

Reflections

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In 1973, I was invited by Professor Levi to attend the celebration meeting of the WHO Research and Training Center in Karolinska Institute. Approximately 10 years later, I established Japan Society for Stress Sciences. Therefore we have 3 society meetings specializing the very topics here in Japan.

I have served as a director of National Institute of Mental Health in Japan, and was appointed as a WHO Expert Panel member for Mental Health for over 40 years.

Having listened to the discussion that were carried out for the past 3 days, I would like to share with you some of my feelings at this minute

First, this meeting has to do with “work-related”, and the most important point is what do we mean by “work related”. What does it mean to engage in work? In contemporary society, we have certain ideas about it, but it is necessary that we specifically define what we mean by work, because the scope of work could be quite wide. In particular, family work, what they do can be classified as work. It’s not just something that should be restricted to what is done or the endeavors of organizations and companies. For instance, the issue of working women has been pointed out by speakers from 3 post-industrial regions, so we are questioning what happens after industrialization. It’s been several hundred years after the industrial revolution occurred in England, but here in Japan, it has only been 130 years after the Meiji restoration. Looking back, we are wondering whether or not what we did during the past 130 years were correct or not. We are questioning companies who are content just by producing. Now that we are experiencing severe economic recession, and we are looking into the post industrial setting. From the Adam Smith notion to the Keynesian economics, we are questioning what will be the

next economic philosophy that will follow. So we have to come up with fundamental considerations, or otherwise we won’t be able to clearly define what we mean by work related stress and health in post industrial settings.

In the evening edition of yesterday’s Asahi, there was mention about discrepancy between the rich and poor, and there was a survey looking at 18 industrialized countries. Sweden was the country where the population of the poor was the smallest; Japan ranks 8th, and the US surprisingly 16th. In another words, the US has the widest gap between the rich and poor amongst those who were surveyed. So the question is which directions should Japan assume? Are we going to opt for a route to diminish the gap between the rich and poor, or are we going to give priority to those who can continue to climb up. I believe this is a very philosophical question. This economic recession is the second one that we are experiencing because we went through that in the 1930s when I was young. I believe this is a great opportunity on the other hand. What do we mean by work? What do we mean by post industrial? It’s a great opportunity to think about those concepts. I am coming up with some philosophical ideas. I believe that we’re currently vested with a lot of problems. The Japanese unemployment rate stands at 4.3% but in actual fact it is not as low as that. Because that only reflects the numbers of those who don’t seek jobs so that’s why it remains only at 4.3%, but the actual numbers of those without work could be nearly twice as high. Particularly, it is high among women. Even if women graduate from college, only half of them can find a job. So this is an imminent question for us. Think about our grandchildren. Are they going to be able to find nice jobs after they graduate from school? How about their tax and pension and so forth? These are big ques-

tions for people who belong to my generation. That is problem number one.

The second issue is that of Professor Ezra Vogel's Book called, "Japan is number one." I do not think we shall never be number one any more. We have fallen back, and there are so much that we need to reconsider. For instance, Professor Chie Nakane pointed out that Japanese vertical society, has been changing into a horizontal one. Once that is realized, then we may be able to resolve some of the work related stressors. Of course, there are gender questions involved as well. But that, the Japanese vertical society, is the major issue in any organization. We still have this traditional idea of those who are superior and those who may be subordinators. Additionally, so-called big bang is in progress. Companies are being merged and acquired. There is organizational restructuring, so the next generation for those who are around 50, especially those who are part of the management, are concerned as to when they are going to be fired. They are so anxious of what is going to happen to them. This is eminent, perhaps they are not going to lose their jobs but they need to be prepared if that should ever happen.

Besides what to do with those who are already working, what do we need to do for those who are going to work. That's another major point that we have to look into when we discuss work related stress. The courses have been outlined, but the approaches that could be taken would depend on the research outcome and what governmental administrative measures can be taken. There had been some discussion regarding that point, perhaps collaboration between the government and the industry and the link with education. At the individual company level, there can be individual measures taken, and of course that's

indispensable as well, but we only see that amongst the larger corporations which would be around 30% of all of the companies. If you look at smaller companies with employees of less than 50, they don't have any or hardly any countermeasures against work related stress.

Now we are at a point of having health promotion centers nation wide. As it has been pointed out by many, the administration would have to join the efforts with the researchers, and of course we are trying hard to that end. I am sure that the government is as well. That means, the Ministry of Health and Welfare and the Ministry of Labor will be combined. In fact, they are already in the same building, and the other agencies will be combined. There is within the Japanese government, an office that looks at human resources and human matters, and they are emphasizing work related stress. The management coordination agency is also interested in this subject as well. My request would be that the Ministry of Labor will try to look into the question of the quality of working life, so that the Ministry will be able to come up with a plan, followed by legislature. In particular, we have to improve quality of life of the workers and their family. I believe that is of paramount importance as well as goals as are concerned and that has to be done through administrative approach.

I have come up with several requests. Of course, we need to consider how to respond to them. We could look at individuals or groups, and study more about work related stress and health. But I hope that at the administrative level or even at the diet or parliament or at an industrial level, there will be some changes brought about. Otherwise, we won't be able to see positive changes in the post industrial settings.