

Vocational Training as Job Search Support: Role and Effect of Employment Realization Strategy

Summary

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1. Objective of Research

The objective of this research is to survey and analyze the occupational awareness and behavior of unemployed people who engage in reemployment activities while receiving public assistance and to identify effective methods in providing reemployment assistance to the unemployed in Japan.

Today, perceptions about occupation and employment are diversifying. It is conceivable that personal views and differences in attitudes are also reflected on the job search awareness and behavior of unemployed people who seek to be employed again. It seems socially significant for public employment security offices (hereafter called the “security offices”) and vocational training schools to consider the psychological aspects of the unemployed people, propose strategies for realizing employment, and provide effective public assistance for reemployment. Therefore, we analyze the role and effectiveness of vocational training that is provided as a part of the government’s support measures for reemployment of the unemployed, in relation to the job search behavior and awareness of unemployed people receiving the vocational training.

2. Outline of the Survey

(1) Survey method and question items

Method: A questionnaire survey was conducted on unemployed people who are attending vocational training (in which respondents were asked to write their own answers). The answer sheets were collected straight after the survey was taken.

Subject: Those 183 people enrolled at public vocational training schools in Tokyo (total five courses at two schools) who are receiving public vocational training. The survey, however, was conducted twice on the same subjects. The number of the subjects who

replied to both surveys was 147 (male: 103 sets, female: 44 sets).

Survey period: April and June 2004

Question items: The questions items (1) to (5) are shown below. In principle, the same questions were asked on the same subjects twice, once at the beginning of vocational training and the second time three months into the vocational training. The questions that were asked only once were those that inevitably became unanswerable after the passing of time or that could only be appropriately answered at arrival of certain time.

(1) Attributes of the subjects, (2) acquisition of occupational information for job search activities, (3) status of vocational training, (4) perceptions about commitment to stay in the workplace, and (5) preparation for occupational selection.

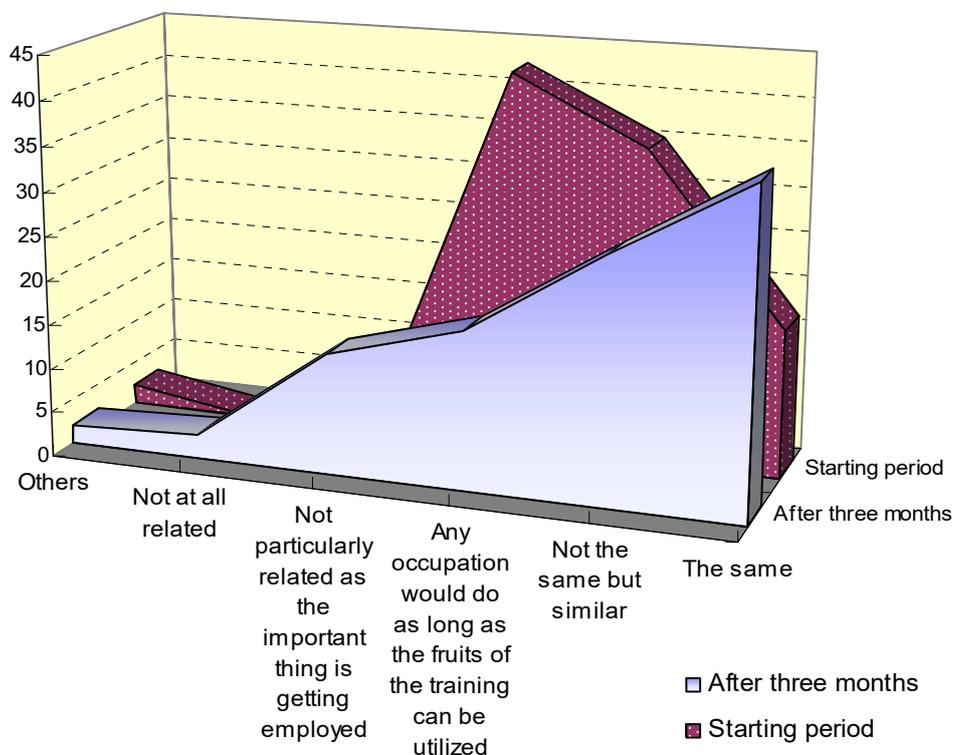
(2) Results and analyses

<Positioning of vocational training as employment strategy>

Relation between desired occupation and trained occupation

The trainees' perceptions about the relation between the occupation they want to be employed in (hereafter called the "desired occupation") and the occupation for which they are actually receiving training (hereafter called the "trained occupation") provide the key to knowing what the trainees truly seek to obtain from vocational training and what their true expectations are. We asked them in which occupations they really wanted to be employed in and how the vocational training they were receiving related to that. As a result, there were slight differences in their answers at immediately after starting vocational training (hereafter called the "starting period") and three months into the training (hereafter simply called "after three months"). After three months, the number of those who wanted to utilize the skills they acquired during the training increased. On the other hand, the number of those who did not mind being employed in occupation outside the trained occupation, as long as they could realize employment, also rose. Although there was no statistically significant difference between the situations at the two different points in time, it appears that this was due to conditions associated with the number of samples, survey period, etc.

Figure 1. Relation between Desired Occupation and Trained Occupation



When the same data were sorted out based on the prescribed periods of vocational training, we found the tendency where those in 12-month courses, the longest courses, differed from those in 3-month and 6-month courses. In the three-month courses, the point of the survey (“after three months”) came practically at the end of the training period when all the planned skills guidance had already been given. In the six-month courses too, the basic skills guidance had already been given, and more emphasis was starting to be placed on preparing for job search activities. On the other hand, it appears that in the case of the 12-month courses, trainees still did not have any real sense of having acquired the skills as three quarters of training period were still remaining, and their engagement in job search activities were different.

Figure 2. Relation between Desired Occupation and Trained Occupation by Training Period (Starting Period)

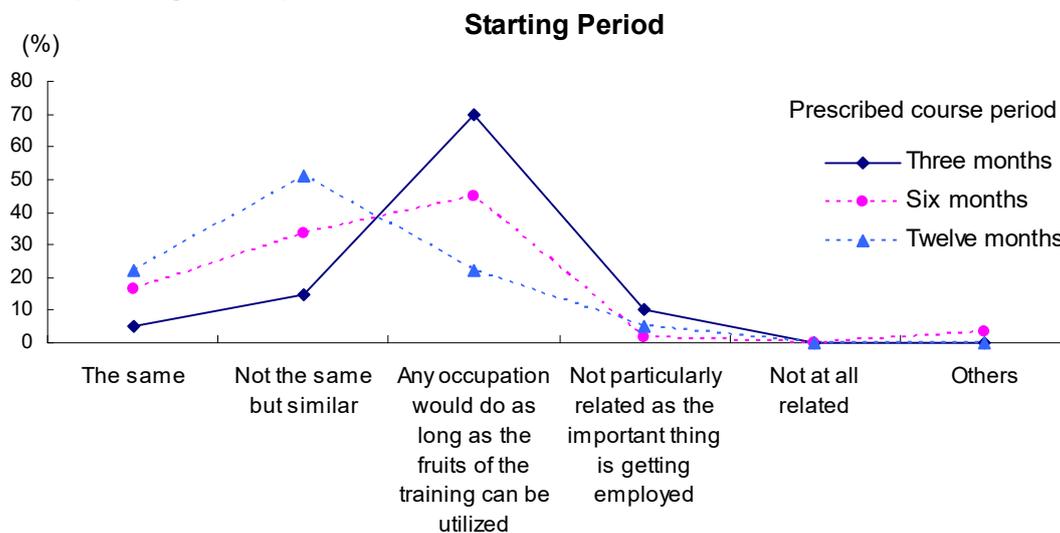
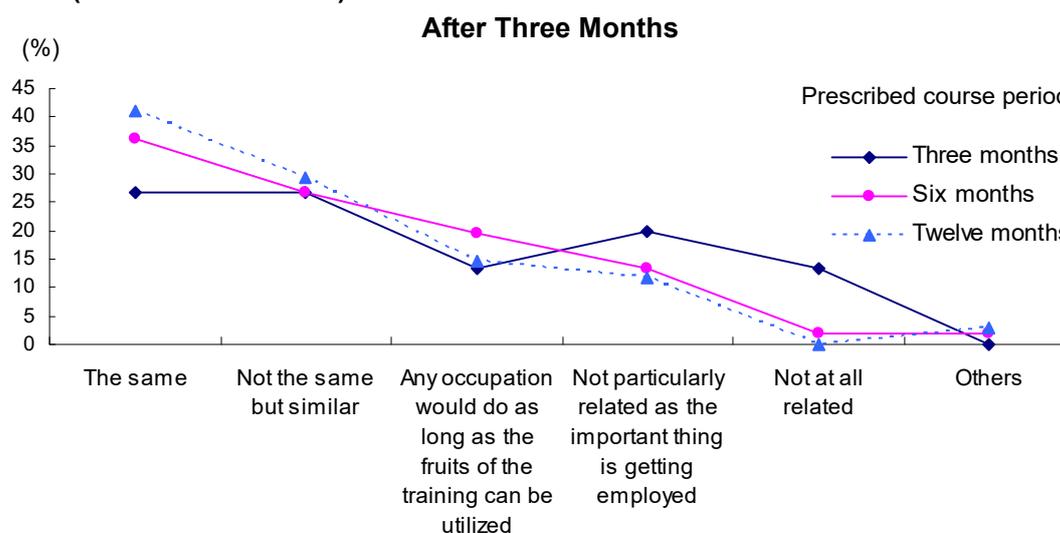


Figure 3. Relation between Desired Occupation and Trained Occupation by Training Period (After Three Months)

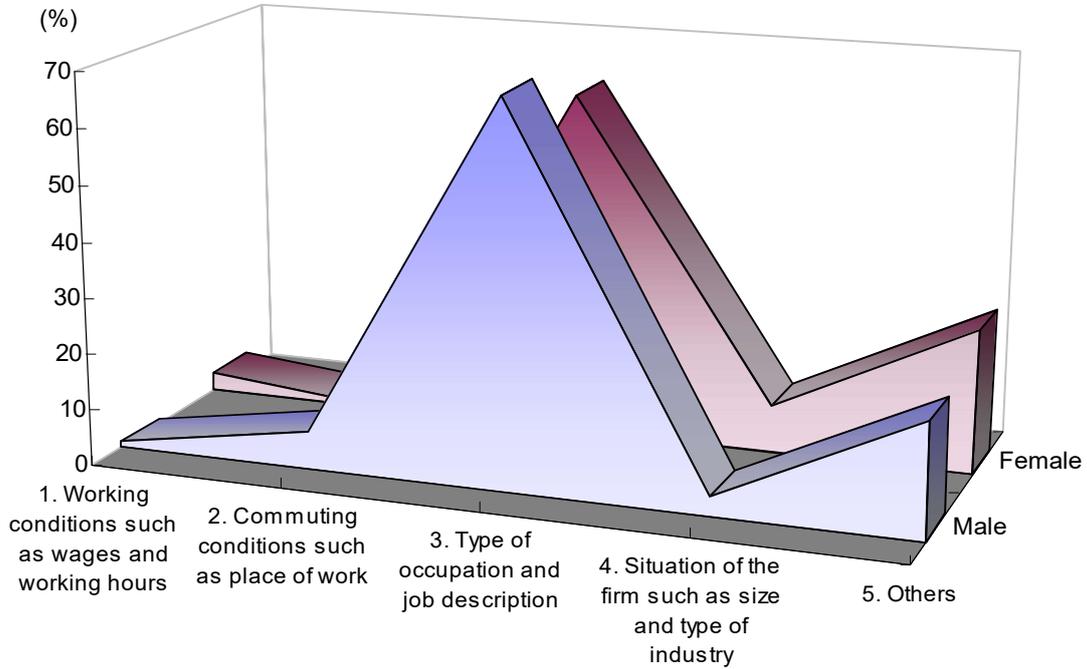


<Conditions for selecting a job>

The question of which conditions the trainees saw as most important when selecting a job is basically tantamount to asking, “Frankly, what are the conditions with which you will be willing to take on a job?” At both the starting period and after three months, the trainees thought that type of occupation and job description to be important. After three months, however, interest in the situation of the hiring firms rose as they seemed to make judgment with particular job offers in mind. There seem to be differences between genders as regards their interest in type of occupation, job description, working conditions, and place of work.

Figure 4. Conditions for Selecting a Job (Starting Period)

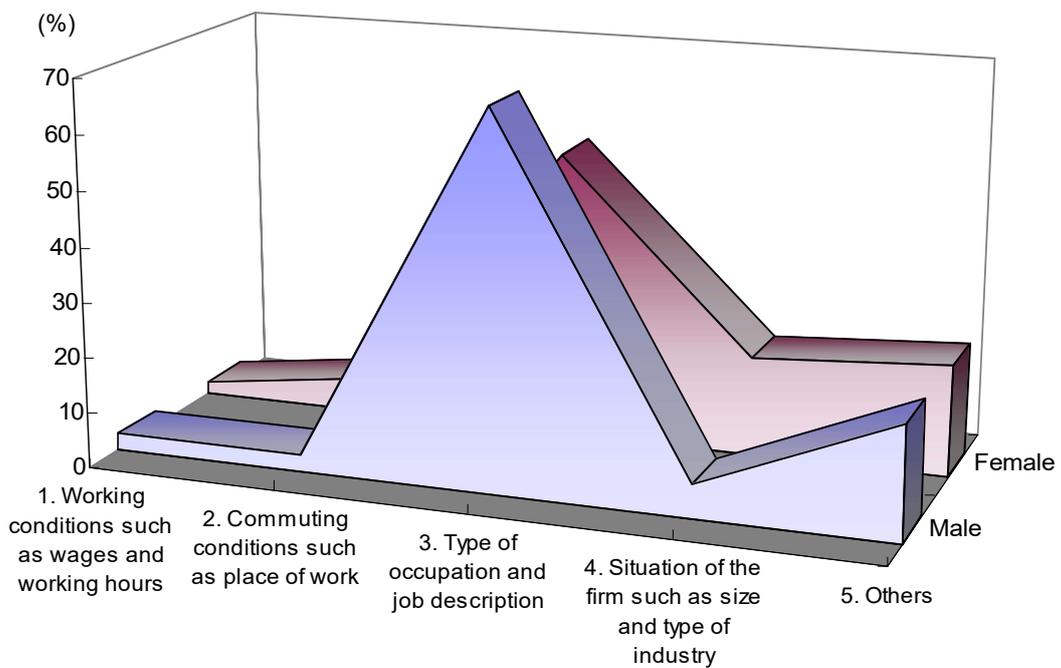
Starting period



(%)

Figure 5. Conditions for Selecting a Job (After Three Months)

After three months



<Effect of vocational training on job search activities>

For this report, the same survey was conducted twice on the same subjects who were receiving public vocational training at the start of the training period and at three months into the training, and we explored the relation between the trainees' job search activities and the effect of the vocational training based on the three viewpoints shown below. On trainees' job search activities, we focused particularly on acquisition of necessary information for job search. The necessary information for job search covers a wide range of information needed to carry on job search activities for reemployment and includes information on job offers, firms, labor market, and livelihood support.

- Does obtaining enough necessary information for job search clarify the objectives of finding employment and thereby increase the effect of occupational understanding brought about through vocational training?
- Does vocational training increase occupational understanding by providing occupational information through skills acquisition and contributes to job search activities?
- Does vocational training, by enhancing occupational understanding through skills acquisition, help trainees to have self-efficacy in finding employment and in adjusting to the workplace?

On the above three points, we conducted a multivariate analysis using the trainees' level of understanding about their desired and trained occupations, awareness about the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of vocational training, degree of self-awareness about their prospect for employment, etc. as the related indicators. From the results, we were able to identify the type of trainees, their features and conditions, who could effectively utilize vocational training in their reemployment strategy.

Assessment of the effect of vocational training on job search activities

There were mainly two tendencies as regards the trainees' views on whether vocational training was effective or not in carrying out their job search activities for reemployment. In other words, trainees' assessment of vocational training as an employment strategy was divided, depending on whether they understood the contents of the training they received, into those recognizing the effect on further promoting employment and those going about their job search activities without having many expectations.

However, more noteworthy was the attitude about the need to match their desired occupation and trained occupation. At the starting period, all trainees had

expectations about vocational training's effect on realizing employment, but such expectations were for the fruits of the training to be utilized at least somewhere of the desired occupation. In other words, the most predominant attitude was that it was enough if there was some relation between vocational training and occupation to improve any chances for employment so that "any occupation would do as long as the fruits of the training can be utilized in some elements of the job," rather than have one's desired occupation and trained occupation match. But after three months, the number of those who wished their desired and trained occupations to match substantially increased. On the other hand, the number of those who said, "No particular need to be related as the important thing is getting employed" also increased. At the same time, the number of those in between, in other words, those who said, "No need to be exactly the same but should be similar" or "Any occupation would do as long as the fruits of the training can be utilized in some elements of the job" decreased considerably. There was polarization of the attitude about the need to match the desired and trained occupations. As the trainees actually received vocational training and engaged in job search activities at the same time during the course period, the assessment, in terms of the acquired skills, gradually became deeply divided

It was observed that the length of the training period in different courses also had an influence on the trainees' awareness about job search activities. The 12-month course showed different tendencies compared with courses of other lengths with respect to employment preparation. As a preparatory period for reemployment, a year is a very long time. At many companies, it corresponds to an accounting term, and if one were working, performance and business evaluation would be made at the time of settlement of accounts. Also, if a firm were recruiting new graduates, a lapse of year would force a new graduate to be employed a year later than his peers. Of course, at the 12-month courses, the trainees may expect to acquire different types and levels of skills from other courses. It is very much possible that there are trainees who think more about acquiring skills than about being employed in the immediate future. It seems that the fact that our second survey was conducted three months after the start of training might have accentuated the one-year course, as regards the difference in the length of course period.

Relation between collection of information for job search activities and evaluation of vocational training

On the relation between skills acquisition during vocational training and job search activities, which include search for job offers and collection of occupational information,

the trainees who were eagerly engaged in job search activities in parallel with skills acquisition during the three-month period ultimately had better results.

The results of an analysis on the relation between a trainee's behavior to collect and use information for job search activities and the effect of vocational training can be briefly expressed as follows: Those who were capable of collecting information for reemployment of their own accord and gleaning the needed occupational information from trained skills evaluated the vocational training as effective for their job search activities. Therefore, it is important that trainees sufficiently raise the level of readiness for employment before they start to receive vocational training. Above all, if a trainee has not clarified the objectives of employment, he or she would not be able to process information appropriately, and may not fully grasp information on desired occupation through trained occupation.

To add a little more explanation along the flow of job search activities, collection of information before starting vocational training helps to clarify the objectives of employment, and this contributes to enhancing occupational understanding through the subsequent skills acquisition. The effect of vocational training and information collection behavior influence each other, and the effect of vocational training has an impact on trainees' employment awareness. Therefore, obtaining appropriate information by the starting period plays an important role in the spadework for connecting the effect of vocational training to highly rational job search activities. Moreover, because occupational understanding through trained occupation for which one is acquiring skills has an impact not only on one's job search activities, but also on one's thinking about work after reemployment, successful acquisition of skills through vocational training is meaningful in realizing employment and stabilizing the subsequent occupational life. Therefore, a high level of correspondence between a trainee's desired and trained occupations is extremely important for the trainee to realize employment.

The correspondence between desired and trained occupations clarifies the position of vocational training as a specific measure for realizing employment. This seems to imply that for a trainee to fully enjoy the effect of vocational training, occupational consultation performed at the security offices before an instruction is given to receive vocational training is decisively significant.

There is also a question on the effect of skills acquisition on promoting employment. Because there are no items in the questionnaire that directly ask this question, we cannot clearly grasp its effect. However, because we have grasped the level of understanding about desired occupation and trained occupation, we can understand the

state of skills acquisition from that. In other words, what we comprehended as the degree of “imaginable desired occupation” and “imaginable trained occupation” expresses the level of occupational understanding during the vocational training period. In particular, because the “imaginable trained occupation” is the measure of “how much one can visualize oneself working in the trained occupation,” it is closely related to the skills acquisition that the trainee is actually working on. By examining this in relation to the trainees’ assessment on the vocational training effect and to their employment prospect, it is possible to estimate the effect of skills acquisition on promoting employment. This topic is touched upon in our next analysis.

<Relation between smooth skills acquisition and the effect of vocational training on promoting employment>

Whether or not vocational training had an effect on realizing employment was influenced strongly by how trainees were engaged in job search activities before starting to receive training and by the content of assistance provided.

On the relation between smooth acquisition of skills and the effect of vocational training on promoting employment, we grasped the following three points: (1) Sense of information plenitude after three months into training was brought about by improvement in occupational understanding about the trained occupation and by the real sense that vocational training was effective; (2) there was a significant relation where the high level of understanding of desired occupation after three months guided the high level of occupational understanding of trained occupation during the same period; and (3) there was a relation where the high level of understanding of desired occupation at the starting period guided the high level of occupational understanding of trained occupation at the same period and the high level of understanding of desired occupation after three months. This means that when the level of correspondence between desired and trained occupations is high, the selection of the trained occupation as an employment strategy has been properly done, which leads to the assessment of vocational training as having an effect as a job search activity.

Secondly, when we examine the relation between vocational training and the level of realization of employment in terms of prospects for employment after three months, the level of understanding of trained occupation after three months and the “real sense of the effectiveness of vocational training” had a significant relation with the good prospects for employment. This also shows that proper selection of trained occupation leads to the positive assessment of vocational training as an effective job search activity.

In sum, how a trainee is engaged in job search activities before starting vocational

training and what kind of support is provided to the trainee for that purpose has a strong impact on whether vocational training will have an effect on realizing employment. The behavior of an unemployed person and his or her supporter based on the idea that vocational training is an implementation of an employment strategy increases the effect of vocational training on job search activities. The selection of trained occupation is also done as an employment strategy. Therefore, if a trainee aims for a moratorium effect of temporarily escaping from being employed or from engaging in job search or if a supporter has expectations to uncover a trainee's potential aptitude and abilities, it might confuse the trainee's job search activities or make the trainee to become negative.

Furthermore, even though the level of understanding of desired occupation and that of trained occupation at the starting period are in a mutually causal relation, we must keep in mind that the target of employment is always the desired occupation. In other words, we can discern a warning issued by the survey of this report that the objective of vocational training is, after all, skills acquisition. This is clearly indicated when we examine the relation between the trainees' behavior of collecting information for job search activities and the level of understanding of desired and trained occupations in the overall context from the start to end of the training period. In other words, it was understood as regards the effectiveness of vocational training that (1) a good understanding of the desired occupation, which is the objective of employment, or in other words, clarification of the objective of employment before starting vocational training leads to better understanding of the trained occupation; and (2) as an effect of vocational training on job search activities, the understanding of the trained occupation does not increase the understanding of the desired occupation.

In the final analysis, unless the jobseeker, in carrying out job search activities, first precisely clarify the objective of employment rather than focus on acquisition of skills and techniques, and adopt a strategy of vocational training that he or she can be sure of for realization of employment, it will be difficult to have many expectations on the effect of vocational training on promoting employment.

<Relation between employment prospects and age/gender>

From the findings on the situations of trainees in different age groups and number of years of service, it became clear that those who were actively and practically carrying out job search activities had better chances of early reemployment regardless of age. In addition, those who had the conditions to recognize the effect of vocational training, in other words, the effect of vocational training as an employment strategy, were

carrying out job search activities more advantageously. On whether or not age itself is a factor in increasing the employment difficulty, Matsushige (2003) did a survey on the reemployment situation of those who were severed from their jobs as a result of a bankruptcy of a major securities firm and pointed out that for those who were under 60 years of age, there was hardly any disadvantage arising from age, and that the value of a person's abilities in the labor market was more important. We can clearly discern this tendency from the survey of this report.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that many reports indicate that middle-aged and senior jobseekers actually feel an age barrier when they meet with recruiters. Therefore, there is a need to conduct a close analysis of the meaning and effect of jobseekers' condition of age in combination with other conditions of jobseekers. To be more specific, a detailed analysis that crosses age with occupational background (in particular, job description and employment status immediately before leaving one's job), size of the firm one belonged to immediately before severance, type of industry, definitive abilities and skills, type of qualifications acquired, state of physical and mental health and appearance, educational background, level of wages immediately before severance, and wages as a condition for employment, is necessary to elucidate the true situation. It appears that it is time that we thoroughly addressed this topic as policy research.

With regard to the difference of gender, gender itself does not have an effect on employment prospects, but our survey revealed that when age and gender were combined, there was a difference in employment difficulty by age. We observed an aspect that might indicate that the difficulty of realizing employment increased when women became older than 40. But then again, it is not particularly rare for woman jobseekers in their 50s or older to realize early employment through security offices' job placement services.

On this point too, there is a need to combine gender with occupational background, desired occupation, and various other conditions for employment, rather than only following the relation between gender and age, and to analyze the relation between each element and the degree of employment realization. In particular, by including the jobseeker's views about her family, child-rearing, etc. and the size of household budget in the analysis, it should help to more accurately capture the real situation.

<Awareness about employment and adapting to the workplace>

There was a positive mutually causative relation, at the starting period, between the awareness about the easiness of reemployment and the view that one should not quit

jobs easily. The sense of easiness about reemployment did not lead to easiness of mind in trying to find another job again if one could not adapt to the workplace.

The question about whether one may easily quit a job if one could not adjust well to the workplace after being employed is about how one is engaged in one's work, in other words, about one's occupational values of how much effort one is willing to put into occupational life. Therefore, the personal condition of whether it is easy to leave one's job after reemployment and try again may be an important consideration when judging whether to actually leave the job, but it appears that it basically has hardly any bearing when considering the right and wrong of a future action.

A feeling of difficulty about trying again after reemployment was eased after three months of training, but there was no change in the awareness about the question of whether one should stay in the job. The feeling of difficulty about trying again changed during the three-month period, because the judgment on whether it is easy or not to leave one's job can be made from the circumstances one is in, but the question of whether one should or should not be committed to staying in the job did not change in a short time because it is a matter of one's sense of values.

However, it cannot be said that the effect of skills acquisition does not have any influence on easing the feeling of difficulty, after three months, in trying again. As understanding about the trained occupation increased after three months of training, the trainees became aware that it would not be easy to try again after reemployment. It can be interpreted that as the trainees became aware of their abilities and aptitude in the process of skills acquisition and increased their occupational understanding, it resulted in the trainees to become more mentally prepared about reemployment.

It appears that when trainees were able to obtain additional information from the behavior centered on skills acquisition and utilize the information for increasing occupational understanding, such trainees were able to increase a sense of effectiveness about their adaptability to a workplace.

3. Future Challenges and Implications

This report was compiled based on the survey conducted in the spring and early summer of 2004 when the employment situation in Japan was difficult. The employment situation was even more difficult when the subjects of the survey became unemployed and began job search activities for reemployment. It is conceivable that evaluation of the effect of the strategy for realizing employment at such time will more purely (if 'purely' is not the appropriate word, then more 'directly') identify the conditions for realizing employment. It is expected that it will provide many common

implications also for unemployment at the time of labor shortage on the selection of strategies and how support should be provided for realizing employment.

For the reemployment of unemployed people, it is effective that before economically mitigating the pain of unemployment and providing conveniences for drawing up a strategic action plan, the unemployed person takes action to voluntarily set down his or her own policy for solving the problems and a strategic action plan and have the mind to make preparations for that. The results of our survey showed that it was necessary more than it was effective.

Therefore, it appears that working on unemployed people to establish their own policy and an action plan at an early stage is fundamental in providing reemployment assistance to them. The importance of the supporter to work on unemployed people in this direction was confirmed during the continuous flow of support from occupational consultation at the security office to vocational training at the vocational training school.

A number of supporters are involved in this flow of support. Rather than pursue becoming a multiplayer or providing one stop services, these supporters should have mutual respect and understanding for each other's roles and work on refining each one's inherent roles. This, at least for the immediate future, seems to increase the significance and effect of reemployment support. It goes without saying that supporters are required to have expert knowledge about many employment strategies there are in society and give advice to jobseekers to serve their interest when giving them advice about how to select strategies for realizing employment. It is important that they have extensive knowledge not only about vocational training, but also about other measures, and be able to actively provide advice on the most appropriate measures. The effectiveness of their support will probably be lessened if it is not substantiated by a high level of expertise and fairness. On the other hand, when providing vocational training, it is important that trainers have a high level of expertise in giving trainees guidance about skills while checking their preparedness about their employment objectives after starting training. Because successful skills acquisition after starting training leads to successful job search activities for trainees, trainers are required to have a high level of expertise of adjusting the relation between employment objectives and trained occupation in accordance with the unemployed person's preparedness, which only those who actually work on the trainees in skills acquisition could do. And utilizing the merits of each supporter's expertise and coordinating among them will be effective in promoting the employment of unemployed people.

Contents of the Report

Introduction

Outline

Chapter 1. Issues and objectives

1. Issues and background
2. Objectives of the survey
3. Viewpoints from which to understand the issues
 - (1) Vocational training as employment support
 - (2) Employment objectives and setting of employment conditions
4. Contents of the report

Chapter 2. Outline and viewpoints of the survey

1. Outline of the survey
2. Viewpoints of the survey
 - (1) Subjects of the survey and survey items
 - (2) Selection of the survey method

Chapter 3. General description of the subjects of the survey

1. Profile of the subjects of the survey
 - (1) Subjects of the survey at the starting period of training
 - (2) Subjects of the survey after three months into training
 - (3) Those who did not become subjects of the survey after three months
2. Positioning of vocational training as an employment strategy
 - (1) Relation between desired occupation and trained occupation
 - (2) Relation between the time by which employment is essential and training period
 - (3) Conditions for making decisions about accepting employment
3. Effect of vocational training on job search activities
 - (1) Anticipation about the effectiveness of vocational training
 - (2) Real sense about the effect of vocational training
4. Employment prospects

Chapter 4. Effect of vocational training on job search activities

Introduction

1. Relation between information collection and occupational understanding
2. Relation between skills acquisition's information provision effect and enrichment

of information for job search activities

3. Impact of information collection and skills acquisition's information provision effect on occupational understanding
4. Awareness about commitment to stay in a workplace and acquisition of information for job search activities
5. Employment prospects in the third month

Chapter 5. Summary and Implications

1. Summary
2. Future challenges and implications

Reference cited

Glossary

Appendix. Question items (survey sheet)