
Introduction

The Professional Labor Market

The word “professionals” has a broad meaning, but in this issue, it refers to people with highly specialized knowledge in the specific fields in which they earn a living. Examples that come to mind include people with advanced certifications, such as doctors and lawyers, as well as researchers, chefs, musicians, and athletes.

Rather than being restricted to working only in a specific organization or company, professionals show a strong tendency to make their way by the specific skills they have acquired. Though it has often been regarded that a substantial number of Japanese firms have highly developed internal labor markets, Japanese people have begun to show a deeper interest in working as professionals and in the process for producing these professionals. The following points can be put forth as the reasons behind this.

Firstly, the number of people involved in specialized and technical professions has increased. Among these are a number of people who make their way not by using the same kind of skill as the craftsmen of the past, but by using specialized skills that not everyone can easily acquire.

Secondly, since Japan’s economy is not in good condition, there has been a visible change in what people are asking of their firms. Because of this, many workers are now studying toward acquiring the qualifications they will need to protect themselves when they leave their firms, and the “qualification fad” has continued among college students who are preparing for finding a job after graduation. These seems to be due to the notion that gaining such qualifications is highly valued in the society as proof that a person has acquired a high level of specialized knowledge.

Thirdly, it is now widely recognized that serious problems have arisen related to training physicians, legal professionals, and researchers (in the broad sense of the word), all of whom could be called representatives of the “specialized-knowledge professional.” Typical problems are the issue of doctor shortages, confusion concerning the law school system, and the problem of the highly-educated working poor, or those who cannot find regular work even with a Ph.D.

The current issue covers some of the problems in today’s professional labor market.

First, Atsushi Yoshida’s “Physicians’ Career Building and Their Shortage in Some Specialties” introduces career formation among doctors in Japan, and also attempts to shed light on the causes of the doctor shortage that has become a significant social issue. In the past, in the medical field, *Ikyoku*, or divisions of universities’ schools of medicine, exerted their monopolistic power over the allocation of doctors to private hospitals. However, when the postgraduate clinical training system was introduced in 2004, hospitals became able to directly recruit new graduates, and since that time there has been an increasing tendency for newly graduated physicians not to join *Ikyoku*. The role that the *Ikyoku* alumni network plays in physicians’ career formation is predicted to continue diminishing into the future as well. Additionally, if the shortage of doctors comes from the fact that the total number of physicians falls short of the demand, the internal rate of return should be higher for doctors, but no such tendency is observed. Rather, Yoshida points out, the recent

growth in the number of female doctors, who tend to prefer certain specialties and begin to move from hospitals to clinics at an early stage in their careers, could aggravate the shortage of doctors in the specialized fields of surgery, obstetrics, pediatrics, and anesthesiology.

Another profession that requires an extremely high level of qualification is the legal professional. Tomio Kinoshita's "Problems with the Legal Professional Training Mechanism: From the Perspective of Economics" emphasizes that the legal professional training system and the law school system need to be looked at as the framework to ensure that students who aspire to be involved in the justice system make an investment in their human capital. Currently, there are far too many law schools and the pass rate for the bar examination has fallen below 30%, and behind this is the issue that little attention was paid to the situation of law school students, who were to play the principal role in the recent reform of the legal professional training system, while the justice system (the Bar Association and the Ministry of Justice), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, and each university were trying to pursue their own independent benefit. The article draws the conclusion that pursuing a career in the legal profession has become increasingly risky for students, and that these issues are hindering the realization of optimum human capital investment. In conclusion, Kinoshita argues that three reforms would be effective, namely (i) limiting the total enrollment at law schools, (ii) consolidating smaller schools, and (iii) maintaining the number of passing bar examinees over the medium to long-term.

Kinoshita's article also argues that, looking at the distribution of examinees' scores on the national bar examination and assuming that the test takers' average levels of ability remained the same from 2007 to 2009, the criteria for passing the examination must have been raised during these three years. The suggestion that the bar examination, which should of its essence be a qualifying examination, may actually be turning into a competitive examination, provides interesting perspective in considering how qualifications in general should function.

In "The Ph.D. as a Professional: Current Status and Issues Concerning the Early Careers of Doctorate Holders," Shinichi Kobayashi looks at establishing a position for doctoral graduates within the labor market as "doctorate holders." There is a strong tendency to explain the fact that doctorate holders are facing worsening employment conditions in university faculty and other research positions as coming from excess supply of doctoral students and post-docs. However, this article argues that an aspect of this is that the actual situation of "doctorate holders" is not necessarily being appropriately reflected in current statistics. Further, Kobayashi points out that rather than the narrow former way of looking at doctoral programs, which saw them as having the ultimate goal of training a small number of academic leaders (the "pipeline model"), a new image of the Ph.D. is coming to the forefront, with a new perspective expressed as "one profession, multiple careers," focusing on the variety in careers for scientists (the "tree model"). It is clear that even now, graduate schools that nurture academics as human resources are also functioning to produce human resources for society as a whole, and this article treats the necessity of reexamining the post-doctorate issue, based on this perspective.

The articles up until this point focus on the professional in terms of highly intellectual, specialized professions. Artists and athletes are another type of professional, ones who make full use

of human artistic sensibilities and physical capabilities. People who work in professional sports, in particular, must inevitably face retirement at a comparatively early stage in life, as most of these abilities reach a peak while the athlete is still young.

Takahashi and Shigeno's "Career Transitions in the J-League: Theories and Practices of Career Support for Professional Football Players" deals with this issue, focusing on professional football (soccer) players. In 2002, the Career Support Center was established within Japan's professional football league, the J-League, and has been working actively to give various kinds of support to both players who are currently active and players who are about to retire in finding employment and schooling. In addition to undergoing the psychological damage of losing their identities, many players who are facing retirement have no vision for their long lives after retirement, and they often lack preparation for this part of their lives. Accordingly, the Career Support Center's activities are highly valued by the players as providing a valuable service. At the same time, this article points out, no matter how much support they have around them, nothing can move forward unless the players themselves are willing to make it happen, and Takahashi and Shigeno stress the importance of providing them the opportunity to do so.

It has long been discussed how to position professionals in labor laws. Ikuko Mizushima's "The Legal Issues Surrounding Professionals in Relation to Labor Law" first examines the "worker characteristics" of the professional. "Worker characteristics" are usually judged not on the type of profession in which a person works, but on his/her working relationship with his/her employer. Additionally, Mizushima takes up the two issues of the working hours of physicians and the dismissal of professionals, from the perspective of labor law concerning professionals, who are also workers. One point often at issue is that hospital physicians have working hours that put them on duty day and night. Moreover, in determining the social appropriateness of reasons for dismissing them, as well, this article cites cases in which doctors' employment was effectively terminated when they showed a lack of the high levels of ability and qualifications expected of them, and asserts that this reflects what society asks of people in such highly specialized professions.

I very much hope that the articles contained in this issue will be of use in helping our readership's understanding of Japan's professional labor market.

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