Introduction

The Japanese Workplace Today

In this issue of *Japan Labor Review*, the focus is on "the Japanese workplace today." For working people, it may be difficult to step back and take an analytical view of the place where they work every day; it is simply too close to them. But places where people work are also places where various work-related problems occur, including long working hours and harassment. The quality of the workplace must also be a matter of concern for management, as it affects productivity, among other things. For a wide range of people, then, it would be more than useful to keep abreast of quality research on the workplace.

To compound the issue, workplace-related problems are changing all the time, in tandem with economic, social and legal environments. Indeed, the circumstances of workplaces themselves have been going through some significant changes in recent years. For example, as highlighted by the papers in this Special Edition, these include trends in corporate strategies and the increasing emphasis on performance in personnel systems; expectations of a work-life balance; the creation of new criteria for certifying mental disorders; the emergence of a knowledge-based society and the advance of IT; and changes in teleworking practices after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami disaster. Amid these changes, workplaces face a number of challenges today. It is therefore important that we take another look at the workplace, based on new perspectives and empirical data, as well as the cumulative body of research. To achieve that goal, the aim of this Special Edition will be to consider the situation of Japanese workplaces in the modern day.

In *Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Contemporary Workplaces in Japan*, Ken'ichiro Tanaka highlights the concept of "organizational citizenship behavior" in connection with autonomous work behavior by employees in the workplace. After outlining the concept based on previous research, Tanaka discusses the positive effect of organizational citizenship behavior on an organization. Citing the introduction of performance-based pay systems in recent years as a change in the circumstances surrounding Japanese workplaces, Tanaka suggests that such systems could inhibit organizational citizenship behavior, as they tend to make employees focus too greatly on their own performance. This brings into question the very survival of organizational citizenship behavior, seen as traditionally established in Japanese workplaces. In light of this, Tanaka considers ways of promoting organizational citizenship behavior in the workplace, and asserts the importance of three key elements: firstly, optimizing work volumes and clarifying jobs and roles to avoid a sense of excessive workload and conflicts over job roles; secondly, ensuring fairness in systems of evaluation; and thirdly, fostering empowerment by delegating authority to employees. Of these, Tanaka concludes, it is particularly important to foster empowerment by establishing workplace environments that include supportive leadership by superiors.

In *The Impact of Prolonged Application of Short-Time Work Systems on the Careers*

of Regular Employees, Mitsuyo Matsubara turns the spotlight on types of work assigned to users of short working hour systems for regular employees, and considers how prolonged employment under such systems affects regular employees' careers. Using case analysis, Matsubara reveals that the work assigned to short working hour regular employees involves less urgency, rapidity and presence of new challenges than that of full-time regular employees, and that prolonged use of such systems could potentially delay career development. Meanwhile, cases of system users in management posts are also examined. These show that short working hour systems can be used for regular employees in management posts, through creative adjustments such as delegating authority and the use of telecommuting. Experience of management work from an early stage is an important means to this end. Various measures will be needed to balance the use of short working hour systems for regular employees with a company's need to secure human resources. These could include diversifying programs for training core personnel, correcting long working hours, or revising short working hour systems for regular employees. Matsubara shows that workplace managers play an important role in allocating work with a view to human resource development, as well as revising ways of performing work, motivating system users by discussing their career options, and so on.

Harassment has been identified as a serious problem arising from human relations in the workplace. In *Workplace Harassment, Mental Health, and the Law*, Ikuko Mizushima discusses the present status and challenges of mental health caused by human relations in the workplace from the standpoint of labor law studies, with reference to criteria for certifying mental disorders and previous litigation trends. Because human relations in the workplace are continuous, stress tends to persist and accumulate. Moreover, employees in a weaker position, based on the inevitable hierarchies of command and subordination or senior and junior, are more likely to accumulate stress. In legal terms, new criteria for occupational disease certification of work-related mental disorders were drawn up in December 2011. Now, workers may claim compensation for damages from employers and perpetrators if they suffer mental disorders due to harassment, etc., as well as being able to seek compensation for occupational disease. In reaction to this, Mizushima discusses the background to the creation of the new certification criteria, how they differ from the old Judgment Guidelines, and how harassment is treated under the new certification criteria. Among other issues also examined are trends in court cases related to occupational disease certification, and the range of compensation when the fact of harassment and the workers' psychological symptoms or mental disorders have been acknowledged.

Changes in the workplace, meanwhile, have an impact on people's working conditions. In *Teleworking and Changing Workplaces*, Akio Sato focuses on teleworking and categorizes its main types as telecommuting, mobile-work and *zaitaku* (stay-home) work, then studies trends in recent years, working conditions and other aspects of each working type. Based on his own research, Sato shows that the main purpose of companies and others introducing telecommuting has changed, since the Great East Japan Earthquake disaster,

from one of improving the work-life balance to one of continuing business and conserving energy; that mobile-work employees, introduced by companies mainly to reduce costs and extend time spent on customers, are working long hours at home under the de facto working hour system; and that, partly due to the emergence of "*zaitaku*-work agents" (work-at-home agents) who adopt a bidding system, remunerations for *zaitaku* work, including translation and other specialized occupations, are in a downward trend. Sato also outlines the legal protection currently available for various types of teleworking employee, and asserts the importance of research in gaining an accurate grasp of changes in teleworking without being influenced by expectation or judgmental pressure.

In *Diversification of "the Workplace" and Problems with Labor Law*, Hirokuni Ikezoe defines a workplace, based on the main existing legislation, as "a certain spatial location where the duty to perform labor based on a labor contract is discharged." Ikezoe then identifies work outside the workplace and working at home as prime examples of diversifying "workplaces," and considered issues of legal policy related to regulations on working hours and accident compensation. Work outside the workplace is attracting attention in connection with work (occupations); interest in working at home is more related to the work-life balance and managing risks such as major disasters. Based on these considerations, Ikezoe proposes that, even when applying the system of "conclusive presumption of hours worked" (the de facto working hour system), upper limit standards on work beyond statutory hours ought to be applied and health maintenance measures ought to be established by employers. On the other hand, the duty of employers to manage and keep track of hours worked should be distinct from whether or not de facto working hour systems can be applied; the aim should rather be to prevent long working hours and maintain health. There is no precedent for accident compensation in such cases, however. This is because working at home, in particular, is a working format not previously envisaged by the Industrial Accident Compensation Insurance Act. Ikezoe concludes that accidents unique to working at home should be anticipated and studied in practical detail.

As these descriptions reveal, the very breadth of themes covered in these papers suggests not only the extent of research being conducted on the workplace but also the diversity of issues surrounding the workplace. And there must be many more such issues. Indeed, several of the Special Edition papers have stressed the importance of making further progress in theoretical research on the themes dealt with here, as well as empirical research based on surveys, and legal and policy studies based on these. This Special Edition will hopefully provide an impetus for considering contemporary issues facing the workplace today.

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