible for an induction lecture.) the section to visit is determined according to situations concerning the reception desk, counseling desk for first visitors, ordinary counseling desk for vocational guidance, and so on.



Source: Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, "Guidelines for General Job Placement Placement," p.18.