
The Psychological Impact of Job Loss in Japan after the “Lehman Shock”

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This paper analyzes the psychological impact of job loss using the qualitative KJ method of research, based on interviews conducted with seven people who lost their jobs at foreign companies in Japan as a result of the corporate rationalization carried out after the collapse of Lehman Brothers. Of the seven people, three worked for foreign IT companies (Group A). These are all highly-educated people who have remained unemployed for a long period of time since they lost their jobs after working for their last employers for a number of years. As they have not overcome the psychological shock caused by losing their jobs, they are at a loss about how to come to terms with the harsh reality and make a major change of course. The other four of the seven people worked for foreign financial institutions (Group B). They have overcome the shock of losing their jobs, which they now view as an opportunity to switch to a new working style. The stark difference between the responses of these two groups indicates that from the psychological viewpoint, what Japanese workers must do as they face the harsh winds of globalization is to see abrupt, rapid change in their situation in a positive light and respond to it positively. It is also important to develop strategies to promote such positive thinking and behavior.

I. Introduction

Western countries have a history of sociological and psychological research on unemployment that dates back to the era of the Great Depression (1929) (Bekke 1933; Jahoda 1982). However, Japanese research activity in this field remains slack in comparison. This paper examines the psychological impact that job loss resulting from corporate rationalization has on the individual, based on interviews with people who lost their jobs after the so-called “Lehman Shock” of 2008, which shook the global economy and financial markets after the collapse of major U.S. brokerage house Lehman Brothers.

Losing one’s job is a serious form of “object loss,” so it is very important to take account of the psychological aspect of this when providing support to the unemployed. As Freud (1961) points out, work is man’s strongest tie to reality and unemployment loosens man’s grip on reality. Okonogi (1979), a pioneering expert on Freudian psychology in Japan, defines object loss as follows: 1. death of or separation from the object of affection and dependence; 2. change in working environment or break with one’s position or role ([i] loss of a person with whom one has closely identified [ii] loss of the working environment with which one has identified and [iii] loss of the role and style necessary for adapting to the working environment); 3. loss of pride, ideals or possessions ([i] loss of identity and [ii] loss of possessions).

The object loss experienced by unemployed people represents a multilayered and serious psychological problem. According to Hirokawa (2006), who conducted interviews with people who had lost their jobs after the Lehman Shock, many unemployed people regard their job loss as an abrupt declaration of farewell by the object of their strong affection and dependence, or as a personal rejection. They are expelled from their organizations, lose their affiliations with their companies and job positions, which are evidence of their identity, lose their personal relationships with their bosses, colleagues and subordinates, and experience radical changes in their daily routines, such as the disappearance of the need to go to work. Their families worry about them, which adds to their psychological pressure all the more. Naturally, they also face economic problems as they lose their sources of income.

How do unemployed people overcome these losses? Harvey (2002) argues that when a man faces a crisis in his life, contextualizing his experience of loss by giving words to his sorrows and narrating them will give him the power to fight against depression and loss of hope. To heal after a loss, the following process (narrative-behavior model) is necessary: experiencing serious loss → formulating a narrative, which means understanding the meaning of one's loss → narrating the loss, which means talking to a person who cares about that loss → undergoing a change of identity → dealing with the loss in a constructive manner. Going through this process enables people to gain something from their losses. A change of identity refers to a radical change in the way a person views himself/herself that results from the experience of a serious loss.

In career counseling practice, it is presumed that counselors enable people to recover from identity loss not by applying theoretical metaphors for crisis and opportunity to individual cases, but by having them narrate their crisis-transition process in their own words. This indicates that the concept of social constructivism, which attempts to create reality through language, and the study of story-telling as part of life-story research and narrative therapy are useful in career counseling research (White [2000], Krumboltz [1996], Cochran [1997], and Sugiura [2004]).

In 2001 and 2002, when the unemployment rate in Japan was higher than 5%, this author conducted a research survey (Hirokawa 2006) regarding psychological support for unemployed people, using outplacement companies as the field of research. In addition, in 2008, the author conducted a survey on career consultants commissioned by public employment support centers (Hirokawa 2008). In light of the experience gained in these studies, the author believes that psychological research into unemployment must necessarily focus on three points: (i) the mental care and career development aspect; (ii) specific ideals of psychological support; and (iii) the study of counseling approaches and processes that are effective in supporting unemployed people.

Takahashi (2010) has recently made a notable achievement in the field of psychological research into unemployment. She examined in detail the findings of previous studies, both domestic and foreign, into the psychology of unemployment and support for the unemployed, and conducted meticulous research on individuals' unemployment experiences

Profiles of Subjects

Subjects	Gender	Marital status	Age	Last job	Number of employers worked for	Duration of unemployment (months)	longevity of work at the last employer
A	Male	Married	57	Publisher	1	5	34
B	Male	Married	50	Foreign IT company	5	12	4
C	Male	Married	49	Foreign IT company	5	14	14
D	Male	Married	45	Foreign IT company	2	11	15
E	Male	Married	39	Foreign financial institution	4	3	3
F	Female	Single	37	Foreign financial institution	5	3	5
G	Female	Married	40	Foreign financial institution	7	5	6
H	Female	Single	39	Foreign financial institution	5	11	3

and the psychological support provided by public employment support centers. Takahashi suggested that “it may not be until unemployed people go through the retrospective process of looking back at their own unemployment experiences that psychological support for them can be provided.” For unemployed people, understanding their own unemployment experiences in the context of their lives is quite meaningful. What is needed is counseling research conducted from the perspective of how effective psychological support should be provided with regard to both career development and mental care. However, research is seldom conducted from this perspective.

II. Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to describe the reality of job loss due to the post-Lehman Shock rationalization, as narrated by people who have fallen victim to the ax. The interviewees in the survey and the method of analysis are as follows:

Subjects : The subjects consisted of eight people introduced to the author by career consultants through reemployment support companies (see the table above)—five men and three women—ranging in age from 35 to 57 (average age at 45). The longevity of the unemployment period among them ranges from three to 14 months (average period at 8 months). Of the eight people, seven last worked at foreign companies and one at a

Japanese company. This paper focuses on the seven who last worked at foreign companies.

Method: The study was conducted through partially structured interviews. In the interviews, the subjects were asked about: their basic career histories; backgrounds to their resignations; current livelihoods; their feelings and opinions (concerning the past, present and future); family members' responses; and key points of effective support, in that order. The duration of interview per subject was approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded with the subjects' consent and verbatim records were created. The study was conducted in February and March 2010.

Analysis: The analysis used the KJ method (Kawakita 1967), a qualitative research approach developed in Japan. Keywords were extracted from the verbatim records and divided into groups of related words, which were arranged in a single word map (see the figure) (Yamada 1999). The author underlined those parts of the interview records that are regarded as particularly important.

III. Results

Below, the story of post-Lehman Shock job loss is narrated in a way that reflects the word map. As a result of the rapid deterioration of business performance, foreign companies carried out rationalization measures, including withdrawal from Japan and consolidation of operations in the country. The story of job loss as narrated by the people who lost those jobs played out as follows:

Ruthless Job Cuts

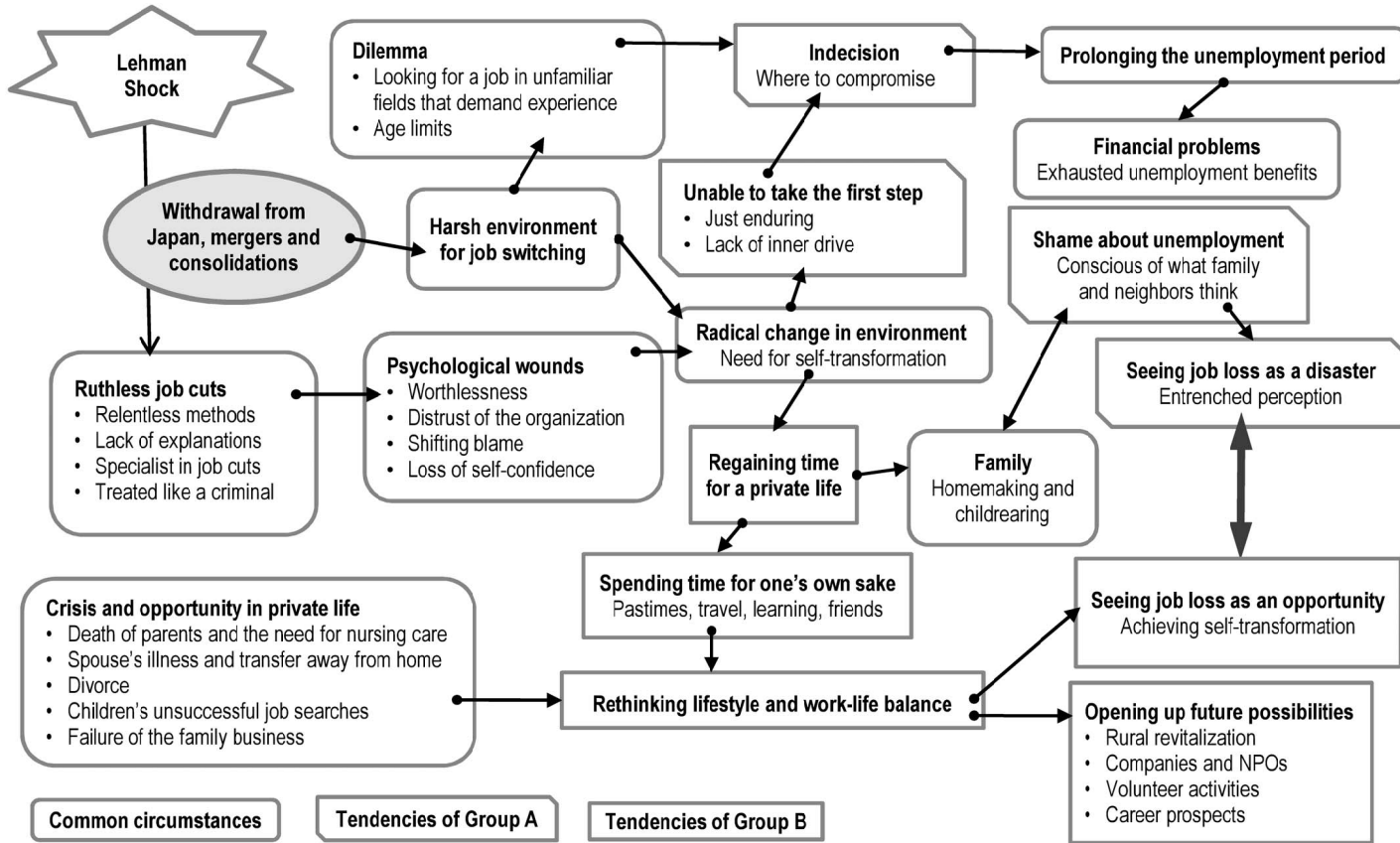
An Entire Division Guttled by Job Cuts

Our company decided to reduce personnel costs by 25%, which meant that one in four employees should be dismissed. In my department, my boss, who had long been trying to protect the department from the ax, was forced to resign three years ago. In my division, all of the employers were fired. The new boss was a kind of specialist in job cuts. As job cutting is a popular rationalization measure in this industry, there are many people who move from company to company, boasting records of a series of successful job cuts (Mr. C, a 49 year-old employee at a foreign IT company).

Abrupt Layoffs without Sufficient Explanations

I was summoned by my boss on the day that the head office had announced a job cutting program. I suppose that preparations had been going on for some time, but the boss abruptly told me, "You are on the firing list, so you've got to go." It was like receiving a mandatory order to resign. No further explanation was offered. (Mr. C, a 49 year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

As a certain proportion of the workforce was earmarked for job cutting at our



KJ Method Chart

company, our colleagues left one after another. It was not unusual to suddenly find a colleague's desk empty when arriving in the office in the morning after a holiday. They would abruptly be summoned to a certain room, notified of their dismissal, made to sign the paperwork and be sent away with a few of their personal belongings. It was completely unceremonious. They would in no way be allowed to return to their desks. I was let go after receiving just my bag and a few other things, and I was told that my other possessions would be sent to my address later. I was made to sign the paperwork, without any room for protest. (Ms. G, a 40-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

Psychological Wounds

Feelings of Worthlessness

As I mentioned when I explained my career background, I had left my previous company of my own accord, but this time, I was forced to resign even though I had no wish to quit. I felt worthless. (Mr. C, a 49 year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Shifting Blame

Our company had no intention of protecting jobs in the first place. If the company wanted to reduce personnel costs by 25%, I assume it would have been possible to preserve jobs by cutting salaries by 25%. But there was little chance that our company would consider an option like that. Instead of taking responsibility, the top managers, including the president, created a job cutting committee, cobbled together a list of employees to be fired and told them to go. First and foremost, I was dismayed at having been singled out for firing and angry at the top managers for not taking responsibility. (Mr. C, a 49 year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Treated Like a Criminal

As soon as I was let go, I was treated like a criminal. I was prohibited from using my computer for what the company said were security reasons. You know, foreign companies confiscate all of their dismissed employees' work-related possessions. In Japan, too, the story is the same. When we are notified of our dismissal, we are told to return our computers. In principle, all our belongings, including our computers, are confiscated. It was completely shocking to me how much I was treated like a criminal. (Mr. C, a 49 year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Fighting against the Company While Taking Anti-Depressants

I received a notice encouraging voluntary resignation. When I asked whether that meant job cutting for rationalization, I got no answer. I complained about a lack of sufficient explanation. I made a counteroffer on the amount of severance pay, at which the president, who was a foreigner, expressed surprise. From the following day, I was prohibited from entering the office. I could not use my computer. I left the company after making it

clear that I saw what was going on as a forcible resignation. As the amount of severance pay that came up during settlement negotiations was close to what I had in mind, I signed. People who remained at the company agonized alone, without consulting lawyers or labor consultation centers, and in the end, they lost their nerve, if I may say so, and they ended up signing, too. I am by nature susceptible to bouts of depression and I have accepted that as part of my life. But somewhere in my mind, I feel that it is natural to pick up the gauntlet. (Mr. E, a 39-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

Harsh Environment for Switching Jobs

Struggling to Reach the Interview Stage

I suppose that I registered with a total of 23 or so recruiting agencies, and I reached the interview stage at two companies last year. I filed job applications with nearly 40 companies, and yet I reached the first-round interviews at just two companies. This year, I filed job applications with more than 20 companies in January, as I sent an application letter almost every day. But I have not passed the paper-based screening at any company. (Mr. B, a 50-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

This is not an era in which experience working in the United States or holding certifications and qualifications count. You have to fully meet the criteria required by the company. A few years ago, the story was different. Now that there is a flood of applicants, employers weed them out. So, it is a rather difficult situation. (Mr. B, a 50-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Leave or Stay, a Hell Awaits Either Way

The overall workload declined. However, the workload on each employee increased because the work of the employees who left the company was transferred to the remaining ones. One of my colleagues who stayed died – I think he probably killed himself. An employee who left the company also committed suicide. I guess I have to consider myself to be lucky to be alive, at least. (Mr. C, a 49 year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Uncertainty over the Key Hiring Criteria

I feel as if I am groping my way in the dark. I do not know what my strengths and weaknesses are. How to write a resume is often mentioned as an important issue, but that is not the point, I think. As I often say, it is like winning the lottery. The issue is not whether we have certain strengths or weaknesses. It seems more hit or miss than that, as if employers make their selections based on a gut feeling that such-and-such a guy “may be a good pick.” (Mr. B, a 50-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Dilemma

Looking for a Job in an Unfamiliar Field That Demands Experience

I am hoping to work in the supply chain field, as I previously worked in the same kind of job. If at all possible, I wanted to switch from the IT industry to the medical care industry. I have some experience related to electronic medical appliances. Given my age, I knew it would be my last chance, and I figured that if I was going to find a long-lasting job, the medical care industry was a good choice because it is resilient to economic cycles and relatively stable. However, even in the medical industry, the situation is getting increasingly difficult, as employers are weeding out applicants who have no industry experience. So finally, I have come to the conclusion that the IT industry is my only remaining option, and I am now looking for a job that has to do with IT or a job in consumer goods that requires IT experience. Only two weeks ago, I filed an application with Company A through a recruitment agency, as the company was willing to accept workers without the relevant experience. But it is difficult to pass the paper-based screening. (Mr. B, a 50-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Age Limits Posing a Huge Obstacle

With the paper-based screening, one problem is my age. I don't understand why age limits need to be set. Looking back at the history of Japanese culture, elderly vassals used to serve the young warlords during the Sengoku era of civil war, so it seems unreasonable to set age limits. I think that the government, particularly the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, should instruct companies to abolish age limits. I believe that managing older workers is one of the essential abilities a manager should have. If the managers are unable to do that, the company should be held accountable for appointing incompetent managers. Employers generally set the age limit at around 45 years old. (Mr. B, a 50-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Unable to Take the First Step

Lack of Inner Drive

One problem is that I cannot bring myself to take action. Although I know in the bottom of my heart that I have to make a move, the drive that I need to do it just isn't there. (Mr. D, a 45-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

A Blank Resume

Although I am not being cowed, I feel like putting off making any moves until some time later. I have put off taking action over and over again. This tells the whole story. A blank page. One year after I lost my job, I have not finished writing my resume. (Mr. D, a 45-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Career Prospects Too Dire to Be Discussed

I wonder if there are any people who can afford to discuss their career prospects. Maybe one in ten people can afford to do that, and yet I suppose that the remaining nine cannot. We just cannot afford to have that kind of discussion as long as we are company employees. (Mr. D, a 45-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Indecision

Uncertain Where to Compromise

Even if I join a company, it would be meaningless if I leave it six months later. I don't know how to settle my own feelings. I have been overwhelmed by them. There is another me within me. That inner self asks me, “What are you going to do?” This time, I don't want to make the wrong decision. (Mr. D, a 45-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Financial Problems

Looming Financial Squeeze

The problem may be that I am not having such a hard time, as I am not yet in a financial squeeze. Even so, I cannot afford to continue to live a leisurely life forever. I will have to break with this state of affairs sooner or later. (Mr. D, a 45-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Shame about Unemployment

Keeping It Secret from Family Members

As my mother died only a short time ago, I have not told my father about me losing my job. Although he may have some inkling that it has happened, I have refrained from revealing the news to him to avoid adding to his distress. I have not told my daughter who is a university junior about it, either, as I don't want her to worry. Although she may also have some idea, I won't tell her. I have confided only in my wife. My previous company allowed employees to work at home, so now, I am pretending to be working at home again, confining myself mostly to my room. This is a delicate time for my daughter herself. If she had already found a job, I might have told her the truth, but she is having a hard time herself. (Mr. B, a 50-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

I have not told my children the truth. My eight-year old daughter may have noticed something, as I stay at home most of the time. But maybe because she does not want me to think she's being nosy, she hasn't asked any questions. (Mr. D, a 45-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Conscious of the Inquisitive Eyes of Neighbors

I do not attend my kid's events or go to parent's day at her school, even though I have the time to do so, because if I participated in that kind of event too frequently, it would at-

tract people's attention. Also, I refrain from frequenting my kid's preschool for the same reason. (Mr. D, a 45-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

I was conscious of neighbors watching me when I went out to take out the trash. When I was working for my previous employer, I sometimes worked at home, so I pretended to be doing that again, saying that a computer and a telephone line are all I need for my work. (Mr. D, a 45-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Crisis and Opportunity in Private Life

Death of Parents and the Need for Nursing Care

My mother died last September, and my father lives alone. Although he is still in good health at age 82, I am planning to give him financial assistance when his condition becomes such that he needs to move to a nursing care facility. (Mr. B, a 50-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Wife's Illness

Since I quit my job in the spring, my wife has been ill. She had an operation and spent some time in the hospital, so I did not look for a job during that time. (Mr. C, a 49-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Husband's Transfer Away from Home

When I returned from my assignment overseas, my husband was transferred away from home. Now, he lives alone. It may take a few years before he comes back. (Ms. G, a 40-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

Divorce

As soon as I was divorced, I lost my job and fell into a state of depression. The severance pay was given to my ex-wife to be used as living expenses. (Mr. E, a 39-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

Failure of Family Business

I am working with a lawyer to reduce the debts left by my parents' failed real estate business. (Mr. E, a 39-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

Regaining Time for a Private Life

Pastimes

I started snowboarding. I also got my motorcycle license. I was afraid that I might crack under the pressure unless I tried something new for a change. Snowboarding helped me let off steam and relax, and that was really good for me. Physical exercise created a change of pace and gave me the opportunity to consider what to do next. (Mr. E, a

39-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

Travel

I knew that I would be laid off. My company was cutting jobs, as the securities industry had been hit hard by the collapse of Lehman Brothers. The company was also outsourcing some work. I started thinking about which countries I would like to go after quitting. Although I wanted to study abroad, I thought it would be too hard on my husband. So then I started thinking of just traveling abroad on my own, and my husband told me, “Go wherever you like and study there,” so I went to New York for a three-month stay. (Ms. G, a 40-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

Friends

I felt that it would be better to avoid meeting people until the situation settled down. But then I went to visit a close friend of mine from high school. I just thought that I had to let off some steam. I told him everything, including about my divorce and losing my job. He had me come over and served me sukiyaki. (Mr. E, a 39-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

Family

Our child was still little, so I became a stay-at-home dad. My wife is still working for the same company. She may lose her job anytime, though, since the company has recently merged with another firm. After seeing my wife off when she leaves for work, I set myself to doing the household chores. The day passes very quickly. I have free time from 9 a.m. till around 4:30 p.m., when our child comes home. My wife prepares breakfast in the morning, and I am responsible for washing dishes. For dinner, I do everything including shopping for ingredients. (Mr. D, a 45-year-old employee at a foreign IT company)

Rethinking Lifestyle, Working and the Work-Life Balance

Making a Fresh Start

I finished working out the debts left by my parents’ failed business, got divorced and lost my job, so I feel that I have undergone a full cycle of private and public life events. As I have now reset my life, I expect no further setbacks ahead as long as I stay healthy. I would like to use 2010 as a year of preparation for a leap forward. (Mr. E, a 39-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

Keeping Distance from the Company

I think it’s inevitable that I will switch jobs again in the future, so I plan to acquire skills that may be required when I move on to another company, and I also intend to keep my information on file with the job change information site. It is essential for me to maintain my peace of mind by always keeping my options available. Some people may look

askance at keeping an escape route open like that, but our employer does not protect us. I suppose I will continue to be on the lookout for an opportunity, preparing for the day when I may be fired or get fed up with the company. I have taught myself to keep some distance between me and my company, for better or for worse.

(Mr. E, a 39-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

Seeing Job Loss As an Opportunity

Providential Chance

I used to be too busy trying to make more money to take the time to reflect on the significance of educating myself or contributing to society, so in that respect, I feel like maybe God was giving me the chance to do that. Now, I get the chance to talk with a lot of different people. When I was always busy preparing for presentations, I did not have any time to do that, and now I realize that I should value it. I suppose there are plenty of things that I overlooked when I was busy. Recently, I had an opportunity to meet with a friend from college who is now devoting herself to raising her children. As I have realized that other people are spending their days in a meaningful way, it has occurred to me how deficient I am as a human being by comparison. I feel like I need to make a bigger effort to lead a more meaningful life. (Ms. F, a 37-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

Waking Up to the Importance of Volunteering

Losing my job was like a gift, so I feel that something bad could happen to me unless I pay it back. That is why I have been volunteering for the past year. I woke up to the importance of volunteering only after I lost my job, and I now feel like I am doing something worthwhile. (Ms. H, a 39-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

Sense of Elation Overcomes Worries

My husband and I have no children, so it's just the two of us. It was like my husband was an aircraft carrier from which I took off in a fighter plane. I would fly away somewhere for awhile and return to it to rest. The carrier would go on in its own course. We are quite different types of people. Recently, my husband was transferred to a different location and can't live at home. Now, I am kind of embarking on a voyage on a new ship of my own, albeit a small one, although I still feel as if I am flying in the sky. I have tried new things before, and I am always worried and scared when I do. However, at the same time, I always feel a sense of elation that overcomes my worries and fears. (Ms. G, a 40-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

Opening Up Future Possibilities

Learning Know-How about Rural Revitalization

I am scheduled to start my new job next week. This job that I found is out in the country. I used to work in a job that dealt with hotel investment, so this time, I will work to

turn around struggling resort hotels. My former boss from my previous company invited me to join him. Since I am single, I thought that I would find it easier to make a fresh start if I live away from Tokyo and from my parents. I also hope to gain some knowhow about business turnaround and revitalization in rural communities. When I returned to my home recently, it occurred to me that if something happened to either of my parents, I will have to come back immediately so that I can care for them. In any case, I intend to quit working as a company employee sometime in the future. I am convinced that I must return to my hometown some day and start my own business there. (Mr. E, a 39-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

Career Prospects

I think that the next 10 years, while I am in my forties, will be a critical period for me. In the future, I would like to work without attaching myself to an organization—to work freelance or start business in partnership with somebody, for example. When I’m a bit more certain in my mind about the path to take, I would like to go back to school. I want to take a correspondence course in a relevant field and if possible, I would like to go on to graduate school as well. I am also still hoping to be able to get back to the United States. (Ms. G, a 40-year-old employee at a foreign financial institution)

IV. Deliberation

From the above narrative, it is clear that foreign companies operating in Japan are as ruthless and tough in their approach to job cuts here as they are in their home countries. Their way of cutting jobs inflicts psychological wounds on the employees, creates feelings of worthlessness and foments anger and distrust of the organization and bosses. In the meantime, if employees dismissed by foreign companies wish to obtain a similar type of job in the same industry, there is a shortage of job openings given the wave of job cuts resulting from the withdrawal from Japan, mergers and consolidations triggered by the Lehman Shock. This situation is unlikely to turn around anytime soon. Consequently, the range of options available for the unemployed is narrow unless they are willing to take their chance in unfamiliar fields. However, even employees willing to look for new jobs in unfamiliar fields face a dilemma, as many companies hire only employees who have relevant experience. In a situation like this, unemployed people have to achieve a dramatic self-transformation so that they can make a fresh start and adapt to changes in the working environment. The above circumstances are universal to people who have lost jobs at foreign companies in Japan since the Lehman Shock.

However, the two groups of people studied perceived and responded to their job loss quite differently. The first, Group A, comprises people who worked at foreign IT companies, and the second, Group B, comprises people who worked at foreign financial institutions.

Group A consists of three men with an average age of 48 (range from 45 to 50). All

three are married with children and have either undergraduate or graduate school degrees. Although one of them has changed jobs frequently, the average job longevity at the last company was 11 years, which suggests that Group A has a relatively strong sense of belonging to the company. None of the three have told their children or parents about having lost their jobs. Their average unemployment period is approximately one year, and as they have received the full period of unemployment benefits, they may have to start worrying about their financial situation soon. While they understand intellectually that their futures will remain dim unless they accept the change in working environment and take their chances in unfamiliar fields, their hearts have not come to terms with that reality. One of them has not been able to finish writing his resume in more than a year since losing his job. The survey results illustrate these men's failure to bring themselves to take the first step in a new direction, for which there are several presumed reasons. Given the looming financial squeeze, it is uncertain how long they can afford to continue sitting on the fence in the hope that their situations will improve. As they have families to support, they are at a loss as to where they should compromise with regard to income, company size and other factors. The circumstances are in place for prolonging their period of unemployment.

Meanwhile, the people in Group B have an average age of 39 (range from 37 to 40), and none of them have families to support. Their academic backgrounds vary widely, with one of them having U.S. graduate school degrees and another having only a senior high school diploma. As far as employment arrangements are concerned, all people in Group A were regular employees, while those in Group B include a person who started as a temporary staff worker and switched to the status of a contract worker and then to a regular employee. For Group B, the average job longevity at the last company was approximately four years, less than half the average for Group A. The people in Group B presumably value autonomy in career development more than those in Group A, and because of this, keep more distance between themselves and their employers. Some members of Group B are thinking of working freelance or starting a business on their own, and one of them is considering working for an NPO. Partly because they do not have children, all of the people in Group B have revealed to their families that they have lost their jobs. Having regained the time for a private life, they are all deliberately making a change of pace by spending it on pastimes and travel for their own sake, rather than for the sake of their families. Some of them have begun to review their work-life balance, while others are starting to see new possibilities open up. We must allow for the fact that most of them have been unemployed for a relatively short period of time and so have not acutely felt the hardship of living without a job or of looking for a new job. They all see their job loss as an opportunity, in sharp contrast to the entrenched thinking of Group A that losing their jobs was a disaster.

Douglas T. Hall (2002), a career development researcher and organizational consultant, argues that as the psychological contract between the employer and employee changes as a result of the industrial structure, employees need to pursue a "protean career" in which they proactively work at career development and constantly adapt to changes in the working

environment. The protean career is characterized by the following concepts:

- Individual employees, rather than the organization, take charge of career management.
- A career is a lifetime, continuous process that involves the person’s experiences, skills, learning, opportunity and identity change (career maturity should be measured in terms of not chronological age but “career age”).
- Career goals are set in terms of psychological success, such as job satisfaction and feelings of self-growth, rather than objective achievements as evaluated by other people (promotion, position, salary, etc.).

Hall characterizes identity and adaptability as essential elements for the development of a protean career, and argues that if people do not have a solid identity as an “internal compass,” they behave like chameleons, always changing their color. Flexibility and adaptability must be rooted in the foundation of a strong and clear identity. To develop their identities, people need not only have self-awareness but also know how to learn more about themselves. To that end, they need to receive feedback and support from other people and go through a relational process. When they reflect on and try to learn from their experiences, it is more effective for them to do so with the appropriate partners. As a way to do that, Hall recommends that people keep records of what they have learned. People can deepen their learning if they keep records of, and deeply reflect on, career-related problems and changes that occur in their lives, including everyday incidents as well as turning-point events, describing what occurred, why it occurred, what can be done to deal with it, and with whom it can be shared, and then share those experiences with the right people (bosses, colleagues, friends, family members, etc.).

Hall emphasizes the relational approach, which is based on the concept that career development is achieved through the process of mutual learning as part of relationships among people. A career perspective that emphasizes self-fulfillment and relationships with other people, has significant implications for those people within Japanese organizations who have been dismayed at having their self-fulfillment measured by an external yardstick as a result of a rapid shift in emphasis from team performance to individual performance, and who have a sense of unease about the concept of using a change of jobs as a way to climb the career ladder.

Van Vianen, De Pater, and Preenen (2009) pointed out that the meaning of career adaptability has recently changed from a turning point between different career stages or the balance between a person’s work and his/her private environment (Goodman 1994) to the state of being ready to cope with the predictable tasks of preparing for and participating in the work role and with the unpredictable adjustments prompted by changes in work and the working environment. (Savickas 1997).

The ability to accurately predict changes in the working environment in a timely fa-

shion and the ability to make adjustments as soon as possible when unpredicted changes occur are the critical elements of career adaptability. This is evident from the contrast between the responses of Groups A and B to job loss, as shown in this paper.

V. Conclusion

Above, this paper has described the psychology of people who have lost jobs at foreign companies as a result of the wave of corporate rationalization triggered by the Lehman Shock, based on their own narratives of their unemployment experiences as obtained through interviews. Of particular note is our finding that these people have perceived and responded to their job loss differently, despite invariably experiencing ruthless job reductions and a harsh environment for finding a new job.

People like Ms. G in Group B (a 40-year employee at a foreign financial institution) who feel a sense of elation as they face rapid changes in the working environment, are presumably a minority in Japan. In an extreme case, Mr. D in Group A (a 45-year-old employee at a foreign IT company), cannot bring himself to make a fresh start and cannot even complete his resume and file a single job application in the year after losing his job, as he continues to face uncertain career prospects. What kind of support would be effective to help people like him? The more achievements people make in terms of academic attainment, job performance, status and income, and the greater the burden they are saddled with in terms of families to support and housing loans to repay, for example, the less able or willing they become to extricate themselves from the tangles of their life. However, unless they are ready and brave enough to face up to the harsh reality and come to terms with the consequences of corporate rationalization, unemployed people will find it difficult to get out of their rut. If they do too much soul-searching, they could fall into a state of self-denial. The effective approach would be to prescribe cognitive-behavioral therapy that enables unemployed people to better understand the gap between themselves and the situation in which they find themselves in an objective and rational manner, helping them to change their mindset.

From the psychological viewpoint, what Japanese workers must do as they face the harsh winds of globalization is to see abrupt, rapid change in their situation in a positive light and respond to it positively. It is also important to develop schemes to promote such positive thinking and behavior.

This paper does not include a detailed analysis of support for unemployed people, a matter that the author hopes to study sometime in the future in relation to the narrative approach that encourages unemployed people to recognize and explain their unemployment experiences as a turning point. The author intends to more closely analyze the data collected through this survey and conduct a new survey on a larger sample population that covers a wider range of age groups and business sectors. Based on the new survey, the author plans to examine differences in how different groups of people recognize changes in the working

environment and what causes these differences, and to study effective support measures as well as counseling approaches and processes, in terms of both mental care and career development.

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