

Report

Is Career Counseling Effective?

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I. Comparing individuals with and without experience of career counseling

In Japan, it was the first half of the 2000s when the government started a policy to train experts to provide career counseling and career guidance to individuals. In Japanese labor administration, “career counseling and guidance” are referred to as “career consulting.” The term “career consulting” is translated in this article as “career counseling” throughout. The experts who provide this career counseling are called “career consultants.”

While career consultants are active in a broad variety of fields today, they are mainly active in three types of organization — public employment security agencies, companies, and educational institutions. As of 2013, the first of these three accounted for the largest number of career consultants, with 30% of the total. As for the other two, 20% were in companies and 17% in educational institutions.

“Career counseling” in Japan is not necessarily limited to counseling support for individuals, but also includes other support such as career design, management and evaluation of school’s career education programs as well as corporate systems of vocational ability development. The Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare defines career counseling as “counseling and other forms of support given in response to personal requests, to design their own vocational lives in accordance with their aptitudes, professional experience, etc., and thereby to make effective career choices and develop vocational abilities effectively in forms such as vocational training.”

Meanwhile, one-to-one counseling aimed at individuals is regarded as lying at the core of

these. And doubts over the effectiveness of individual counseling have been repeatedly expressed as in other developed nations. The aim of this paper is to assist in resolving these doubts.



In FY2016, the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT) conducted a large-scale questionnaire survey to search for evidence on the effects of career counseling. In the survey, subjects were divided into those with past experience of receiving career counseling or similar types of counseling support, and those without such experience. Both groups were then asked extensively about their present awareness, employment status, and working style.

Specifically, the subjects were asked at the start of the survey if they had ever received career or career-related counseling from an expert or specialist in career. They were then divided into those who replied in the affirmative and in the negative, respectively. The former were further asked from whom they had received counseling, with alternatives to choose from: “expert in career counseling (career consultant, career counselor, etc.),” “expert in non-career counseling (general counselor, other counseling supporter)” or “other related personnel (university and other career center staff, company human resources personnel).” On the assumption that about one in ten persons in Japan today has had some experience of career counseling or similar counseling support, the survey targeted around 10,000 survey company monitors, with the aim of recruiting around 1,000 respondents with experience of counseling. As a result, 1,117 responses were gathered from research

participants with some experience of counseling, and 8,833 from those without such experience.

The survey results were studied using a semi-experimental method of comparing the two types: those with and without experience of career counseling. This method was not as rigorous as RCT*, and in that sense, the quality of the evidence can hardly be described as high. Yet, not even this kind of semi-experimental study has been adequately attempted in the past. Since the financial and time-related cost of fully-fledged research would have been enormous, it was thought sufficiently meaningful to obtain provisional findings within a practicable scope in advance of such research.

The discussion in this paper is based on a re-analysis of data from JILPT survey conducted in 2016 on 1,117 persons with experience of counseling (JILPT 2017).

* RCT (randomized controlled trial): an experimental research method in which groups with and without some kind of intervention are established and the two are compared.

II. Was career counseling effective?

Traditionally, the effects of career counseling are known to appear most clearly in terms of awareness, such as a sense of satisfaction.

As shown by the results of this survey (Figure 1), the sense of satisfaction with “job assignment,” “human relations in the workplace” and “working life in general” was also highest amongst those with experience of counseling by an expert in career counseling, followed by experience of counseling by an expert in non-career counseling, experience of counseling by other related personnel, and finally no experience of counseling, in that order. The survey also asked about respondents’ satisfaction with “income,” “status at work” and “life at present in general,” but all followed the same trend. Figure 1 shows that satisfaction with “job assignment” was also unusually high for “other personnel,” but this includes human resources personnel and others in the company in question. The inference is that satisfaction with “job assignment” became higher when some form of internal counseling was used.

This survey found evidence not only of effects in terms of awareness, but also of employment status that are somewhat closer to objective indicators.

As shown in Figure 2, a high ratio of persons with experience of counseling by counseling experts in career were currently working as regular employees, and a high ratio of them had an annual personal income of 4 million yen or more. A high ratio of those working in an organization had also experienced promotions.

The survey respondents were also asked about when they had experienced counseling. Answers were 3.8 years before for those with “experience of counseling by an expert in career counseling,” 4.1 years before for those with “experience of counseling by an expert in non-career counseling,” and 4.1 years before for those with “experience of counseling by other related personnel.” Thus, there was no statistically significant difference between them. As such, we may see this survey as reflecting how subsequent working life is impacted by having or not having had experience of counseling around four years earlier.

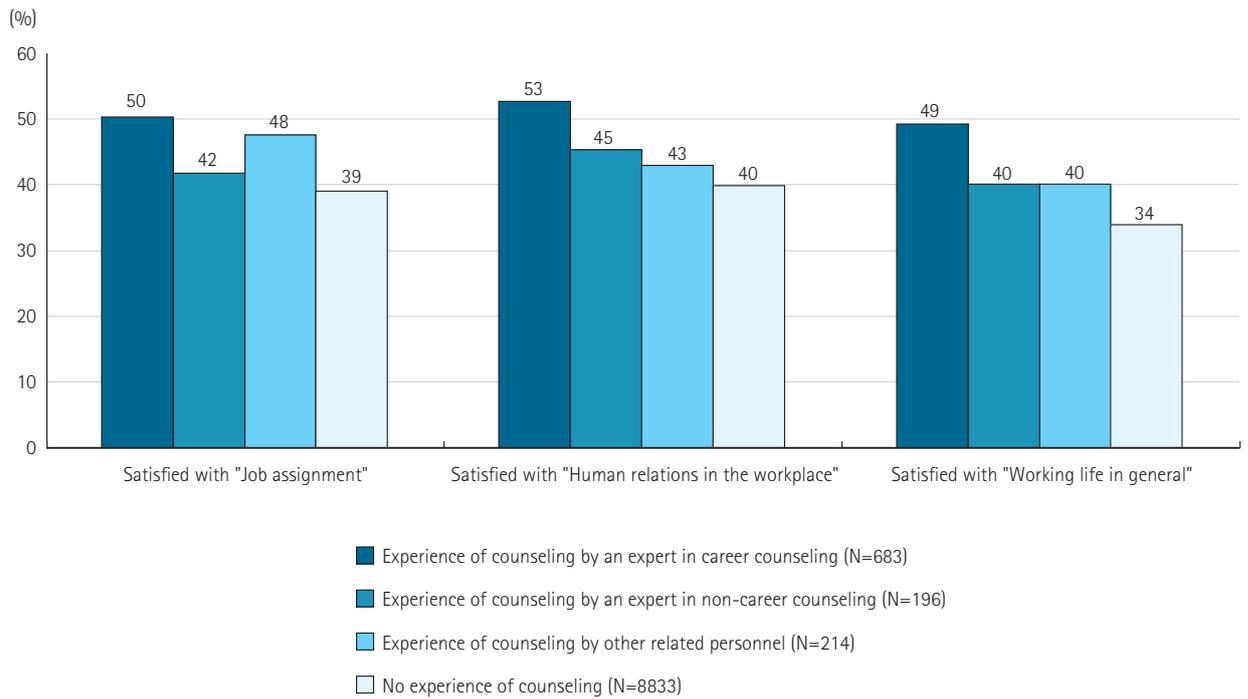
From the results so far, then, we could say that people with experience of counseling by an expert in career counseling are shown to be in a better situation at the present time, to a certain extent, in terms of indicators such as satisfaction, regular employment ratios, annual income and promotion.

III. Effects unique to career counseling, excluding the impact of various factors

In the results until now, however, it is assumed that various factors such as the person’s education, employment form, job assignment, scale of employer, age and gender could have impacted the result. It is normally preferable to allocate these various factors at random in advance, in order to eliminate their impact. When that can be completely achieved, RCT is possible.

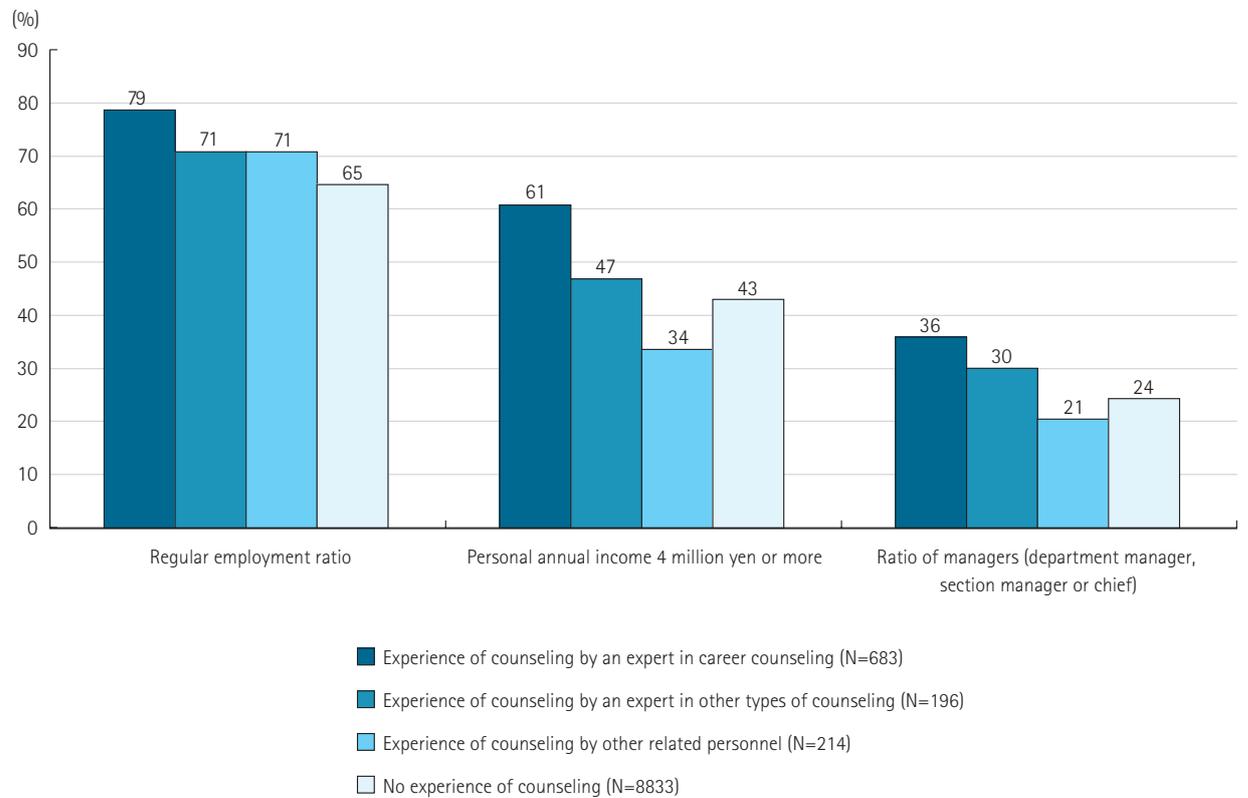
When that cannot be done, a method of eliminating the impact of these factors statistically may be employed as the next best option. Here, logistic regression analysis was used to remove the factors mentioned above, and the effects obtained by having experience of counseling were examined on that basis (see Table 1).

The examination reveals that whether or not a person has experienced counseling by an expert in career counseling has a statistically significant



Source: JILPT, 2017.

Figure 1. Present levels of satisfaction by experience of counseling



Source: JILPT, 2017.

Figure 2. Regular employment ratio, annual income and promotions by experience of counseling

Table 1. Impact of "experience of counseling by career experts" on regular employment, annual income, and satisfaction

	Satisfaction with current working life			Currently in regular employment			Currently, annual income 4 million yen and over		
	B	Exp(B)	sig.	B	Exp(B)	sig.	B	Exp(B)	sig.
Age	0.01	1.010		-0.200	0.819	**	0.225	1.252	**
Gender (1=male, 2=female)	0.365	1.441	**	-1.144	0.319	**	-1.192	0.304	**
Education (vs. junior/senior high graduate)									**
Junior college/Vocational college graduate	0.03	1.031		0.224	1.251	**	0.024	1.025	
University (arts) graduate	0.169	1.184	**	0.217	1.243	**	0.771	2.163	**
University (sciences) graduate	0.08	1.083		0.607	1.834	**	0.925	2.522	**
Job change frequency	-0.032	0.968		-0.148	0.863	**	-0.018	0.983	
Employment form (1=non-regular, 2=regular)	0.069	1.071					1.776	5.905	**
Years of continuous employment	0.025	1.025		0.399	1.491	**	0.383	1.467	**
Job content (vs. manufacturing and other work)									**
Managerial	0.641	1.899	**	2.010	7.467	**	1.485	4.416	**
Specialist or technical	0.548	1.730	**	1.181	3.258	**	0.855	2.350	**
Administrative	0.326	1.386	**	1.547	4.698	**	-0.031	0.970	
Sales or services	0.242	1.273	**	0.265	1.303	**	-0.035	0.966	
Weekly working hours	-0.032	0.968	**	0.336	1.399	**	0.125	1.134	**
Employee scale	0.023	1.023		0.300	1.350		0.577	1.781	**
Career counseling experience (vs. no experience)									**
Counseling by expert in career counseling	0.635	1.886	**	0.540	1.715	**	0.656	1.927	**
Counseling by non-career expert	0.258	1.295		0.088	1.092		0.228	1.256	
Counseling by other related personnel	0.292	1.339		0.351	1.421		-0.332	0.717	
Constant	-1.752	0.173		-0.072	0.931		-1.232	0.292	
** p<.01		Cox-Snell R ²	0.025**		0.341**			0.441**	

impact at the 1% level on satisfaction with current working life. Specifically, when a person has experienced counseling by an expert in career counseling, compared to a person who has not, the satisfaction with current working life was 1.886 times higher.

The same result is obtained when examining whether the person is currently in regular employment, and whether the person has an annual income of 4 million yen or more. In both cases, when the respondent had experienced counseling by a career consultant, these factors were statistically significant at the 1% level; the probability of being in regular employment was 1.715 times higher and the annual income probability was 1.927 times higher.

Of course, education, job assignment, gender, number of employees and the other factors also have an impact. However, this result means that experience of counseling by a counseling expert in career also had an effect independently of the impact of these factors.

The same results are obtained when narrowing

the study down to persons working as regular employees in a company. For those with "experience of counseling by career experts," satisfaction with current working life was 1.958 times higher and the probability of an annual income of 4 million yen or more was 1.979 times higher. Again, the same result is found when limiting the analysis to females; those with "experience of counseling by career experts" have a regular employment ratio 1.799 times higher, a satisfaction level 1.752 times higher, and probability of an annual income of 4 million yen or more 2.775 times higher.

On the other hand, no significant results are produced in certain cases. For example, if we limit the same analysis to persons currently working as non-regular employees, satisfaction is 1.591 times higher but no effect is seen in terms of annual income when they have "experience of counseling by career experts." Again, when divided by age, the effect of having "experience of counseling by career experts" is only statistically significant in terms of satisfaction with current working life for those in

their 20s, where it is 2.159 times higher. For those in their 50s, it is only statistically significant in terms of an annual income of 4 million yen or more, where the probability is 2.592 times higher.

IV. Medium- to long-term effects of career counseling

Based on the results so far, one could probably assert that career counseling is effective to an extent, albeit with certain limitations. Of course, research based on more rigorous RCT needs to be accumulated in future, if possible. Partly due to prevailing trends, it is a fact that researchers examining issues of career support are required to show rigorous evidence at all times, whether in Japan or abroad.

In career guidance study, on the other hand, “the economic impact of career guidance” is a theme of ongoing interest. This is based on the argument that career guidance does not merely solve the problems of individuals who are undecided about their vocational path or career, but could also affect the economy of a country as a whole, over the medium to long term.

As a recent theory along these lines, Hooley and Dodd (2015) divide the effects of career guidance into i) individual outcomes, ii) primary economic outcomes (increased labor market participation, decreased unemployment, enhanced skills and knowledge base, flexible and mobile labor market), iii) secondary economic outcomes (improved health, decreased crime, increased tax revenue, and decreased cost of benefits), and iv) macro-economic benefits (deficit reduction, improved productivity, raised living standards, and economic growth). On this basis, they assert that the effects of career guidance will generally be disseminated in this sequence. A theory derived from the assumption of this dissemination effect is that career guidance must be given to workers a priori when developing the basis for a nation’s skill policies (CEDEFOP 2008; ELGPN 2012; OECD 2012).

This and other similar debates are also underway in Japan, which is referred to as the “right to a career.” That is, workers are regarded as having an inherent right to receive career support services such as career counseling, while it is the duty for the

government and organizations therefore to provide career support services in line with that. Rather than merely solving the problems of individuals, career guidance is seen as impacting the economy and society of the country as a whole. In this respect, the economic impact and medium- to long-term effects of career guidance could be said to be prioritized in Japan, as they are in other developed nations.

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