

Conclusion: Towards the creation of a society in which a variety of challenges are possible

Has Japan achieved a society in which a variety of challenges can be made, a society in which each and every citizen, at every stage of their lives, can try to realize their aspirations time after time? 'Possibilities' exist within the varied aspects of our daily lives – family, health, hobbies, interaction with the local community or society at large. Through using these possibilities we are able to enrich our lives. However, among all these aspects, it is not overstating the case to say that work, or ways of work, use the majority of our time and energy, and since this is directly linked to the economic foundations of our lives it takes on a huge meaning. From this point of view, the White Paper has focused on people making another attempt to find the job and way of working that they want, and analyses this situation and the barriers that impede such attempts.

Below we reaffirm the issues we have mentioned thus far, and after examining the background causes, we consider what is needed in order to create a society in which a variety of challenges are possible.

- There are more people who are making fresh challenges to find the job and way of working that they want

People are making attempts to find the job and way of working that they want at every stage of their lives. Regarding young people, the increasingly narrow recruitment quotas for permanent employees and the prolonged recession has forced new graduates to take jobs they do not really want to do, resulting in large numbers of people who want to make amends for this situation. For women, less people want to be full-time housewives and more are keen to work, leading to the need for continuing working after childbirth and chances for reemployment after they have finished raising children. Looking at the elderly, we see that the length of time that they can live for in good health has increased, and as they are more inclined to consume they are making more active efforts to go back to work rather than retiring at around 60. Contributing to society through, for example, community activities, also represents a great chance for elderly people to make challenges. Though it was not covered in this White Paper, we also found that middle-aged and older people who lost their jobs due to redundancy or bankruptcy, or people temporarily away from the workplace due to sickness and injury, are likely to try to go back to work.

- Barriers impede people's new challenges

An analysis of the barriers impeding new challenges showed the following three major causes. First, many businesses have standardized criteria for recruitment. If they have stereotyped and preconceived notions that 'freeters' have little incentive to work, that women are difficult to work long periods, and that elderly people cannot work too hard, their recruitment of or human investment in

these groups tends to be cautious. But since there is really nothing that these people can do about their experience, gender or age, judging people on the basis of a not necessarily accurate 'average' image is severely limiting their chances of making fresh challenges. While cross-the-board recruiting of new graduates may ease the path from the class room to the office, this rigid form of management is damaging the prospects of those who have already graduated.

Second, there are not enough opportunities for rebuilding vocational skills. Though the systematically nurtured permanent employees enjoy the chance to acquire skills through their work, part-time and temporary workers have virtually no chance to obtain specialized skills. There is also the problem of whether or not individuals can afford to pay for vocational skills training outside of the workplace. Furthermore, women who leave work to give birth are away from the workplace for extended periods and it is subsequently easier for them to lose their vocational abilities. And since there are not enough objective standards for evaluating vocational skills, it is difficult to know exactly what sort of skills are required, and therefore hard to enhance their abilities towards such a goal. It is not easy for part-time or temporary workers to build up their vocational skills, and there is a gap between the abilities that businesses require and the abilities of the people who want to make another challenge.

The third cause is the way of working without balancing work and lifestyle. Most permanent employees are expected to lead a company-oriented way of life, so when they try to work and bring up children at the same time it becomes difficult to keep a balance between the two. This is resulting in many people either giving up activities other than work, such as child rearing, or giving up work or reluctantly taking up part-time / temporary work instead.

- Forward-looking companies' efforts to break down the barriers

Some efforts to break down these barriers are, nevertheless, starting to be made in certain quarters. In the area of recruitment practices, some companies are starting to take a borderless approach, which does not limit their hiring to new graduates. There is also a move towards companies not taking a negative view of those who have stopped working in order to bring up children or make a contribution to society, and those who have experience working as 'freeters', because such people actually have rich experience and a variety of ideas. Some companies are providing vocational skills training chances to part-time and temporary workers, and, based on their skills, present them with the opportunity to become permanent employees. There are also employment agencies that are starting to invest in the vocational skills development of part-time and temporary workers. In addition, more companies offer staff an attractive working environment including flexible working systems and in-house nursery facilities.

Behind these developments is the need to secure as many as possible excellent human resources

in the light of the serious decrease in the labor force. The increased necessity of recruiting varied and flexible staff to respond to the diversification of values and globalization is also a contributory factor. Currently, these developments are far from commonplace across society and many of them, while they start to feel the changes of the times, are at the trial and error stage; some businesses are, however, taking steps that will put them ahead of their contemporaries.

- There is a need for back-up support in order to create an environment in which challenges can be easily made

What should the government do in tandem with these sorts of businesses in order to create a society in which people can easily try again to find the job or way of work that they want?

First, the government should gather and provide information about the sort of pioneering examples given above so that they can be shared throughout society. It would be helpful for businesses that are still at the 'trial and error' stage to be shown some specific examples, to let them discover that fostering a better working environment and using a diverse workforce lead to a better business results. The government could also spread these developments by giving awards to pioneering businesses. As mentioned elsewhere in this paper, the United Kingdom's 'Work-Life Balance Campaign' is implemented by the government, and could prove to be a useful development for the Japanese government to refer to.

Second, the government should support businesses that are trying to make their working environment more conducive to fresh challenges. For example, a trial recruitment system, which supports companies that experimentally accepts applicants for a short period in order to carefully assess individual ability and aptitude, would be an effective incentive for businesses developing an environment in which people can easily try again.

Third, the government needs to assist skills development for people who want to make a fresh challenge. The creation of an environment in which people, regardless of age, can acquire specialized vocational abilities is vital. This will requires continued efforts to improve the occupational training programs, including by commissioning such projects to the private sector. In order to smoothly build skills needed for reemployment, it is necessary for people to know both their own skills and what is required of them by businesses; cross-sector, objective appraisal standards in each type of work could be an effective tool. The formulation of such standards is underway in cooperation with the business sector, but they will need to be extended to cover more business areas in the future.

- The independent-minded efforts of individuals are needed

'The society in which a variety of challenges are possible' is one in which its members have to make their own choices in an independent-minded manner. Even if the barriers to challenges are lowered through the efforts of businesses and the aid of the government, and a variety of possibilities become apparent, there are still the individual choice and volition issues of which possibility to pursue and how to do so.

As we have repeatedly pointed out, the building of vocational skills is absolutely vital in bringing out the full potential of each individual. Gaining specialized skills is obviously important. However, the basic academic ability that is the basis of acquiring these skills, communication skills and other abilities required whatever path people follow, cannot be effectively acquired unless individuals learn them purposefully from their schooldays.

Even if a selection of ways of working is enlarged, it goes without saying that basically it is the individual who should hold responsibility for the outcome of these choices. It is generally difficult to assess what ways of work are available at companies with what sort of management policies, or what impact globalization and technological advances will have upon certain occupations. But it is important that each and every member of society can reach a conclusion that satisfies them, by acquiring the degree of literacy that enables them to understand and use the varied information about the choices.

- The exercising of each individual's abilities opens new avenues for the future

In a society in which individuals can choose ways of work, and people can smoothly start again in response to changing ways of thinking and conditions, everyone can lead a satisfactory life, and the vitality of the whole society increases. It is expected that the creation of such a society will help Japan to solve the wide-ranging issues that it currently faces.

The first effect is the mitigation of the shrinking labor force. Japan's population started to decline in 2005, and the speed of the working age population's decline is expected to accelerate further. Yet as we have mentioned, there are many people in Japan who want to work but find themselves excluded by various barriers. If these people can be put to work, the shrinking of the labor force inherent in a declining population can be mitigated. If the majority of people take up the job they want, and businesses use diverse human resources, their productivity is also likely to improve. With the globalization of the economy and the wave of technological advances, it is essential to facilitate a smooth shift of the workforce into the fastest-growing industries and sectors in order to flexibly alter the economic structure. Moreover, the baby-boomer generation will start to retire in 2007, and the passing down of the mature technologies that they built up has been brought into question. If those of this generation who want to carry on working are able to do so, the impact of this phenomenon will be reduced.

A second effect is the halting of Japan's declining birthrate. Young people may hesitate to have children when their financial footing is unsure. If it becomes easier to change jobs or try again, if the economic horizons of young people widen, then there is hope that they will become more positive about getting married and having children. It is difficult for women to continue working after childbirth because of a lack of nurseries, the difficulty of taking child-care leave and a severe working environment. People who return to work after raising children find it difficult to gain reemployment as permanent employees, and are left with no choice but to become part-time or temporary workers. Consequently, the opportunity cost of childbirth is massive, and many women are hesitant to have children. If continuing working or reemployment in line with the wishes of individuals becomes possible, women can give birth with ease of mind, and it will help to halt the escalation of the declining birthrate. This would also clearly be a beneficial development in the realization of a society with equal gender participation. Moreover, if elderly people, for whom the burden of work, housework and child-rearing has been reduced, can easily integrate into society, support activities for child-care in the community will become vitalized, an enormous help to the generation who are bringing up children.

The third effect is dealing with the risk of entrenched disparity. In a situation in which job changing and mid-career recruitment rates go down as people age, taking up work straight after graduation exerts a great influence on subsequent chances for employment and skills development, inevitably leading to an entrenched disparity. By creating a society in which people have a choice of employment at every stage, we can avoid a situation in which once-in-a-lifetime decisions leads to a fixed polarization.

- Measures need to be strengthened now, when we have finally come out of a prolonged recession

Japan has finally come out of the prolonged recession following the collapse of the bubble economy, and the recruitment environment is on the whole favorable. It is easier for young people, women caring for children, and elderly people, to find the jobs they want; it may appear that, temporarily at least, the barriers that prevent them from working are coming down. As we indicate in this White Paper, however, the barriers are related not only to the concept of corporate personnel management or capacity development but also to the perceptions of society as a whole, and will not be overcome just because the economy is recovering. If we do not implement any measures now, when the economy starts to stagnate these barriers are sure to emerge once more and stand in the way of the people.

Creating a society in which many different challenges can be made will of course require efforts on the part of every individual, as well as businesses and the government. Once the appropriate systems and environment are in place, the key to success lies ultimately with the will and efforts of

the individual. With the economy in a stable situation, now is the time for the public, businesses and the government to try to create a society in which many different challenges can be made. Measures to encourage this task should be taken with the stance that this is a challenge for the whole of Japanese society.

Past Issues of White Paper on the National Lifestyle

No	Publication date	Title (subtitle)
1	June 26, 1957	The reality of the transformation in the national lifestyle
2	September 25, 1958	The current state of the national lifestyle
3	December 11, 1959	The national lifestyle during economic recession
4	November 28, 1960	Structural changes in the postwar national lifestyle
5	December 20, 1961	The state of the national lifestyle by occupation, and the progress of reform
6	November 27, 1962	Regional differences in the national lifestyle and their causes
7	December 13, 1963	The national lifestyle in a period of economic adjustment, and current lifestyle reforms
8	April 10, 1964	White Paper on the National Lifestyle The trend of better and more evenly spread consumption
9	April 9, 1965	(No subtitle)
10	May 13, 1966	Towards an economy serving lifestyles
11	June 27, 1967	(No subtitle)
12	July 16, 1968	(No subtitle)
13	July 8, 1969	Towards putting a priority on lifestyles
14	June 26, 1970	Creating a harmonious human environment
15	July 20, 1971	Blueprint for a prosperous society
16	August 15, 1972	The Japanese and their society
17	July 31, 1973	Life and its quality in Japan
18	October 1, 1974	Beyond the years of anxiety
19	October 28, 1975	Changes in consumers' behavior and generations
20	September 28, 1976	New undercurrents in people's lives
21	October 18, 1977	Towards new affluence in lifestyles
22	October 31, 1978	New life and solidarity consciousness in the community
23	November 2, 1979	Towards improving the foundations of living and expanding opportunities
24	October 31, 1980	The changing society and how people are facing it
25	October 27, 1981	In search of a good quality of life
26	November 9, 1982	Household economy under low growth and changing regional life
27	October 28, 1983	In search of greater latitude in the household economy and a new image of the family
28	November 9, 1984	For latitude and stability over an 80 year life span
29	November 1, 1985	40 years since the end of World War : on the threshold of the age of maturity
30	October 24, 1986	In search of an affluent society open to the world
31	October 23, 1987	The higher yen and creation of affluent infrastructures
32	November 18, 1988	The increasing diversity of the Japanese lifestyle and public attitudes
33	November 10, 1989	Creation of wealth in a 700,000 hour lifetime
34	October 30, 1990	An affluent society amenable to all people
35	November 19, 1991	Tokyo and the regions: diverse choices for affluence
36	November 13, 1992	The arrival of the society with a small number of children
37	November 12, 1993	Rediscovering the community for a better quality of life
38	November 18, 1994	Towards a society of fulfilled longevity
39	November 14, 1995	Looking back on the 50 post-war years, and forward towards an affluent and diversified national lifestyle
40	November 19, 1996	Rethinking safety and security for a new national lifestyle
41	November 4, 1997	Working women - the need for a new social system
42	December 4, 1998	The middle-aged: their fears and hopes
43	December 10, 1999	Towards a society with a better quality of life and flexible job opportunities
44	November 10, 2000	Volunteering enriches society
45	March 26, 2002	Family life and structural reform
46	May 30, 2003	Deflation and lifestyles: young job-hoppers today
47	May 21, 2004	Changing regional and lifestyle bonds: towards a new public sector
48	August 12, 2005	Perceptions and lifestyle of the child-rearing generation
49	June 20, 2006	Towards a society in which a variety of challenges are possible