

## Research on Adult Career Development —Career Development Looked Back on by Workers in their Fifties—

### Summary

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#### Abstract

In this study, we conducted a survey focusing on external/objective careers and internal/subjective careers of workers in their fifties by having them look back on their career from their twenties through to their fifties, and examined the process of career development and issues to be addressed in providing support for career development. In the survey, in addition to quantitative data obtained from a normal questionnaire, we collected qualitative data using the lifeline method, free description, and other methods, and analyzed them. Based on the results of the survey, we showed a diversity of careers, possibility for qualitative assessment, etc., and also made suggestions for career support measures and career consulting techniques, etc.

#### 1. Research Objectives

In this age of population decline in Japan, it is important to realize a vigorous and affluent economic society in which all people who are willing to and capable of working can accumulate and make full use of their abilities throughout their life.

The issue of support for career development, including career guidance for adult workers who have already entered the labor market, has been less discussed than those for workers who are entering or re-entering the labor market or elderly workers who are

around the retirement age.

However, the employment environment is changing drastically. The stance of companies toward employment stability shows that, although they maintain their attitude of providing “steady and long-term employment”, there is a growing tendency to limit the employees to whom companies keep employing on a steady and long-term basis (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2009).

Under these changing circumstances, more attention is given to adult workers who form the backbone of the labor market as the target of support measures to help independent individuals develop their career.

A report by the Research Association on Lifelong Career Development Support and Corporate Organization (2007), for example, mentioned the importance of getting through critical junctions in an adult’s work life and pointed out issues of three turning points in one’s career: graduation from school and commencement of employment (younger period), middle age, and the period around retirement (old age). These periods are considered issues to be addressed in each career stage of one’s work life when the entire work life is divided into three stages: the early career stage (entry into the labor market), the mid-career stage (the backbone of the labor market), and the late-career stage (around retirement).

In the mid-career stage, workers reconstruct their career in both objective and subjective terms for the development of their late-career period, out of a career struggle that entails conflict between an objective and subjective career, while considering their responsibility to their family. In order to create an economic society where everyone works vigorously making full use of their abilities and where everyone develops their career throughout their life, it is necessary to provide support that is necessary and appropriate for each stage. This can be said also for those in the mid-career stage, who form the backbone of the labor market. Rather, they should be the focus of the discussion concerning support for career development in that they need to restructure their career in view of a lifelong career by getting through internal struggle, both in objective and subjective terms.

Based on the awareness of those issues as described above, we conducted a survey with workers in their fifties asking them to look back on their career from graduation to the present day (their career from their twenties to their fifties). In this report, we present detailed analysis of the relationship between the objective career of each respondent and their 1) current level of satisfaction, 2) life events, and 3) qualitative data (by lifeline method, free description, etc.), and make suggestions for adult career development as well as future measures to support their career development and career

consulting techniques.

## **2. Research Method**

### **(1) Target of the survey**

In this research, we conducted a questionnaire survey to full-time workers in their fifties (aged 50–59, as of January 2009, born from February 1949 to January 1959) concerning the need for support for lifelong career development. We considered that, by selecting full-time workers in their fifties as the target of the survey, we would be able to identify issues and needs regarding the career development of workers in their thirties to their fifties, who form the backbone of economic society.

### **(2) Method of the survey**

The survey was conducted in January 2009. We sent questionnaires through a research company to the workers registered with them and asked for reply. A total of 2,000 full-time workers in their fifties (male 1,500, female 500) were selected to reflect as much as possible the actual male-to-female ratio and composition by occupation of workers in their fifties, based on the national census and the Employment Status Survey.

### **(3) Items of the survey**

The survey items were largely divided into six sections: “About yourself”, “About the future of your child”, “About career education at school”, “About career education from your perspective as a member of society”, “About career education from your perspective as a member of the local community”, and “About your social situation in the future”. The question items in each section are shown below.

- Basic attributes (sex, place of residence, age, form of employment, working hours, annual income, academic background, marital/parental status, existence or non-existence of a family member requiring care)
- Career to date (length of service, how the respondent joined the company, type of business, occupation, number of employees in the current company, experience in career change, experience in unemployment, self-evaluation of work experience and vocational abilities, and milestone events related to “work” and “family” in each decade of life)
- Present career (level of satisfaction toward their current lifestyle, level of satisfaction toward work life and career to date, desire for career change, and willingness to learn)
- Future career (outlook for their future work life, outlook for life after the completion of work life, to what age the respondent wants to keep working, anxiety about one’s old

age, request for administrative support in thinking about the future)

- Qualitative survey items (free description of crises in the past, sentence completion method, lifeline method)

### **3. Research Results**

#### **(1) Overview of “Chapter 1: Issues, Section 1: Background of Research—Changes in the Socio-economic Environment and Lifelong Careers”**

The career of each generation reflects their historical background. Chapter 1 summarizes the historical background of career development of the target workers in their fifties and their present employment situation as background information for the analysis in subsequent chapters.

Based on the results of the study in this chapter, the following environmental conditions need to be taken into consideration when examining the career of workers in their fifties (aged 50–59, as of January 2009, born from February 1949 to January 1959), who are the targets of this research (Figure 1).

i) Most people entered high school, etc., while the percentage of those who went on to university or junior college was still small.

ii) The age when one chose his/her first marriage was lower than today and was concentrated around 30 for men and around 25 for women.

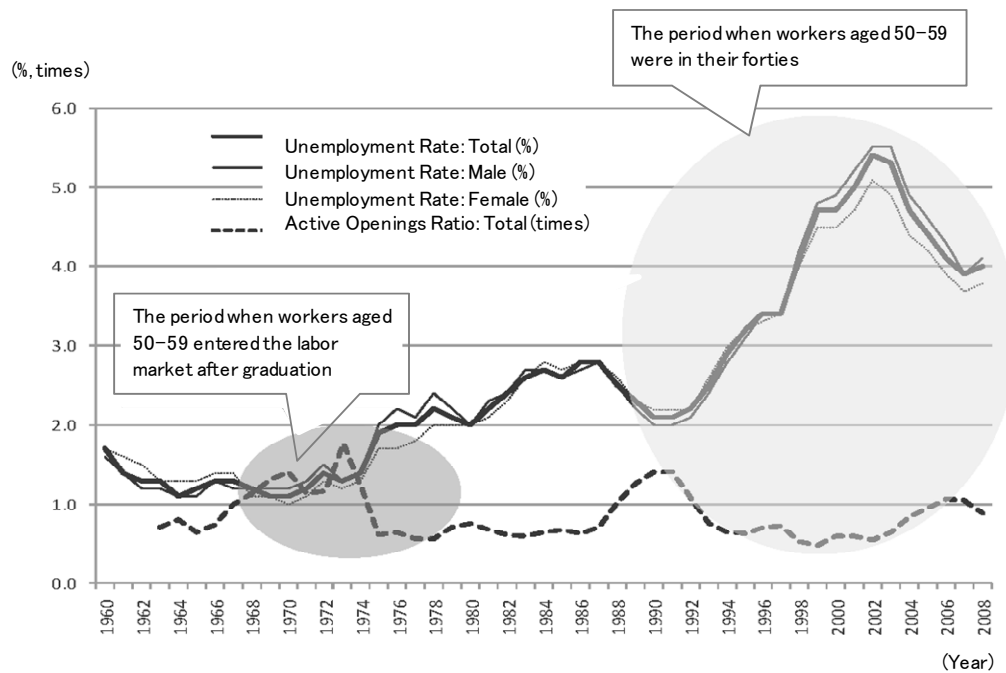
iii) Many people entered the labor market after graduation during the period following the first oil shock, when the employment situation was deteriorating.

iv) They experienced a boom period in their late twenties to their late thirties.

v) Since when they were in their early thirties to early forties, the employment situation rapidly worsened with drastic changes in the economic environment.

vi) They experienced a reform of the economic society throughout their mid-career stage.

Figure 1: Unemployment Rate and Active Openings Ratio



Source: “Labour Force Survey” by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications  
 “Employment Referrals for General Workers” by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (Employment Security Service Statistics)

**(2) Main results of “Chapter 2: Current Level of Satisfaction of Workers in their Fifties”**

The results of the study concerning the current level of satisfaction of workers in their fifties indicate that the level of satisfaction toward their work life and career generally tends to be higher for those workers that: i) have higher income, ii) are working for larger companies, iii) are university or graduate school graduates, and iv) feel that the knowledge acquired at school is useful in their work (Figure 2).

As a result of the study of a causal model of factors that define the current level of satisfaction of workers in their fifties, a model was constructed, as shown in Figure 3, in which factors that affect the current level of satisfaction are roughly divided into: i) factors concerning the situation of the companies that they are currently working for, including annual income, number of employees, etc., and ii) the attitude that their life depends on their own efforts, and in each case, experience at school influences the situation of the current companies.

Figure 2: Relationship between Level of Satisfaction, Annual Income (left), and Knowledge Acquired at School (right)

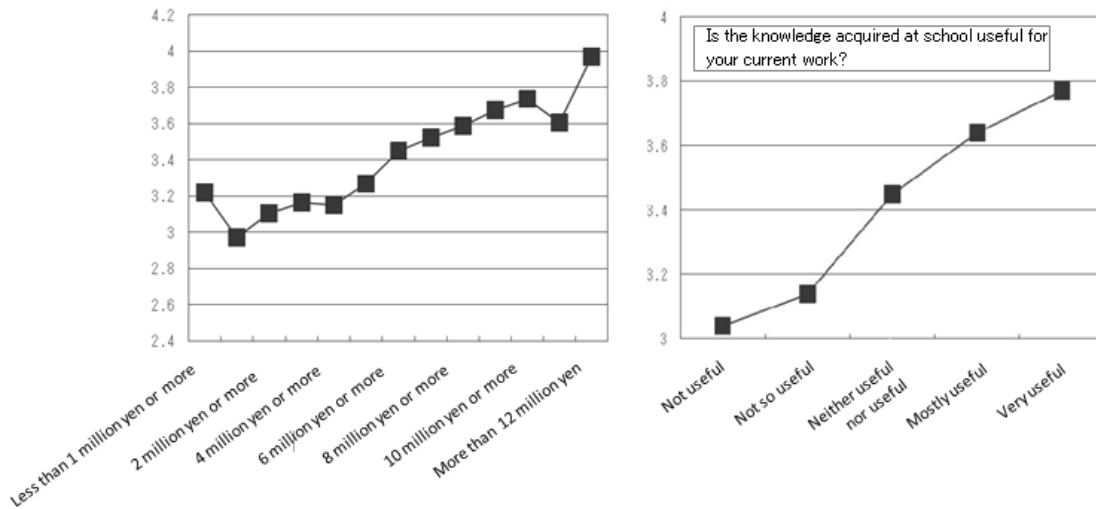
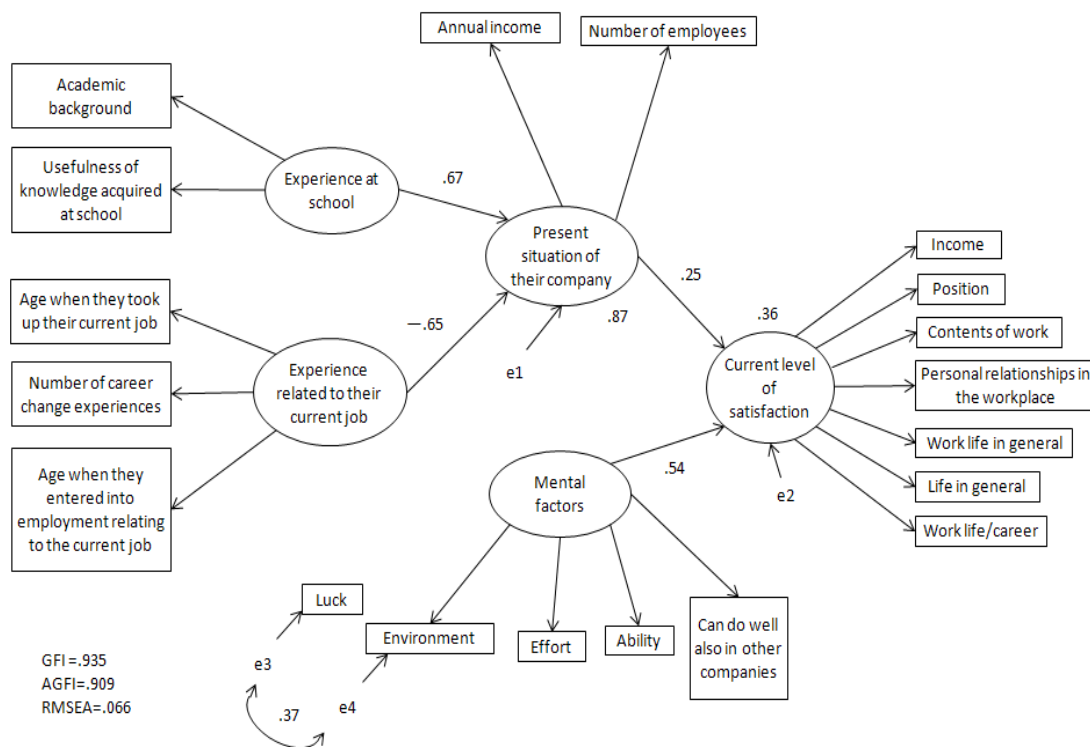


Figure 3: Factors Defining the “Current Level of Satisfaction” of Workers in their Fifties



Note: Error variables for each observed variable are not shown except for some.

### **(3) Main results of “Chapter 3: Study of Relationships between Life Events and Adult Career Development of Workers in their Fifties”**

In Chapter 3, we studied the relationship between life events and the career development of workers in their fifties.

Figure 4 shows the life events that the respondents chose from the list of work-related events as the most important event in each decade from their teens to their fifties. They chose: “entering university or graduate school”, “obtaining employment as a regular employee”, and “graduating from school” as important events that occurred when they were in their teens. Furthermore, they chose: “obtaining employment as a regular employee” in their twenties, “obtaining promotion/rising in rank”, “changing careers”, and “change in work contents” in their thirties, “being promoted to a managerial position”, “obtaining promotion/rising in rank”, and “change in work contents” in their forties, and “change in work contents”, “being promoted to a managerial position”, and “being transferred to another department” in their fifties.

Figure 5 shows a list of family-life events. “Leaving their hometown” and “becoming economically independent from their parents” were the most important events for the respondents that occurred when they were in their teens. Meanwhile, they also chose: “getting married” in their twenties, “having a child” and “getting married” in their thirties, “their child taking entrance examinations” and “buying a house/land” in their forties, and “their child obtaining employment” and “losing their parent(s)” in their fifties.

As a general tendency, the answers for their teens and twenties concentrate on one or two specific events both for “work-related” and “family-related” life events, whereas the answers for life events in their thirties onward are distributed among all choices, and consequently, the rate of respondents who choose each item tends to be relatively low. However, the results indicate that the work-related career patterns are a little more varied than family-life patterns. The difference is distinct particularly for male workers reflecting the fact that, after life events chosen as the most important event in their teens, career patterns vary widely among respondents.

In general, although there was no difference in work-related events between males and females when they were in their teens and twenties, career patterns largely differ in later years. As for family life, differences between males and females were not as large as that for work.

Figure 4: Top 10 List of Work-related Events in Each Decade of Life by Selection Rate (%)

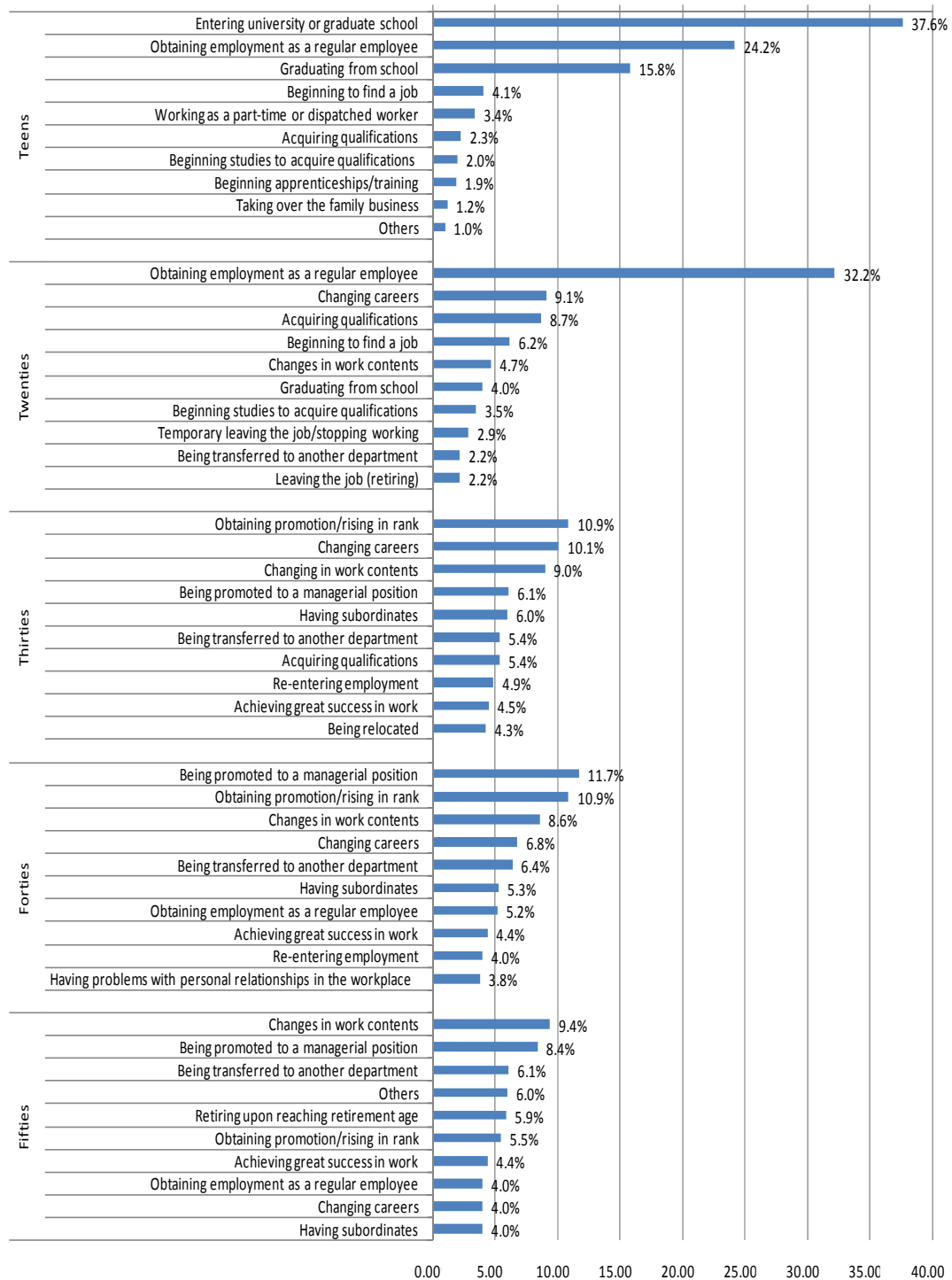
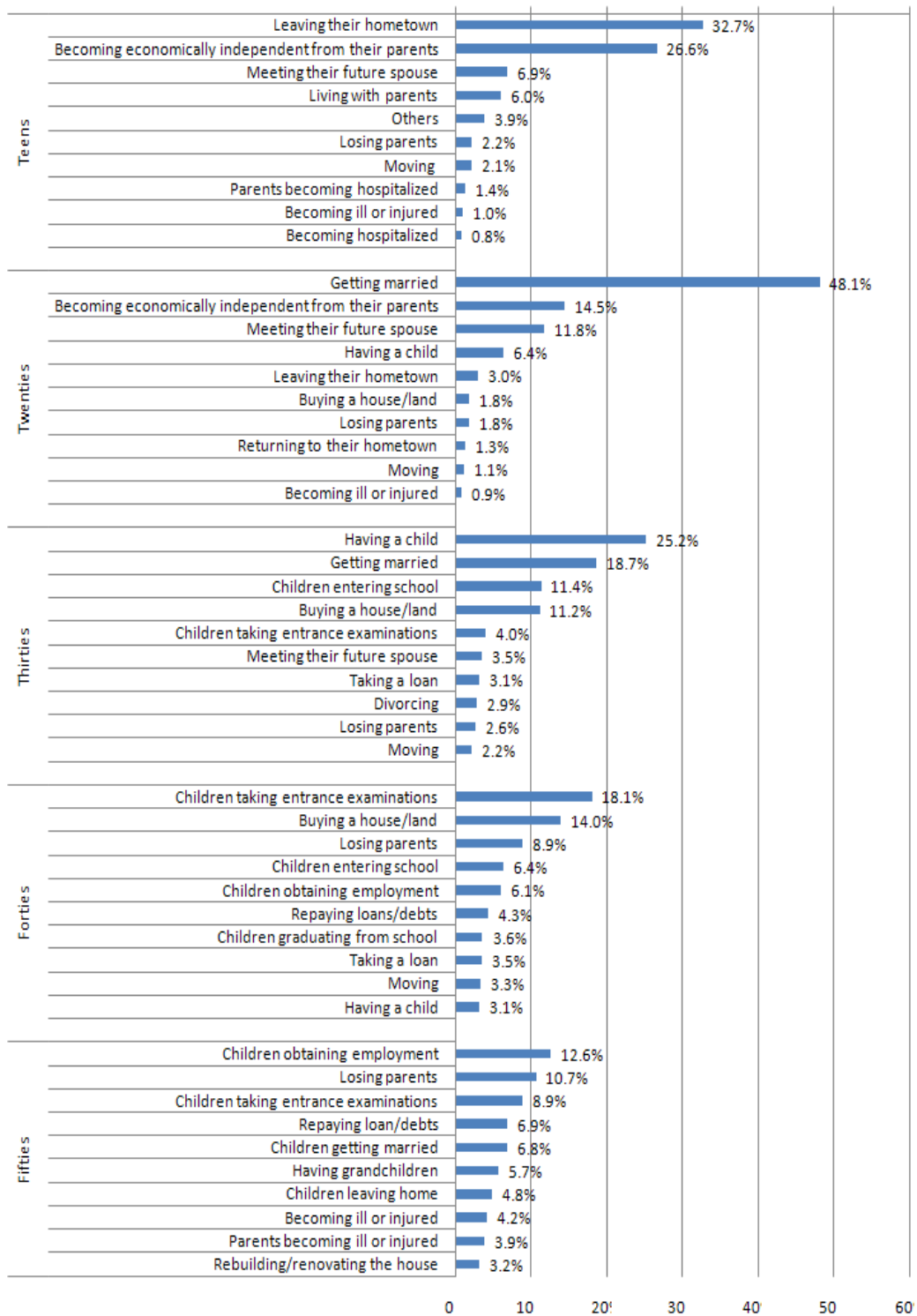




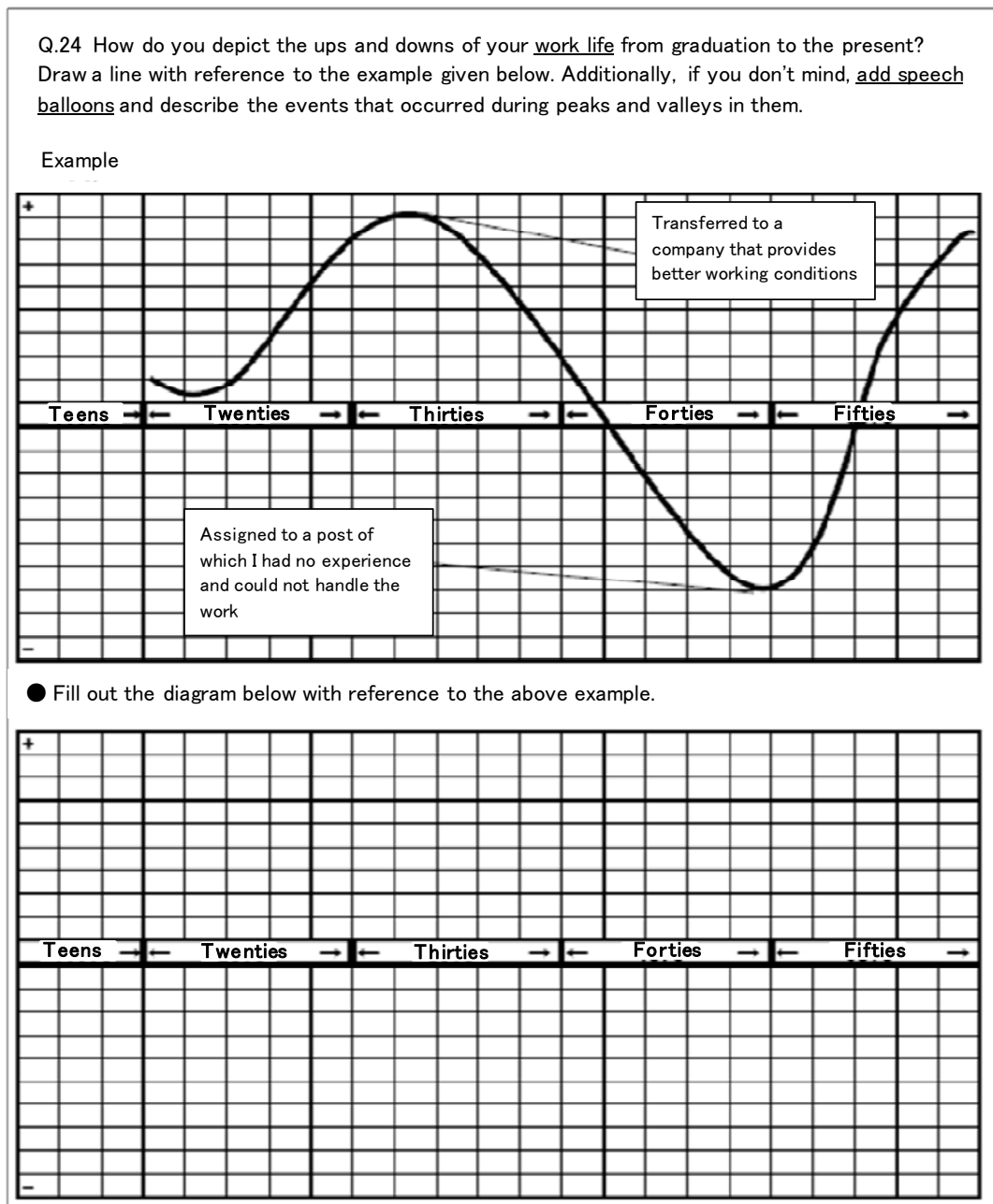
Figure 5: Top 10 List of Family-related Events in Each Decade of Life by Selection Rate (%)



**(4) Main results of “Chapter 4: Career Depiction of Workers in their Fifties I—Study of Adult Career Development using the Lifeline Method”**

In this research, we asked the respondents to draw a line depicting the ups and downs of their work life from graduation to the present by giving specific instructions and examples shown as Figure 6.

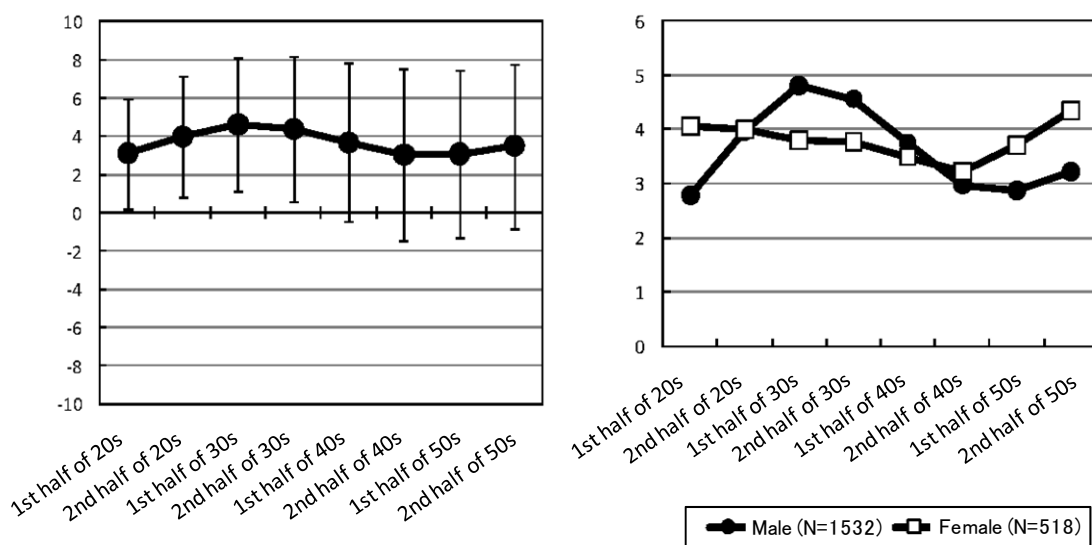
Figure 6: Procedure for the Lifeline Method and Instruction



The left-side graph of Figure 7 shows the average of the data of the lines drawn by all respondents converted to numeric values for each decade of life. As shown in this graph, in most cases, the line is drawn above zero. In terms of the shape of the lifeline, it curves upward from the twenties to the first half of the thirties, and after hitting peak in the early thirties, it turns downward and keeps on dropping until the second half of the forties. Then, it turned upward again from early to late fifties. Lifelines drawn by workers to reflect their work life tend to take on an “S”-shape, which reaches its peak in the first half of their thirties, turns downward to bottom out in the second half of their forties, and then turns upward again.

By sex, as shown in the right-side graph of Figure 9, the above-described “S-shape”, which peaks in the first half of the thirties and bottoms out in the second half of the forties, is observed more clearly for males, while for females, the line is more flat-shaped. The result shows that the shape of lifelines drawn to reflect careers is different for males and females.

Figure 7: General Tendency of Lifelines (Left) and Differences in Shape by Sex (Right)

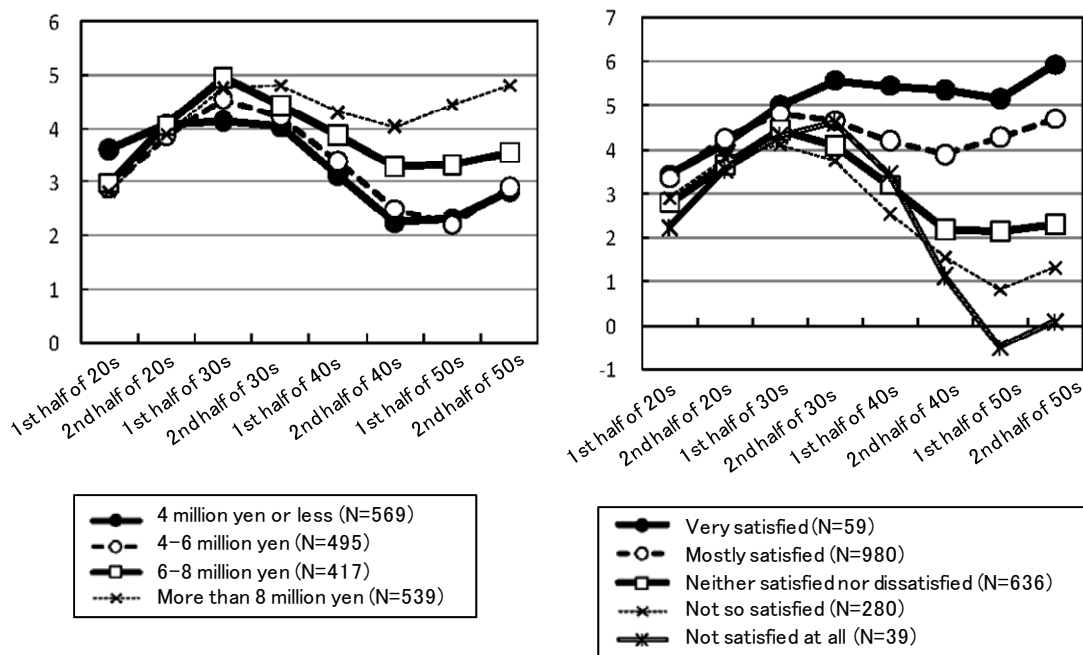


The shape of the lifeline is influenced by the type of business performed by one’s current company, their type of job, and other various factors. In particular, “income in the past year” and “satisfaction with their career to date” are factors that cause the most distinctive difference.

The left-side graph of Figure 8 shows the difference in the shape of lifelines by income in the past year, including tax. In the first half of one’s twenties, the value is higher for those with an annual income of “less than four million yen”. As they get older, the

differences widen among those with an annual income of “more than eight million yen”, those with “six to eight million yen”, those with “four to six million yen”, and those with “four million yen or less”. The right-side graph of Figure 8 shows the difference in the shape of the lifeline by the level of “satisfaction with their career to date”. The values for those who are “very satisfied” are higher than others in the second half of their thirties and onward. As they get older, the differences widen among those who are “mostly satisfied”, “neither satisfied nor dissatisfied”, “not so satisfied”, and “not satisfied at all”, as in the above. Differences are clearly observed in one’s fifties.

Figure 8: Differences in the Shape of Lifelines by “Annual Income in the Past Year (including Tax)” (Left) and by the Level of “Satisfaction with One’s Work Life and Career to Date” (Right)



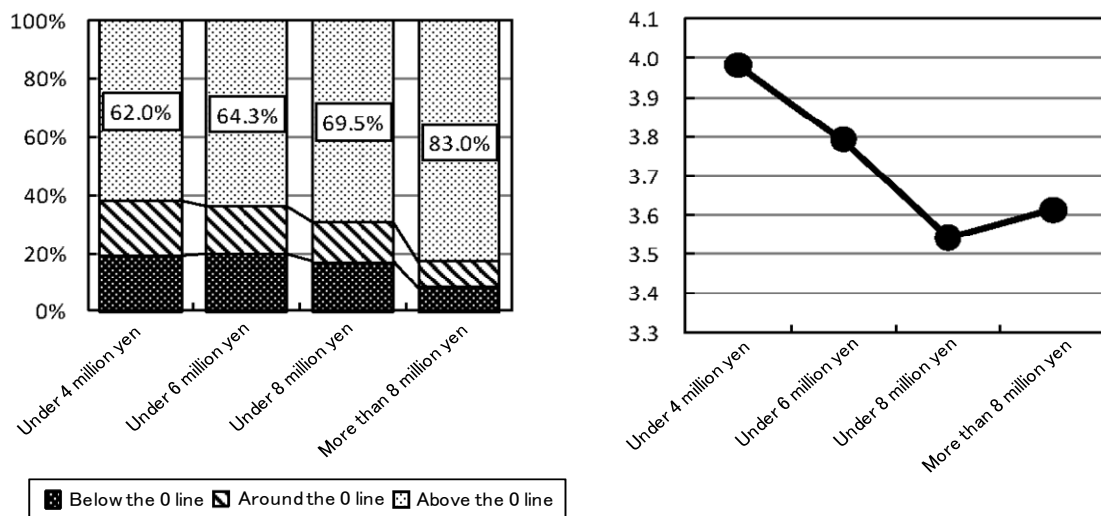
**(5) Main results of “Chapter 5: Career Depiction of Workers in their Fifties II—Study of Support Tools for Career Development using the Lifeline Method”**

In addition to the general shape of the lifeline, we created various indicators and studied, including “general position of the line”, “final point of the line”, “wave form of the line”, “number of folding points”, and “age and value of the highest point and lowest point”.

The results also present distinctive differences by “income in the past year” and the “level of satisfaction with their career to date”.

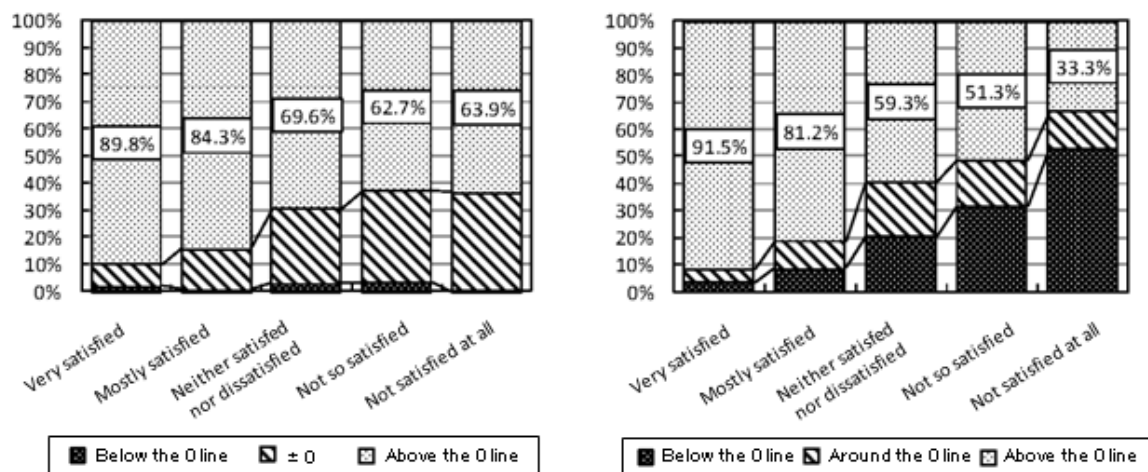
As shown in the left-side graph of Figure 9, the higher the annual income, the more respondents draw their lifeline above the zero line in both terms of “general position of the line” and the “final point of the line”. The right-side graph of Figure 9, which shows the “number of folding points”, seems to indicate that, in general, the lower the annual income, the more complicated the shape of the line is drawn with more folding points.

Figure 9: “Final Point of the Line” (Left) and “Number of Folding Points” by Annual Income in the Past Year (Including Tax)



As shown in Figure 10, respondents with a higher level of satisfaction tend to draw the lifeline “above the zero line”, while respondents with a lower level of satisfaction tend to draw the lifeline “below the zero line”—both in terms of the “general position of the line” and the “final point of the line”.

Figure 10: “General Position of the Line” (Left) and “Final Point of the Line” (Right) by Level of Satisfaction with their Career to Date



## **(6) Main results of “Chapter 6: Significance of Career of Workers in their Fifties—A Study Using Free Description Data”**

In Chapter 6, we studied the significance given by workers in their fifties to their career using the free description data. Free description about “the greatest crisis experienced in one’s work life” and “views and feelings toward one’s work life to date” was analyzed<sup>1</sup>.

Table 1 is a list of the words and phrases frequently used in free description to answer the question: “What event do you think was the greatest crisis experienced in your work life to date”? The most frequently used word was “work”, followed by “company”, “relationships”, “bankruptcy”, and “career change”.

We examined the words and phrases frequently used in free description concerning crises experienced in one’s work life to date, focusing on several major factors.

Table 2 shows the results of analysis by sex, by decade in life when the crisis occurred, and by the annual income of the last year. The following three findings were obtained: i) The percentage of respondents who used the words “company”, “career changes”, and “downsizing” was high for males, while the percentage of those who used the words “relationships”, “people-related”, and “getting employed” was high for females; ii) Among the respondents who answered that they faced a crisis in their work life during their twenties, the percentage of those who used the words “career change” was high, while that for the word “downsizing” was high among those who faced a crisis in their forties and fifties, and that for “hospitalization” was high among those who faced a crisis in their fifties; and iii) The percentage of respondents who used the words “bankruptcy”, “downsizing”, and “getting employed” was high among those with an annual income of four million yen or less in the past year. Meanwhile, that for “company” and “retirement” was high among those with an annual income of four to six million yen, that for “workplace” was high among those with an annual income of six to eight million yen, and that for “boss” and “contents” was high among those with an annual income of more than eight million yen.

These results are interpreted as suggesting that workers with higher an annual income generally tend to mention crises in the workplace, while workers with lower an annual income tend to mention crises related to employment itself.

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<sup>1</sup> For the analysis using free description, we used freeware developed and published by Koichi Higuchi “KH Coder” (<http://khc.sourceforge.net/index.html>).

Table 1: Words and Phrases Frequently Used in Free Description concerning Past  
Work Life Crises

Work	260	Children	21	Employee	14
Company	253	Physical condition	21	Moving	14
Relationship	100	Salary	20	Childbirth	14
Bankruptcy	87	Failure	20	Leaving for new post	14
Career change	86	Temporary transfer	20	Mental condition	13
People-related	79	Change	20	Responsibility	13
Boss	78	Hope	19	Management	13
Illness	51	President	18	Experience	13
Retirement	61	Crisis	17	Child-rearing	13
Myself	52	Income	17	Hard	13
Downsizing	51	Personal relations	17	Anxiety	13
Workplace	50	Single	17	Recession	13
Getting employed	41	Deterioration	17	Slump	13
Job relocation	38	Merger	17	Bubble	12
Problem	35	Overtime	17	Technique	11
Contents	33	Part-timer	16	Type of job	11
Hospitalization	33	Achievement	16	Inferiority	11
Department	30	Duty	16	Stress	10
Sales	30	Project	16	Personal computer	10
Service	29	Division	16	Regular employee	10
Business management	27	Unemployment	16	Debt	10
Accident	26	Family business	15	Living	10
Economic depression	25	Subordinate	15	Business closure	10
Assignment	23	Balance between two things	15	Personnel distribution	10
Transfer	22	Transportation	14	Divorce	10

Table 2: Words and Phrases Frequently Used in Free Description about Past Work Life Crises by Sex, Decade of Life When the Crisis Occurred, and Annual Income of the Last Year

Sex	Male (N=1532)	Female (N=518)
Company	<b>14.2%</b>	<u>6.2%</u>
Relationship	<u>4.1%</u>	<b>7.1%</b>
Career change	<b>5.0%</b>	<u>1.9%</u>
People-related	<u>3.1%</u>	<b>6.0%</b>
Downsizing	<b>2.9%</b>	<u>1.4%</u>
Getting employed	<u>1.2%</u>	<b>4.1%</b>

When the crisis occurred	Teens (N=30)	Twenties (N=291)	Thirties (N=339)	Forties (N=583)	Fifties (N=247)
Career change	0.0%	<b>9.3%</b>	5.9%	5.7%	<u>1.6%</u>
Downsizing	0.0%	<u>0.3%</u>	1.8%	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>
Hospitalization	3.3%	2.7%	0.9%	1.5%	<b>4.5%</b>

Annual income of the last year	Less than 4 million yen (N=569)	Less than 6 million yen (N=495)	Less than 8 million yen (N=417)	More than 8 million yen (N=539)
Company	13.0%	<b>15.6%</b>	10.8%	<u>9.5%</u>
Bankruptcy	<b>6.7%</b>	5.1%	2.9%	<u>2.0%</u>
Boss	<u>1.9%</u>	2.8%	4.3%	<b>6.3%</b>
Retirement	3.7%	<b>4.8%</b>	<u>1.2%</u>	1.9%
Downsizing	<b>3.9%</b>	3.4%	1.7%	<u>0.9%</u>
Workplace	<u>0.7%</u>	2.0%	<b>4.1%</b>	3.5%
Getting employed	<b>3.9%</b>	1.4%	1.2%	1.1%
Job relocation	<u>0.7%</u>	1.2%	2.9%	2.6%
Contents	0.7%	0.6%	2.4%	<b>2.6%</b>

\*Based on the results of residual analysis, significantly high values are shaded and low values are underlined, taking five percent as a standard level of significance.

Table 3 shows a list of words and phrases frequently used in free description to answer the questions: “What do you regret in your work life to date?”, “What do you think was the best thing in your work life to date?”, and “Which ability was most useful in your work life to date?”



Table 3: Words and Phrases Frequently Used in Free Description concerning Views and Feelings toward One's Work Life to Date

What do you regret?		What do you think was the best thing?		Which ability was most useful?	
Qualification	118	Work	258	<b>Ability</b>	<b><u>160</u></b>
Work	108	Myself	129	Qualification	147
Study	80	Company	117	<b>Knowledge</b>	<b><u>88</u></b>
Company	77	Relationship	84	Relationship	78
Myself	68	People-related	77	Technique	76
Career change	60	Experience	63	<b>Personal computer</b>	<b><u>67</u></b>
Getting employed	47	Qualification	57	Work	58
Occupation	42	Getting employed	49	<b>License</b>	<b><u>51</u></b>
<b>Regret</b>	<b><u>42</u></b>	Workplace	46	<b>Communication</b>	<b><u>50</u></b>
Obtainment	41	<b>Friend</b>	<b><u>46</u></b>	Obtainment	45
<b>Retirement</b>	<b><u>31</u></b>	Career change	46	People-related	42
<b>University</b>	<b><u>29</u></b>	<b>Overseas</b>	<b><u>39</u></b>	Experience	42
<b>Beginning</b>	<b><u>28</u></b>	<b>Boss</b>	<b><u>38</u></b>	Specialty	39
Relationship	27	<b>Colleague</b>	<b><u>38</u></b>	Myself	34
People-related	26	<b>Living</b>	<b><u>35</u></b>	<b>Character</b>	<b><u>33</u></b>
<b>Lack</b>	<b><u>26</u></b>	Occupation	32	<b>Personal relations</b>	<b><u>32</u></b>
<b>Marriage</b>	<b><u>23</u></b>	Technique	31	Sales	28
Child	21	<b>Subordinate</b>	<b><u>31</u></b>	<b>Patience</b>	<b><u>27</u></b>
Experience	21	Sales	28	<b>Driving</b>	<b><u>25</u></b>
<b>Student</b>	<b><u>20</u></b>	<b>Income</b>	<b><u>24</u></b>	<b>English</b>	<b><u>21</u></b>
Technique	20	<b>Success</b>	<b><u>23</u></b>	Management	21
Workplace	20	Study	23	Study	21
Specialty	20	Child	21	<b>Accounting</b>	<b><u>20</u></b>
		<b>Management</b>	<b><u>21</u></b>		
		<b>Firm</b>	<b><u>20</u></b>		
		Obtainment	20		

The most frequently used word was: i) “qualification” for the question “what do you regret?”, followed by “work”, “study”, “company”, and “myself”; ii) “work” for “what do you think was the best thing?”, followed by “myself”, “company”, “relationship” and “people-related”; and iii) “ability” for “which ability was most useful?”, followed by “qualification”, “knowledge”, “relationship”, and “technique”.

The words written in bold letters and underlined in Table 3 are the words that are used in free description about only one of the three topics of: “what do you regret?”, “what do you think was the best thing?”, and “which ability was most useful?”, and are not used for the other two topics. These words include “regret”, “retirement”, “university”, “beginning”, and “lack” for “what do you regret?”, “friend”, “overseas”, “boss”, “colleague”, and “living” for “what do you think was the best thing?”, and “ability”, “knowledge”, “personal computer”, “license”, and “communication” for “which ability was most useful?”

**(7) Main results of “Chapter 7: For Support of Adult Career Development”**

Based on the results of each chapter of this report, this chapter summarizes the points of note when providing support for adult career development and makes some suggestions for career development support measures. Furthermore, on the basis of the above, we discussed administrative support, which will be necessary in providing support for lifelong career development in the future.

The discussion on support in each decade of life is as follows. For long-term career support for workers in their thirties, it should be pointed out that, it is important not only to be satisfied with one’s present career but also to plan ahead concerning one’s work life, under which specific goals should be set and ability development should be pursued. For preventing (minimizing) a career slump in one’s forties, support measures are necessary. Also pointed out is the importance of consultation provided by companies to individual employees about their career development, and such support as to enable smooth labor mobility. In support for future career planning of workers in their fifties, it is important to provide information on the labor market and occupations, etc., and to strengthen the consultation and job-placement system to support career changes and the starting of one’s own business. The importance of consulting and advising functions concerning one’s work life is also pointed out.

Other issues discussed in this chapter are: the “strengthening of the function of career consultation and provision of high-quality career consultation services” and “the lifeline method as a tool for the support for adult career development”.