

Surviving in a Changing Labor Market: Issues and Trends for the Employee in Japan

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1. Introduction

The labor market is composed of two markets a market outside the organization that exerts influence over the market within.² The long-term reliance by Japanese companies on the internal labor market has propelled the development of the Japanese Personnel Management. Apart from the employment of entry-level employees, it is no exaggeration to say that Japanese companies have had only limited dealings with the external labor market. For the university graduate in search of work, the search was not so much for an occupation or the job itself but rather for the right kind of company. Once having entered the internal labor market, one's lifelong occupation would be pursued solely within this market. Over

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² According to Ōtake (1998), the labor market is “... an abstract concept of a locale in which people search for work, companies search for labor, and work is distributed amongst workers.” In other words, the labor market is a locale that knows of the existence of a job and the workers who want the job. In labor economics, employment that involves transfer of people between companies and new employment by students and housewives and such represent the “external labor market.” The “internal labor market” refers to movement of labor within the company between jobs and job locations.

a long period of time, the internal and external labor markets developed independent of each other with the internal labor market playing the greatest role in the labor market overall.

The structure of the labor market is in a continual state of flux. The environment surrounding the labor market is undergoing profound change. It is this change that is influencing the structure of the labor market. According to a 2002 Labor Economics White Paper, since October 2002, the Japanese economy has been in a state of retreat with production/manufacturing at the same levels of 1987 through 1988. Accordingly, the situation for the labor market has become very stringent. By December 2001, the unemployment rate had reached as high as 5.5%. The ratio of available jobs workers was a low 1:0.53, even with the slight upward trend. Of the workers that did manage to secure a job, 930,000 ended up losing them representing the largest, industry-wide reduction in jobs ever. The greatest impact was felt amongst employees who belonged to companies with over 500 employees.

If we examine the breakdown according to type of employment, excluding workers employed in the agricultural and forestry industry, the number of regular (*seishain*) employees who lost their jobs was 1,260,000 more than the same period the previous year. At the same time, however, the number of employees in short-term employment increased, highlighting the trend towards reducing the number of regular employees and replacing them with part-time and other contingent workers. These trends indicate that lifetime commitment (or lifetime employment) and seniority-based wage systems that had supported the high rates of economic growth are fast becoming something of the past. The uniformity once found in wages, working hours, employment structures, and job transfers are beginning to crumble with greater diversity starting emerge.

In line with all the various changes described above, it is granted that the freer movement of human resources and changes in the function of the labor market is taking place within both the internal and external labor markets. In discussions about the labor market, freer movement of workers and the diversification in

working styles have become the most prominent issues.

In this paper, I examine the changes in the internal and external labor markets. Based on this examination, I propose strategies for employees to survive in a labor market characterized by growing competition and underlined by the growing diversity in the way people work.

2. The Fluidity of the Labor Market

Over recent years, the Japanese mass media and members of the world of business have been asserting that “the (Japanese) labor market is becoming more liquid, as it rightly should be.” Even during the bubble economy observes had noted that Japan had “... now entered an era where it is more common to change companies.”³ And, with the burst of the bubble economy, a wave of interest in the “fluidity” of the labor market has emerged. The debates surrounding liquidity or more pointedly, the effectiveness of “Japanese-style employment practices” are strongly related to assessments of the efficiency of the labor market in Japan. But is the Japanese labor market in fact becoming more liquid? My own take on the issue in this paper is that the number of workers who are changing companies is growing proportionately larger. The basis of my argument is drawn from various statistics.

2-a. Fluidity as Understood from Statistical Data

The statistics I draw from are published in “Survey on Employment Trends” by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. The indices that deserve greatest attention are those for “job separation”, the rate of workers entering employment, and the rate of worker mobility. The rate of workers entering employment in the this same survey refers to the percentage of employees who are newly employed within the one year period out of the total population who are able to work as of the first of January. The rate of “job separation” (loss of job) refers to the number of employees who were no longer in employment or were transferred to a subsidiary company

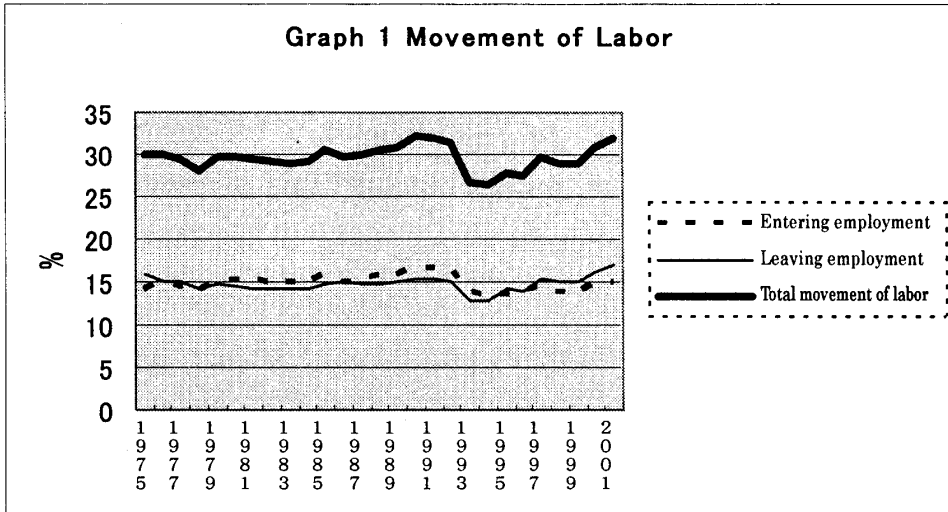
³ Refer especially to Shimada & Oota (1997), Yashiro (1997), Muramatsu (1999), and Koike (2000).

(*keiretsu-kaisha*) out of the total labor force population as of first January. Those who are hired as temporary labor or on a daily basis are not included in the regular employee (*Jyōyōrodosha*⁴) population data.

As indicated in Graph 1, the 1960s through to the first half of the 1970s represented a very high rate of movement in the labor force. However, with the advent of the 1973 oil shock, the rate of economic growth dropped, as did the movement of workers in the labor market. Any increase in these rates following the oil shock was again lost as the burst of the bubble economy brought about new low levels of growth. By 1994, there were clear indicators that movement in the labor market was on the increase. The rate of workers changing companies reflected much of the overall movement. However, we need to distinguish the situation for the regular employee (*ippan rodosha*⁵) and the part-time worker. As indicated in Graph 2, the rate of part-time workers, especially amongst women, who were changing jobs/companies was relatively high and continuing to increase. It was this trend that contributed to the overall rate of people changing companies. Obviously, the prosperous state of the economy was a major influence in this trend. During the period of high rates of economic growth and the bubble economy, the large number of people changing jobs was the result of the demand of a thriving economy for more labor. Characteristic of the increase in the later half of the 1990s was the increasing diversification in employment types and a shift towards the third economy – a service economy. Overall, it can be argued that the increase in the movement of workers is proof of the increased liquidity of the labor market.

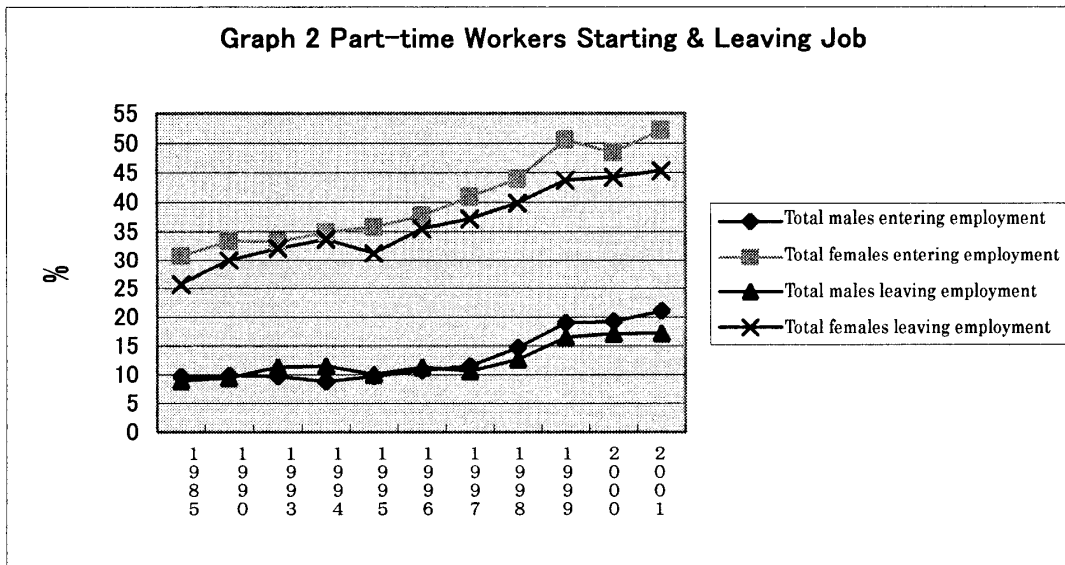
⁴ According to the definition provided by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, a regular employee (1) has no fixed period of employment, (2) is employed for more than one month, and/or (3) has been employed for more than 18 days in the previous two months employed under a fixed term of employment of less than a month or employed on a daily basis.

⁵ A regular employee refers to all employees other than part-time workers.



Source: Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (2002) Survey on Employment Trends

Note: Construction Industry is included from 1991



Source: Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (2002) Survey on Employment Trends

2-b. Characteristics of the Fluid Labor Market

The fluidity of the labor market is accelerating in both the internal and external labor markets. In the internal labor market, there are largely two different types of movements. The first is the movement between the internal and external labor market. The second is the movement within the internal labor market itself.

According to the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications' "Fundamental Statistics of the Structure of Employment", the number of workers under full-time employment has been dropping. From the later half of the 1950s, the rate of permanent full-time employees started to rise steadily to reach a rate of 90% by the first half of the 1970s. However, by 1992, the ratio had dropped to 80%. Up until the 1980s - the end of Japanese bubble economy- the number of non-permanent employees had shrunk greatly affecting the overall makeup of the workforce population. However, upon entering the 1990s and the decline of economic growth, the trend started to reverse with companies beginning to reduce their permanent employees- the core human assets that the company had nurtured and developed within the organization. At the same time, companies started to employ more non-permanent workers such as part-time, contract and temporary workers. Companies also made more use of outside human resources as dispatched workers as well as workers that were contracted internally. This trend made for the expanding diversification in types of employment (refer to Table 1). In an industry breakdown, it was the retail, food service and service industries that were spearheading the diversity in employment. In essence, companies were reducing the number of permanent employees and in turn bringing in from the external labor market non-permanent workers under a wide array of working conditions.

Table 1
Utilization of Part-time Workers and Other External Human Resources
 (Excluding contract-based workers, % of multiple choice responses)

Industry	Employment Type					
	Regular Employee	Contracted Worker	Temporary Worker	Part-time Worker	Dispatched Worker	Other
Total	96.3	10.0	4.4	56.0	5.7	2.2
Mining	99.9	7.7	2.3	26.6	1.1	5.3
Construction	97.6	9.9	8.1	28.0	5.3	5.0
Manufacturing	97.4	7.6	3.2	61.1	5.6	1.5
Electricity & Gas	99.6	18.2	4.9	31.6	8.6	4.8

Transportation & Communications	99.4	17.2	4.7	40.9	6.5	1.9
Wholesale & Food Services	94.4	7.0	3.9	65.8	4.0	1.1
Finance & Insurance	98.6	20.2	1.0	41.3	25.9	2.2
Real Estate	95.8	17.6	3.9	43.4	10.3	3.2
Services	96.7	12.8	4.4	59.4	5.1	2.9

Note: Definition of Employment Types in Table 2

Another movement has been occurring in the internal labor market itself. Here I mainly refer to the movement within a company group. The most common type of movement is the temporary or permanent transfer⁶ of employees between companies in the group. There are a number of reasons why these kinds of transfers occur. ① The career development, training and education of employees. ② The need of a company for specialist and technical skills or more manpower. ③ To cut labor costs, downsize or to overcome the problem of lack managerial posts. Although the purpose for the transfer differs according to the age of the employee, the lack of managerial posts and the need to cut labor costs has been the most common case over recent years. Through displacements, the company sphere within which employees are being posted or transferred has widened beyond one individual company to extend to the whole company group. This phenomenon has created what could be termed a “pseudo internal labor market.”⁷ The movement of labor in this market concerns almost exclusively one employment type - the permanent employee. This type of transfer is not apparent for employees under non-permanent employment conditions.

⁶ According to the “Dictionary of Personnel and Labor” by Atsuko Suzuki, published by Nihon Jitsugyo Shuppan Publishing Company, transferees maintain the employment relationship with the company dispatching them and develop an employment relationship with the new company. According to the definition in Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare report on “Survey on Employment Trends”, a “transferee” is “a regular employee who under the provisions of an employment contract or by company decree transfers to another company to work under the direction of the new company.

⁷ A term used by Imano & Sato (2002)

Table 2
Definitions of Employment Types

Employment Type	Definition
Permanent Employee	Workers under terms of employment that do not specify a set period of employment.
Contracted Worker	A worker that is employed under a contract to perform specialist work and the period of employment is fixed.
Temporary Worker	A worker who is employed temporarily or from day to day for a period that is less than one month.
Part-time Employee	<p>1. Part-time workers with shorter working hours: A worker who's fixed working hours is less than that of a permanent employee over a period of one day or the number of days in week. Such employees have terms of employment more than a month or are not fixed at all.</p> <p>2. All other Part-time workers: A worker who has a designated number of working hours or has a designated number of workdays at almost the same level as permanent employees. (However,) these employees have periods of employment that are more than one month or with no determined length or employment at all.</p>
Dispatched Worker	A worker who is dispatched by a temp agency in accordance with the dispatched worker law.
Other	All other types of workers not covered above.

Source: "1999 General Survey on Diversified Types of Employment", 2000, Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare

Labor mobility in the external labor market has a strong relation to changes in regulations governing labor laws. Regulations relating to fixed-period contracts and discretionary labor systems are being re-assessed. The number of occupations that fall under the dispatched worker law are increasing. With the easing of regulations dealing with private job placement agencies, the use of dispatched workers, contract workers, part-time workers, temporary workers and other so called "non-regular" workers has become a significant trend in the management of the workplace. The conditions under which workers in the external labor market are under are diversifying and as a result the market is transforming into as a multi-tiered entity. Statistics indicate this situation very clearly. According to the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications

survey into manpower, excluding those with top management positions, of a total of 49,370,00 employed workers, 35,290,000 were permanent employees or public servants and 14,700,000 were part-time workers, *arubatio* (side employment), or any other type of non-regular employee. This means that 28.5% of the workforce is employed as non-regular workers (excluding workers in top management positions.)

The above discussion has dealt with characteristics of a fluid labor market by looking separately at the internal and external labor markets. However, a common theme that has emerged for both markets is the important influence of diversification in the way people work.

2-c. Reasons Behind the Mobility of Workers in the Labor Market

In this section, I discuss the reasons behind the rapid increase in mobility of workers in the Japanese labor market.

Firstly, with the advance of globalization, competition between companies in the global arena has intensified. In this age of mega-competition, companies must be able to provide high added-value to their products and services while at the same time have control over what is seen on a global standard as over-priced fixed labor costs. The competition to acquire talented technical and other specialists able to produce high added value is fierce. Companies that have high growth potential and thus able to provide very appealing work conditions are attracting talent. As a result of this process, the movement of labor has increased.

In an attempt to contain labor costs in this era of low levels of economic growth and high uncertainty, many companies are reconsidering the levels of employment and pursuing downsizing strategies. Amongst the major forms of downsizing are reductions in hiring, establishment and implementation of early-retirement systems, expansion of job transfers. These measures are also contributing to the greater mobility of labor.

Secondly, performance evaluations based on length-of-service are holding less weight in the determination of wages and severance (retirement) pay. In the past, it had been commonly held that a system that rewarded length-of-service in the same one company in the determination of wages and retirement pay was very beneficial for the employee. However, as I have stated above, in order for companies to increase their competitiveness they are introducing measures that provide control over fixed labor costs. These measures include the introduction of result or merit-based performance evaluation systems- systems place importance on the contribution a worker makes at particular point in time. In response to the freer movement of labor, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry is implementing measures such as developing public policy that re-assessed taxation on retirement pay.⁸ Loosening the various restraints imposed on wage determination and retirement pay when workers want to change companies can lead to larger numbers of workers changing jobs and the increased mobility in the labor market.

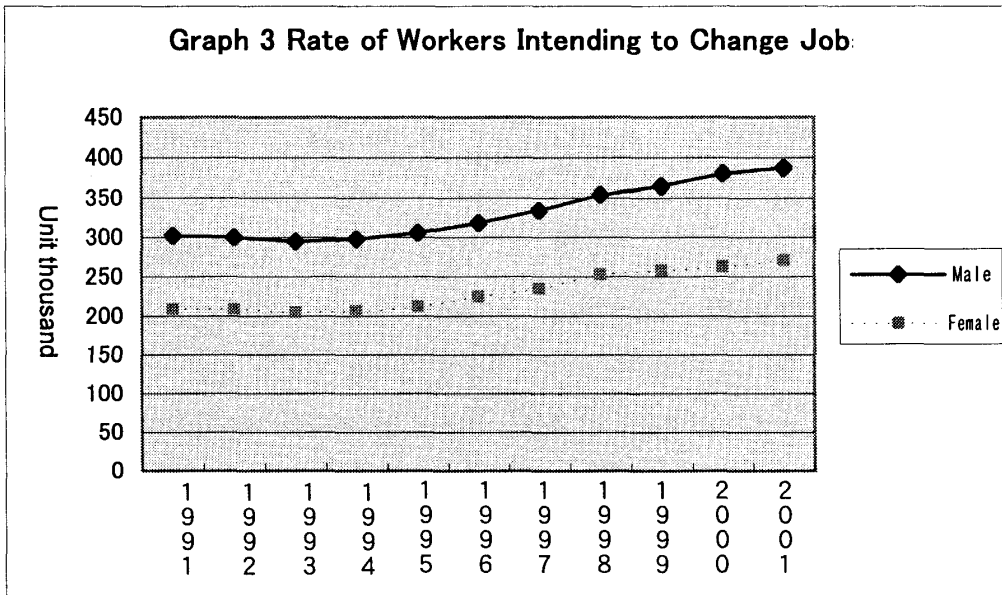
Thirdly, labor laws are undergoing deregulation. Fixed-term employment contracts and discretionary labor systems are being re-assessed and the types of occupations that can come under the Dispatched Worker Law are increasing. Restrictions that had been placed on temporary placement agencies are being lifted. This is setting the stage for the greater use of non-permanent workers such as dispatched workers, contract workers, part-time workers and temporary workers. Companies are turning to human resources outside of the organization to for labor on an on-demand basis. With the greater utilization of non-permanent workers the mobility of workers in the labor market is increasing.

⁸ The Nekkai Shimbun Newspaper (July 24, 2002) reported that Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry had indicated they would be making changes to the taxes on retirement and pensions in the following years adjustments to the taxation system in order to cope with the freer movement of labor. The Finance Ministry has been instructed to correct the disadvantages for workers who have lesser number of years in tax deductions on retirement pay by setting a fixed a yearly deduction rate in place of the deduction determinates that benefited those with over 20 years of continual employment. Further, with cooperation from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, it was agreed that efforts would be made to expand preferential taxation of defined contribution pension plans (a Japanese version of the 401K) and that these plans continue if the employee transfers to another company.

Lastly, besides the rational strategic or economic approaches to the issues discussed above, exist the more subjective issues that deal with the change in attitudes and values of workers themselves. There are indicators that the values held towards long-term employment in one organization and the “organization man”, who pursues advancement in the same company, are changing. Employees are losing confidence that the company they work for will continue to grow. The older values can lead to complacency in developing skills and abilities and thus there is now a movement on part of both the employees and employers towards employability that can translate to the external labor market. Workers are pursuing self-actualization through their job, which they view very subjectively and pursue more autonomously. A job is now seen as a means to exhibit skills and aptitude and, due to this perspective, changing jobs is being increasingly perceived as very positive. In a “Labor Opinion Poll” released by Prime Minister's Office, 70% of the respondents indicated they would change jobs⁹ if this enabled them to make better use of their skills and aptitude. This type of attitude deserves special attention as it points to the increased approval towards changing jobs that is above and beyond that of the desire for lifelong employment. Further, a survey of the labor force released by the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications indicated that the number of workers intending to change companies is on the rise for both women and men. (Refer to Graph 3)

In my discussion so far, I have looked at the mobility of workers or the liquidity of the labor market. In the following sections, I investigate the situation surrounding the internal and external labor markets to provide some background in understanding the increasing liquidity of the labor markets.

⁹ According to the “Survey of the Labor Force” by the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications, “a person who wants to change jobs” refers to someone who wants to quit their present job to obtain another job.



Source: “Survey of the Labor Force”, Bureau of Statistics, 2002

3. Changes in the Internal Labor Market

Human Resource Management (HRM) has, for a long period of time, operated within the internal labor market. I would like to investigate the conditions under which the internal labor was able to function.

First Condition: Continuous high rate of economic growth

During Japan’s period of high rate of economic growth, the burgeoning need for production and manufacturing also increased the demand for labor. In order to procure more workers, companies would regularly hire new recruits with undeveloped business skills, train them within the organization, and develop work skills for the company’s own end. Through this type of recruitment and training, companies would benefit by having limitless use of the employee’s labor. As employment was assured right up until retirement, workers were willing to accept a job that had no bounds for the employer. This type of employment management is called “stock-type employment.”

Second Condition: Practice of Lifelong Employment and the Seniority System

During the period of high levels of economic growth in which “if it was made it was

sold”, the return on investment in a company’s specialist technology was very high and profit assured. It was this set of conditions that nurtured the practices of lifelong employment and in-house training and development. Based on the practices of lifelong employment, the internal labor market developed and strengthened. Recruiting, placement, training and development, retirement, and other components of employment management, as well as employment conditions under the HRM system had been pursued in the internal labor market. The seniority system and the practice of lifelong employment were interdependent. With the systemization and implementation of remuneration and other personnel functions based on seniority, companies were able to hold on to their employees. Under these circumstances, it is natural to expect that employees would leave the fate of their life career to their same one company.

Third Condition: Underdevelopment of the External Labor Market

The supply of human resources and information and other functions normally expected of the external labor market was largely underdeveloped. Talented workers were being employed for the long-term in the one company, making it difficult for all other companies to draw from the external labor market the particular talent needed. As a result, an even greater emphasis was placed on developing internally the talent a company required.

It was under the conditions described above that the internal labor market in Japan was able to function. As the internal labor market became fixed firmly in place, the motivation needed to bring about a movement of workers into the external labor market was very weak. However, in this present period of low economic growth and high uncertainty, it is the external labor market that is now seeing greater activity. As structural readjustments take place is becoming increasingly difficult to try and keep the internal labor market closed. (See Table 3).

Table 3
Structural Readjustment to the Internal Labor Market*

Item		Past & Present Trends	Emerging Trends
I. Employment Type	Employment Type	Lifelong employment Stock-type employment management.	Emergence of diversity of employment types centering on long-term employment.
	Category	Almost entirely permanent and similar traditional categories of workers.	Part-time workers, casual workers, dispatched workers and other non-traditional workers.
II. Organizational Composition	Organization Type	Pyramid and stable.	Flat and flexible.
	Organization member	Homogenous, stability-orientated.	Diversified organizational members who present a source of instability.
III. HRM	Recruiting	Almost entirely new university graduates	Walk-in recruitment, recruiting throughout the year.
	Placement & Transfers	Company-directed placement.	Mutual adjustment by company and worker, stressing the worker's right to a career.
	Education & Training	Internal training and education.	Autonomous self-development, enrichment and development of employability
	Personnel Evaluation	Relative evaluation focusing on ability, attitude and will, dispersion and ambiguity of thinking regarding job ability in accordance with the company's particular characteristics.	Absolute evaluation based on job and performance, competency evaluation, convergence ¹⁰ in concept regarding ability according to occupation and job.
	Remuneration management	Seniority-based wage, <i>shokuno-shikaku seido</i> (job-ability classification system).	Wage system that places importance on ability and job results.
	Benefits and Retirement Funds	Lump payment upon retirement, benefits that include housing, amusement and sporting and other facilities.	Simultaneous use of lump payments and corporate retirement funds, benefit system that enables the individual freer choice.
	Work hours and job location	Starting and finishing hours and location of work determined by the company.	Flex-time, discretionary work hours system.
IV. Employee Consciousness	Job consciousness	Company centered.	Balance between job and private life.
	Career Planning	Dictated by the company.	Career planning pursued autonomously by the employee.

¹⁰ For more about "convergency", refer to Hanaoka (2001).

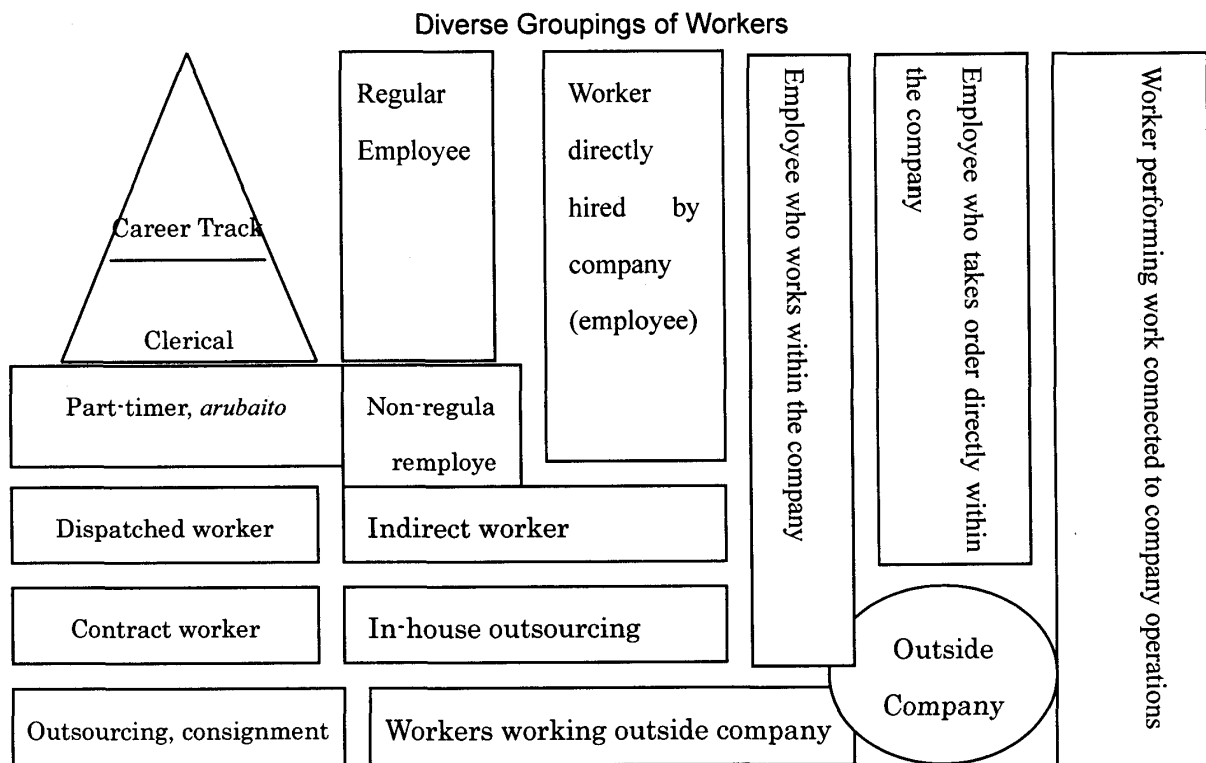
As illustrated in Table 3, there are various changes in the internal labor market with regard to employment type, organizational composition, HRM and the consciousness of employees. Following, I outline these changes through the lens of HRM.

I. Employment Type

Long-term employment has been in existence for a long period of time. However, with the slow down in economic growth, the practice of long-term employment is being reconsidered by a larger number of companies. In Nikkeiren's (Japan Federation of Employers' Associations) publication, "The New Japanese-style Management", an employment portfolio strategy consisting of three approaches to managing human assets is presented - utilization of abilities that been accumulated over the long term, utilization of highly specialized skills, and employment flexibility. These types of approaches point to the how a larger number of companies are utilizing a more rationale mix of permanent regular employees, non-regular employees, and human resources from outside of the company. The increased use of non-regular employees is evidence that a portfolio strategy is being pursued.

As all ready noted, the types of employment employees are working under are becoming more diversified. Many people are noting the increase in the number of non-regular employees. These employees are working under a diversity of employment conditions that have such labels as part-time, *arubaito*, contract employee, dispatched worker, and so on. The following figure indicates visually the groupings of these diverse types of workers.

Figure 1



Source : Imano & Sato (2002) p.48

II. Organizational Composition

In terms of organizational structure, the pyramid-type organization in which the internal labor market was provided the stability to operate is gradually crumbling and making way for a flexible, flat-type organization. A growing number of workers are shifting away from the belonging to the same one company group mentality towards a wider diversity of employment types that offer greater mobility. In turn, this movement is sprouting highly flexible organizations that center on networking and small-group project teams.

III. HRM

Recruitment: Recruitment methods are diversifying. Even in the recruiting of new university graduates for clerical (office, white collar) positions, companies are introducing recruiting strategies that target specific job types. Companies are also making use of systems in which new graduates are accepted as a dispatched

worker for a fixed period of time after which they are hired as regular employees.¹¹ Another new development is the use of internship programs as a recruiting strategy. Rather than posting job advertisements, a growing number of companies are making use of headhunting agencies in a pro-active effort to seek out the ready-talent needed.

Placement and Transfers: Job placements and transfers are tied to the employee and the job and are conducted to get a particular job done. For a long time the personnel department has held the power in determining the placement and transfer of employees. An employee's own career was left in the hands of the company. However, more recently, companies are introducing new approaches in determining placement and transfers in order to balance the wishes of the employee with the needs of the company. These approaches attempt to conduct decision-making that mutually involves the employee and the company, rather than being solely company led. The backdrop to this shift is the greater importance placed on autonomy and the increasing number of employees who are determining and managing their own career. A recent report issued by the "Research Committee into Public Policy for the Labor Market that Supports Career Formulation" in the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare and chaired by Yasuo Suwa (Professor of Hosei University) stated that the experience business-men and others gain through working in an occupation should be legally positioned as a "career right" and that it necessary to bring about change to a business environment in order to encourage transfers and people to change jobs.

Education and Training: Investment in education and training conducted by companies in Japan was based on lifelong employment. However, economic and other circumstances have changed no longer making the practice of lifelong viable. Education and training is now becoming the responsibility of the individual employee. In turn, the company is making it a point to provide a certain amount of

¹¹ The pre-condition for receiving the placement is that it be as a dispatched worker under a fixed period of time. After the period is over, the dispatched worker can request to be employed and if the company wishes to employ the worker the temp agency affirms the condition of recruitment. This type of arrangement could be pursued legally as of December 2002.

support in various forms for the employee who is putting effort into developing their own skills and abilities.

Personnel Evaluation: Within the internal labor market, an employee's behavior and actions and the results of this are evaluated relative to others in the same organization. The standard on which the evaluation was based included the employee's potential ability, attitude towards work, and so on. This kind of evaluation ended up being unable to strike a proper balance in the treatment of employees. Job classification, or rather, the concept of 'ability', is ambiguous in this setting. Job classification-based evaluations were able to adjust and conform to the particular characteristics of the company and had the effect of making it difficult to ascribe clear and objective definitions for the evaluation itself. As personnel management began to become more results and performance orientated, a growing number of companies started to introduce evaluations based on more absolute standards, evaluating the employee's professional duties, work and performance. 'Ability', under these new standards, refers to the specific skills and abilities required to perform a job. There is convergence of this definition within the internal labor market. That be said, there are a growing number of companies who are deliberately avoiding a hardnosed results-based standard and focusing on "behavioral ability competence" that leads to high levels of performance.

Promotion Management: According to Koike (1999) the form of promotion pursued by large Japanese corporations had been modeled as a "slow (delayed) selection method." In order to maintain this kind of selection method, it is necessary to promotion opportunities right up to the highest positions. However, it is extremely difficult in practice to be able to guarantee these opportunities. With the slowing down of corporate growth and the flattening of the organization, the number of managerial posts is being reduced. In addition, with more and more employees possessing higher levels of education, the chances for promotion for these employees is decreasing. To cope with such a dilemma, companies are introducing fast-track personnel and specialist track systems.

Remuneration Management: The 1990s saw the rapid reformation of the annual wage system that had been a pillar of Japanese management for a long period of time. The underlying motivation for the shift in wage systems was the heavier weighting placed on the job and results. This is resulting in results-based wage-determination systems based on job ability as well as results-orientated annual wage systems.

Social Benefits and Retirement Funds: Besides wages, social benefits represent an important labor cost that is currently facing revision. In 1999, the Temp agency Pasona introduced a cafeteria plan to manage social benefits. Under this plan, employees are awarded points based on their work performance, etc.. The employee uses these accumulated points to purchase the type of social benefits wanted by the employee (i.e. not dictated by the company.) With the implementation of this plan, social benefits became more work performance orientated, it became possible to better manage costs, and the company was able to respond to the diversity of individual needs. Retirement fund systems, that had been set up to benefit older workers who had worked with the same company for a consecutive number of years, are also being reassessed. A specific example of this is, rather than paying the retirement fund as one lump payment on retirement, there are a larger number of companies that are introducing what has been called an “eligible retirement fund”- a fund in which payments are spread over a number of years.

Work Hours and Work Location: In order to satisfy the changing labor requirements of the company and the desired working conditions of the employee, companies are introducing variable work hour systems and flextime as well as discretionary labor systems. With the advances in information communication technologies, it is no longer necessary for the employee to constantly commute to the company and companies are able to take advantage of having employees working in flexible and diverse work locations.

IV. Consciousness of Employees

In the past, a large number of employees had designed and planned their careers based on work within the internal labor market. However, with the development of the external labor market, the scope of job opportunities has broadened and the number of employees who are autonomously developing their own career is on the increase.

In my discussion above, I considered the changes taking place in the internal labor market from the perspective of organizational structure through to personnel management. My discussion following will outline the characteristics of the external labor market that have greatly influenced the changes in the internal labor market.

4. Development of the External Labor Market.

One measure that can be used to indicate the extent to which the external labor market has developed is the degree of worker mobility. The reasons why worker mobility in the external labor market is important is closely linked the reasons I have all ready mentioned for the importance of mobility in the labor as a whole.

4-a. Reasons for the Development of the External Labor Market

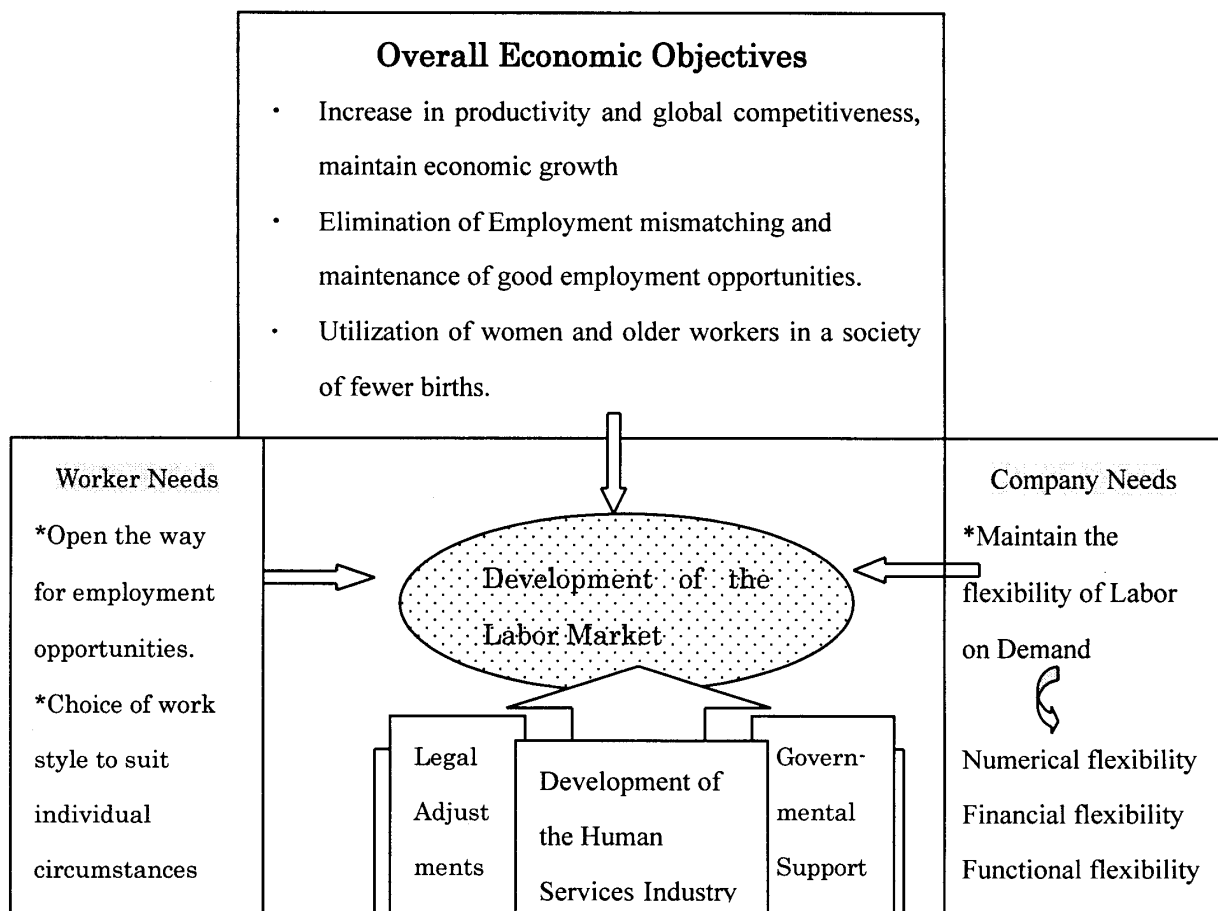
As illustrated in Figure 2, the development of the external labor market comes from the influence held by the objectives of the overall economy and the needs of the company and workers, changes in labor laws, public policy support, and the development of the human services sector/industry.

Or particular importance is the concept of “flexibility” in fulfilling the labor needs of the company. In recent debates over ways of striking equilibrium in human talent inside and outside of the organization, three kinds of flexibility are mentioned.¹² The old employment system that targeted regular employees and

¹² The concept of three kinds of flexibility is set out by Atkinson (1985). Atkinson argues that for management to cope with uncertainty, companies are making use of a mix of three different types of employees: the regular employee, the non-regular employee and outside talent. An organization would be able to obtain equilibrium through the three kinds of flexibility.

was based on long-term continuous employment- was not entirely inflexible. In order to respond to changes in a company's management environment, companies would seek out flexibility internally, even if it meant sacrificing external flexibility, through such measures as internal transfers and so on while also being able to reap the benefits of long-term employment. However, with the more recent structural changes, such measures are proving inadequate and management is turning to the external labor market to enhance organizational flexibility.

Figure 2
Reasons for the Development of the External Labor Market



4-b. Support Mechanisms for the Development of the External Labor Market – The Human Services Industry

The engine behind the increased activity in the external labor market has been the

public employment placement agencies, job advertisements, dispatched workers, and so on. Whatever the vehicle, singularly or mutually, the company and the worker have been able to fulfill their requests for labor and employment and through a mechanism of adjustment had the various needs met. In this way, one function the human services market¹³ has been performing is matching the right person for the right job. The free movement of human talent is not currently as developed in Japan as it is in the West, but the human services mechanisms to forge development are in place and very active.

Another new challenge for companies in Japan is developing the ability to act swiftly and flexibly to the ever-changing needs of the labor force. To achieve this, companies need to draw from the external labor market and secure dispatched workers, part-time workers, contract and other peripheral workers. In order to make this possible, companies have no alternative but to turn to external human services that act as an in-between for the company and the peripheral worker.

An indication of the level of worker mobility is the rate at which workers are changing jobs. There are many studies that indicate workers will resign their current position only if they are certain they will be able to obtain employment in another company. The business sections in the bookstores are filled with titles about changing jobs as “A Practical Guide to Changing Jobs” and “The Job-Change Expert.” Amongst the younger generation, changing jobs has become a part of the everyday consciousness as illustrated by the “7-5-3”¹⁴ and “Freeter” phenomenon. Now that changing companies and jobs has become more commonplace, the need for job information and counseling services is on the increase. Assisting workers to change jobs is but one of the many different services offered by the human services industry. The other services offered are as diverse as they are complex include

¹³ According Sano (2002) JILNO506 in the book titled “Issues and the Current Situation of the Human Services Industry” the human services industry provides intermediary services between the supplier and receipt of labor when there is a mutual need.

¹⁴ This is a phenomenon that was highlighted in Employment Insurance statistics that indicated of those employees who quit their company within three years of joining 70% were graduates of junior high school, 50% graduates of senior high school and 30% graduates of university.

recruiting and job-hunting support and so on. These different services are listed in Table 4. It is purported that the market scale for private companies in the human services industry has reached approximately 2.36 billion yen.¹⁵ It would not be too much of an assertion to state that it has been the activity in the human services industry that has brought forth the propelled development of the external labor market.

Table 4
Types of Human Services

Service Type	Example
Job Advertisements	Newspaper advertisements, recruiting magazines, advertising bills, recruit websites.
Recruitment Support	Recruitment consulting targeting companies, outsourced recruitment testing and selection, training of new employees.
Job Introductions	Fee-based and non-fee based job placements, re-employment type outplacement.
Job Hunting Support	Training for job hunters
Dispatched Labor	General and specialist dispatched labor, introductory dispatched labor arrangements.
Contracted Work	General outsourcing and in-house contracting.

*Formulated with information from Hello Work

According to a “Special Survey into the Labor Force” by the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications conducted in 2002, the methods used by job hunters who were unemployed was: 37.1% for job advertisements and recruit magazines (calculated as an average percentage from April through June, 2002), 36.8% for registrations at government-run employment offices, 1.4% for privately-run job placement agencies, 8.2% for direct applications for positions, 1.7% for registration with dispatch (temp agencies), 8.2% for

¹⁵ March 2002 report, “A Proposal to Invigorate the Human Services Industry” released by the Study Group into a Human Services Industry that Invigorates Private Industry and Imagination.

personal introductions by staff and educational institutions, and 9.4% for others. These statistics indicate that services most used by workers when changing jobs are the job advertisements. At the same time, there is greater diversity of methods used in the search for work. The shift is from “stock-type employment management” to “flow-type” employment. It can be anticipated that as the various agencies in the external labor market continue to pursue their role, the human services market will expand and provide a solution to job mismatches.

4-c. The Coming External Labor Market

The labor market environment, namely the changing demographics of the population, the slow down in economic growth, structural changes in the manufacturing industry, the speed in which new technology is developing and so on is changing the very conditions on which the employment system will function in the future. Further, with the number of births on the decrease, it is foreseen that there will be an accelerated shortage in labor resulting in the increased importance in utilizing women and older workers. Meeting the needs brought forth by these changes will be sort out in the external labor market. The most sited practical solutions are the enrichment of the human services industry and deregulation.

5. Adapting to the Changing Labor Market

Newspapers and magazines are full of stories about “hopes for promotion are bleak” and are dispelling the old myths over promotion. Other headlines read, “Changing jobs is now an everyday occurrence”, pronouncing the collapse of lifelong employment practices. With the opening up of the internal labor market and the development of the external labor market, what should the individual do in cope?

The era in which the employee would remain with the same one company and expect to be taken care of till the very end- a philosophy brought forth from a sense of common human fate- is undoubtedly a thing of the past. In the present world of low economic growth and intense competition, it has become necessary for the

company to turn its focus to the world outside the organization and be aware of its comparative value. For the employee, this means that he or she must also be aware of how competitive their skills or career are in the open labor market, and how confident these workers are at being potential targets of headhunting. These issues need to be constantly in the minds of workers and considered automatically, especially when developing a career.

In this section, I examine the changes in values amongst individual workers and the diversification in work styles and propose what it is that individual workers should do in order to cope with these changes.

5-a. Changes in Thinking About the Way to Work

The prolonged downturn in the state of the economy the plummeting rates at which babies are being born has heightened the sense of uncertainty, inducing greater anxiety about the future. At the same time, the IT revolution that has brought on the rapid diffusion of the internet, and the acceleration of globalization in various areas, is increasing the speed of change in the way we live and the environment in which companies must operate. Along with this change is the diversification of values towards the way we live. There are a number of different surveys which track this trend amongst the Japanese including the “Consciousness Structure of the Japanese People Today” by NHK’s Research Center¹⁶ and the “Survey into Values Held by the Japanese About the Way We Live” by the Life Insurance Culture Center.¹⁷ With regards to the ways of working, the NHK survey placed a stronger focus on the balance between work and private life, whereas the Life Insurance Culture Center survey focused on the attitudes towards work itself. As the basis of my discussion in this paper has stronger correlations with the Life Insurance Culture Center survey, I would like to

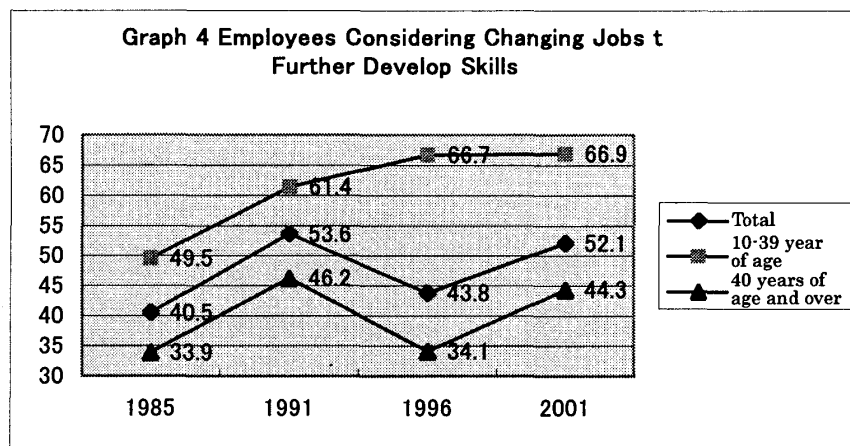
¹⁶ NHK’s Research Center has been conducting the survey every 5 years ever since 1973. 1998 was the sixth time the survey took place and looked at the goals in living and way of life, the family and men and women, work and free time, politics, religion, nationalism and so on covering a wide range to determine the trends and shifts in values amongst the Japanese.

¹⁷ A chronological survey that has been conducted five times since 1976 and is designed to look at the changes in values as seen in common flows in consciousness. The scope of the survey is not as wide as that of NHK’s.

examine the findings of this survey in more depth.

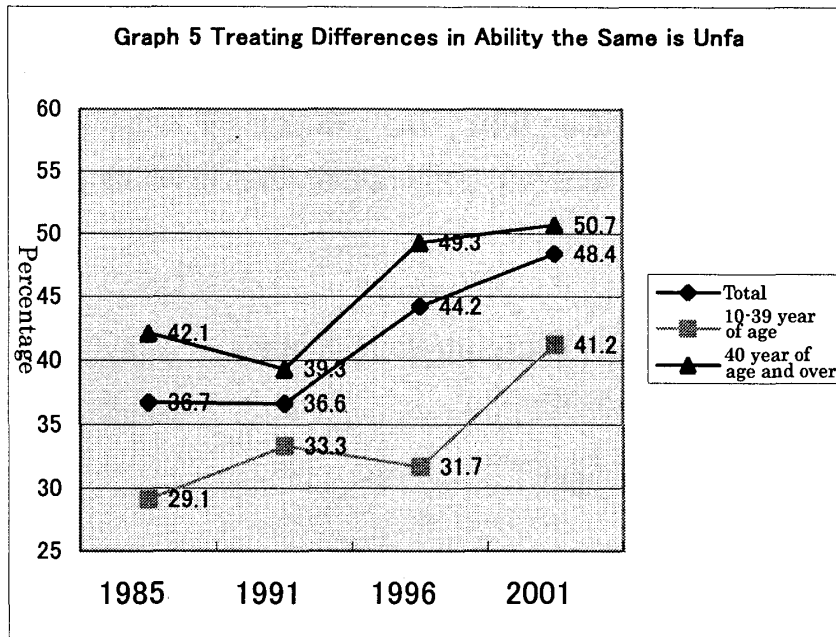
According to the Life Insurance Culture Center survey, the values held towards ways of working can be characterized as following.

- I . Irrelevant of sex or age, approximately 70% of respondents think that “even if it means encountering a little difficulty (sacrifice) (they) want to perform work (they) find enjoyable”, indicating a steady increase in the thinking that places importance on the job being enjoyable.
- II . There is an increase in ability-based orientations as indicated in the responses, “I want to think that changing jobs gives me the chance to put my skills and abilities to use” and “it is not fair that people with different levels of ability are treated in the same way.” (Refer to Graphs 4 and 5)
- III . Attitudes towards the ways of working vary little amongst generations and that both younger workers in the 10 to 30 age group and middle-aged workers over 30 indicate a solid increase amongst those who view work from an ability-orientated perspective. (Graphs 4 and 5).



Source: Seimei Hoken Bunka Sentā (Life Insurance Culture Center) (2002)

Survey of Japanese Values towards Living



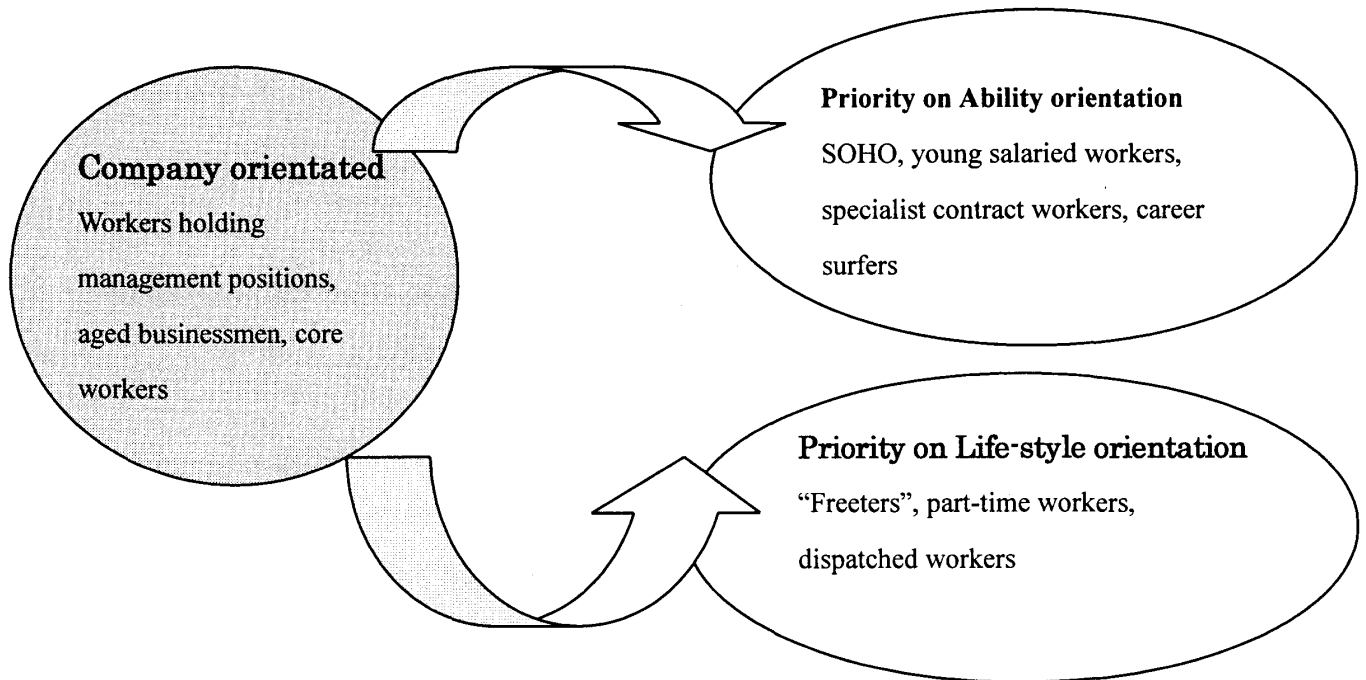
Source: Seimei Hoken Bunka Sentā (Life Insurance Culture Center) (2002)
Survey of Japanese Values towards Living

As we can see from these survey results, there is a noticeable change in the way employees view the way to work. Namely, the traditional company-centered orientation is being replaced by an individual-centered orientation. In other words, there is greater weight being given to an ability-orientation and thus greater approval towards different treatment given to employees according to ability. Also, there are strong indicators that workers are placing greater priority on lifestyles based on assumptions that life is to be enjoyed and one's own specialist ability be properly utilized- an ability-based orientation. These trends are illustrated in Figure 3.

As can be seen in Figure 3, the backdrop to changes in the values held by workers is the progress in the diversification of lifestyles. The archetypical worker of old- workers who are company-centered, receive preferential treatment, and/or hold management positions, being core workers and older businessmen- are supportive of this old line, though the support is weakening somewhat. Amongst those who represent the ability-based supremacy orientation- in which the worker can properly utilize their abilities with the liberty to choose the hours and place they

work- include, SOHO (Small Office Home Office) workers and “career surfers”- a term to depict the worker who changes her or his job in order to continually develop specialist skills.¹⁸ Those who hold lifestyle as most important include many of those who choose a work style along the lines of the “freeter” and part-time worker.

Figure 3
Changes in Work Values



Changes in the consciousness of workers come from the diversification of work styles. The other perspective can be the other way round- that diversification in work styles has been brought about because of changes in the consciousness of the workers. We are now in an era in which the worker is choosing their job and work style based on a very clear recognition of their own values and aptitude towards work. To elaborate on the thinking that forms the basis for this phenomenon, no matter whether the economy is in a state of prolonged low levels of growth or whether the economy is in the midst of recovery- in other words, whether or not it

¹⁸ According to the weekly magazine “Daiamondo”, a “career surfer” has to have graduated from a university or above and changed jobs more than two times and has quit each job on their own accord.

is a buyers' or sellers' market- in the end, with the fluidity of the labor market, it is only those workers who pursue work to satisfy their need to utilize abilities and skills who will survive. Accordingly, it is vital for the worker to consider what they should do as an individual in order to prepare for change and in what way they should go about training themselves. These are the questions I attempt to answer in the following section.

5-b. The Road to Take in Order to Survive in the Labor Market

I . From Being “the Right Person in the Right Place” to Someone Who is Self-reliant and has Survived as the Fittest

Each worker provides her or his own labor (service) as a product to a company (the customer.) Companies that purchase this product of labor possess internal labor markets that are geared to changes in the external management environment. These changes govern the direction and nature of the internal labor market and thus affect the very nature and quality of work and the execution of business operations. The company may call upon someone who is the right person in the right place and use its best efforts to distribute work according to each individual's abilities. However, both the internal and external labor markets are changing. Even if at a certain point in time there happens to be the right person in the right place, this situation itself is fluid, and so ends up in there being a mismatch with person's ability to the work to be performed. This means there is considerable risk in not knowing when suitable talent is no longer suitable. In a situation under which only the fit survives in the labor market, it is essential that the value of the worker's own labor be maintained.

Labor as a commodity is traded on both the internal and external labor markets, and thus consistently facing competition. It is therefore necessary to cast aside the company dependent mentality represented in such comments as “at the very least, my company will look out for me.” The labor market is not conducive to people who wait around to be told what to do, but rather, seek those who are clued on to changes in a company's external and internal environment and can think and act

for themselves- those who proactively contribute value. Self-reliant workers, while possessing a personal vision, are also able to recognize their present limitations and work on them. To be self-reliant is to know yourself and consciously recognize the direction that needs to be pursued- by no means an easy feat. Providing that you have the staying power, you have the potential to realize self-reliance. It is in this way that self-reliance forms the foundations in the development of human talent and without which all efforts to nurture and cultivate for one's environment prove to be ineffective. Having one's own individuality and being independent enhances ability development.

II. Designing and Planning Your Own Career

Most of us use the expression "career" without much thought. But what does "career" refer to precisely? According to Ootake (1998), a career "... in Japan is the long-term work experience which an employee gains upon entering a company, is assigned a job, receives training, develops technical skills, gets promoted, changes jobs, if the case may be, and continues to work up until retirement." Koike goes into more detail about the establishment of careers in his book, "The Economics of Work". Pointedly, Koike explains that the formation of a career is based on two main conditions. One is the existence of work that requires a high level of technical skills. The second is the existence of a field in which it is possible to have an outlook for the long term necessitated by the fact that the development of technical skills requires a considerable amount of time. This situation is more advantageous to the internal labor market than it is the external labor market. However, with structural change taking place in both industry and employment, it is now time to seriously consider incorporating career development in the sights of the external labor market also.

Although career development starts with leadership of by the individual, there is still the need to orchestrate and integrate the company's needs for talent and the individual's career needs. As such, Japan has been gradually introducing a career development program since the latter half of the 1960s- a program that was first developed in the USA. To the employee, if her or his own career needs cannot be

satisfied in the integration of the company's needs then it becomes necessary to seek out opportunities in the external labor market.

Kanai (2002) states that we consciously pursue our careers as we encounter different turning points in our lives- when we first start job hunting, mid-career, when changing companies or jobs and so on. No matter the point in our lives we think about our careers, careers represent strategies for how to live. We need to continually question ourselves about seemingly simple matters as what type of career we really want to pursue, develop a clear picture of the career, and use best efforts to make it a reality. Failing to plan and develop strategies for your own career because you are too busy each day to be bothered about thinking too deeply about it, or because you do not know how to go about planning and strategizing, means there are opportunities lost. In essence you are abdicating your right to freely choose what job you really want to do.

III. Autonomous Ability Development

Over recent years there has been increased interest in employability¹⁹ brought on by a paradigm shift in the business environment, especially in the diversification in values amongst the younger generation and changes in thinking on part of both the company and the employee regarding lifelong employment. In order to be continually employed, it is first necessary to sketch out a professional career. Once you have a clear picture of the career you wish to pursue, it is then necessary to formulate a career development program.

Company-led ability development programs had as their goals the nurturing of employees so that they could contribute to the specific company's organizational objectives of long term growth and development of the company, increase performance, and reach annual goals. More recently, however, ability-orientated wage systems are appearing in companies of all sizes and the greater movement of human talent is in its initial stages. Originally, the shift to a results-orientated

¹⁹ "Employability" refers to the ability to be in continual employment in the internal and external labor market.

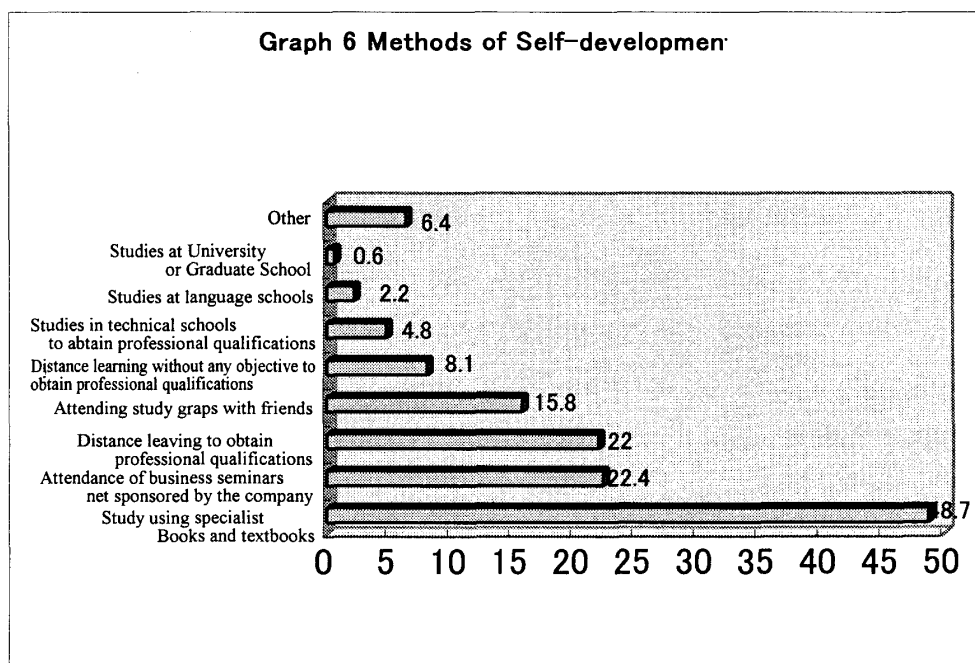
employment system was because individual remuneration could be linked with the promotion of occupational ability. However, the system was still operating under the old system of occupational ability development that had as its focus the nurturing of the individual to suit the company. This led to only the select few employees receiving support in achieving an increase in remuneration. The thinking that then emerged was that the cost of skills and ability development was to be borne by the individual. A new framework has therefore now emerged in which each individual employee takes onto her or himself the development of their own abilities and skills in line with their own personal career goals. When the development also profits the company, the company provides support within this sphere. The employee and the organization are making a determined shift from the organization man and the complete reliance on the company towards autonomy and ingenuity towards someone who is able to make decisions and act upon them by themselves.

The importance placed on autonomous development in ability development methods within the company is on the rise. According to the Seimei Hoken (Life Insurance) 2001 survey, the motive for autonomous development comes from the efforts to increase employability by where the skills procured in one company can also be utilized in other companies or if the employee were to work for her or himself, or even for continued employment with the same company. For those under non-regular forms of employment, the motive for autonomous development is not for the present job, but rather, to procure the skills and abilities in order to be able to change jobs or to work for themselves.

Graph 6 outlines the contents of autonomous development. In order to increase the worker's market value, the worker is making use of outside organizations to secure professionally certified qualifications and technical skills, and represents an unprecedented increase in workers pursuing development autonomously. Self-development is not only important in responding to a company's search for atypical abilities and occupational skills. Self-development also enables the employee to be flexible in pursuing their career. For instance, if a mismatch

between the employee, the job, and the company, occurs then self-development gears the worker to face the challenge of leaving the company to join another or to work for themselves.

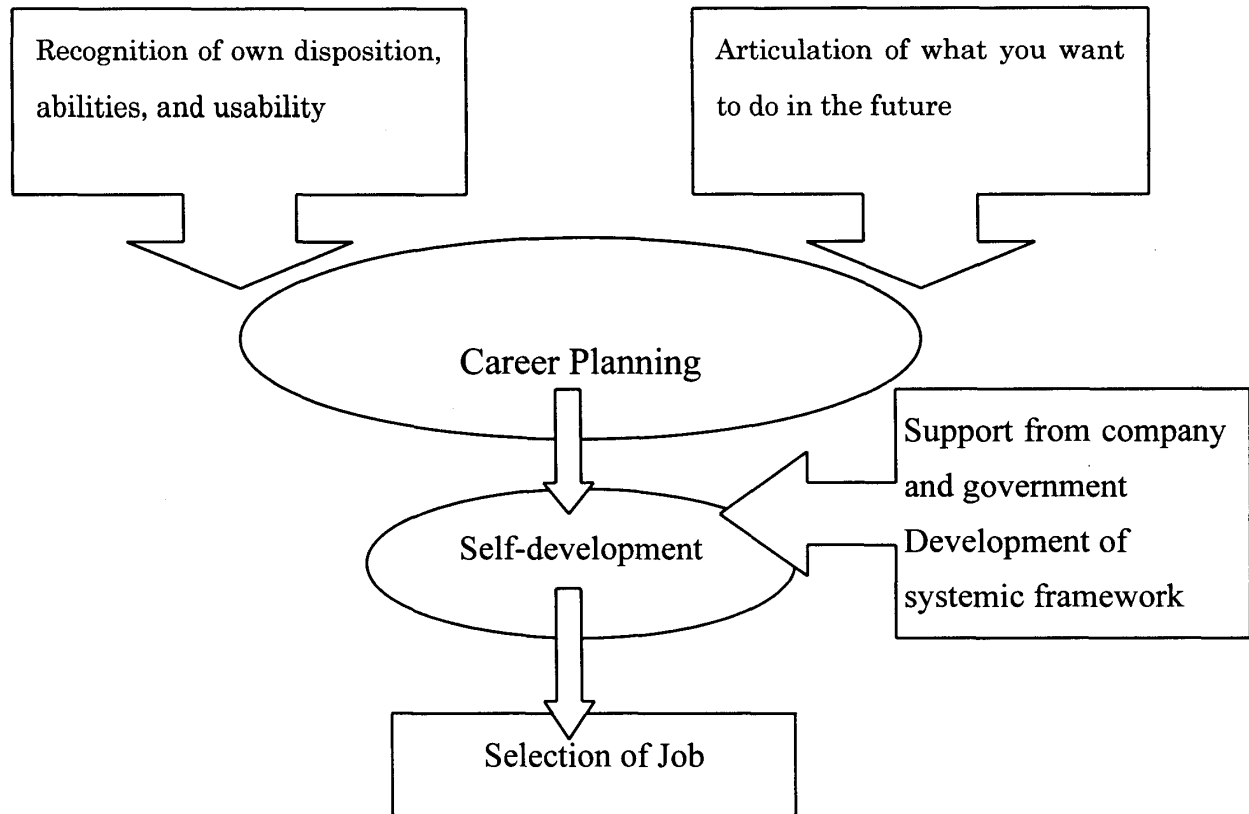
In this section, I have articulated what an employee must do in order to be competitive in the labor market. This discussion can be presented in the way I have done in Figure 4- career development takes place by identifying your own special disposition, abilities, and aspirations, while also considering the needs of the company and responding to changes in the labor market. Self-development in career planning can aid in nurturing value that is also recognized outside of the company. “Lifelong learning” is a term that is often used in association with planning the lives of the elderly. However, it is a concept that also has relevance for the younger generation. So that the individual can achieve life goals and satisfy the need for self-realization in a fluid labor market, there has been a shift towards pursuing studies even after joining the workforce. This stands in contrast to educational approaches of the past in which the education received at high school and university was independent of the outside world.



Source: Seimei Hoken Bunka Sentā (Life Insurance Culture Center) (2000)

Family Budget of the Nuclear Family

Figure 4
Autonomous Career Development



6. Conclusion

In this paper I focused on the changes taking place in the internal and external labor market and examined what each individual must do in order to cope with these changes. In a proposal released by Nikkeiren (Japan Federation of Employers' Associations) it was stated that in Japanese companies there are three distinctly different kinds of workers that constitute a company's "employment portfolio."²⁰ Two follow-up surveys conducted on this portfolio indicated that there were still a large number of companies who have chosen a "utilization of ability accumulated over a long term". This tells us that, even now, utilization of labor in the internal labor market is still viable. In one way, this points to how

²⁰ These three kinds of workers being, (1) the traditional lifelong employment type, (2) the employee who has specialist skills and abilities and works under a fixed contract, and (3) the traditional non-regular employee such as part-time workers, dispatched workers and so on.

multi-layered the labor market is. Both the closed and open elements of the internal labor market exist in duality. Compared to the internal labor market, the movement of labor in the external labor market is intense.

In order to cope with these changes, it is important not to disregard the autonomous development of ability simply because the closed nature of the internal labor market. Indications are that profound change is to take place in both the internal and external labor market. It cannot be stressed enough how strong an influence that changes in the labor market will have over all workers. For the individual employee, these changes will mean rethinking the old approaches to ability development. Employees will have to pursue careers on their own. At the same time, it will be necessary for companies to provide support and some form of safety net if we are to see making a success of their efforts. There are regular employees whose employment is mostly guaranteed, and then there are non-regular employees as part-time workers, dispatched workers, and so on who are in a constant state of instability. Overall employment in Japan is in a state where the relationship between the individual and the organization is unstable. With the instability of the business environment, the forms that individual career development take are diverse. What needs to be further examined is coping measures relevant to each type of employment based on changes in the values and consciousness of employees.

This paper focused on the labor market in Japan. However, it is also worth taking a look at changes taking place in China. China has the largest population of any country in the world and has received considerable attention because of its economic growth. According to Chinese census statistics, at the end of September 2001, the national total of urban workers was 113,676,000— a drop of 4,849,000 from the same period the previous year (2000). At the end of June, 2001 the number of registered unemployed urban workers reached the all high number of 6,187,000 of which 53% were aged 35 and younger. Add the 7,000,000 that were laid off and the actual rate of urban unemployment is close to 7%. By taking a look at the number of wages paid in the labor market in 59 large to medium cities and

towns we can see that the number of jobs per job seeker is 0.65. Over recent years the number of new jobs each has been around 15,000,00 with most positions being filled by workers who have moved in from the rural farms and villages.

The Chinese Labor Social Security Department (the equivalent to Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in Japan) released the 10th Five Year Labor and Security Plan (for 2001 through 2005) in May 2001. The objectives for the period was to build up an employment system with a market mechanism, expand employment opportunities, improve the structure of employment, and increase the quality of employees. During the period it is expected that the number of new workers in the urban centers will increase by 40,000,000 and the number of workers who will change occupations from agriculture and farming also at 40,000,000. The basis for this projection is the anticipation that the market mechanism will be developed and functioning effectively and that there will be freer movement of labor in the labor market.

Due to political, cultural, and economic differences in China and Japan, the labor market in each country has its own unique characteristics. However, if we look at the increasing liquidity of the labor market we can also find many similarities. Much research remains to be done into the way employees work and the measures take to cope with change. Comparative studies may provide further insight. Examining the similarities and differences in the labor market in China and Japan looms as an important field of study.

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