

Perceptions and Reemployment Behavior of Trainees of Vocational Training: Vocational Training and Job Search Activities

Summary

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Objective of the Research

The survey was conducted on unemployed people who were advised by job placement agencies that their reemployment would be difficult if they did not seek employment in jobs that were different from the jobs they were originally employed in and who were instructed to receive vocational training to promote reemployment. The survey was carried out with the purpose of understanding how they accepted and used such opportunities for vocational training in their job search activities. Based on the results, the author examined the kinds of support that should be provided through vocational training and job placement for early reemployment of unemployed people.

Summary of Research Results

1. Background and objective of the research

In this research, the author examined how assistance in job search activities could be provided to unemployed people who were advised that reemployment would be difficult if they did not seek employment in jobs that were different from the jobs they were originally employed in and who were going through vocational training to overcome their disadvantage and find reemployment. The author conducted the survey on unemployed people who were instructed by public job placement agencies to receive job training because of skills mismatches. The basic assumption was that the unemployed people who were instructed to receive training would carry out concrete job search activities in parallel with their job training.

Realization of reemployment, on the other hand, is essentially the result of a transaction in the labor market between the employer and the job seeker. It is the result of a complicated working of a number of factors, including opportunities for meeting prospective employers, the existence of intermediaries, and the activities within specific industries. Personal factors such as skills and aptitude are not the only factors of reemployment.

Moreover, unemployment is also not only an economic issue. It has various effects on the lives of unemployed people, including changes in their statuses within society and family. The effect unemployment has on individuals differs significantly from person to person in its contents and magnitude. Even if two unemployed people were to receive the same vocational training at a same place under public assistance, evaluation of the rationality of their job search activities would be difficult if the differences in their backgrounds were not taken into consideration. In this research, therefore, the author attempted to elucidate the relation between the effect that vocational training has on unemployed people's job search activities and their personal traits by investigating individual unemployed people's perception of job selection in the process of skills development and the concrete changes in their job search activities.

2. Outline of the survey

(1) Survey method and questions asked

Method: Interview survey on individual unemployed people receiving job training

Subject: Fourteen trainees enrolled in vocational training courses for unemployed people provided by public vocational development schools in the Tokyo metropolis (hereafter called the "courses"). The courses terminated in March, and the survey was

conducted immediately before the termination of the set period (hereafter called the “training period”).

[Training period and types of courses]

The training period lasted either for a year or six months. One-year courses were provided on telecommunications services and services for maintenance of machinery and electricity, and six-month courses on housing management services.

Survey period: February 25, 26 and 27, 2004

Questions asked: Questions were asked on the three subjects as follows:

- (1) The subject’s attributes, vocational training, and views about employment and job search activities.
- (2) The subject’s attitude towards occupation
- (3) Changes in the subject’s views about occupation and job search activities during the training period, impressions about job training, comprehensive evaluation, and remarks.

(2) Results and analysis

<Job search behavior patterns and improvement in realization of employment>

The subjects of this research have not actually been employed before the end of their training periods. However, four trainees were informally promised employment by the time of the survey. They were given informal promises before they completed training for acquiring basic skills, which occupied about a half of the training period. They had undertaken concrete job search activities before this halfway point. Among these four trainees, many common features were found in terms of their behavior and perceptions with regard to their job search activities during the training period.

On the other hand, among those who were not promised employment before the end of their training period, not many common features were found in their behavior and perceptions with regard to their job search activities during the training period. They did not take the initiative in starting job search activities early.

<Trainees who were informally promised employment>

In the self-evaluation of the contents of and views about job search activities during the training period, all four trainees who were informally promised employed regarded acquisition of skills during the training period as a means for systematically carrying

out job search activities. It was observed that they were receiving job training as part of a continuous job search activities leading up to reemployment (the effect of considering job training as a means of job search activities).

They selected the training courses based on their selection of the types of jobs they sought employment in. They considered vocational training as useful in developing their skills. When they acquired a certain level of skills, they met potential employers. As a preparation for meeting potential employers, they approached specialist counselors and learned the skills for preparing for interviews and for smoothing such meetings, in parallel with their vocational training. After this preparatory stage, they collected information from a number of channels to suit their needs (the effect of proactively carrying out concrete job search activities). With respect to their attitude towards occupation, their self-understanding improved as they became aware of their vocational aptitude.

From the above, it can be said that the behavior of those who were informally promised employment was characterized by a high level of consistency between jobs sought and courses taken, self-awareness about improvement in skills as a result of job training and understanding about their vocational aptitude, and continuous job search activities (the effect of a high level of consistency between jobs sought and courses taken).

Those who were informally promised employment could, because acquisition of skills after beginning of training went as planned, act with confidence about their aptitude and competence in their desired jobs. In other words, the successful acquisition of skills and awareness about their vocational aptitude, or potential competence and possibilities, in their desired jobs that were highly consistent with the courses taken promoted further clarification of the goals of their job search activities. With respect to the method for achieving their goals, they were able to discover and decide for themselves on ways that suited them and act on those decisions, and this underlay the action plan that led to improvement in the quality of their job search activities (the effect of an increased sense of their effectiveness and self-awareness about their vocational aptitude).

<Trainees who were not promised employment>

With respect to how vocational training was considered within the context of job search activities by those who were not promised employment, acquisition of skills through job training was not necessarily part of a plan of continuous job search activities that led up to reemployment. Moreover, whereas those who were informally

promised employment had commonalities among themselves with respect to their behavior and perceptions, the way in which vocational training was perceived among those who were not promised employment differed from person to person. It should also be noted that among the latter group, the relation between courses taken and their desired jobs was weak. It may be possible to say that a common feature among them was that they did not regard vocational training as a means for facilitating their already planned job search activities but selected to take such training, for the time being, as a temporary way of spending their time during the unemployed period.

There may be two ways in which these people take such vocational training. Firstly, vocational training was considered not as a means for reemployment but as a replacement for employment and a way for accommodating themselves to unemployment, which included obtaining psychological stability from it. In this case, vocational training was not used to improve the quality of job search activities but as a means to stabilize their life in unemployment. Secondly, some of them might have originally considered vocational training as a means for job search activities, but might have stopped having such expectations as it did not have the anticipated effect. They might regard vocational training as an interim measure that they would employ until they could implement another measure.

With respect to their self-assessment on the contents and perceptions of job search activities during the training period, it was observed that they were not proactive about receiving the support of vocational counseling advisers - specialists who support trainees providing advice and information on actual job search activities, that they had only a few channels, often only one, through which to obtain information, and that their attitude towards occupation, including their understanding about vocational aptitude, rarely changed. One of the reasons for these observations was that from the beginning, vocational training was not considered positively in their job search activities.

More specifically, some of them were not entirely partaking in job search activities or were not actively involved in such activities. Among those who could not, during the training period, narrow down their desired jobs sufficiently because of changes in interest or bleak views about their chance for reemployment, the level of consistency between desired jobs (the number of which had increased) and training courses taken declined for some of the trainees.

<Comparison of those who were and who were not promised employment>

In the job search activities of those who were not promised employment, the positive

relation between determination of desired jobs, selection of training courses, and collection of necessary information on one hand and realization of reemployment on the other became diluted. And because there was a lack of planning on how to carry on with their job search activities, there were no commonalities among them. Those who were informally promised employment shared the same goal and intention of achieving early reemployment through vocational training. There were commonalities in their actions for actualizing their goals, and based on these commonalities, it was possible to explicate a consistent behavior pattern. On the other hand, for those who were not promised employment, their objectives for receiving job training and their intentions in their selection of training courses differed for each person, and even in the earliest stages, they tended to diverge into a group who received training for reemployment and another group who received training to stabilize their life in unemployment for the time being. Their job search activities developed differently, and it was not possible to show a common behavior pattern among those who were not promised employment.

The subsequent developments indicated that the differences in their perceptions about job search activities further widened in their behavior. Meanwhile, self-understanding, especially about their vocational aptitude, either did not change or, became unstable, because they had to deny their previous self-image, at the time of being laid off or instructed to receive vocational training,.

In cases where there was no change in their self-understanding, it may be possible that because they could not expect to improve their skills or job search activities, they tend to think that their lack of sense of self-effectiveness or unemployment itself was not a social setback or failure on their part. So, they tried to affirm their occupational self-concept and maintain the status quo as they had before unemployment.

Under these circumstances, they lacked consistency in planning the entire job search activities, and as a result, were not able to facilitate improvement in the quality of job search activities based on acquisition of skills.

<Improvement in realization of reemployment and synthesis of occupational self-concept>

The common changes observed in the job search activities of those who were informally promised employment seem to indicate that occupational development was a process of the development of their occupational self-concept. For job search activities to result in employment, the choice behavior needs to be rational with the set goals, and the question is whether a job seeker has composed a rational relation within him between vocational training and employment. Those who were informally promised

employment had intentionally and properly established this relation, but those who were not had not fully established this relation for different reasons.

In other words, those who succeeded in their job search activities (1) recognized that to eliminate the state of unemployment, they needed to realize reemployment and that vocational training was not a means to ease the state of unemployment, but a means to facilitate reemployment; (2) planned their job search activities based on the recognition of (1) above; and (3) made a series of selection of actions in executing their job search activities, which promoted the development of their self-concept and ultimately increased the rationality of the job search activities.

On the other hand, those who were not promised employment tended to regard vocational training as a means to postpone taking concrete job search activities. They also tended to avoid actively selecting certain actions, during the training period, to eliminate unemployment because, for instance, the gap between their desired jobs and training courses widened, and were often unable to select rational job search activities that led to employment because, for example, their expectations on job training had been betrayed.

Because they were either not able to sufficiently associate vocational training for reemployment with job search activities from the onset or failed to do so after the start of the training period, it may be possible that they were not able to synthesize their self-concept in the process of repetitious occupational choices.

From the above, it can be surmised that if unemployed trainees, who gather together to acquire skills with the common purpose of achieving reemployment, could learn from the ways of thinking and life of others to review or adjust their occupational self-concept to rationally accommodate it with reality and to develop their self-concept towards stabilizing the relation between occupation and self, this may provide the impetus for them to carry on rational job search activities.

<Improvement in realization of reemployment and selection of strategic actions>

In the labor market, no matter how exceptional the conditions of the unemployed person seeking a job, in other words, the supplier of labor, if there is no apparent demand for that labor, employment could not be realized. The demand for labor also changes in short time depending on industrial activities. Therefore, unemployed people need to carry out efficient job search activities by realistically setting and adjusting their conditions in light of the trends of the labor market and by selecting and obtaining necessary information. It would not be appropriate to explain improvement in realization of employment through job seekers' occupational maturation alone. To

increase the chance for reemployment, job seekers need not only to increase competitiveness over others, but also to plan and execute job search activities timely. Analyzing the market trends and collecting information that relates closely to their employment are some of the most basic activities. It can be observed that those who were informally promised employment were intentionally carrying out these basic job search activities. It would be appropriate to say that up until the time they were promised employment, they had synthesized their occupational self-concept and deliberately taken actions to draw up, execute, and adjust plans that were accommodated with the situation in the market, and as a result, they were able to find employment.

On the other hand, with respect to those who were not promised employment, there can be observed discontinuance or interruption of the decision-making process related to execution of job search activities. They tended to be off in their ability to make an image of their desired jobs or their understanding about the contents of their training courses before the training commenced. They often viewed vocational training as a means to ease unemployment for the time being, did not actively approach specialist counselors, and did not improve their occupational self-understanding. In the selection of jobs or the decision-making process for employment, these tendencies resulted in (1) lack of information, (2) acquisition of information that had negative effect on their goals and objectives, and (3) selection of passive strategies for reemployment. These had negative impact on the final selection of activities for employment and the results of those activities.

(3) Summary and proposals

<The effect of the differences in the concepts of job types and how they are handled in the operations of job placement agencies and vocational training schools>

The types of jobs that job seekers indicate as conditions for employment at job placement agencies do not always match with the types of jobs for which vocational training courses are provided. While vocational training schools are devising ways to provide courses for different kinds of job types, their primary role is to provide instructions in basic skills. So, the range of jobs for which courses are set is narrower than those discussed at job placement agencies. There is a need to realize the subtle differences in actual concepts of job types and the way they are handled when two specialized organs, job placement agencies and vocational training schools with distinctly separate functions, are both involved in vocational training.

Therefore, job placement agencies, when instructing unemployed people to receive

training, need to pay sufficient attention to how much the job seeker understands the actual situation of one's desired jobs and how concretely one understands the contents of their courses in relation to the jobs.

On the other hand, vocational training schools that accept job seekers as trainees and provide skills guidance should, before enrolling trainees into their schools, provide explanations and information so that trainees can understand the contents of their courses in relation to their desired jobs. In this case, the schools should first pay close attention to how much the job types discussed at job placement agencies for receiving training correspond with the job types for which training is actually provided. After the enrolment of the trainee, the school needs to adjust their instructions depending on the differences in the concepts of job types at these two institutions. Handling by individual vocational training schools is an issue that will need to be examined in the future.

<Characteristics of those who were and who were not promised employment>

For those who seek to facilitate reemployment by improving their skills through vocational training, the role played by vocational training in their job search activities has a significant effect on realizing reemployment. In a more conversational style, this can be expressed as:

“I want to achieve a certain kind of reemployment soon → I will take a certain type of job training to facilitate reemployment → Because reemployment is my primary objective, I will utilize what I can during the training period to realize my objective.”

Therefore, the awareness that one's skills and understanding about one's occupational self have improved during the training period has a positive effect on the preparation and execution of plans for job search activities.

Obviously, this is a question of whether each trainee is able to consistently perform what institutionally each trainee is expected to perform in relation to job placement and instructions to receive training. It is also a question of whether job placement agencies and vocational training schools can be thorough in providing vocational guidance to such trainees. It was observed that those who succeeded in securing employment early in their job search activities were consistent in this respect, while there was diversity in such performance among those who did not succeed.

In other words, those who did not succeed differed, in one way or another, from those who did in their perception of vocational training in the process of job search activities.

Where they differed was dissimilar from person to person. Therefore, those who succeeded in the early stages of job search activities tended to have all the elements favorable for employment, while there was diversity among those who did not with regard to fulfilling these elements. This suggests that elements promoting employment are not limited to one or a few elements, but many elements have to be met to realize employment.

<Characteristics of those who were not promised employment and key points in providing assistance>

While the trainees who were not promised employment did not have the same level of commonality shared by the trainees who were informally promised employment, they had three common characteristics, namely: (1) they only had a few channels of information and they did not use those channels of information very much; (2) they did not use the services of specialist counselors very much; and (3) there was no change in their attitude towards occupation. In addition to addressing specific problems related to individual job seekers, it can be expected that working on the improvement of the above three points for all job seekers during vocational consultations and provisions of information that are repeatedly held during the training period will be effective in promoting employment. In particular, with respect to the use of services of specialist counselors of (2) above, there is a need to closely examine the reasons they were not used. It must be remembered, however, that those who proactively carried out job search activities for reemployment were also active in employing the services of specialist counselors, and not that the active use of such services simply led to securing employment.

<Vocational consultation, career counseling, and career consultation>

The frequent use of the services provided by “vocational counseling advisers” was one of the common features of those who were informally promised employment. On the other hand, those who were not promised employment hardly saw any value in the use of such services for employment assistance. It can be noted that those who were promised employment did not necessarily recognize that vocational counseling advisers played a significant role in employment assistance. For instance, they went to see the counselor simply because the counselor was stationed in their vocational training schools and provided counseling services. Those who were not promised employment hardly saw any value in using such services.

The reasons that those who were not promised employment did not recognize the

value of using such services were “the counselor was not informed about the situation in the industry,” “the counselor did not know specific details about occupation,” and “the counselor does not have actual information about job offers.” As a result, unemployed people who were informed to a certain extent about different occupations and industries and who had collected substantial amount of information on job offers and other job-related information through their job search activities considered that they or their acquaintances knew more than vocational counseling advisers did and that specialist counselors only listened and were not useful.

What they wanted from counselors was, for one, specific information and skills for employment. Moreover, they did not want common knowledge but wanted specific information that they did not have. They hoped that while they had to spend many hours acquiring skills through training in their daily lives, the counselors would collect for them and examine for them in detail information on job offers. When counselors did bring such information or when counselors advised on a review of their professional careers that they had not done before, a number of them recognized the counselors’ significance in employment assistance

Obviously, for any consultation, trainees must be listened to by their counselors. Reemployment is not an easy task even for adults with job experience, and unemployment can easily inflict mental damage. Therefore, counselors play an important role in accepting people and listening attentively to what they say. It also goes without saying that counselors’ advice given from a broader perspective and as experts on occupation is meaningful to many unemployed people. It can be said, however, that because the subjects of this research were unemployed people who, as a result of their consultation at job placement agencies, were instructed to receive training and who underwent training at specialized organs from six months to a year to acquire skills, what they expected from “specialist counselors” was not mental support, but “practical information for carrying out specific job search activities.”

Communities provide various forms of consultation services including vocational consultation, career counseling, and career consultation. In each case, these services are effective as employment assistance only when the kinds of services required by those seeking consultation are provided in appropriate ways. Today, it is urgently required of expert occupational counselors who provide vocational consultation, career counseling, and career consultation to offer consultation services that are effective in employment assistance for those who, for one reason or another, stopped short of taking the initiative in finding employment for themselves.

Contents

Introduction

Overview

Chapter 1. Issues and objectives

1. Issues and background
2. Vocational training and job search activities

Chapter 2. Survey method and questions

1. Selection of a method
2. Subject
3. Process
4. Survey period
5. Questions

Chapter 3. Results and analysis

Section 1. Summary of results

1. Summary of interviews and matters for consideration
2. Summary by matters for consideration

Section 2. Analysis of results

1. First analytic viewpoint
2. Second analytic viewpoint
3. Third analytic viewpoint
4. Analysis based on each viewpoint
 - (1) Job search behavior patterns and improvement in realization of employment
 - (2) Improvement in realization of reemployment and synthesis of occupational self-concept
 - (3) Improvement in realization of reemployment and selection of strategic actions

Chapter 4. Summary and proposals

1. The effect of the differences in the concepts of job types and how they are handled in the operations of job placement agencies and vocational training schools
2. Characteristics of those who were and who were not promised employment
3. Characteristics of those who were not promised employment and key points in providing assistance
4. Vocational consultation, career counseling, and career consultation
5. Significance as a reference for vocational training and job placement