
The Impact of Prolonged Application of Short-Time Work Systems on the Careers of Regular Employees

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This paper analyzes case-study examples to examine the impact on careers of prolonged application of shortened working-hour systems, while comparing full-time and part-time work in terms of both content and qualities. Part-time and full-time work differ qualitatively in terms of urgency and rapidity, presence or absence of new challenges, and ability to take business trips, and over the medium to long term these factors tend to create disparities in workers' knowledge and skill levels. To rectify the disparities in competence development that differing work formats create, it is necessary to adopt the following five measures: (i) Re-examine and reform one-size-fits-all career development programs for greater diversity; (ii) Allow for greater diversity in careers themselves; (iii) Re-examine and reform the work culture in workplaces where long working hours have become commonplace; (iv) Find consensus on career-development issues between management and users of short-time work systems, and encourage system users to consider their own career advancement while using these systems; and (v) Re-examine and reform short-time work systems, and various other systems governing work formats, so as to prevent them from hindering employees' careers.

I. Introduction

Work-life balance (WLB) has become a major national policy issue in Japan. This is due to a number of factors, including a declining birth rate, a low rate of female participation in the work force despite a decline in the overall working population, and major disparities in the treatment of regular and non-regular workers. Among women of childbearing and child-rearing age (late 20s and 30s), in particular, the rate of participation in the work force is one of the lowest among OECD member nations at 67%,¹ and it is common for women to abandon their careers due to pregnancy and childbirth. Figure 1 shows the change over time in the percentage of women who continue working after bearing children. This percentage stood at 40.4% in 1985–1989, and rose to 52.9% in 2005–2009, an increase of 12.5%. Though this can scarcely be called a major improvement over a 25-year period, the percentage is steadily rising. This is partly due to repeated amendments of the Act on the Welfare of Workers Who Take Care of Children or Other Family Members Including Child Care and Family Care Leave (enacted 1992, hereinafter referred to as the Child Care and Family Care Leave Act), with work formats diversified so as to accommodate workers engaged in child rearing. A 2009 amendment made it mandatory for employers to offer

¹ Based on figures in the 2011 Labour Force Survey (Basic Tabulation) by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications. These figures represent results for all of Japan except Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima prefectures.

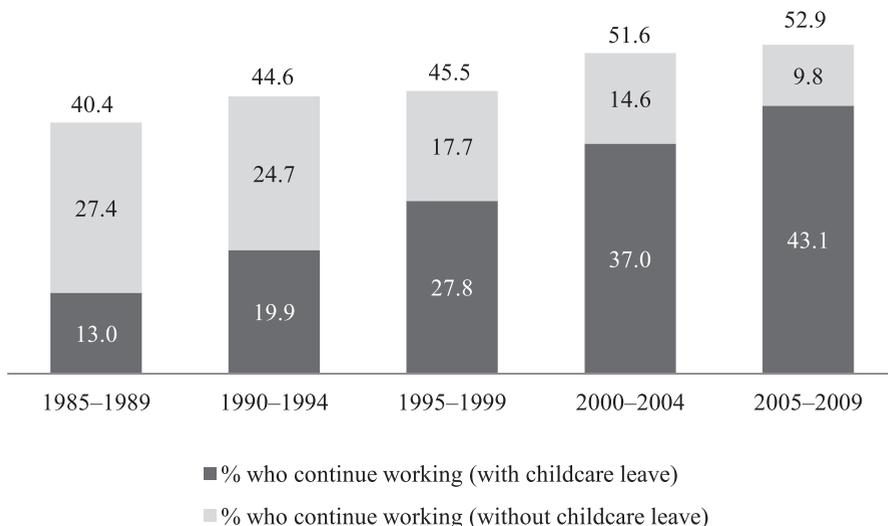


Figure 1. Percentage of Employed Women Who Continue Working after Birth of First Child (Regular Employees Only)

short-time work systems with a six-hour workday, and exemptions from work outside regular hours, to employees with children under the age of three, in addition to existing provisions for child care leave, nursing care leave and leave for care of sick or injured children.² Particularly at large corporations, active efforts are being made to enable employees (primarily regular employees) to balance work with child-care, including extension of the period of eligibility for short working-hour systems from six years to ten years for those engaged in child-rearing. There has been increasing support from both the government and the private sector for workers seeking to continue working while raising children.³

However, problems are emerging in that a growing number of regular employees are using short-time work systems for extended periods of time, obstructing competence building in some occupations. In Japan, responsibility for raising children is still generally con-

² The childcare leave period is until the child reaches the age of one, but under the 2004 amendment, this can be extended to 18 months if certain conditions were met (such as when waiting for admission to a day care center). Under the 2009 amendment, meanwhile, the leave could be extended by two months if the mother and father were taking childcare leave separately. The period of family care leave can be up to a total of 93 days per family member in need of nursing care. Leave for care of sick or injured children is a maximum of five days per year until the child enters elementary school (or up to 10 days when there are two or more children), and short-term family care leave is also a maximum of five days per year (or up to 10 days when there are two or more eligible family members).

³ With regard to the application periods of shortened working-hours systems for employees responsible for childcare, the FY2008 Basic Survey on Equal Employment by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) finds that 57.5% of businesses apply the system “until the child reaches the age of three,” another 35.6% apply it for six years or more, and around 8% allow it to be applied for approximately ten years.

sidered to lie with women, and when women return to work after taking child care leave, they generally do so under short-time work systems. Female regular employees who follow a pattern of repeated child care leave and short-time work over the course of multiple child-births may not work full-time for periods of ten years or so. Herein lies the problem, as a ten-year period away from full-time work may have an adverse impact on an employee's competence and career development.

In Japan, several studies have examined the job content, establishment of targets, and remuneration of short-time workers. Matsubara (2004) looked at the work performed by such employees in the electronics and department store industries, finding that they tend to be assigned low-pressure schedules or work that can be executed in teams, and that superiors allocate tasks that can be completed quickly or are tailored to the competence of those working shortened hours. Meanwhile, the Japan Institute of Workers' Evolution (2010) points out that tasks that can be completed in short periods of time, and targets that are easy to meet, do not necessarily lead to employee motivation or job satisfaction. It can be said that tasks assigned to short-time workers take both their competence levels and work formats into account, but long-term use of short-time work systems at times leads to job content that remains unchanged for extended periods of time.

It is obvious that a variety of workplace experiences (on-the-job training, or OJT) shape an employee's career. Koike (2005) identifies problem-solving abilities, and sophisticated, specialized skills for addressing uncertain situations, as the skills demanded of white-collar university graduates, and finds that corporations offer their employees numerous OJT opportunities so they can obtain these skills. However, if short-time workers perform the same tasks over long periods of time due to the constraints of their work format, not only do motivation and competence decline over the medium to long term, but organizations' internal labor markets may be diluted.

Japan is a rapidly aging society, and an increase in the number of workers balancing jobs with care of elderly family members is expected in the future. As part of its Research Project toward Realization of a Work-Life Balanced Society, the Institute of Social Science at the University of Tokyo conducted a Survey on Work-Eldercare Balance (2012) focused on employees aged 40 and over. The survey found that 13.9% of respondents (males: 12.3%, females: 16.7%) are currently caring for parents or others. However, one part of the survey targeting employees of large corporations found that 29.3% (males: 25.5%, females: 36.0%) considered the likelihood that they would be involved in caring for parents or others within the next five years "very high." The figure stood at 14.6% (males: 13.6%, females: 16.2%) for employees of small and medium-sized enterprises. Together with the percentage responding that there was "a small probability" they would be involved in nursing care, 82.7% of respondents at large corporations (males: 80.9%, females: 85.8%) and 66.6% at small and medium-sized enterprises (males: 65.8%, females: 67.9%)⁴ recognized some

⁴ This project included a survey of six large corporations taking part in the project (the Large Cor-

possibility they would be called on to provide care. Given that involvement in nursing care often lasts for long periods of time, and more than one person may be needed to care for parents or others, an increasing number of workers may choose to work short times for extended periods of time so as to care for family members, and workplaces may face a shortage of employees capable of working full time. Under these circumstances, Japanese corporations may struggle to cultivate human resources with the competence required of core personnel. In the future, re-examination of career development methods will be vital for corporations and other organizations seeking to maintain or expand their operations.⁵

In light of the above considerations, this paper will examine the impact of prolonged application of short-time work systems on employees' careers, through interviews with employees making use of such systems and their superiors. This examination will include a comparison of work content, and changes in that content, in comparison with those of full-time workers. The paper will discuss the following two issues:

- (i) In Japanese workplaces, what kinds of career development plans are used to cultivate core human resources?
- (ii) What jobs are performed by full-time workers and short-time workers in various workplaces, and how do they differ qualitatively? What is the impact of these differences on careers?

Section II below will examine the impact of work formats on career awareness. Then, Section III will analyze case studies, based on the results of interviews, concerning the qualitative differences and impact on careers of short-time work versus full-time work. Finally, Section IV will summarize the results of the analysis and explore their implications.

II. Relationship between Work Format Differences and Motivation

Sato (2008) and Wakisaka (2012) have examined the impact of work formats on motivation. The tasks assigned to a worker strongly affect his or her motivation and sense of whether a job is rewarding, and assuming that different work formats entail assignment of different tasks, these two previous studies are important resources for examination of the impact of differing work formats on careers. Both of the studies employ data from a survey

poration Survey) and another targeting businesses in Hyogo Prefecture (the Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise Survey). The former targeted employees aged 40 or over (though 2.6% of the respondents were 39 or below), while the latter covered all age groups. This difference in the target groups may account for a difference in the percentages expecting to be involved in nursing care within the next five years. Detailed results are published on the project's website (Japanese version only).

⁵ Hisamoto (2003) points out the need to diversify the working formats of regular employees, but also asserts that unless they have the occupational competence expected of regular employees, their employment under this format would result in immediate failure, even if they have achieved the employment stability and wages above a certain level concomitant with status as regular employees. He proposes that a wide range of regular employees be provided with opportunities to build appropriate occupational competence.

Table 1. Work Motivation and WLB Satisfaction by Work Format

Work format	Work motivation	WLB satisfaction level
Standard full-time work	60.7	42.4
Flex-time	67.6	40.4
Short-time work	56.5	62.7
Discretionary labor system for professional work	69.6	30.4
Discretionary labor system for planned-type work	70.4	37.8

Source: Prepared by the author on the basis of the chart “Employment Formats, Job Motivation and Work-Life Balance [WLB] Satisfaction” (Sato 2008, 31) and “Outline of Employment Formats and Job Motivation, WLB Satisfaction and Working Hours” (Wakisaka 2012).

by the Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union (2007) to analyze work motivation and WLB satisfaction levels for different work formats. Sato (2008) analyzed work motivation and WLB satisfaction level for each of four work formats: standard full-time work system, flex-time system, discretionary labor system for professional work, and discretionary labor system for planned-type work. The results indicated that workers in flexible work formats had high work motivation but somewhat low WLB satisfaction levels, and the survey noted that responsibilities and authority were greater in jobs and workplaces with higher levels of work motivation.⁶ Wakisaka (2012) added a short-time work system to the list of systems analyzed by Sato (2008), and found that conversely, workers in such systems have high WLB satisfaction levels but low levels of work motivation (Table 1).⁷ It is possible that jobs held by shortened working-hours employees have qualities that set them apart from those of employees in other work formats, and these qualities may have an impact on system users’ careers.

Meanwhile, Table 2 shows changes in female employees’ attitudes toward their careers before and after having their first child.⁸ It is not a direct illustration of the impact that differing work formats have on careers. However, the fact that many women with preschool children returned to work under short-time work systems after taking childcare leave may be correlated with a shift in attitudes from those characteristic of full-time workers before the birth of the first child, to different attitudes afterward.

⁶ Sato (2008) also asserts that frequent handling of unexpected tasks, and ambitious quotas and targets, also enhance work motivation.

⁷ Wakisaka (2012) does not examine the qualities of jobs or workplaces.

⁸ The survey was aimed at male regular employees in their 20s to 40s with a youngest child below the age of three (2,248 cases), and female regular employees (1,131 cases) and non-regular employees (1,109 cases) in their 20s to 40s with a youngest child of preschool age. The survey was conducted online via an Internet monitoring service (in February-March 2012).

Table 2. Changes in Attitude toward Career before Having First

		1. I want to advance to a managerial position as soon as possible	2. I want to advance to a managerial position at my own pace	3. I want to boost my expertise as quickly as possible	4. I want to boost my expertise at my own pace
Entire sample (n=1131)		3.7	6.7	6.1	23.6
Before having first child	1. I want to advance to a managerial position as soon as possible	36.6	23.7	4.3	15.1
	2. I want to advance to a managerial position at my own pace	3.7	48.1	2.5	12.3
	3. I want to boost my expertise as quickly as possible	0.6	5.0	24.8	31.7
	4. I want to boost my expertise at my own pace	0.0	0.4	4.3	55.2
	5. I am uninterested in being promoted or boosting my expertise, but I want to do my best at my current job	0.5	0.9	2.3	9.3
	6. I am uninterested in being promoted or boosting my expertise, but I want to experience a variety of jobs	0.0	1.5	1.5	10.8
	7. I am uninterested in being promoted or boosting my expertise, and I would prefer to focus on enriching my life outside work	2.2	2.2	1.5	5.9
	8. None of the above applies	0.0	0.0	2.9	3.8

Source: Mitsubishi UFJ Research and Consulting Co., Ltd., *Fact-Finding Survey on Childcare*

Note: The figures in each row should add up to 100, but there is a 0.1–0.2% margin of error in

Child and Now (Female Regular Employees) (n=1131)

Now				Low degree of career motivation and ambition (5+6+7)
5. I am uninterested in being promoted or boosting my expertise, but I want to do my best at my current job	6. I am uninterested in being promoted or boosting my expertise, but I want to experience a variety of jobs	7. I am uninterested in being promoted or boosting my expertise, and I would prefer to focus on enriching my life outside work	8. None of the above applies	
20.4	5.7	23.8	10.0	49.9
5.4	1.1	12.9	1.1	19.4
8.6	4.9	16.0	3.7	29.5
17.4	5.0	13.0	2.5	35.4
16.6	4.3	16.6	2.5	37.5
58.9	6.1	20.1	1.9	85.1
13.8	36.9	33.8	1.5	84.5
4.4	1.5	80.7	1.5	86.6
3.8	0.0	2.9	86.7	6.7

Leave System, etc. (Workers' Questionnaire Survey) (FY2011).

some rows. This is probably due to rounding off from the second decimal place or below.

Of seven options concerning attitudes toward career,⁹ four are collectively seen as indicating a high degree of career motivation and ambition: 1. “I want to advance to a managerial position as soon as possible,” 2. “I want to advance to a managerial position at my own pace,” 3. “I want to boost my expertise as quickly as possible,” and 4. “I want to boost my expertise at my own pace.” Meanwhile, the other three are seen as indicative of a low degree of career motivation and ambition: 5. “I am uninterested in being promoted or boosting my expertise, but I want to do my best at my current job,” 6. “I am uninterested in being promoted or boosting my expertise, but I want to experience a variety of jobs,” and 7. “I am uninterested in being promoted or boosting my expertise, and I would prefer to focus on enriching my life outside work.” An examination of the changes in female employees’ attitudes toward their careers before having their first child and now (after having their first child) reveals that of those with a high degree of career motivation and ambition before having their first child, between 20% and slightly under 40% now had a low degree of career motivation and ambition. In the study, the same analysis was conducted with male employees, although the findings are not shown in this paper. Only about 10% of men showed a similar drop in career motivation and ambition after the birth of their first child. It seems likely that the smaller change in attitudes toward career stems from the fact that men’s work formats less often depend on whether they have children.

Section III below will compare the tasks performed by short-time and full-time workers through case studies, analyze the qualities of the two, and examine the impact of short-time work systems on employees’ careers.

III. Qualities of Short-Time and Full-Time Work and Impact on Careers

1. Survey Framework

This analysis employs case studies personally conducted by the author as part of a JEIU survey (Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union 2011). The survey targeted workers who had worked under a short-time work system for approximately five years (hereinafter referred to as “short-time workers”) due to childcare or other responsibilities, and their superiors, in order to examine the impact on careers of prolonged periods away from full-time work. As many short-time workers go directly from childcare leave to work under a short-time work system, the survey also targeted those whose combined length of time away from full-time work including childcare leave and short-time work was approximately five years. Respondents included past and present users of short-time work systems. The period of five years was chosen because workers in overseas companies tend to work under short-time work systems for around five years, during which time they discuss their career paths with superiors. Also, it was hypothesized that five years was the

⁹ Although there were eight options in the survey, option 8 (“None of the previous options applies”) has been omitted from this paper, as it implies no specific career awareness.

maximum length of time employees could work short-time schedules and continue to be treated as regular employees. Survey respondents in both technical and administrative positions were selected so as to avoid bias toward a particular occupation (see Table 3). Each respondent was given about one hour to respond to questions primarily concerning the specific content of tasks performed as full-time workers and as short-time workers, and their attitudes toward their careers. Superiors were asked about the tasks assigned to short-time workers; the qualities and specific content of work performed in the workplace overall; the duties and skills expected of regular employees in the workplace; the career processes through which those skills were acquired; and the degree to which prolonged application of short-time work systems affects the development of skills expected of regular employees.

2. Short-Time Workers' Desired System Use Period and Attitude toward Career

First, let us examine the leave systems and short-time work systems for workers engaged in childcare at the companies where survey respondents are employed. In addition, let us take a look at the vision short-time workers responding to this survey have regarding their careers.

Two companies participated in this survey. Both are leading Japanese electrical equipment manufacturers, and their employees belong to the sector-specific trade union JEIU (Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union). With regard to childcare leave, Company A complies with legal requirements, while Company B goes further, not only allowing workers to take leave until their children reach the age of three, but also to take this leave in separate stages. In terms of short-time work systems for employees engaged in childcare, both companies offer this option to employees through their children's third year of elementary school. In practice, workers are permitted to switch back and forth between short-time and full-time work, though company rules do not clearly stipulate this option.

How long did the short-time workers intend to continue making use of the available systems? Of the six survey respondents, two persons have already returned to work full time. One of them had used the system for the maximum period allowable, while the other returned to full-time work while living together with parents, though she is exempt from overtime work.¹⁰ Four were still working under the system, and all four said they intended to continue doing so for the maximum period allowable. This means that five out of six respondents had spent, or would spend, ten or more years away from full-time work, and if they were to have further children this period would grow even longer. The respondent who did not intend to work for the maximum period allowable under the system said she planned to continue for four years, until her youngest child entered elementary school, making her total period of short-time work approximately six years.

The respondents gave the following reasons for using the system as long as possible:

¹⁰ At Ms. C's place of employment, employees are permitted to work under the short-time work system until their child completes the third grade of elementary school.

Table 3. Overview of Survey Respondents

Short-time worker	Company	Division	Workplace characteristics	Years on the job	Length of time using system ¹	Working hours	Superior
<i>Case Study 1</i> Mr. A ² (Male) Ordinary employee	A Co.	Design	22 employees. Roughly equal number of people in their 20s and in their 30s. Work hours often long.	8 years	3 years	7 hours combined with flextime (reduced by 1 hour)	Mr. B Superior
<i>Case Study 2</i> Ms. C (Female) Senior	A Co.	Development	32 employees. Many young workers. 15 to 25 hours of overtime per month.	17 years	4 years, 6 months 2 years, 5 months	7 hours combined with flextime (reduced by 1 hour). *Currently working full-time	Mr. D Superior
<i>Case Study 3</i> Ms. E (Female) Ordinary employee	B Co.	General affairs	14 employees. Work includes management of labor and benefits as well as human resources, staff conditions, hiring and training duties.	20 years	9 years (1 year, 7 months)	6 hours, 45 minutes combined with flextime (reduced by 1 hour) *Currently working full-time	Mr. F Superior
<i>Case Study 4</i> Ms. G (Female) Chief	B Co.	Procurement	12 employees. Work includes support for parts procurement buyers, equipment procurement planning.	14 years	2 years (2 years, 6 months)	6 hours, 45 minutes (reduced by 1 hour)	Mr. H Superior
<i>Case Study 5</i> Ms. I (Female) Ordinary employee	B Co.	Publicity	7 employees. Work includes planning and support duties for personnel division.	20 years	3 years, 6 months 2 years, 6 months	5 hours, 45 minutes (reduced by 2 hours)	Mr. K Superior
<i>Case Study 6</i> Ms. J (Female) Chief	B Co.	Publicity	As above	17 years	1 year, 6 months (3 years)	5 hours, 45 minutes (reduced by 2 hours)	Mr. K Superior

Notes: ¹The periods of time in parentheses under "Length of time using system" are periods of leave (= maternity leave + childcare leave).
²In this case study, the period of system use differs from that specified for survey respondents. However, this case was included in the survey due to the wishes of the individual, and also because the worker was male, enabling comparison with female cases.

(i) It would be possible to return to work full-time, but there tends to be a lot of overtime work and it is difficult to leave the office on schedule. (ii) They would like to devote sufficient time to childcare and housework. These responses indicate that they do not make prolonged use of the system because they would be unable to work a normal schedule. Rather, they do so because extremely demanding work conditions in their workplaces make it difficult to resume full-time work.

How did the short-time workers view their own careers? Of the six people surveyed, five felt anxiety over their future careers, particularly due to major discrepancies in the rate of advancement and promotion between short-time and full-time workers, and due to the sense that they had ceased to be full-fledged members of the workplace because of their shortened work schedules.

It can be said that hesitation to resume full-time work, and extended use of the short-time work system, further widen disparities in career achievement and ambition, dampening short-time workers' motivation and causing them to give up on their careers.

3. Characteristics of Full-Time and Short-Time Work

Next, let us examine the characteristics of full-time and short-time work, taking the specific tasks performed in each workplace into account.

In Case Study 1, Mr. A (a short-time worker) belongs to the design division, which primarily handles (i) design of the housing of commercial car navigation systems and (ii) outsourcing of the design and manufacture of cables and optional accessories. The first entails planning projects in conjunction with factories and other third parties, and executing design work according to a schedule so as to meet the market release date. The department manager assigns projects to subordinates according to their skills and training. As it is important not to postpone the release date, employees work long hours of overtime as the project nears completion. Once manufacturing has begun, they must visit factories to ensure production is proceeding according to design and to handle any problems that arise, and this requires two or three one- to two-week business trips per project. These trips are sometimes extended, depending on the circumstances. Recent years have seen an increasing number of production sites transferred overseas, necessitating overseas business trips, while domestic business trips are still required when manufacture takes place in Japan. For obvious reasons, these duties are assigned to full-time workers.

Meanwhile, the second entails collecting and coordinating viewpoints from various divisions within the company and then outsourcing the work of product creation. These tasks are usually assigned to employees with the title of Group Leader or higher, as they require considerable coordination skills. The tasks feature less variability and urgency than those of design work, and tend to proceed in a systematic fashion. The supervisor, Mr. B, assigned these tasks to Mr. A for these reasons, and because they match Mr. A's capabilities.

In Case Study 2, Ms. C belongs to the development division, which develops car audio software. As in Case Study 1, overseas manufacturers form a growing percentage of the

customer base, leading to an increasing number of overseas business trips. Because projects must progress according to development schedules, any troubles that arise must be dealt with without delay. Employees in this division are expected to understand, from the perspective of product users, how each element and component works, as well as the functional principles of the product as a whole. The latter requires a higher level of specialized knowledge, necessitating a process of trial and error through OJT and often entailing long working hours. These tasks are therefore assigned to full-time workers, while short-time workers handle areas that can be managed with already accumulated knowledge and skills, and that do not involve rapidly shifting technological trends. Short-time work also involves few meetings or negotiations with other corporate divisions or third parties, and few business trips.

In Case Study 3, Ms. E belongs to the general affairs division, which handles personnel and labor issues (hiring, evaluation, training, union relations, benefits) for a business with about 3,000 employees. There are relatively few urgent tasks, although the division becomes busy when events such as personnel assessments, union negotiations, and training coincide. Some work, however, such as formulation of plans and proposals for employee training to address future business challenges and development strategies, requires a lengthy process of trial and error and is therefore assigned to full-time workers.

In Case Study 4, Ms. G's division is mainly engaged in determining parts prices and making purchases for products manufactured in the company's plant. Procurement buyers meet frequently with representatives of factories, design divisions, suppliers, and so forth, selecting suppliers, determining prices and ensuring a steady supply of parts. When problems with a supplier or distributor occur, procurement buyers must act swiftly to secure parts from other suppliers or find other distribution channels. Another important duty is to locate and build relationships with new suppliers in case of unforeseen emergencies. The role of procurement buyer is thus assigned to full-time workers. While Ms. G held this position when employed full-time, upon switching to short-time work she was transferred to the planning division, which handles general planning procurement and provides support for procurement buyers. This support entails management of performance data, reviewing and signing contracts, training division personnel, compiling and managing personnel costs and other expenses, green procurement (i.e. prioritized use of products not containing parts and materials detrimental to the environment and biodiversity), compiling rules, dealing with audits and other duties. While not requiring the same degree of expertise or versatility as that expected of procurement buyers, Ms. G's current position does require wide-ranging knowledge of and experience with all parts the procurement division handles.

In Case Study 6, Ms. J's division is responsible for planning PR for the entire company, formulating plans, organizational management of divisions, and procedures for administration of each division's website. As many division stakeholders are inside the company, there are relatively few urgent tasks. Ms. J is in charge of procedures for website administration, a position that fluctuates greatly in terms of number of tasks, urgency, and proce-

dural complexity, depending on whether the work concerns business-related divisions or staff-related divisions. The task execution process is the same for both, but when the work involves a business-related division, there are a greater number of tasks and more flexible and complex responses are required, meaning work sometimes lasts late into the night. For this reason full-time workers are assigned work concerning business divisions. Meanwhile, short-time workers are assigned work concerning personnel divisions, as it is less urgent and there are fewer tasks involved.

From the above findings, we can identify the following three characteristics of full-time work.

First, urgency and rapidity. This is due to two factors: serious responsibilities to customers and external stakeholders, and rigorous schedules. To build mutual trust with customers, who are external stakeholders, it is essential to adhere rigorously to the schedules customers demand. Success or failure in achieving this has a major impact on mutual trust-based relationships with customers and ultimately on business results over the medium to long term. Work outside regular business hours is sometimes required for success. Also, every case study found unscheduled overtime and sudden business trips necessary in order to observe sales procedures and manufacturing processes.

Second, the presence of new challenges. Taking on new challenges requires a process of trial and error so as to obtain knowledge and skills that will be needed in the future. In Case Studies 1 and 2, workers were expected to deal with unfamiliar products and projects, and to obtain diverse knowledge and skills through repeated trial and error. In Case Study 3, as well, full-time workers in the general affairs division were expected to employ trial and error and exercise their originality as they addressed issues of future concern to the company and formulated plans in areas such as employee training.

Third, the need to go on business trips. As described earlier, in this survey's case studies there was a strong correlation between business trips, urgency of tasks, and rigorous adherence to schedules. In Case Study 4, procurement division employees had to take sudden business trips to resolve parts delivery problems, and technical division employees were sent on extended business trips (one to three weeks) to production sites to prevent delays in product sales schedules or resolve other problems. It was found that highly profitable business endeavors often involve business trips, and these trips call for an outstanding degree of knowledge and negotiation ability in order to resolve problems in limited periods of time.

Short-time work, on the other hand, generally lacks the above-described characteristics. The survey found that short-time workers are often allocated tasks that utilize their manifest abilities. This is understandable, as putting these workers' skills to effective use helps to maintain workplace productivity in the short term. In the long term, however, their competence building is delayed due to long periods of time without engaging in work requiring rapid action, new challenges and problem solving in limited periods of time. This state of affairs may detract from workplace productivity and dilute the internal labor market.

4. Professional Skills Required of Regular Employees and Career Processes for Acquiring Them

Certain skills are required of regular (full-fledged) employees, and certain career processes have been developed to help employees acquire them. It is important to understand what these skills and career processes are in order to judge whether the tasks assigned to short-time workers are compatible with the processes.

To briefly summarize this section's conclusions: the professional skills expected of regular employees are the same as those required at the managerial level, namely problem analysis, problem solving, negotiation and judgment. As soon as employees are hired, they begin a career process aimed at developing these professional skills, and all the workplaces surveyed employed the same career development model aimed at cultivating managerial-level personnel. Taken to its logical conclusion, this model aims to advance all the employees in a given workplace (or sector) to the managerial level. The specific career development processes pursued in each workplace are outlined below.

Case Study 1 found that newly hired employees in the design division assist senior co-workers for their first two or three years on the job, while mastering the basics of design and being given progressively greater responsibility. Thereafter, they are assigned increasingly difficult tasks while acquiring experience with design of diverse products and more specialized knowledge and skills. After about six years, employees become group leaders and formulate design plans themselves, with the goal of implementing these plans while training and assigning tasks to junior co-workers. While the pace of professional development differs from person to person, in general a worker is considered a full-fledged employee after 10 years or so, and is then eligible for promotion to a managerial position. This is the basic career process. In recent years, an increasing volume of design work involves products for export, and the company must keep track of product safety standards for each country. For this reason, an important step in career development is to be placed in charge of a particular overseas manufacturer and acquire wide-ranging design knowledge and expertise. We may assume that a similar process applies in Case Study 2, where employees in the development division are expected to assume the responsibilities of project leaders after around 10 years on the job, to manage any risks and expenses that arise during the development process, and to ensure that development plans are being implemented effectively (Figure 2).

Business trips constitute an important form of OJT in this career development process. Business trips are seen not only as opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, problem solving abilities, negotiation skills and judgment, but also as litmus tests indicating whether employees are suitable for leadership roles. In administrative divisions as well, employees go through a 10- to 20-year process of repeated transfers to various divisions and attendant changes in work content, aimed at fostering problem identification, problem solving and negotiation skills. This process is intended to cultivate personnel suitable for managerial positions (Figure 3).

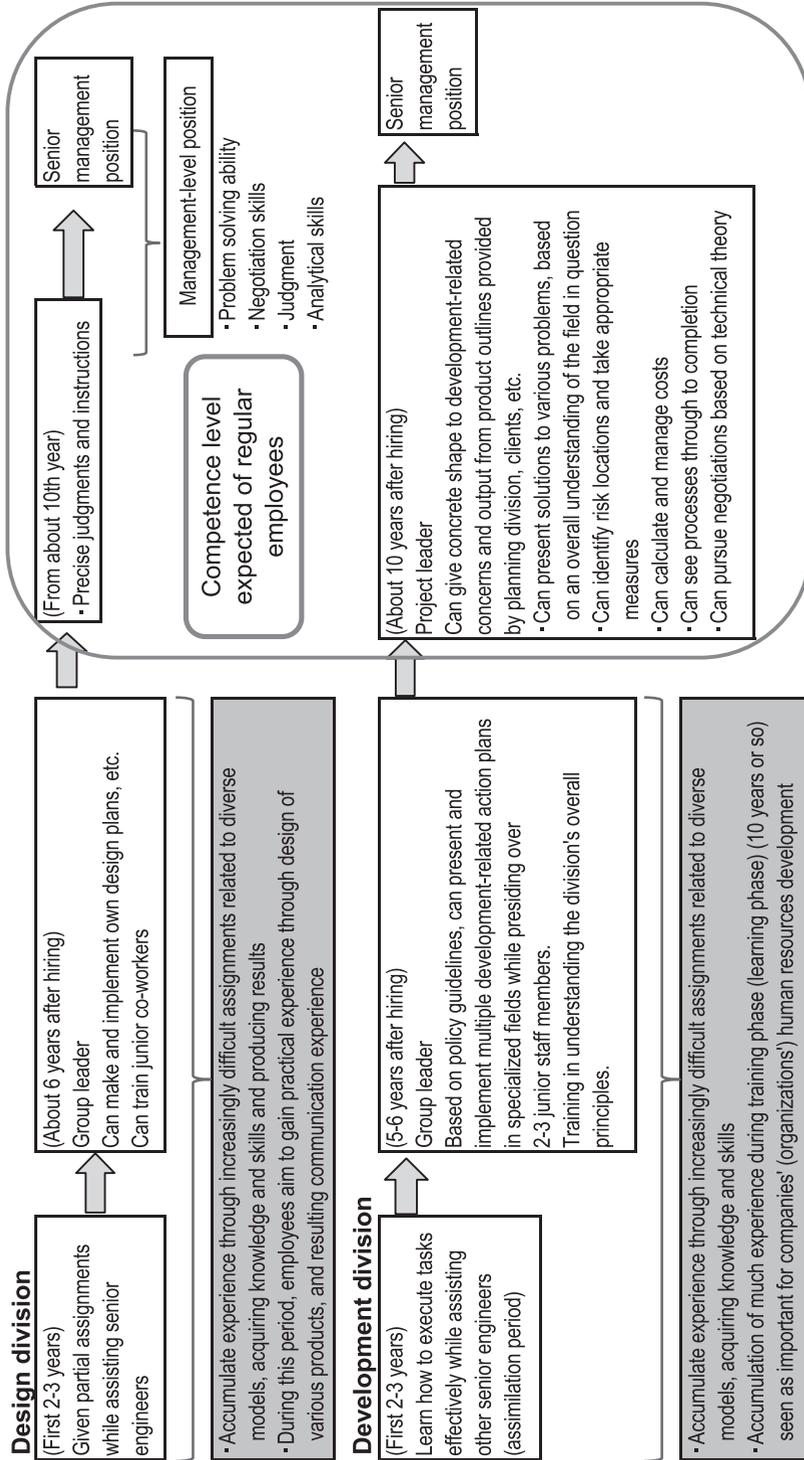


Figure 2. Career Steps for Regular Technical Employees

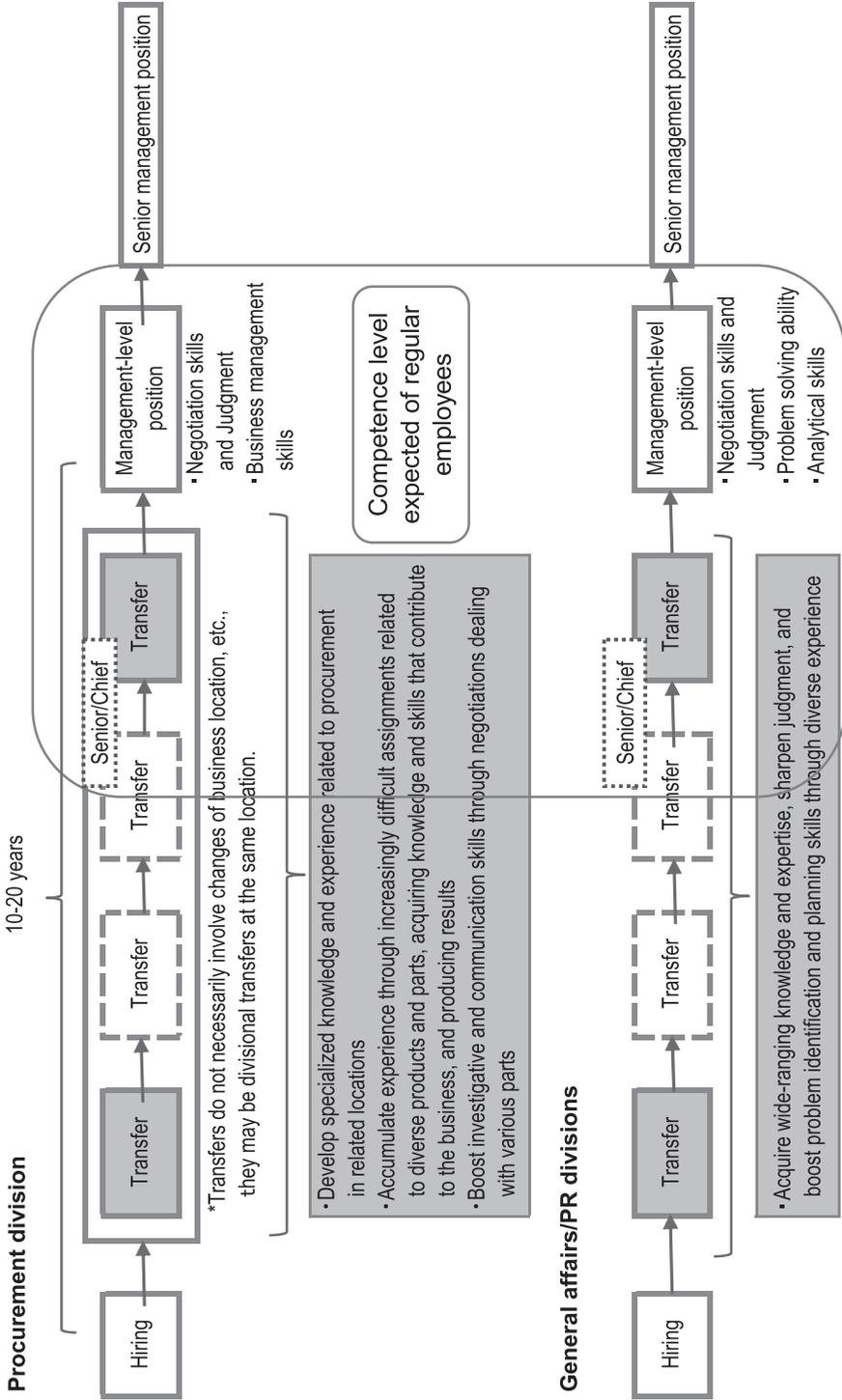


Figure 3. Career Steps for Regular Administrative Employees

Table 4. Change in Short-Time Workers' Work Content

	Has work content changed?	Rapidity	Business trips	New challenges
Case Study 1 (Design division)	Yes	No	No	No
Case Study 2 (Development division)	No	—	—	—
Case Study 3 (General affairs division)	No	—	—	—
Case Study 4 (Procurement division)	Yes	No	No	A little
Case Study 5 (Publicity division)	No	—	—	—
Case Study 6 (Publicity division)	Yes	No	No	No

5. Change, or Lack Thereof, in Short-Time Workers' Tasks

Boosting the sophistication of work content is important for regular employees' professional development. Does the content of short-time work evolve over time as well?

Table 4 shows changes in the tasks performed by short-time workers.

Mr. A (Case Study 1) had been a short-time worker for three years. Though assigned design work, the primary focus of his division, for the first year, this work fell to only 50% of his total work content during the second year. The other 50% consisted of ordering optional parts, a task which primarily entailed in-house coordination. This work could be called more difficult in that the group leader had previously handled it, but the degree of urgency and rapidity was low, as it basically consisted of internal company negotiations. It also involved fewer new challenges than negotiations outside the company. Mr. A's superior, Mr. B, points out that short-time workers can only handle a limited range of tasks, that these tasks tend to stay unchanged, and that employees who perform only these limited tasks for five years or more will fall far behind their full-time coworkers in terms of professional abilities and this disparity will become insurmountable. Mr. D, Ms. C's superior in Case Study 2, expressed similar opinions. There have been no major technological paradigm shifts in Ms. C's field, and she is currently able to handle her tasks with the skills she has amassed over many years, but if she continues to handle only these tasks over the long term, she may fall short of the proficiency level expected of regular employees.

The situation is similar for administrative short-time workers. With the exception of Ms. G (Case Study 4), none of them have changed workplaces since starting short-time work. Naturally, there have been minor changes in all of their job contents, but neither they nor their superiors perceived the difficulty level as having increased.

As we have seen, prolonged short-time work not only strips workers of opportunities to grow professionally by performing tasks requiring urgency, rapidity, and acceptance of new challenges, it also runs the risk of robbing them of the competence expected of employees.

IV. Conclusion

This paper has aimed to clarify differences in the content (qualities) of full-time and short-time work, and to examine impact on the careers of short-time workers with a focus on changes (increasing sophistication) in their tasks. The following three points have become clear.

First, there are three discrepancies between full-time and short-time work. One is the degree of urgency and rapidity. This quality has three notable aspects: (a) on-the-job interaction with those outside the company, (b) building long-term mutual trust-based relationships with external parties (usually customers) by adhering to the schedules these customers demand, and (c) work that is strongly reflected in business results. As a result, these tasks are usually assigned to full-time workers with flexibility in their working hours. Meanwhile, short-time work is characterized by (i) interaction with others within the company, (ii) highly flexible schedules, and (iii) little responsibility for business results.

The second discrepancy is the presence or absence of new challenges. Work entailing challenges requires strong powers of concentration and major time commitments. At the same time, these experiences are expected to impart a high degree of expertise. With short-time work, however, the emphasis is on ability to complete tasks within designated working hours. This means that short-time workers may go for long periods without taking on challenges and, in the future, fall behind their full-time counterparts in terms of competence.

The third discrepancy involves business trips. The issue here is not merely one of schedule flexibility. Business trips are also seen as opportunities to put negotiation skills, knowledge and judgment into practice, and as a means of cultivating leadership qualities. Short-time workers are rarely assigned to go on business trips, and thus miss out on opportunities to cultivate judgment and negotiation skills. For these reasons, it is difficult for short-time workers to plan their future career paths and easy for them to lose motivation.

The second point clarified by this paper is that in all kinds of workplaces and fields, career development models are solely focused on employees who can take on increasingly sophisticated tasks over 10 to 20 years, cultivating their judgment, negotiation and problem solving skills until they are eligible for managerial positions. In all cases, these career development models assume all employees will be full-time, and workers who spend lengthy periods away from full-time work find it difficult to stay on this career path.

The third point is that the content of short-time work tends to remain virtually unchanged over time. As described earlier, taking on increasingly sophisticated tasks is essential for professional development, and performing the same tasks year after year stands in the way of competence building for short-time workers. The longer they work under a short-time work system, the greater the risk of delay in their professional development. It is noteworthy that the degree of risk does not depend on gender.

The number of short-time workers is expected to rise in the future, and it must be said

that habitual use of short-time work systems will pose challenges in terms of career development. What measures should businesses take in order to administer these systems effectively and at the same time secure enough sufficiently qualified personnel?

One is to diversify career development processes aimed at cultivating core personnel. The current process assumes that employees will work full-time throughout their careers. In the future, there is a need for diverse career processes that take the possibility of short-time work into account. This will require managers to assign work from the standpoint of human resources development. The role of management is both to meet immediate targets so as to boost the organization's performance in the short term, and to cultivate human resources to boost its performance in the long term. For the latter, day-to-day allocation of tasks is key, and superiors should assign short-time workers tasks that change and grow increasingly sophisticated, as they do with full-time workers. The tendency of tasks to stay unchanged over long periods of time is particularly problematic. This should be addressed by considering, in discussions with subordinates, workplace transfers that do not require upheavals such as change of residence.

Another measure is diversification of careers themselves. This paper has found that workplaces consistently adopt a one-size-fits-all career development model in which every employee is expected to advance to a managerial position. Moving forward, career models ought to be diversified so that the final goal is not necessarily a managerial position, but for instance a highly specialized non-managerial position. There is also room for variation in the speed with which careers advance. Workers have diverse values and family situations. Some may be willing and able to stay on "the fast track," while others may prefer "the slow track," pursuing career advancement at their own pace. Each employee is entitled to career support, and a more flexible approach will ultimately lead to the cultivation of more ambitious and motivated human resources.

A third desirable measure is a change in working styles. Japanese workplaces have long been known for lengthy working hours, and this seems to be a root cause of prolonged application of short-time work systems. Full-time workers are expected to work overtime, and those who seek to go home on time are not considered full-fledged team members. Under these circumstances, short-time workers lose the motivation to return to work full-time, and reluctantly settle for reduced wages and curtailed careers. In addition to allocating tasks with an eye to building all employees' competence, as described above, management ought to move away from the culture of habitual overtime work to allow short-time workers to return earlier to full-time work.

A fourth measure is for management (superiors) and short-time workers to meet and discuss career options. This survey revealed that while superiors take such workers' work-life balance into account, they do not discuss career development with the workers or consider the impact of long-term short-time work on their careers. Of course it is important to consider the balance between work and home. However, as stated above, the duties of management include advancing the careers of subordinates and building competence

throughout the workplace. This paper has shown that short-time work has three characteristics not found in full-time work, making it difficult for them to pursue career prospects and thus to maintain motivation. Managers should learn about subordinates' visions for their careers, advise them on work formats conducive to achieving these visions, and help maintain motivation while letting them know clearly what is expected of them.

Meanwhile, short-time workers must have a strong awareness of career development, and discuss careers cooperatively with their partners (spouses). Rather than one partner remaining in a short-time work system year after year, couples should be flexible, understanding and cooperative, for example by having one partner do short-time work at critical junctures in the other's career.

The fifth and final measure is an overhaul of short-time work systems themselves. This paper has noted that long periods of time away from full-time work can be a stumbling block to workers' careers. Both short-time workers and managers need to consider temporary returns to full-time work when necessary for career development. To this end, the system must be made more flexible so that workers can switch freely between short- and full-time work.

As an increase in the number of short-time workers is growing into a virtual certainty, examination of how both employers and employees can derive maximum benefit from short-time work systems is urgently needed.

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