

Research Article

Job, Performance Evaluation, Career, and Education and Training Systems in Japanese Companies and International Comparisons

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Introduction

When performing work, how tasks and duties are allocated and defined is important. This chapter discusses job assignments, job documentation, job design typologies, office layout, and other aspects, including an international comparison.

Regarding performance evaluation, this paper examines the concept of performance evaluation and an international comparison of performance evaluation systems. Regarding careers, this chapter focuses on the definition and content of careers, specialist and generalist career development, international comparisons of career development, and international comparisons of skills and proficiency development. Regarding education and training, this chapter explains education and training systems such as on-the-job training (OJT) and off-the-job training (Off-JT), as well as examples of education and training systems in Australia, Germany, and Southeast Asia. Finally, the author offers recommendations for future career and education and training strategies for Japanese companies.

International Comparison of Jobs

Jobs can be categorized based on job design systems, primarily focusing on job assignments and job documentation.

Job Assignment

When it comes to job assignment, there are two types: job systems that clearly and strictly assign the scope of work, responsibilities, and authority to each employee, and those that do not.

The former type, with strict job assignment, is a job design system in which job assignment is based on individuals and is job-specific. This type is common in Western companies, primarily in Anglo-Saxon countries. This type assigns people to specific, fixed jobs. In other words, the idea is to assign the person best suited to the job. The basic unit of job assignment in a management organization is the individual. This can be said to be based on the principle of bureaucracy. From a cultural perspective, in Western countries, where individualism is deeply rooted, the idea is to clearly define each individual's share of

work and clearly distinguish each individual's gains from others in order to avoid interpersonal conflicts and unclear authority and responsibilities. This type of job design system can be called job-specific. The advantage of job-specific job design is that it makes performance evaluation easier because each individual's job responsibilities and authority are clearly defined. The disadvantage is that individuals only perform the tasks assigned to them and are reluctant to do another people's work.

The latter type, with loose job assignments, is a job design system in which job assignments are based on teams or groups, and while individual tasks are assigned, the scope of each individual's tasks varies depending on the situation, and work is carried out primarily through teamwork. In other words, while tasks are assigned to individuals, the details are broad and vague. Those with the ability to do the job are given a larger scope of work, while those with less ability are given a smaller scope of work. There is also a tendency for people to help or share the work of others depending on the situation. This type of job system is commonly seen in Japanese companies. This type is based on the idea that there are people and tasks are assigned. In other words, the idea is to give specific personnel the most suitable tasks. This type of job design system can be called job-independent. Ideologically, Japan has a tendency toward collectivism, which means trying to accomplish work collectively. This is the idea that it is desirable to have mutual aid and help each other in the workplace. The advantages of unrestricted job design include the ability to help each other at work, the ease of adjusting work schedules even during busy periods, and the ability to work together and complement each other even if there are differences in ability and experience. The disadvantage is that it is difficult to evaluate performance because each person's job is not clearly defined.

Job Documentation

When it comes to job documentation, there are two types of companies: those that emphasize explicit knowledge, documenting and manualizing job and work content, and those that emphasize tacit knowledge gained through organizational learning among group members rather than job documentation.

The former is a job design system that emphasizes strict description of individual job content, responsibilities, and qualifications in job descriptions and strict documentation of work methods in manuals. This type of job system is primarily seen in Western European companies, primarily in Anglo-Saxon countries.

The benefits of job documentation are as follows: First, it makes work easier because individual job content, responsibilities, and authority are clearly described. Jobs can be performed according to job descriptions and manuals. Second, it accumulates work-related knowledge and experience in documents, promoting the manualization of knowledge. In particular, documenting know-how and techniques from production sites in the form of manuals allows knowledge to be shared within the workplace and company. Third, documented job duties make handover easier. Successors can also perform their work in accordance with job descriptions and manuals. Documenting jobs has the following disadvantages. First, people tend to rely solely on documents like job descriptions and manuals. In real-world work, many situations arise that are not documented. In such cases, forcing work to follow a job description or manual may result in inadequate response. Second, revising documents like job descriptions and manuals requires a tremendous amount of effort. A company's work content is constantly changing. As a result, additions and revisions to individual job descriptions are made over time and as circumstances change, necessitating revisions.

The latter is a job design system in which individual job duties are not necessarily strictly documented, and manuals and other documentation are used only when necessary. This type of job system is primarily found in Japanese companies. Its advantages include the following. First, it is a job design system suitable for open-ended teamwork. When working as a team, tasks are not strictly assigned to individuals, but rather to the team as a whole. For this reason, a job design system that does not strictly document individual job descriptions is more suitable.

Second, there is the advantage of being able to think for oneself without relying on documentation. Knowledge and skills include so-called tacit knowledge that is difficult to put into manuals, and excessive documentation can be a disadvantage in forming this tacit knowledge. The disadvantages are as follows: First, because each individual's job content, responsibilities, and authority are not strictly documented, they are vague. Second, there is a possibility that knowledge and know-how will only be accumulated by individuals, and knowledge sharing in the sense of being shared by everyone will not progress. Particularly in production sites, the accumulation and sharing of knowledge and skills through manuals will not progress.

Types of Job Design

	Definite-job assignments	Undefined-job assignments
Highly documented jobs	Western European corporate type, primarily in Anglo-Saxon countries	New team management type
Low-documented jobs	Traditional artisan type	Japanese type

(Source: Athor)

Figure 1

Figure 1 categorizes the job assignments discussed so far into four categories, based on whether they are defined or undefined, and how much or little documentation there is. The Western European corporate type, primarily in Anglo-Saxon countries, and the Japanese type are typologies of the previously discussed concepts. Let us explain the individual types, "traditional artisan type" and "new team management type."

The type of job design with narrowly defined job assignments and little documentation is called the "traditional artisan type." Traditional artisans are independent craftsmen who have acquired skills and techniques through long periods of training, such as apprenticeship. Traditional artisans' work is primarily individual, and their skills and techniques are imparted by masters or other professionals. Craftsmen do not acquire skills through manuals or other written documents; rather, they learn by watching and imitating, often stealing the techniques of their masters. Historically, many Japanese craftsmen developed their skills through this type of apprenticeship.

This type of job design, characterized by unrestricted job assignments and extensive documentation, is called the "new team management model." Work is primarily performed in teams or groups, but documentation is well-documented. This "new team management model" will likely become an important

direction for job design in Japanese companies going forward. While Japanese companies have traditionally tended to adopt the "Japanese model," factors such as the increasing globalization of Japanese companies, the decline in the number of craftsmen, advances in mechanization, and technological sophistication will necessitate a shift in focus to the "new team management model."

The increasing globalization of Japanese companies is driving an increase in overseas factories. At Japanese-affiliated overseas factories, the lack of Japanese-style job documentation on the production floor is no longer sufficient. In fact, the development of documentation, such as production manuals, is essential for overseas factories. Many local employees overseas lack sufficient technical and skill levels, and turnover is often high. In this environment, maintaining and improving factory skills, technology, and quality standards requires the development and expansion of documentation, such as manuals, as work and quality instructions and a means of sharing technology and skills.

Even within Japan, the skilled workforce is aging, creating an urgent need to train young workers. Furthermore, advances in mechanization and technological sophistication are making it increasingly difficult to develop skills through the traditional, less-documented approach. Against this backdrop, there is

a growing need to document and manualize artisan skills and techniques. While it is certainly impossible to document all craftsmanship, it is desirable to document and manual as much as possible so that it can be shared with younger workers. In other words, knowledge sharing and accumulation are essential. In this sense, a "new team management" approach to job design will likely become a key new strategy for Japanese companies in the future.

Office Layout

In relation to job roles, office layout is an interesting aspect from an international comparison perspective. While individual office layouts are common in Western companies, large-room office layouts, suitable for team management, are common in Japanese companies.

The advantages of a shared office are that it encourages closer communication between managers and employees and promotes greater uniformity of status across hierarchies. Shared offices are more suitable when work is team- or group-based. However, shared offices have disadvantages when it comes to maintaining managerial or executive status, working independently, and quiet contemplation. When employees want to immerse themselves in their work quietly without being distracted by their surroundings, a private office is more suitable than a shared office. Furthermore, when individual duties are strictly defined and work is done individually, a private office may be more appropriate.

Let's take a look at the relocation of Japanese companies' shared office layouts overseas. Many Japanese companies have relocated shared office layouts to Asian countries. Initially, there was complaints, mainly from managers, but the relocation has been relatively smooth since then. The advantages of a shared office are that it encourages closer communication between managers and employees and promotes greater uniformity of status across hierarchies. However, shared offices have disadvantages when it comes to maintaining the status of managers and executives, working independently, and quiet contemplation. For this reason, some Japanese companies prefer individual offices for senior managers and a shared office system for lower levels.

Japanese companies are not necessarily transferring the shared office layout to Europe or the United States. In Europe and the United States, individual offices are a traditional style, and changing this can be quite difficult. However, even among Japanese companies in Europe and the United States, there are quite a few that adopt the shared office layout as much as possible, in order to respect individual space and promote close communication in the workplace, even if they do not go as far as the Japanese shared office style.

Personnel Appraisals

Personnel appraisals are evaluations of an employee's work performance, abilities, and achievements. The content and results of personnel appraisals play an important role in decisions regarding employee promotions, grades, wages, bonuses, and transfers, as well as in career and skill development.

Personnel appraisals are typically conducted by a supervisor. However, in recent years, some companies have adopted

360-degree appraisals, in which evaluations are conducted not only by the supervisor but also by colleagues, subordinates, employees in other departments within the company, and external business partners and customers.

When comparing personnel appraisal systems internationally, the following two characteristics can be seen. The first is the perspective of job descriptions and personnel appraisals. In Anglo-Saxon countries such as the United States, personnel appraisals are characterized by focusing on the tasks to be performed as outlined in individual job descriptions. In other words, personnel appraisals are based on whether the tasks in the job description were performed appropriately and whether expectations were met. In that sense, in countries like the United States, performance evaluations are based on merit and are based on job descriptions. In Japan, on the other hand, job descriptions are not widely used, and performance evaluations are not necessarily based on job descriptions.

The second issue is performance evaluations of blue-collar employees.

In Japanese companies, performance evaluations are generally conducted for both blue- and white-collar employees. However, in Anglo-Saxon countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, it is common for blue-collar hourly and weekly wage employees not to undergo formal performance evaluations by their supervisors. In Anglo-Saxon countries, a long-standing labor-management practice dictates that wages be determined for each job based on job content and difficulty, and there is a principle of not discriminating between workers. This means that labor unions do not recognize employee performance evaluations. Furthermore, in these countries, wages are set by occupation, job type, or job grade in collective agreements, leaving little room for performance evaluations.

However, even in Anglo-Saxon countries, a high percentage of white-collar employees on a monthly or annual salary system, such as professional, clerical, and managerial positions, receive performance evaluations and appraisals from their superiors.

The third is whether the results of performance appraisals are fed back to employees. In Anglo-Saxon countries such as the United States, it is common for superiors to provide feedback to employees on performance appraisals. In the United States, for example, superiors inform their subordinates of the results of performance appraisals, compare them with the subordinates' self-evaluations, hold interviews, and give instructions for improvement. In Japan, on the other hand, there is relatively little feedback to employees on performance appraisals.

Career

What is a Career? A career refers to an individual's work-life journey, including their occupation, job and work experience, occupational status and role, professional qualifications, skill development, and education and training. Broadly defined, career encompasses not only an individual's occupation or job, but also non-work activities (e.g., volunteering, community involvement, hobbies, friendships, family, religion, etc.), lifestyle, and personal philosophy. The former can be distinguished as working career, while the latter can be referred to as life career.

Traditionally, Japanese companies have typically assumed long-term employment, with young people joining a company after graduating and continuing to work for the company or corporate group until retirement, building their careers. This core employment relationship was combined with various other employment relationships, including mid-career recruitment, experienced hiring, and contract employment. It is true that this long-term employment practice is gradually eroding in today's Japanese companies. Furthermore, while long-term employment at Japanese companies primarily applies to full-time employees at large corporations, it is important to note that long-term employment practices do not necessarily exist for non-full-time employees or employees at small and medium-sized enterprises.

Education, training, and personnel transfers are important in intra-company career development. Training was primarily conducted within the company in accordance with employees' career development. External training was also provided when necessary. Personnel transfers (job rotations) involve transferring employees within a company or corporate group. Personnel transfers include horizontal transfers such as reassignment and secondment, and vertical transfers such as promotion, advancement, and demotion. Horizontal transfers such as reassignment and secondment can involve transfers within the same job type or to a different job type.

Conclusion

Future Career and Education and Training Strategies for Japanese Companies

The environment surrounding Japanese companies is rapidly changing, necessitating career and education and training strategies that respond to these changes. The author believes that the following measures are important for Japanese companies' career and education training programs in the future.

The first is how Japanese companies respond to the globalization of their businesses. While there are various ways to achieve this, one idea I would like to propose is to increase the number of employees sent overseas by Japanese companies. This would involve having as many employees from the Japanese headquarters as possible work at overseas subsidiaries. The goal is to develop global talent who are familiar with local conditions by sending primarily Japanese employees overseas and allowing them to gain international experience.

Generally, Japanese employees sent to overseas subsidiaries are given positions with significantly greater responsibility than those in Japan. Local management experience will be a valuable asset for their careers. Cross-cultural experience is also valuable. Working in a culture and society different from Japan will likely broaden their international perspective. It's true that traditional international management thinking favors the localization of human resources and the common belief that fewer Japanese employees are preferred. But is it really enough to leave it to local people? From the perspective of human resource development, career development, and education and training in response to the globalization of Japanese companies, the number of Japanese employees sent overseas should increase and be systematically implemented.

Furthermore, expanding the number of employees sent overseas would also be an effective means of transferring and maintaining technology overseas. Quality control, particularly at local factories in Asia, is a key issue. Japanese employees, especially experienced production technicians, could play a major role in overcoming this challenge. Furthermore, sending surplus Japanese personnel overseas would also serve as a way to alleviate Japan's unemployment problem. While long-term overseas assignments are an option, short- to medium-term business trips should also be considered. Japanese employees could be sent to overseas factories for periods of three to six months to provide technical guidance and training to local employees.

Second, we should emphasize self-selection of career paths. Career development should not remain unchanged; rather, we should further expand career support and systems that allow individuals to choose their careers to a certain extent—in other words, career paths that respect the individual. To achieve this, we will need self-selective education and training, expanded in-house recruitment systems, self-selective placement and reassignment, and the development of specialists and professionals.

Third, we need to restore the dignity of craftsmen. Traditionally, craftsmen have supported Japan's production sites. Craftsmen are developed through long periods of training to develop their skills. As the term "craftsman spirit" suggests, the existence of Japanese craftsmen plays a major role in the foundation of Japanese manufacturing. While adopting the traditional craftsman system is difficult today, with the exception of a few jobs, it is important to make the most of the strengths of craftsmen. To this end, we need to develop a new type of craftsman in production sites. This new type of craftsman is someone who masters the skills and techniques of their field by utilizing not only traditional techniques but also cutting-edge technologies. In other words, they are craftsmen who incorporate both the old and the new. To restore the dignity of craftsmen, support from both companies and the government is necessary. To this end, measures such as various skill qualification systems, skill testing systems, and craftsman certification systems could be considered.

Fourth, we need to further enhance the country's vocational training system. Even in Western countries, the public sector plays a significant role in vocational training. In developed European countries in particular, there is a strong belief that education and training should be primarily provided by the public sector, such as the national and local governments, rather than by the private sector. In Japan, the national and local vocational training systems are still insufficient compared to those in those developed countries. It is essential that the government further expand and improve vocational training, particularly for problematic young people, part-time workers, non-regular employees, and the unemployed.

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