Career Analysis of Modern Japanese People from Different Viewpoints: Drastic Changes in Japanese Society and Workers' Lifestyles

Summary

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Research Project: "Study on Improvement of Labor Market Infrastructure concerning Vocational Ability Development"

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1. Research Objective

This study was conducted as part of a research project entitled "Study on Improvement of Labor Market Infrastructure concerning Vocational Ability Development."

This research project is designed to elucidate the realities of vocational ability development in Japanese society, from the standpoints of both educational training service suppliers (i.e. service providers) and service users (i.e. workers). Our study approaches the topic focusing on the side of educational training service users to identify how individual workers acquire vocational abilities and develop their careers.

In recent years, fewer and fewer people are following the "standard path of career advancement" where workers start working right after graduation from school and build their careers in a single company. Labor policies are required to provide a support system that helps individuals build their careers on their own. In order to establish an effective system to assist individual workers, it is necessary to examine what kind of measures will be useful in the future, in light of the various methods and examples of career development of the past.

This study, therefore, takes the approach of thoroughly looking at individual workers' career building processes. We examined a "Career Tracking Survey" conducted in the past, and interviewed the subjects of the above survey, who are now aged around 50, to find out how they built up their vocational abilities and careers. Based on the results of the above field survey, we have already made a proposal for policies on the career and

vocational ability development of workers in Japan (JILPT Research Report No. 27, "Individual Career and Vocational Ability Development," the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training).

Unfortunately, we received so much information from the interviewees that it was not possible to analyze all the information in the above research report. In this report, therefore, we present our analysis by theme based on the information we have at hand. In parallel to this research, we are conducting other research as part of the same research project in order to identify the entire picture on individuals from a quantitative perspective, and by analyzing the information in association with this research, we expect to have a wider picture on the analysis.

2. Outline of the Survey
[Career Tracking Survey]

The "Career Tracking Survey" was conducted in the period from 1970 to 1982 through a collaboration between the National Institute of Employment and Vocational Research (so called at the time, and hereinafter "NIEVR") and the National Institute of Educational Research, as part of the "Tracking Research on Vocational Adaptability of Young Workers" (hereinafter "Career Tracking Research"). Since detailed information was available on junior-high and senior-high school students from the "Long-Term Career Tracking Research" that was initiated by the National Institute of Educational Research, the "Career Tracking Research" was conducted taking advantage of this information, instead of using a random sampling method, by interviewing part of the same subjects from the above survey conducted by the National Institute of Educational Research. The National Institute of Educational Research conducted the survey on those who were still in school and NIEVR conducted the survey on those who had left school.

The career tracking research included 2,820 subjects (1,459 males and 1,361 females) born between 1953 and 1955, in principle selecting one class from each school for 71 schools in seven prefectures. Whether the prefecture was a "labor supplying" prefecture or "labor demanding" prefecture was considered when selecting prefectures, and as a result, all of the selected prefectures happened to be located in the Kanto area and areas to the west of Kanto. Furthermore, those who were employed immediately after the graduation from school were focused on, and it should be noted that the number of employed includes a higher percentage of junior-high graduates than the average.

The subjects of the survey were tracked from age 15 to 26. Due to the large number of subjects and economic and time constraints, we divided the subjects into three groups in

each prefecture and conducted the research on the subjects graduating in alternating years. Therefore, the conditions of the labor market may differ from subject to subject even when the number of their educational years is the same. The result of the 10-year tracking survey is summarized in the Koyo Shokugyo Kenkyusho (Institute of Employment and Occupation Research) (1988).

[Subjects of This Survey]

The career tracking survey was not conducted after 1982 when the survey was completed for people at the age of 26. During the period between the end of 2003 and the beginning of 2004, we sent a letter to approximately 2,800 people whose addresses we had when they were 26 years old. Approximately 300 responded. 72 of them initially agreed to the survey, and we interviewed 66 of them. During the survey, two more subjects, whom we had initially failed to find, were added thanks to information from other subjects, making a total of 68 interviewees for this survey. Since the subjects were distributed over different locations throughout the country, we received the help of experienced external researchers and specialists for individual interviews.

[Analysis Viewpoint in this Report]

In the report on "Individual Career and Vocational Ability Development," we made the following proposals: (1) More support for job choices in schools, (2) More support in the early stages of career development, (3) More support focusing on the influence on career development by the social economy and the status of the organization to which one belongs, (4) Expansion of the scope for research concerning "career and vocational ability development," and (5) The need to review vocational ability development and ability certification. For this survey, however, we only looked at the general picture and analyzed some of the individual cases, leaving a detailed analysis of each and every individual for next time.

In this report, therefore, we set out the following themes for further analysis. Since there is a large gap between males and females in career and vocational capability development, as has been pointed out before, the analysis was conducted separately for each sex.

Chapters 1 to 3 describe the analysis on male subjects. Chapter 1 describes the transition from school to work, considering the importance of the change from school to the first job and the influence of society and the economy. Chapter 2 describes a general analysis on job changes (including job loss) which are important events in career development. Chapter 3 describes occupational qualifications, off-the-job training and

careers for men from the viewpoint of ability development and ability certification.

Chapter 4 focuses on women to analyze not only their occupational career but also their life career.

3. Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1, "Transition from School to Work," has been written with reference to other surveys in addition to this survey.

Firstly, transition from school to work that our subjects, both men and women, experienced was roughly determined by their socio-economic environment, and it can be easily understood when we place it in the macro context. Our subjects were born in the period between 1953 and 55 and received their education during the period of rapid growth after the war. They went into employment in the period before or after the first oil crisis, experiencing a particular period in history. It was a period in which the rate of students entering senior-high school increased to some 80 percent, and the rate of enrollment in junior colleges and universities also increased. In the 1970s, when our subjects went into employment, drastic changes were occurring in the economy, and the employment situation differed greatly depending on when one went into the market due to the influence of the oil crisis and labor market conditions. The situation was different depending on the subject's level of education, since junior-high and senior-high graduates went into employment before the oil crisis, while those who finished junior college or university went into employment after the oil crisis when the employment situation had deteriorated. With interaction between this macro environment and individuals' micro situations at the time of their employment, the subjects experienced a dynamic process in selecting their first job.

Secondly, according to the analysis of the JGSS data that was occasionally referenced for comparison during the analysis of the surveys in this research, the cohort of those who were born in the period between 1953-55 did not have a second chance at improving their academic careers once they left school and went into the labor market due to the unavailability of infrastructure in the real world[1]. As for the timing of their entering into employment, approximately 90 percent of new graduates went into employment by June regardless of their education level. As for the routes for going into employment, the analysis indicates that in the period of employment for those who were born in 1953-55 there was a widely established practice in which companies hired those who were selected and recommended by their schools. According to the job position and job

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[1] The subject of education levels poses some risk and bias when examining job careeres, but it is discussed with sufficient care since it is an important point.

category for their first job, the majority of the cohort of 1953-55 was hired as regular employees, and non-regular employees constituted only 6 percent of the whole, indicating that the "Freeter" was not visible yet as a social issue. As for the job categories, there was a high probability of getting office worker or white collar worker positions particularly for women as long as they finished their senior-high school. Senior-high graduates in this period formed their career aspirations and future plans in selecting their careers under employment conditions (job categories) that were different from those today.

Thirdly, this survey also indicates that the subject's initial career was largely influenced by information collected, plans made and positive attitudes that they had while in school. In the mid-1970's, the period of recruitment for our subjects, schools and employment placement offices jointly promoted the employment of new graduates, making it possible to have a smooth and direct transition from school to work. Therefore, the social conditions were quite different from what young people face today. However, it is still a common task for students today to enhance their knowledge and interest in and collect specific information on occupations while they are in school. This survey implies that it is important to reduce the barrier between the world of school and the world of work, supporting the positive introduction of work experiences and internships. There are cases in which deep "repentance" and "regret" is observed for the choice of their first job even 30 years later, and this indicates that process of transition from school to work is extremely important.

Fourthly, the process of transition from school to work was largely affected by the labor market conditions at the time when the subjects finished their education. In the 1970s, when our subjects went into employment, drastic changes occurred in the economy and the employment situation, and labor market conditions differed greatly depending on when one went into the market. Junior-high and senior-high graduates went into employment during the peak period of rapid economic growth before the oil crisis, and the employment market was extremely good. On the other hand, those subjects who finished junior college or university had to go into employment when employment conditions had deteriorated due to the oil crisis and a recession. While the turnover rate after the first job is usually lower with university graduates than it is with junior-high and senior-high graduates, the differences in the rates are not very significant among the cohort of subjects of different educational background. Apart from the labor market conditions, there was another factor, family conditions, over which the subjects had no control of. In those days, depending on the economic situation of a family, there were many cases in which subjects had to give up higher education or

employment, which might have provided them with better conditions, in order to help their family business.

The fact that the economy happened to be bad when new graduates went into employment for the first time after graduating from school also affected their career building not only for their first job but also for subsequent jobs, and this indicates the presence of accidental factors (luck) that they had no control over. Similarly, no one can select when and in what family they will be born. Therefore, it is important to have policies that enable people to overcome " bad luck at the starting point," such as the timing of their birth and employment.

Chapter 2 "Job Change, Job Loss, Career Development and Vocational Ability Development" describes "good job change" with a focus on job changes in the subjects' early 20s during the period from the 1970s to the beginning of the 1980s. Since common problems are always found under common conditions even when historical backgrounds are different, our considerations are summarized for the conclusion of the first stage, providing implications for employment support measures for young people today.

Regardless of time, "good job change" always implies a shorter period of joblessness, longer stable employment instead of repeated changes, opportunities to demonstrate abilities and consequential increases in pay, improving working conditions, and improving satisfaction with one's occupational career and life in general. The following seven aspects are examined to find conditions influencing the achievement of this.

(1) Economic environment at the time of first employment and economic conditions at the time of job change

Those who went into employment with a senior-high school level education or below experienced a good economy when they started to work, and many of them were hired by large companies or government and other public offices through introductions by their schools. Many of those who did not have an introduction by their school began to work as an *"Arubaito"* (temporary worker) and experienced job changes. Since the economy was good in that period they did not go through a long period of joblessness, and their working conditions improved when changing their job. Those who finished higher education went into employment during a recession after the oil crisis, and many of them had difficulty getting a job. Those who changed their jobs had gone to "a company that was acceptable to work for" instead of "a company that they wanted to work for" for their first employment. Some of them were not hired as regular employees. Then, they changed their job. They remained at this new place for over ten years after

the job change. The reasons for job changes in the early period of employment during the recession included re-selection of the "first job."

The implication is that the "7-5-3 job leave rate" (This means turnover rates after three years of employment are 70 percent, 50 percent and 30 percent for junior high graduates, high school graduates and university graduates, respectively) probably does not have to be considered as a problem. "A good job change" for individuals is "a good job change" for the nation as a whole. It is more important to think about what can be improved by changing jobs.

(2) Working conditions, such as wages and working hours

Those who went into their first employment without the introduction by their school often had difficulties with their working conditions and had unstable employment status such as an *Arubaito* (temporary worker) or had long working hours. In such cases, a job change meant improving their working conditions. The situation relatively improved because their original employment condition was bad. In these cases they changed their job more than once. Although job changing is acceptable in order to achieve better working conditions, too many job changes cause negative effects on satisfaction with one's career and life in general. It is related with problems in forming values that supports the selection of an occupation, which is discussed later.

(3) Vocational Ability Before and After Job Change

When job change is based on a specific direction in a career, it is associated with the development and demonstration of abilities, and satisfaction is found after the job change. The direction may be provided unconsciously by person who selects that direction.

(4) Social Network Contributing to Job Changes

Formal information was utilized by those who wished to change their job. This formal information, however, was sometimes discovered through an individual's social network. Without sufficient social experience, young people sometimes fail to utilize job information that is available. Without knowing where it is, they cannot find any information. A large volume of information is now provided on occupation and employment thanks to IT advances made in recent years, but young people on their own may not be able to understand and make the best use of this. To support young people in changing their jobs, "consultation" will play an important role in the customization of information available to individuals.

(5) Career Stage for Job Changes

Job change for young people also implies exploration of careers. They feel lost in their first employment particularly when they are not university graduates. During this period they sometimes meet impressive professionals and receive important influences.

According to the survey, those who went into stable employment after graduating from university, on the other hand, had already established their values, placing importance on stability. They decided their ideas about the future in this period, and they eventually achieved their goals. This was not a period of exploration for them, but these subjects lived in a certain period in history. They shifted from school to work just by going on the "rails already established" and did not have to wonder about how to find their "job for life."

Today, the latter type, shifting to employment without consciously exploring a career, has been substantially reduced. There is also a change in the system for going into employment after graduating from university and a change in the mindset of young people concerning their careers. There is social climate today that makes them lost. Therefore, a policy needs to be established to consider an opportunity for a period of career exploration.

(6) Relationship between One's Job Change and One's Expected Roles in Life ("Life Career")

In this survey, many people showed a strong awareness of playing the filial role of a child. In particular, this awareness was demonstrated the most by the first sons of self-employed workers. This awareness is more strongly felt by those who have assets to inherit such as family businesses or farmland. It may suddenly be demonstrated as a factor in job changes, for example due to the illness of parents. Parents also evaluate the stability and job prospects of their children in comparison with the importance of the family business that their children inherit, telling their children their wishes.

(7) Awareness of Long-Term Career and One's Sense of Values

Subjects of the survey were divided into those who are aware and those who are not aware of their "job for life." Many of those who are in stable careers are not aware, while those who have changed their jobs are further divided between those who are aware and those who are not aware. A job change sometimes provides stability or satisfaction even when it is not associated with career design, indicating that this awareness of job for life is not necessarily an absolute condition for "a good job change." This point may change depending on the conditions present at the time. Also, many of those received higher education are aware of their "lifetime job." All of those who changed their job recognized

the occasion as the step in searching for their lifetime job.

Today, young people are in a situation in need of a career design more than ever, and in fact they have strong interest in its importance. In the old days, young people had conventional values that in fact determined their career design itself, which supported their life. It is a large burden for individuals to be asked to have a career design. There is a time of "drift" in one's career. Instead of asking young people to have a career design, a mechanism is also needed to provide them with opportunities to make a "temporary" choice depending on their situations.

The following points are made in Chapter 3, "Off-The-Job Activities Such As Occupational Qualifications, Training and Self-Motivated Development and Careers."

Firstly, when workers themselves find that education and training are effective, these workers are often those who have had a consistent career without experiencing job changes. Most blue-collar workers received their education and training led by their companies while some of the white-collar workers received their education and training based on their personal initiative at the expense of their company, showing a high degree of autonomy by individuals for education and training.

Secondly, OJT definitely constitutes the core of vocational skills development, but it is backed by experience in off-JT. For example, by receiving a job-function based training course, people may not actually become able to do the job, but they may be able to "understand the logic." Studying law in a correspondence course, they may be able to use the knowledge as the "base" of their job. These activities work effectively, as they provide partial support. However, office workers in particular do not strongly recognize the effectiveness of Off-JT.

On the other hand, hierarchical based training courses are often not recognized as being effective, and it may be necessary to "clearly show the purpose" to enhance their effectiveness, as is pointed out by Fujimura (2003).

Thirdly, there were multiple cases in which white-collar workers received education and training based on their personal initiatives but at the expense of their companies by persuading the company of the effectiveness of the training. Recently, there is a trend in which skill development is changing from company-led to individual-led activities, and examples taken in this report indicate that individual-led Off-JT is highly effective and shows the possibility of having individual-led education and training programs. Self-motivated development with use of computers also shows a certain degree of effectiveness, contributing to the vocational skill development of the subjects of the survey, although the effect is restricted to the particular time period in the survey.

However, individual-led activities are difficult for workplace-oriented blue-collar workers, and company-led activities may be maintained.

Fourthly, both administrative and managerial jobs have limited qualifications to certify their effective vocational skill, and the achievement of qualifications is often not recognized in their organizations. Thus, instead of introducing new qualifications it may be more effective to provide career passports to summarize their experiences, including job experiences, training and seminar sessions, correspondence courses and other education and training experiences.

In the technological and skill-based fields, an achievement of vocational qualifications was the minimum requirement for promotion, as an indicator of vocational skill development, but it was not positively treated as a factor for promotion. In any case, vocational qualifications provided limited effects on promotion within organizations. The importance of vocational qualifications that are required to set up business of their own is limited, because it is more important to have managerial skill for any one to set up and conduct business successfully.

The following points are described in Chapter 4 "Women Who Cultivate Their Future By Living Now: Lifetime Career and Job."

Firstly, by looking through 35 years of 19 women's lives, there is an indication that there may be common characteristics in how they handle their job in regards to whether or not they interrupt their career due to marriage or childbirth. In the end, women made a choice between their vocational activity and child-rearing, and they always gave priority to child-rearing and running their family to raise their child. When getting married or giving birth to a child, they made their choice from the options available to them based on their own values and lifestyle. The selection was not just between one of two choices: child-rearing or work. Making one choice their priority, they were also able to pursue the other choice at the same time if it did not cause a problem in their life. As a result, those who followed both choices at the same time maintained their job.

Therefore, many women would have continued their job if a certain set of favorable conditions were met, including all general aspects such as place of work, working hours, working pattern and other working conditions, as well as the their husband's way of thinking, support from other women in their family, so on.

For married women who work, the advantages of the child-care leave system are often emphasized due to recent requirements for child-care assistance. According to this survey, however, rather than with the introduction of child-care leave, women are more encouraged to work when daily working conditions are organized, so that their job is

coordinated with the role in child care that they intend to pursue in their life plan. In other words, it suggests that whether or not women continue to work depends largely on their working conditions such as working place and working hours.

Certainly, this does not mean that women wish to work as non-regular workers. Working conditions that affect their general determination include commuting, overtime, holidays, working environment and also the social purpose of their job. They do not simply want to have short-hour work or easier jobs. Once they are determined to continue working, they make every effort to handle the job that they have in their workplace. All of the women, including those who began working again after childbirth, are sincere and enthusiastic in their work, and they gain a lot of satisfaction and social meaning from their jobs.

In short, what is important for women in connection with work is whether or not their job allows them to "raise their child and work at the same time" during the period that they think of as appropriate for child raising, and whether or not working while raising their child instead of not working enhances the value of their life based on their values.

In a sense, women make their decisions about whether or not to continue to work when they get married or give birth to a child not based on their conditions at the time but on their long-term vision for their life. Although their decisions are often affected by their social environment or their cultural and historic background, they do make their own decisions for what they do. Actually, many of them temporarily stopped working at the time. But they hoped that they were going to get a job or become engaged in a wide range of other activities to participate in society, and they actually achieved this hope and participated in society.

Secondly, after temporarily stopping their work, all of the subjects of the survey restarted their work (or local activities) at one time or another. Each of them had a positive attitude, and was willing to work steadily. However, they did not have much work experience since they left their job when they were young, and their past experiences did not influence their job selection or work conditions. Their school career did not provide any influence either. Qualifications such as licenses and registration sometimes helped, but they do not seem to be definitive factors.

Furthermore, individual women had to accept a variety of recruitment processes and employment formats to go back to work. A possible reason is that with regards to their criteria for selecting a job, they did not want a specific job category or a position with high social status. It may also be because they wanted to work, and they participated in society due to their own internal motivation.

In any case, the most important fact is that after they stopped working once they

went back to work again. In depopulated Japan, the society and government are required to enable energetic women to effectively demonstrate their ability. It is socially important to guarantee that women will have opportunities to achieve their wishes and take action in making use of their abilities. More efforts should be made to study and find out the conditions that enable more women to smoothly get a job regardless of whether or not they have stopped working for marriage or childbirth.

Thirdly, when their husbands die, women shoulder a large burden, and from their viewpoint they do not receive sufficient assistance.

2. Implications for Policy Making

Based on the above findings, the following policy suggestions have been made.

1. Young people should be given a "second chance" for improving their academic careers and skill training in order to overcome the "bad luck at the starting point" that they had when they were born or started to work, and to build up a mechanism to overcome their "bad luck at the starting point." To do this, it is important to build up a system to provide young people who are in the process of building up their careers with active support beyond the company that they work for, instead of relying on in-house self-completed training such as OJT in individual companies.

   Comprehensive employment assistance needs to be enhanced, including not only vocational capability development but also coordination between individual's work and life and coordination between family developments such as marriage and childbirth and an individual's career.

2. Considering a longer job search period and assuming that the '7-5-3' job leave rate is part of the career search period, a mechanism should be established to support this search.

   Based on the information obtained from this research, for those who entered the labor market in the period of recession the job change was more like the reselection of a job, and their working conditions often improved after the change. However, information on job changes was often not fully utilized when they changed their job. While young people seem to have abundant information today, "consultation" is needed for them to customize a flood of information to be suitable to their individuals needs. Furthermore, the subjects of the survey had the idea for their career design supported by conventional values, but young people today are

surrounded by a variety of values that rapidly change and thus it is difficult to make a career design. Reorganization of the labor market is required to give second chances, and young people need to have opportunities to meet interesting professionals who can become their role models.

3.   A mechanism should be established to ensure Off-JT education and training with clear objectives, addressing problems that individuals are aware of. Development and use of career passports that summarize individuals' rich and varied work experience and education and training experiences, including correspondence courses, etc. should be considered.

The mechanism of vocational ability development combining OJT and Off-JT has worked smoothly so far, based on the assumption that the individual remains at one single company throughout their career. Also in the future OJT will play the primary role in vocational ability development. Off-JT and self-motivated development are not the only requirements for learning a job, but these play important role by supporting vocational ability.

For blue-collar workers and other technical workers, individual companies and the industry as a whole will continue to provide Off-JT to fill their job requirements. It seems that the recent shift in the initiative for vocational development from companies to individuals is mainly observed among white-collar workers, but according to the findings obtained in this research, Off-JT is appreciated by workers who propose programs with their own objectives based on a stable career at the expense of their company, indicating the possibility of individual-led Off-JT. On the other hand, company-led hierarchy-based training sometimes do not remain in the memory of those undergoing the program since its objectives are not quite clear. Whether it is led by the company or individuals, Off-JT is effective when it has a clear objective with respect to the intention of individual workers.

As for white-collar workers, the validity of vocational qualifications is limited inside and outside their organization; therefore, organizing career passports might be an effective method, summarizing individuals' rich and varied work experience and their education and training experiences including correspondence courses.

4.   Career studies and policies need to be developed in consideration of individual workers' framework of thinking.

Instead of raising children while working, women made their decision to work while raising children. Also, a number of men built their careers around their priority to remain in their hometown to be close to their parents. So far, careers have been evaluated based on the name value of a job or company or on the level of income, assuming that the first career is an ideal choice. However, this "objective framework of thinking" is different from the "framework of thinking by individual workers," and there is a gap in between these two that cannot be ignored. Instead of correcting the decision-making framework of individuals to be closer to the "objective framework of thinking," career research must be conducted and policies should be developed that captures the subjective mindset of individual workers.

5. Vitalization of Local Employment with Focus on the Living Area of Individuals

As was stated above in section 4, to realize career development based on the mindset of individual workers, employment must be available in the life zone of individuals. Assuming that there is vitality in every area in Japan, in localities respected for their cultural and spiritual climate, or history and tradition, friendly workplaces and employment must be available for people to live there. Careful examination of the survey results indicates that career development based on the mindset of individuals does not simply mean allowing individuals to live as they like or to have an easy life. It is more appropriate to say that this is an expression of the efforts that individuals make to maintain their family life, family members and local history, which give life to individuals, and to pass this on to future generations. It can be said that career development based on the mindset of individual workers is now related to local vitalization and the national life of Japan. It is more about what is achieved by individuals, who determine who does what to support local communities and their families.

Therefore, continuous efforts towards such career development require the vitalization of local employment with a focus on the daily life zone of individuals as well as on local activities to support career development based on that vitalization. With increasing depopulation due to the reduced birthrate, this will become even more necessary in future for the stable development of the whole of Japan.

This report, which is part of the research project, "Study on Improvement of Labor Market Infrastructure concerning Vocational Ability Development," focused on the vocational ability development and career development of individuals. Information

collected from the interviewees in this survey covers not only information related to their job but also information on their entire life experiences over 50 years, and therefore, not all of the information available from two other reports has been analyzed, in addition to the report published by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (2005). Further research is required to identify more details.

Full Contents of the Report