

Career Services and Professionals in Japan

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Introduction

The Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MECSST) are jointly responsible for career services in Japan. MHLW actively works to establish a base line for career consultant competencies and to standardize the quality of career services for adults, whereas MECSST is responsible for career development education in schools (from elementary to high school) and higher education.

Career Consultant Certification

Under the Revised Promotion of Human Resources Act (2016), various career service qualifications became subsumed under a single government ‘career consultant’. Originally, a variety of providers of career services responded to the practical needs of the private sector. As their services differed in range and quality, the government decided to set a baseline for career consultant competencies. Candidates wishing to qualify to take the exam to become a career consultant must complete a basic educational curriculum of 140 hours, divided as follows:

- 10 hours of training on the social meaning of career counseling;
- 30 hours acquiring knowledge about career counseling;
- 53 hours on the skills of career counseling;
- seven hours dealing with ethical conduct; and
- 10 hours of career-related classes.

Candidates must then pass a written exam, a skills demonstration exercise, and a screening interview. Every five years, career consultants must be re-certified; this involves an additional 38 hours of training (eight hours on subject-area knowledge and 30 hours on skill related areas). For the 2016 exam, the first taken by candidates for government certification, the written exam pass rate was 74.2%, whereas skill testing was 51.5%. In 2011, it was reported that the pass rate for the 2nd grade skill exam was 42%, while 1st grade was as low as 25% (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2011).

The government career consultant certificate arose out of necessity. Given this need for national certification, as of November 1st 2016, only government certified career consultants are allowed to use the title of ‘career consultant’. Many private training organizations had already been offering certification programs. It is estimated that they had already certified about 48,000 people as career consultants. So, as a transitional measure, those who have already been certified

by private sector organizations, and who meet the standards set by the government, are eligible to register as a government approved career consultant if they apply for the registration process and pay the fee for that procedure. According to the Revised Promotion of Human Resources Act (2016) those already registered, as career consultants, need to be properly certified to continue to use the title of ‘career consultant’. In addition to this base line license, the title of 2nd grade skilled career trainer will continue to be offered. 2nd grade holders are regarded as master practitioners, whereas 1st grade holders are regarded as trainer or leader level practitioners. Around 7,000 have been certified as 1st and 2nd grade skilled career trainers. Ten training institutions for educating career consultants are licensed by the government.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (2015) revealed that:

- 22.1 % of career consultants were working at government related vocational agencies;
- 21.6% at various companies;
- 18.2% in a university setting;
- 16.4% private at vocational agencies;
- 7.5% at Non-Profit Organizations (NPO);
- 5.3% in a private educational setting; and
- 2.9% at junior and senior high schools.

Career Services in a Work Setting

Hello Work and Dual Training System

The Hello Work centers were created by Article 23 of the Act for Establishment of Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (1999). There are 15,697 career consultants currently working at the 544 Hello Work centers in Japan. Their main job of the center is to offer career consulting for every visitor, including assistance with job searches, employment insurance, and the provision of work-related information. They are all trained to use the job card, which is a tool to help jobseekers design a lifetime career path and make a list of skills to demonstrate their employability. Jobseekers can download the job card application form from the Internet. It requires applicants to fill out a career plan, their employment records, qualifications and licenses, education, and training. Jobseekers may also create their job card with the help of a career consultant.

While job card has enabled some jobseekers to be re-employed, others need practical vocational training to gain employment. In 2004, the Japanese dual training system was implemented to enhance jobseekers’ employability. The dual training system combines formal education with on-site training at private enterprises.

Self-Career Dock System

Under the Revised Promotion of Human Resources Act (2016), any existing employee can use job card periodically for a career consultation with a career consultant. Career consultants are now able to actively engage in providing counseling for employees of small or middle-sized companies, which has been made possible by a 500,000 yen grant from the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare. The self-career dock system was enacted to assist life-

long career design and to help job seekers become autonomous in this uncertain world of employment in accordance with the Japan Revitalization Strategy Revision 2015 proposed by the current Prime Minister, Abe Shinzo, and his Cabinet (Prime Minister and His Cabinet, 2015).

Stress Check Examination

According to the Stress Check Policy on Industrial Safety and Health Law (2015), companies with over 50 employees are obliged to offer their staff the option of a “stress check” exam every year. Though employees can choose whether to take up the offer or not, it is recommended that all of them accept. It is stipulated that the exam and the follow-up individual counseling sessions must be conducted by a medical doctor or related professional. Career consultants may work alongside such professionals to offer counseling and consultation on stress related issues.

Company Career Consultation Room

According to the Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training (2015), career consultations within companies have the following three objectives:

- the retention of employees;
- promoting dialogue among employees; and
- the creation of meaning in life and work.

Career consultants are therefore expected to function as professionals to promote meaningful relationships and facilitate better communication within companies.

Private Job Placement Agencies

The collapse of the “Bubble Economy” in 1991 created unemployment and changed the trend of a single career path in one company. Many jobseekers registered at private online job placement agencies in search of new careers or jobs. These agencies match jobseekers’ qualifications and wishes with companies’ employment needs. Such agencies have a large database of employment options, so many jobseekers use them. In addition, this service comes without any cost to the jobseeker, because advertisement fees fund private job placement agencies.

Career Services in the School Setting

Kindergarten and Elementary Schools

In kindergartens and elementary schools, it is the responsibility of the teacher to provide career education, in order to promote initiative and autonomy in children. Each school is also required to appoint a career education supervisor. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (2011), 83.9% of schools have teachers who act as career education supervisors. Nevertheless, 76.9 % of homeroom teachers reported that although they were aware of children’s need for career education, most have not received training in career education and/or career guidance.

Middle and High Schools

The goal of career education in middle and high schools is to develop independence in students that will enable them to plan their own lives, build relationships and act responsibly.

Emphasis is placed on experiential learning through activities such as volunteering and on the job training. A report showed that 98% of middle schools had appointed career education supervisors (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2011). However, although most of these were licensed teachers, they had received no training as career consultants.

The main responsibility of career education supervisors in these schools is to create a career guidance education program to enhance the career related capabilities of students in four areas:

- building human relationships;
- gathering information;
- life planning; and
- decision making.

Homeroom and guidance teachers provide career counseling for individual students. Many schools have linked up with career consultants, NPO's, and other organizations to develop the career-related capabilities of students.

Higher Education

Chapter 6 of the Standards for Establishing Universities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology, 2016) requires all such institutions to set up 'career centers' that provide job coaching, vocational training, career counseling, career coaching and career coordination. Six or seven career consultants and career related staff are employed at each center. These centers provide training for career consultants, although the education and qualifications of staff are not necessarily defined.

According to the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (2011), a survey showed the percentage of career related classes offered by universities was as follows:

- education on attitudes toward career and vocation, 65%;
- life design and life career classes, 63.2%; and
- internship classes, 57.3%.

Besides career related classes, 67.7% of the universities offer internship programs. Vocational schools and junior colleges basically follow the same guidelines laid down by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (2011a) in terms of career education and vocational guidance.

Career Consulting for the General Population

Job Café (One stop service center)

A Job Café is a 'support station', which has been set up in 46 prefectures and employs 6 to 10 staff, including career consultants and clinical psychologists. It is a free, one-stop service center for people between the ages of 15 and 39 who are unemployed and are in search of work. It therefore aims to promote youth independence and career development, and also to support women with small children. A program called 'Job Café Mothers' has been established at some Job Cafés.

Job Coaches

Employment and life support centers for people with disabilities have been established in each of the 47 healthcare and welfare zones for people with disabilities in Japan. Around 1,200 job coaches have been assigned to them permanently, and an additional 750 visit from time to time. A further 200 job coaches are dispatched by the government to private companies who hire the disabled.

Future Directions

As the average age increases and the birth rate continues to fall, the Japanese population is expected to decline rapidly. Therefore shortages in the labor force will accelerate and artificial intelligence will become increasingly important in the workplace. Collaboration between Nomura Research Institute (2015) and Frey and Osborne (2013) has estimated that in 10 to 20 years, 49% of jobs will be replaced by artificial intelligence and robots. This is viewed as a fourth Industrial Revolution that will change the outlook of the job market, and the need for career services and professionals in Japan will increase ever more.

Educating Career Consultant Professionals

As noted above, formal education for career consultants arose largely out of practical need. The Japanese higher education sector has not developed professional career training courses at either undergraduate or graduate level, though in 2016 the University of the Air did start to set up courses that meet the requirements for career consultant recertification. Although some universities offer courses on subjects like vocational guidance, career counseling, and life design, none offer a systematic training program for those wishing to become professional career consultants.

Japan definitely needs a professional school that offers a doctorate in career consultancy, not only for the purpose of training professionals, but also to build the knowledge that can help employees develop their capabilities and sense of well-being.

There are a few universities that teach graduate level counseling courses. Most of these are now shifting into clinical psychology courses. By 2019, the title of clinical psychologist will become a national license, so that most universities will offer clinical psychology as a graduate degree.

The Human Resources Development Policy

There are two targets specified in the draft of the 10th Human Resources Development Plan created by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare (2016): (a) to promote support stations; (b) to encourage the use of Job Cards for career consultation. About 87,000 people have already completed the 140 hours of training necessary to qualify as an accredited career consultant. The Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare plans to increase the number of career consultants to 100,000 in 10 years. Also, by 2020, through the use of the job card, three million employees will have had individual career consultations. A July 2016 estimate suggests that 1,150,000 have already had such a consultation.

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