

12 Work-Sharing

Not an emergency procedure

In these past several years, with the unemployment rate rising, the work-sharing debate has intensified even in Japan. In March 2002, as a form of a government labor-management agreement, the emergency job security scheme and the diversified employment scheme concerning Japan's work-sharing were organized.

For a period of time, the mass media were very much into this issue of work-sharing, but hardly any articles are published on the subject at the present. Amidst this background, the special characteristics of Japan's labor market are acting as a strong influence.

The purpose of work-sharing in the emergency job security scheme is to reduce the work hours and wages of current employees and to prevent the dismissals of extra workers. However, as this was utilized to overcome the streamline management in many Japanese businesses at the time of the oil shock, and is currently considered as a necessary employment adjustment measure, this is not a new scheme. In addition, saving employment is not reasonable when the danger of business bankruptcy approaches. On top of this, even if the so-called emergency job security scheme was introduced, the fact would still remain that reduced labor cost is not proportional to shortened work hours. This is because non-operation expenses other than wages, such as welfare, education and training costs, and so on, are not necessarily reduced by the number of decreased work hours, due to the fact that the labor cost per person increases in the end. Because paying overtime is much less than the cost of hiring new employees, the potential for creating new jobs is diminishing.

Always towards a dream

Today, it is commonly agreed upon in discussions to spread the diversified employment scheme for the purpose of Japan's work-sharing. This indicates a society which is able to adjust the work hours as necessary, according to the stages of life an employee is at.

Instead of the single-track life cycle which was "school-job-retirement" until now, in this society it is possible to change over at any time to the various dimensions of household, school, job (business), local communities, and so on. In the Netherlands, as part of the progress towards the growth of a service economy, the equal treatment of part-timers and full-timers (equal pay for equal jobs) has been realized, contributing to growth of employment. Related parties in Japan are basically headed towards the same direction.

However, problems are mounting. These include eliminating the status of permanent and nonpermanent employees, the tax system and social security system, economic measures, etc. It is still too early to tell where the diversified employment scheme is going.

12-1 The transitions between life stages in the diversified employment scheme society

