
Research on Difficult Situations in Employment Placement Service

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Since fiscal 2008, the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training has developed a training program where the employees who engage in the employment placement service at Public Employment Security Offices (hereinafter called “Counselors”) learn techniques to cope with actions of job seekers or employers that are difficult to handle (hereinafter called “Difficult Situations”). Prior to the development of the program, questionnaires were given to 85 counselors to obtain basic information regarding Difficult Situations. In this article, by analyzing these questionnaires and upon examining the structure and characteristics of Difficult Situations, we will discuss how to cope with Difficult Situations and suggest an outline of the training program development.

I. Introduction

Looking at the recent trend of the labor market in Japan, the monthly mean of the ratio of active job openings to applicants (seasonally adjusted and including part-timers) was 0.47 in 2009. It is the lowest since 1963 when statistics were taken for the first time. The unemployment rate (seasonally adjusted) was 5.1% in the same year. This high unemployment rate exceeding 5.0% has not been seen since 2003.

While the relationship between supply and demand has tightened in the Japanese labor market as just described, Public Employment Security Offices are needed to show the supply-demand adjustment more effectively. What constitutes supply-demand adjustments are as follows:

- (1) The acquirement of job offers
- (2) The provision of job offers to job seekers
- (3) The matching of job seekers to job offers

Consequently, to show the supply-demand adjustment more effectively, Public Employment Security Offices would have to do the following:

- (1) The acquirement of more high quality job offers
- (2) The provision of job offers to job seekers in a more easy-to-understand form
- (3) A more effective implementation of employment placement services of matching job seekers to job offers

In this research, vocational counseling¹ is focused on showing effective sup-

¹ Vocational counseling that this article is referring to is the consultation for the unemployed and career changers who need employment placement service at the Public Employment Security Offices.

ply-demand adjustments at Public Employment Security Offices. According to Article 4-1 of Employment Security Act, the term “employment placement” as used in this Act means receiving offers for posting job offerings and offers for registering as a job seeker and extending services to establish employment relationships between the job offers and the job seekers. In addition, according to Article 51-3 of the Act which explains vocational counseling, Public Employment Security Offices may offer consultation, necessary advice and other assistance to job seekers, etc. with respect to matters concerning employment placement, labor recruitment and labor supply. Thus vocational counseling can be thought of as a support for job seekers in order to increase the likelihood of finding employment through employment placement. Consequently, the development of vocational counseling ability of employees who engage in the employment placement service (hereinafter called “Counselors”) can be thought of as one means of improving the function of supply-demand adjustments at Public Employment Security Offices.

The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (hereinafter called “JILPT”) has developed training programs for the counselors to improve their vocational counseling ability. As part of the development, JILPT has developed a program where the counselors learn techniques to cope with actions of job seekers or employers² that are difficult to handle (hereinafter called “Difficult Situations”).

The present research aims to acquire basic data for the development of the training program. That is, the direction for the development is examined after understanding the following:

- (1) What kinds of difficult situations are there? How often do difficult situations occur?
- (2) What factor structures do difficult situations have?
- (3) Do the attributes of the counselors such as gender, age, etc. make any difference regarding the level of difficulties they feel toward these situations?

II. Preliminary Survey

In order to collect data for this case study of Difficult Situations, from June to July of 2008, 99 trainees of JILPT who are counselors of Public Employment Security Offices were asked to list as many actual difficult situations they could remember on the questionnaire. From this questionnaire, Difficult Situation was defined as follows.

Difficult Situation is a situation where the counselor does not know how to cope with either job seeker’s or employer’s² actions at an employment placement service. The situation is usually initiated by the job seeker, but may in some occasions be initiated by the counselor or employer.

² In vocational counseling, the counselor contacts the employer by phone with the job seeker present.

135 Difficult Situations were collected from 76 participants. The collection rate was 76.8%. The 135 Difficult Situations were analyzed and grouped into 28 Difficult Situations. Three researchers collaborated and used the following criteria to group them:

- (1) If the semantic contents of Difficult Situations were similar, they were considered one Difficult Situation.
- (2) One Difficult Situation contains a single semantic content.

III. Main Survey

Participants

In July of 2008, questionnaires were sent to 85 trainees of JILPT who are counselors of Public Employment Security Offices and collected. All trainees participated. The collection rate was 100.0%.

Materials

Three Difficult Situations out of twenty-eight were not included, because they were not the object of vocational counseling.¹ The counselor's gender, age, and months of experience on vocational counseling were also asked.

Procedures

The participants were requested to evaluate the frequency of each Difficult Situation (hereinafter called "Frequency"), with each frequency given a number of points. The choices were: (a) never (1 point), (b) infrequent (2 points), (c) sometimes (3 points), and (d) often (4 points). The participants were also requested to evaluate the level of difficulty of each Difficult Situation (hereinafter called "Difficult Level"). The choices were: (a) none (1 point), (b) not much (2 points), (c) a little (3 points), and (d) very (4 points).

Attributes of Participants

Eighty-three participants were the object of analysis. Two participants were removed from this analysis, because they didn't have any vocational counseling experience. As for the gender of the participants, 68.7% were men. As for the age group, 30's comprised the most with 39.8%, 20's with 28.9%, and 50's with 1.2%. The average number of months of vocational counseling experience were 41.8 months (SD=40.6).

IV. Result 1

Factor Analysis was conducted to clarify the structure of Difficult Situations. The variance of the 83 participants' scores didn't have the extreme bias in terms of the mean and the SD of Difficult Level (Table 1). There were no situations where a specific choice was selected by more than 70% of the participants. Principal component analysis of 25 situations

Table 1. Mean, SD of Difficult Situations

Items	Frequency		Difficult Level	
	M	SD	M	SD
1. The employment conditions that the job seeker was requesting regarding working hours, wages, etc., did not match the requirements of the job offers.	3.446	.569	2.723	.686
2. The job seeker complained how bad the employees of the public employment agencies dealt with him/her.	2.578	.544	2.831	.746
3. The job seeker complained how bad the employer dealt with him/her.	3.060	.571	2.866 [†]	.716
4. The job seeker did not know what kind of work he/she wants to do.	3.313	.603	3.157	.819
5. The job seeker wanted me to ask the employer questions that I thought were inappropriate.	2.602	.715	2.819	.735
6. The job seeker having a low probability of getting a job asked for an immediate introduction to a company due to his/her economic hardship.	2.952	.661	3.229	.770
7. The job seeker with no prior experience made an offer that required that specific experience.	3.265	.626	2.265	.607
8. The job seeker with no qualification made an offer which required that qualification.	3.133	.658	2.133	.620
9. The job seeker attached his/her mind to specific employment conditions regarding working hours, wages, etc., and refused to consider alternatives.	2.759	.709	2.506	.739
10. When I contacted the employer during the job placement service, the employer rejected the job seeker's offer due to his/her age or gender.	3.807	.426	3.036	.772
11. The job seeker asked detailed questions other than what was listed in the job offer and other than the content of the employer's registered information.	3.205	.728	2.663	.816
12. The job seeker made an offer that required specific educational background which he/she does not have.	2.831	.746	1.855	.608
13. The job seeker asked for consultation that was beyond the support of the public employment agency.	2.610 [†]	.716	2.711	.789
14. The job seeker complained how the actual employment conditions, work contents, etc., differed from what was listed on the job requirement.	3.458	.548	3.241	.726
15. The job seeker did not seem to want to work.	2.855	.735	2.843	.969
16. There were no job offers that the elderly job seeker wanted.	3.759	.458	3.518	.651
17. I did not know how to express to the job seeker the company's situation that had problems.	2.675	.843	2.723	.915
18. The job seeker did not respond to any of my questions.	2.012 [†]	.676	2.928	.985
19. The job seeker who made the offer did not appear for the job interview which I had set up.	3.000	.681	2.855	.683
20. The job seeker wanted to apply to several job offers at the same time without setting priorities.	3.268 [†]	.754	2.434	.666
21. The job seeker asked for a type of job training that was not related to the job requirement he/she was seeking.	2.695 [†]	.781	2.530	.817
22. The job seeker talked only about a general employment situation and system, and thereby there was no progress regarding his/her job hunting.	2.084	.719	2.542	.786
23. If the job seeker were to have a job interview, his/her appearance and attitude would have been unsatisfactory.	2.831	.640	2.487 [†]	.758
24. Although the job seeker came up with a number of job offers, it was difficult to narrow down the choices.	2.952	.623	2.494	.705
25. The elderly job seeker mistrusted and complained about offers that had an age limit but were not specified in the job requirement.	3.530	.591	3.304 [†]	.642

Note: Mean values with † indicate averages of 82 employees (one missing value).

was conducted using Varimax rotation. As a result, three factors were extracted, and Table 2 shows their rotated factor patterns.

Factor 1 was highly loaded by the following situations:

- The job seeker did not respond to any of my questions.
- The job seeker attached his/her mind to specific employment conditions regarding working hours, wages, etc., and refused to consider alternatives.
- The job seeker talked only about a general employment situation and system, and thereby there was no progress regarding his/her job hunting.

These situations suggest that the counselors either could not understand the job seeker's way of thinking regarding his/her own employment search, or thought it inappropriate.

- If the job seeker were to have a job interview, his/her appearance and attitude would have been unsatisfactory.
- The job seeker did not seem to want to work.

These situations which suggest the counselors considered the job seeker's attitude toward employment had problems, also had a high load.

From these, Factor 1 was interpreted as problems of job seeker's attitude and was called "the problem of attitude toward finding employment" (hereinafter called "Attitude Problem").

Factor 2 was highly loaded by the situations:

- The job seeker with no prior experience made an offer that required that specific experience.
- The job seeker with no qualification made an offer which required that qualification.
- The job seeker made an offer that required specific educational background which he/she does not have.

These situations suggest the incongruity of information between the job seeker and the job offer. Thus Factor 2 was called "the informational mismatch between the job seeker and the job offer" (hereinafter called "Informational Mismatch").

Factor 3 was highly loaded by the situations:

- The elderly job seeker mistrusted and complained about offers that had an age limit but were not specified in the job requirement.
- The job seeker complained how bad the employer dealt with him/her.
- The job seeker complained how the actual employment conditions, work contents, etc., differed from what was listed on the job requirement.

These situations suggest that the job seeker complained about the system and the information of the labor market and with the employer's correspondence. Also, the following situations:

- The job seeker complained how bad the counselors of the public employment agencies dealt with him/her.
- The job seeker wanted me to ask the employer questions that I thought were

Table 2. Rotated Factor Pattern Matrix of Difficult Situations

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	h ²
18. The job seeker did not respond to any of my questions.	.683	-.037	-.070	.472
9. The job seeker attached his/her mind to specific employment conditions regarding working hours, wages, etc., and refused to consider alternatives.	.651	.233	.091	.487
22. The job seeker talked only about a general employment situation and system, and thereby there was no progress regarding his/her job hunting.	.501	.126	.159	.292
4. The job seeker did not know what kind of work he/she wants to do.	.471	.055	.149	.247
24. Although the job seeker came up with a number of job offers, it was difficult to narrow down the choices.	.468	.353	.135	.362
1. The employment conditions that the job seeker was requesting regarding working hours, wages, etc., did not match the requirements of the job offers.	.466	.028	.270	.291
23. If the job seeker were to have a job interview, his/her appearance and attitude would have been unsatisfactory.	.443	.285	.129	.294
15. The job seeker did not seem to want to work.	.375	.164	.087	.175
20. The job seeker wanted to apply to several job offers at the same time without setting priorities.	.366	.326	.165	.267
13. The job seeker asked for consultation that was beyond the support of the public employment agency.	.336	.146	.335	.246
7. The job seeker with no prior experience made an offer that required that specific experience.	.089	.837	.056	.712
8. The job seeker with no qualification made an offer which required that qualification.	.222	.816	.055	.719
12. The job seeker made an offer that required specific educational background which he/she does not have.	.402	.428	.173	.374
17. I did not know how to express to the job seeker the company's situation that had problems.	.106	.396	.272	.242
6. The job seeker having a low probability of getting a job asked for an immediate introduction to a company due to his/her economic hardship.	.224	.291	.016	.135
21. The job seeker asked for a type of job training that was not related to the job requirement he/she was seeking.	.228	.274	.244	.187
19. The job seeker who made the offer did not appear for the job interview which I had set up.	.145	.266	.263	.161
25. The elderly job seeker mistrusted and complained about offers that had an age limit but were not specified in the job requirement.	.069	.018	.822	.681
3. The job seeker complained how bad the employer dealt with him/her.	.219	.045	.639	.458
14. The job seeker complained how the actual employment conditions, work contents, etc., differed from what was listed on the job requirement.	-.037	.348	.515	.388
2. The job seeker complained how bad the employees of the public employment agencies dealt with him/her.	.180	-.045	.489	.274
16. There were no job offers that the elderly job seeker wanted.	.319	.340	.424	.398
11. The job seeker asked detailed questions other than what was listed in the job offer and other than the content of the employer's registered information.	.043	.357	.391	.282
10. When I contacted the employer during the job placement service, the employer rejected the job seeker's offer due to his/her age or gender.	.101	.268	.328	.190
5. The job seeker wanted me to ask the employer questions that I thought was inappropriate.	.083	.225	.311	.154
Percentage of Eigenvalue	22.47	6.071	5.411	
Cumulative Percentage of Eigenvalue (%)	22.47	28.54	33.95	

inappropriate.

These situations suggest that the job seeker complained to the counselor or asked him/her to do unreasonable things. Therefore Factor 3 was called “complaints about the labor market and towards the public employment placement service (hereinafter called “Complaint to Labor Market”).

V. Result 2

The relationship between Frequency and Difficult Level of each Difficult Situation was analyzed. Twenty-five Difficult Situations were plotted. The X-axis represents Frequency (“sometimes”+“often”) and the Y-axis represents Difficult Level (“a little” + “very”) (Figure 1).

If the proportion of the participants who recognized Frequency or Difficult Level was more than 50.0%, the situations were regarded as “the situation happens routinely” and “the difficult level is high.” The relationship between Frequency and Difficult Level of each situation was organized in four quadrants as follows:

Quadrant I: Frequency = Occur routinely, Difficult Level = high

Quadrant II: Frequency = Does not occur routinely, Difficult Level = high

Quadrant III: Frequency = Does not occur routinely, Difficult Level = low

Quadrant IV: Frequency = Occur routinely, Difficult Level = low

The results were as follows:

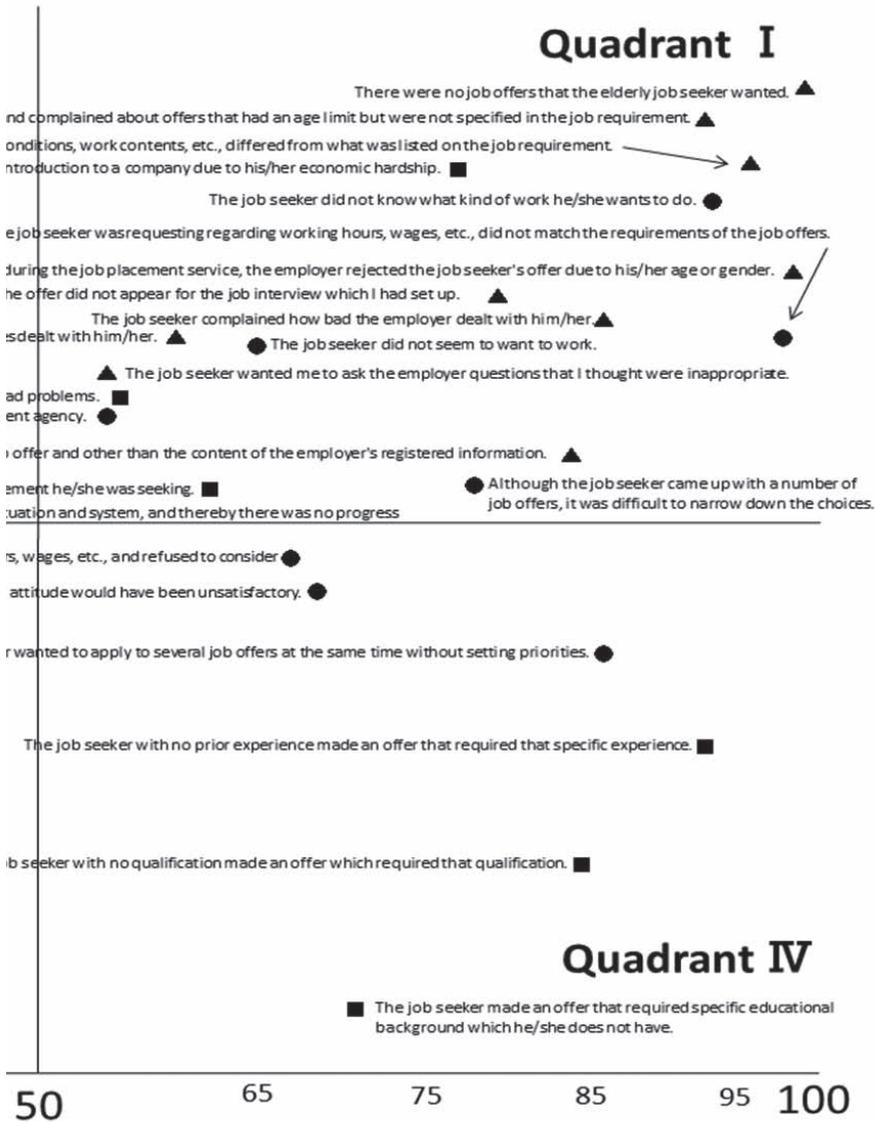
- (1) There weren't any situations belonging to Quadrant III.
- (2) Situations where “Attitude Problem” were loaded high were dispersed within Quadrants I, II, and IV.
- (3) Situations where “Informational Mismatch” were loaded high were dispersed within Quadrants I and IV.
- (4) Situations where “Complaint to Labor Market” were loaded high were dispersed within Quadrant I.

VI. Result 3

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was calculated on Difficult Level using the following 3 variables:

- (1) Gender (male, female)
- (2) Age (20's, 30's, 40+)
- (3) Experience (<6 months, between 6 months and 5 years, >=5 years)

Not counting participants who didn't respond to the Difficult Level, 80 samples were used. The Factor Scores are the mean of Difficult Level of Factor 1 (1, 4, 9, 13, 15, 18, 20,



uation happens.” (“sometimes” + “often”)

and Difficult Level of Difficult Situations

Table 3. Mean, SD and α value of Difficult Situations by Each Factor

	Number of Items	M	SD	α value
Attitude Problem	10	2.68	0.47	0.788
Informational Mismatch	7	2.5	0.43	0.701
Complaint to Labor Market	8	3.03	0.45	0.764

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Table 4. Comparison of Mean of Difficult Level by Gender

	Male (n=55)		Female (n=25)		$F_{1,78}$
	M	SD	M	SD	
Attitude Problem	2.67	0.49	2.69	0.43	0.034
Informational Mismatch	2.47	0.42	2.57	0.47	0.831
Complaint to Labor Market	2.98	0.47	3.16	0.38	2.712

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Table 5. Comparison of Mean of Difficult Level by Age

	20's (n=23)		30's (n=32)		40+ (n=25)		$F_{2,77}$
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Attitude Problem	2.86	0.44	2.67	0.45	2.52	0.47	3.379**
Informational Mismatch	2.61	0.43	2.53	0.44	2.36	0.4	2.164
Complaint to Labor Market	3.15	0.38	3.11	0.4	2.83	0.5	4.397**

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

22, 23, 24), Factor 2 (6, 7, 8, 12, 17, 19, 21) and Factor 3 (2, 3, 5, 10, 11, 14, 16, 25).³

The Mean, SD, and α -value of “Attitude Problem,” “Informational Mismatch,” and “Complaint to Labor Market” are shown in Table 3.

The ANOVA revealed that Gender didn't have any significant effect on any Factor Scores (Table 4).

The ANOVA revealed that Age had a significant effect on “Attitude Problem” ($F_{2,77} = 3.379, p < 0.05$) and “Complaint to Labor Market” ($F_{2,77} = 4.397, p < 0.05$) (Table 5).

For “Attitude Problem,” Multiple Comparisons using the Tukey method ($p < 0.05$) showed a significant difference between “20's” and “40+.” Because there were no significant difference between “20's” and “30's,” and “30's” and “40+,” and the mean of “30's” was between “20's” and “40+,” we can conclude that Difficult Level of “Attitude Problem” decreases as age rises.

For “Complaint to Labor Market,” Multiple Comparisons using the Tukey method

³ The numbers in the parenthesis are the Difficult Situation number (Table 1).

Table 6. Comparison of Mean of Difficult Level by Experience

	< 6 months (n=27)		between 6 months and 5 years (n=24)		≥ 5 years (n=29)
	M	SD	M	SD	M
Attitude Problem	2.79	0.48	2.7	0.46	2.56
Informational Mismatch	2.71	0.44	2.4	0.43	2.39
Complaint to Labor Market	3.2	0.39	2.94	0.5	2.95

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Table 7. Partial Correlation Analysis

	Age	Experience
Attitude Problem	-0.283**/-0.202*	-0.207*/-0.043
Informational Mismatch	-0.224**/-0.047	-0.307***/-0.219*
Complaint to Labor Market	-0.289***/-0.186	-0.238***/-0.079

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$

Note: Coefficient Correlations / Coefficient Partial Correlations (Control of Age or Experience)

($p < 0.05$) showed a significant difference between “20s” and “40+,” and “30s” and “40+.” There was no significant difference between “20s” and “30s.” These results show that Difficult Level of “Complaint to Labor Market” doesn’t change during “20s” and “30s,” but decreases at “40+.”

The ANOVA revealed that Experience had a significant effect on “Informational Mismatch” ($F_{2,77}=5.229$, $p < 0.01$) and “Complaint to Labor Market” ($F_{2,77}=3.280$, $p < 0.05$) (Table 6).

For “Informational Mismatch,” Multiple Comparisons using the Tukey method ($p < 0.05$) showed a significant difference between “<6 months” and “between 6 months and 5 years,” and “<6 months” and “≥5 years.” There was no significant difference between “between 6 months and 5 years” and “≥5 years.” These results show that Difficult Level of “Informational Mismatch” decreases as Experience becomes longer than 6 months.

For “Complaint to Labor Market,” Multiple comparisons using the Tukey method ($p < 0.05$) did not show any significant difference among any combinations.

Because the coefficient correlation between Age and Experience at 0.617 ($p < .01$) showed a strong correlation, the influence of both variables on Difficult Level must be examined in terms of their mutual relationship. Therefore, at first the coefficient correlation between both Age and Experience and Difficult Level of “Attitude Problem,” “Informational Mismatch” and “Complaint to Labor Market” were calculated, and then, between both these variables, the partial correlation that controlled the effects of Age or Experience were calculated. The result is shown in Table 7.

In terms of the coefficient correlation, there exists an inverse correlation between Age/Experience and Difficult Level. That is, as Age or Experience increases, Difficult Level decreases.

The partial correlation coefficient between “Attitude Problem” and Age was rather weak. The partial correlation coefficient between “Informational Mismatch” and Experience was rather weak. There were no partial correlation coefficient between “Constraint to Labor Market” and Age or Experience.

The partial correlation analysis and ANOVA suggest 3 points.

- (1) The change in “Attitude Problem” by Age wasn’t so much influenced by Experience.
- (2) The change in “Informational Mismatch” by Experience wasn’t so much influenced by Age.
- (3) “Constraint to Labor Market” was influenced by the combined effect of Age and Experience.

VII. Discussion

In this research, at first the type and the structure of Difficult Situations were clarified, secondly the relationship between Frequency and Difficult Level was clarified, and thirdly considered the influence of the counselors’ attributes such as gender, age, and vocational counseling experience on Difficult Level.

As the counselors got older and became more experienced, Difficult Levels tended to decrease. On the other hand, there was no difference due to gender on Difficult Level. The Counselors seemed to be able to cope with difficult situations as they learn vocational counseling techniques owing to the accumulation of age and experience.

For the characteristic of individual factor, no tendencies were found between Frequency and Difficult Level on “Attitude Problem.” As the counselors became older, Difficult Level tended to decrease.

“Informational Mismatch” occurred routinely, but there was no correlation with Difficult Level. Difficult Level decreased as the counselors became more experienced, particularly over 6 months.

“Constraint to Labor Market” occurred routinely, and Difficult Level was high. Also, Difficult Level was thought to be influenced by the combined effect of the counselor’s age and experience.

Based on the above statements, we can come up with the following three training program developments.

Primarily, it is difficult for the counselors to observe and learn from their bosses’ and colleagues’ vocational counseling, because vocational counseling is usually performed in a one-to-one environment. Consequently, it would appear that vocational counseling techniques could be taught effectively by having counselors with various age and experience

groups talk to each other about how to cope with Difficult Situations.

Secondly, though the counselors face various difficult situations, they may be unaware of the common characteristic and coping strategy. They can accumulate vocational counseling experiences and acquire vocational counseling techniques effectively by becoming conscious of the factors like “Attitude Problem,” “Informational Mismatch” and “Complaint to Labor Market.”

Thirdly, we should develop training programs on the basis of the characteristic of each factor. “Attitude Problem” may mean there is a problem in the job seeker’s way of thinking or attitude for finding employment. In such situations, the counselors can help job seekers to become conscious of his/her own problems. Therefore it may be effective to learn active listening techniques to raise the job seeker’s awareness.

In coping with “Informational Mismatch,” it is essential to acquire the basic knowledge about how to understand job posting and job application. Because Difficult Level decreases after 6 month’s Experience, it is effective to develop a program for the counselors who handle vocational counseling for the first time where they can study basic knowledge about job posting and job application.

In “Complaint to Labor Market,” the counselors must cope with emotions like job seeker’s dissatisfaction. The emotion of dissatisfaction may go back to the unacceptance of Labor Market’s strictness and the loss of prospect for the future. If it is so, job seekers need to accept reality and adjust the direction of their own career to reality. Concretely speaking, job seekers must reconfirm their own vocational ability and, in addition, find out their own strengths which are effective for finding jobs positively. Therefore, it is effective for the counselors to learn how to talk about the job seekers’ past experience and elicit their strengths, how to write the resumes, etc.