

Promoting “short-term regular employees”

The method of working as a “short-term regular employee” has the potential to change business and society. “Short-term regular employees” refers to workers who hold the same position, responsibilities, and undergo the same applicable skill evaluations and pay systems as full-time regular employees, but the weekly scheduled hours of work is shorter. It is understood that the idea of shorter work hours is no different from part-time work, but the key is that short-term regular employees would receive the same equal treatment as full-time regular employees.

Applicable short-term regular employees include many cases of regular employees in child nurturing and nursing care categories. A child-care leave law was established in 1990, and since then the number of businesses responding to the needs of employees and introducing systems for short-term work that support child nurturing and nursing care have been increasing.

When businesses are asked about their status for introducing short-term regular employment systems, 30% of businesses report that they already have a “system in place.” Furthermore, when one includes offices replying that such a system is “under consideration” or “could possibly be put to consideration in the future,” the number becomes over half (see Table 8-1).

When one looks at examples of how systems are being implemented, most systems had between 6 to 7 actual working hours. Salary is calculated by an hourly basis, and most businesses set targets through consultations with supervisors for what is feasible, given the amount of time spent at the company, and make assessments based not on the “volume of work accomplished (labor hours) but on the quality (content) of work performed.” (Tokyo Metropolitan Government Bureau of Industrial and Labor Affairs, “Study on the Feasibility of Short-term Regular Employees”, 2003.)

For unfamiliar workplaces as well

For businesses, resignations due to child nurturing and nursing care reasons decrease after introducing a short-term regular employee system, where positive effects in an employee’s ability to settle in to their position can be anticipated. In particular, the system is being introduced as department stores and other such companies manage to keep the skills that women have obtained through their experiences.

From the perspective of the individual working, it becomes possible to fulfill their household responsibilities while maintaining their status and assignments as regular employees. The biggest merit of this system is that one can flexibly adjust their time in response to their life stages without putting a halt to their career.

The merits for society are great as well. The progression of women in their careers is one of the causes of trends toward later marriage and having fewer children. If both work and child rearing can be realized, we could probably expect a positive effect against the trend of reduced childbirth. Furthermore, a system which allows us to move toward short-term work would be a powerful option, even concerning a soft landing from an active working life to retirement in an aging society. In the future it is hoped that such a system would be applicable in a broad range of levels for reasons beyond child nurturing and nursing care, regardless of whether the employee is male or female.

Nonetheless, there are also problems that must be solved. The first would be the conflict with existing categories, such as part-time work. In positions where part-time workers perform essential business functions, it is difficult to understand the differences with short-term regular employees, leading to fears that differential treatment might lead to a loss of motivation by part-time workers. In introducing this system it is necessary to review the entire employment system, keeping in mind the equal treatment of regular and part-time employees. The second is assessing the

work assignments in which this system could be applicable. It could be easily introduced in situations involving work that is highly autonomous, such as specialized work. If a company can match the needs

of the job and the individual and make use of this system, then the introduction of this system will lead to positive effects throughout the company.

8-1 Possibilities for considering a future short-term regular employee system (businesses establishments)

(%)

Subjects	System already in place	Currently under consideration	Could potentially be under consideration in the future	No possibility for future consideration	No response
Directed at persons who are regular employees and already undertaking child nurturing and nursing care	27.2	3.6	21.3	42.6	5.3
Directed at persons who are regular employees and would like short-term work due to reasons besides child nurturing and nursing care	4.3	2.9	20.0	67.1	5.8
Directed at part-time and other non-regular employees who would like to transition to short-term regular employees	1.6	2.8	17.5	71.5	6.6
Directed at new graduates or mid-career workers	2.3	2.9	17.6	70.0	7.2

Source: "Survey of Multiple Ways of Structuring Work," Japan Institute of Workers' Evolution (2001).