The limited effects of internal career concerns on self-initiative work style

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Abstract—

Traditionally employees in Japanese companies had self-initiative work style, on the basis of the peace of mind offered by job security. However, today, Japanese companies cannot guarantee the lifetime employment any more. As a result, in order to support individual career development, universities put a lot of effort to begin career education, which mainly focuses on the internal career concerns. It comes from the concept of “career anchors.”

A career anchor consists of one’s own talents and abilities, motivations and desires, and attitude and values. As one’s career anchor stabilizes over one’s lifetime, it is thought that realizing and applying one’s career anchor should be at an early stage. Nevertheless, new employees at Japanese companies who are offered career education do not work in self-initiative style. Against this backdrop, this study focused on limitation of internal career concerns. The results of survey revealed that internal career concerns exerted direct influence over their self-initiative work style in everyday circumstances. But under difficult situations, understanding organizational role, instead of internal career concerns, had direct influence. This study made it clear that internal career concerns had limitation and that internalization of extrinsic values through unexpected jobs offered by organization had direct impact on self-initiative work style in difficult situations. Based on the findings, new basis of peace of mind was discussed for career education and career development workshops in Japan. Suitable one for present Japanese school-to-work transitions is not “career anchor” or “job security (or life-time employment)”, but “capability for change.”

Keywords—internal careers; self-initiative work style; understanding of roles within an organization; career education; school to work transition

I. BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH PURPOSE

Japanese-style organizational structures related to employment differ greatly from those of Western organizations. As highlighted by Hamaguchi (2013), Western organizations operate on a “job model,” whereas Japan is based on a “membership model.” Employment contracts under the job model are arrangements based on a job description, and one’s educational background performs the function of demonstrating one’s ability to fulfill the job contents set forth in that job description. In Western countries, as there is a strong relation of one’s undergraduate field of study to job content, seeking out jobs that conform to one’s career anchor (Schein, 1978) seems effective in the school-to-work transition.

A career anchor is a framework comprising consciousness of one’s own talents and abilities, consciousness of one’s motivations and desires, and consciousness of one’s attitude and values. One’s career anchor is formed from the increasing region of stability within a person, and by working in jobs that conform to their career anchors, people cultivate internal motivation from their career anchors, and it is thought that these people will become able to act imaginatively and creatively. Additionally, many have pointed out the importance of realizing and applying one’s career anchor at an early stage, because one’s career anchor fluctuates and stabilizes over the course of one’s lifetime.

Adults’ career development is primarily realized through job changes, which is migration from one organization to others. In other words, this is job-based employment. If advancing one’s career within the same organization proves difficult, one may simply take a higher position at a different company. These career-up transitions are based on one’s career anchor.

In contrast, Japanese companies do not explicitly specify a position when they employ their workers. As they bind their workers to comprehensive employment contracts, the employees strongly recognizes they are “members” of the organization. The lifetime employment and seniority by tenure have been characteristics of the Japanese human resource systems. Those systems were developed during the postwar period and worked as one of the key factors for high economic growth. Because of long-term employment, many workers developed their careers within the same companies for which they had been hired just after their graduation from college. Movement between organizations was quite rare. In Japanese companies, the right to decide on whether an employee is promoted or transferred elsewhere rests with the company only. As a result, there was no guarantee that an employee would be placed in the position he/she preferred. Further, there are many cases in Japan in which there is no connection between a person’s undergraduate major and the content of his or her first job; as such, at the same time that people are managing their assigned duties, they are seeking to learn and develop the skills and knowledge required to perform those duties.

Accordingly, it is difficult for employees of Japanese companies to act based on their career anchors. Further, there are also many cases of these employees’ experiencing

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“reality shock.” Reality shock is the gap between one’s dreams and expectations on one hand, and on the other hand, one’s job within an organization and the reality of their position (Schein, 1978), and it can cause people to become disillusioned, preventing them from self-motivating.

To work in an innovative manner, it is necessary for people to engage in risk-taking. As such, some form of peace of mind is necessary as a foundation. In Western organizations, one’s career anchor becomes this foundation, but in Japanese companies, the guarantee of job security forms this grounding peace of mind instead. When employees working for Japanese companies are ensured that they will be secure in their employment, these employees often perform quite aggressively in their positions.

![Fig. 1. Differences between Japanese and Western Organizations and Career Development](image)

However, it is difficult for Japanese companies today to guarantee long-term employment for their staff, owing to the maturation of markets in Japan as well as intense global competition. Despite this, these companies have not shifted to become more Western-style, job-based organizations. The management at these companies still holds full personnel rights regarding the promotion and transfer of employees. As a result, employees are uncertain about their long-term careers. These employees’ unrest makes them tend not to take on challenges and not to work aggressively.

Against this backdrop, the Japanese government enacted policies that support for employees to develop their careers by themselves. From the beginning of the 2000s, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare began training “career consultants”, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology mandated career education programs for universities. These national policies have promoted the self-initiated career development in Japan.

The self-initiated career development is a concept imported from the West. This concept emphasizes an approach based on an internalized career (Schein, 1978) formed from one’s personal values and motivations rather than an externalized career based on company name or position title. In addition, the approach to work emphasized through this concept is based on intrinsic motivational factors (Deci, 1971) such as personal values and concerns rather than extrinsic motivation.

For example, in recruiting process for new graduates, greater emphasis is placed on internalized careers and intrinsic motivation based on university students’ interests and concerns than on external factors such as the name of the students’ university. Specifically, companies have begun asking students during their hiring processes questions such as, “What did you put your effort into during college?” and “If you were hired here, what would you like to do?” (Toyoda, 2010). Following this recruitment trend, career education programs at universities are also starting to focus students on how to apply their personal values through self-analysis. In this study, these kinds of internal career concerns will be referred to as “internal career concerns.”

However, although career education programs and hiring processes are now placing focus on internal career concerns, the impact on self-initiative work style seems to be limited. Nevertheless, the concept of the internal career is based on the Western, job-based organizational mindset, but Japanese companies still subscribe to the membership-based organizational style. It remains difficult for employees to work in accordance with their career anchors while facing uncertainty regarding advancement in their careers or where they might be transferred to.
The lack of self-initiative of new company employees serves as evidence of this issue. On a survey by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (2012), respondents from companies reported that they felt that one problem with new employees was that “while they can follow directions well, they have no capacity to act on their own opinions.” In addition, on a 2013 survey by the Japan Management Association, companies reported that their expectation of new employees was that they “perform not only the tasks assigned to them, but also integrate their own consideration and engagement into their work.”

With these ideas in mind, this study suggested that the factors offering an impact on self-initiative work style at Japanese companies may be outside of the idea of the internal career. In other developed countries, the school-to-work transition involves a high correlation between undergraduate field of study and the content of one’s job after being hired, but in Japan, this correlation is lower (Japan Institute of Labour, 2001). As a result, the internalized career ideas held by new graduates at Japanese companies when they start working ultimately prove to have been formed out of an education that had no relationship to the performance of their work duties. Accordingly, developing the skills and knowledge required to do their jobs is essential after new-graduate employees enter companies.

Because there are structural background factors underlying Japan’s particularities with respect to this school-to-work process, there are many cases of employees being unfamiliar with their everyday work, leaving them in need of abilities and skills that are un-honed. Because of this, new employees in Japan are required to be active in undertaking the tasks of their jobs that cause them to feel this reality shock, and they develop new capabilities. Rather than “job satisfaction”, Japanese companies believe that “career development through unexpected work” is more important.

Accordingly, if new entry-level employees hold fast to their internal career ideas, they will not be pushed to learn new skills. It will be necessary for new employees to have not only internal career concerns but also an extrinsic mindset, in which they understand and accept their role within the organization and the duties assigned to them so that they can have self-initiative work style and newly develop their abilities after being hired.

Motivation research in recent years has focused not on the binary of internal and external factors but rather on the internalization of external values, and it has also proposed a multiple-step-based model to represent external motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2002; Sakurai, 2009). This study is based on this viewpoint and focuses on the internalization of external values over the course of people’s careers, and it will refer to employees’ understanding of the roles assigned to them by their organizations as “organizational role understanding.”

Accordingly, internal career concerns and organizational role understanding seems different in their impact on employees’ self-initiative work style. In particular, the author think there is a large difference in the difficult conditions under which employees might need abilities they are unfamiliar with. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to analyze how differently internal career concerns and organizational role understanding have impact on employees’ self-initiative work style.

II. HYPOTHESIS

Based on the research purpose described above, the author set two kinds of hypothesis.

The first one is on everyday circumstances. Self-initiative work style under everyday conditions will be referred to as “creative work willingness.” It is hypothesized that both internal career concerns and organizational role understanding exert an impact on creative work willingness. It can be assumed that internal career concerns indirectly impact on creative work willingness through organizational role understanding. Thus following three hypotheses are established:

- Hypothesis 1-a. Internal career concerns have an impact on creative work willingness. (direct effect)
- Hypothesis 1-b. Organizational role understanding has an impact on creative work willingness. (direct effect)
- Hypothesis 1-c. Internal career concerns have an indirect impact on creative work willingness through organizational role understanding. (indirect effect)

The second hypothesis is on difficult circumstances. In situations when younger employees feel distraught, their self-initiative coping with the situation is referred to as active coping, and if they avoid or flee from the situation, it is referred to as passive coping. These concepts came from stress coping in stress psychology (Shoji and Shoji, 1992). When people face difficulty because they are unable to realize their internal careers, they feel stress. People’s concerns for their internal careers accordingly exert no impact on their active coping; rather, these concerns impact on people’s passive coping instead. Conversely, organizational role understanding will exert an impact on active coping but not on passive coping. Further, internal career concerns have indirect impact on active coping through organizational role understanding. In summary of the above, the following hypotheses are established:

- Hypothesis 2-a. Internal career concerns exert no impact on active coping. (no direct effect)
- Hypothesis 2-b. Organizational role understanding exerts an impact on active coping. (direct effect)
• Hypothesis 2-c. Internal career concerns have indirect impact on active coping through organizational role understanding. (indirect effect)

• Hypothesis 2-d. Internal career concerns exert an impact on passive coping. (direct effect)

• Hypothesis 2-e. Organizational role understanding exerts no impact on passive coping. (direct effect)

III. METHOD

A. Outline of the survey

A survey was conducted by paper questionnaire, collecting responses from undergraduate students at University A in Japan who were taking subject B during their 2009 spring semester. As this research was the initial stage, undergraduate students were respondent to this survey. The survey had students recall their team and group activities, such as clubs, volunteering and academic group work. The author collected questionnaire responses from 149 students, 81 of whom were male and 67 of whom were female. Student respondents’ class years ranged from sophomore to senior. Because the ages of the students responding covered a wide range from 19 to 42, the author excluded from our analysis responses from 3 students who were aged between 25 and 42.

B. Measurement Framework

Sakayanagi (1999) utilized a lifetime career relationality measurement scale in his analysis of internal career concerns. This scale consists of nine measurement statements, such as “I am deeply concerned about the way I will live my life in the future” and “I am actively trying to gather information that will be useful to me in planning and living my life.”

The author developed an original scale for measuring organizational role understanding. This novel scale consists of five measurement statements, such as “I am trying to understand the purpose of the group’s activities” and “I am trying to be aware of what role I play within my group.”

Horino (1987) utilized a self-contained achievement motivational scale in her analysis of creative work willingness. This scale consists of 13 measurement statements, such as “I always like to have a goal in mind” and “I want to be able to express myself even in tasks that have set procedures in place.”

In order to get data on difficult circumstances, the author first instructed students to do the following: “Please write about any experiences you have had while participating in group activities where you noticed your personal limitations, or aspects of other group members that made you have realizations about yourself,” specifically asking them to recount in the free answer section of the questionnaire difficult situations and how they had coped. Next, the author utilized the following measurement scale with respect to active coping and coping by evasion.

The author utilized the measurement items related to active action and recognition from the workplace coping scale used by Shoji and Shoji (1992) in measuring subjects’ active coping in difficult situations. There are 11 measurement items, such as “I thought about what the problem might be” and “I took action to solve the problem in the situation as best as I could.”

Shoji and Shoji (1992) utilized the 10 measurement items related to actions and recognition in connection with business climate from the same workplace coping scale. These items include, for example, “I involved myself with something other than this problem” and “I tried to avoid problem situations.”

The questionnaire utilized five answer choices ranging from “I don’t think so” to “I think so.”

IV. RESULTS

A. Factor Analysis and Reliability Assessment

Before validating hypotheses, factor analyses were conducted in order to make the reliability of the measurements high. Factors with a load amount of less than 0.5 were eliminated, and repeat factor analyses were performed until the factor load amounts no longer yielded items under 0.5. Next, the reliability tests of those factors were conducted. The results of factor analysis and reliability test are displayed in Tables 1 through 3.

The internal career concerns factor was structured from 4 items, and Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) coefficient was 0.702. Organizational role understanding was structured from 4 items, and Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) coefficient was 0.811. Creative work willingness was structured from 2 items, and Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) coefficient was 0.702. Active coping was structured from 3 items with a Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) coefficient of 0.684, and passive coping was structured from 3 items with a Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) coefficient of 0.733.

Although the Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) coefficient for concepts other than organizational role understanding were somewhat low, it was possible to structure them to obtain a certain level of reliability.
### TABLE I.  **Factor Analysis Results for Internal Career Concerns and Organizational Role Understanding (Varimax Rotation)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal Career Concerns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am actively trying to gather information that will be useful to me in planning and living my life.</td>
<td>0.802</td>
<td>0.087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am thinking hard about life planning because it is an important issue to me.</td>
<td>0.643</td>
<td>0.233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am deeply concerned about the way I will live my life in the future.</td>
<td>0.560</td>
<td>0.054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I participate in group activities, I make an effort to understand my role in the group.</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td>0.756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I participate in group activities, I try to be aware of what role I play within my group.</td>
<td>0.242</td>
<td>0.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I participate in group activities, I make an effort to achieve the goal of the group.</td>
<td>0.076</td>
<td>0.711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I participate in group activities, I try to understand the purpose of the group’s activities.</td>
<td>0.175</td>
<td>0.632</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach’s α 0.702 0.811

### TABLE II.  **Factor Analysis Results for Creative Work Willingness (Varimax Rotation)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creative Work Willingness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No matter how small, I think I would like to do something that only I can do.</td>
<td>0.735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to be able to express myself even in tasks that have set procedures in place.</td>
<td>0.735</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach’s α 0.702
TABLE III. FACTOR ANALYSIS RESULTS FOR ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE COPING (VARIMAX ROTATION)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I created a plan for problem-solving</td>
<td>0.673</td>
<td>-0.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I thought about what they personally could do in a given situation</td>
<td>0.629</td>
<td>-0.206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I took action to solve the problems in a given situation as best they could</td>
<td>0.592</td>
<td>-0.320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I involved themselves with something other than the problem at hand</td>
<td>-0.192</td>
<td>0.690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tried to avoid problem situations</td>
<td>-0.262</td>
<td>0.680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I did not think about the problem</td>
<td>-0.106</td>
<td>0.630</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cronbach’s α | 0.684     | 0.811     |

B. Examination of Hypotheses

To examine the hypotheses, path analyses were conducted. This path analyses combined simple linear regression and multiple regression analyses in order to analyze both direct and indirect effects (in Table 5).

The result for Hypothesis 1 is displayed in Figure 2. The direct effect of internal career concerns on creative work willingness was $\beta = 0.21$; because this was significant at the 5% level, the Hypothesis 1-a was verified. The direct effect of organization role understanding on creative work willingness was $\beta = 0.25$; because this was significant at the 1% level, the Hypothesis 1-b was also verified. The path from internal career concerns to organizational role understanding was $\beta = 0.30$ and was significant at the 1% level. As a result, the direct effect of creative work willingness as an intermediary on the path from internal career concerns to organizational role understanding was $\beta = 0.075$, and Hypothesis 1-c was verified. However, the $\beta$ value for Hypothesis 1-a was greater than the value for Hypothesis 1-c; the direct effect exerted greater influence than the indirect effect with regard to the path from internal career concerns to creative work willingness.

With respect to Hypothesis 2, first, Figure 3 shows results in case of active coping as an independent variable. The direct effect of internal career concerns on active coping was $\beta = 0.25$; because this was significant at the 1% level, Hypothesis 2-b was also verified. The direct effect of active coping as an intermediary on the path from internal career concerns to organizational role understanding was $\beta = 0.075$, and Hypothesis 2-c was verified.

Next, Figure 4 displays results in case of passive coping as the independent variable. The multiple regression equation was not significant. As a result, Hypothesis 2-d and Hypothesis 2-e were rejected.

V. DISCUSSION

Following the results of this study, there are two aspects which should be discussed.

The first aspect was that impacts exerted by internal career concerns and organizational role understanding were different in everyday conditions and difficult situations. Under everyday circumstances, both internal career concerns and organizational role understanding exerted a direct impact on creative work willingness. In contrast, under difficult conditions, internal career concerns did not have a direct impact on active coping, although organizational role understanding exerted a direct impact on active coping. In difficult conditions, internal career concerns had indirect impact on active coping through organizational role understanding.

These findings are suggestive of 3 points. The first point is the potential impact range of internal career concerns.
In traditional career discussions, internal career concerns have always had an impact on self-initiative work style. However, in this study, it became clear that internal career concerns had limitation. In everyday circumstances, the concerns resulted in their self-initiative work style. When people faced difficult conditions, their internal career concerns were not tied to active coping. The second point is concerned with the direct impact of organizational role understanding on active coping during difficult conditions. In difficult conditions, people develop originality and ingenuity through internalizing external values. The third point is that in difficult conditions, internal career concerns indirectly impact on active coping through organizational role understanding as intermediary. Because of this, internal career concerns not only directly impact on creative work willingness in everyday circumstances, but also indirectly impact on active coping through organizational role understanding in difficult conditions.

Accordingly, it is important to aware the limitation of internal career concerns especially in difficult circumstances. Also focusing on indirect effect of those concerns to active coping in difficult situations, it is possible to create new career education and young employee training program within company. Focusing on internalization of external values is helpful for school-to-work transition in Japan as well as emphasizing on self-analysis for internal career concerns. It is also important that young workers are not forced to understand external values, but are encouraged to find linkage between their internal career and organizational role.

These activities will include important indications with respect to career development at Japanese companies. Currently, the management at Japanese companies still holds strong powers over the promotion and transfer of employees. However, because these companies cannot guarantee long-time employment, employees experiences substantial uncertainty. As determined from this study, employees can adapt to and cope with any kind of transitions by developing new skills and capabilities through internalization of the organizational values. It means individual career development through unexpected work. It is not peace of mind of the Western-style career anchor or of traditional Japanese job security; this approach is based on capability for change, which is a new peace of mind foundation suitable for the work environment in Japanese companies today.

The second aspect is concerned with passive coping. Because the multiple regression equation using passive coping as the dependent variable was not significant, passive coping and active coping may be impacted by different factors. In other words, there is a possibility that they were influenced by factors not addressed in this study. For example, it is conceivable that a more fundamental form of self-awareness such as self-esteem could have a negative impact on passive coping. In difficult situations, people's work attitudes are called into question. If they do not harbor a self-esteem mindset and they cannot face those difficult situations, they will flee the situations as a passive coping mechanism. This should be explored in future research.

In addition, if the different factors impact active and passive coping, in order to encourage young people in passive coping behaviors to engage in active coping, it is insufficient to remove passive coping factor from them; it will be also necessary for active coping to support them to internalize extrinsic values which comes from organizational role. In future research, it is important to investigate the factors effecting on passive coping and to explore how different model of passive coping is from one of active coping.

VI. LIMITATIONS

As an exploratory study, the author focused on surveying undergraduate students, and the hypotheses were validated to a certain extent. However, undergraduate students compared to company workers would have many opportunities to easily demonstrate their internal career concerns in everyday circumstances. New employees doing expected jobs would be difficult to demonstrate their internal career concerns even in everyday situation. Accordingly, if surveying new employee, there would also be a possibility that the impact of internal career concerns on creative work willingness is limited.

Also, as the multiple regression model for passive coping was also not significant, future research would be necessary to explore what factors have impact on passive coping.

With these points in consideration, in the future, the author plan to conduct research concerned with the aspects that were unable to be clarified in this study, by focusing on new employees immediately after they enter companies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I would like to extend our thanks to Professor Mitsuyo Hanada of the Faculty of Policy Management at Keio University for his guidance offered in connection with the writing of this paper.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX

**TABLE IV. CORRELATION OF FACTORS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Internal Career Concerns</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>0.719</td>
<td>0.296**</td>
<td>0.281**</td>
<td>0.230*</td>
<td>0.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Organizational Role Understanding</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>0.717</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.313**</td>
<td>0.298**</td>
<td>-0.109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Creative Work Willingness</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.802</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.328**</td>
<td>0.153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Active Coping</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>0.927</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-0.387**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Passive Coping</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>1.035</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05,  **p < .01

**TABLE V. MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSIS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Creative Work Willingness</th>
<th>Active Coping</th>
<th>Passive Coping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Career Concerns</td>
<td>0.206</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>0.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Role Understanding</td>
<td>0.252</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>0.253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.123</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>0.096</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*b p < .01,  **p < .05

*N* 124

Fig. 2. Results of the Analysis of Hypotheses 1-a, 1-b, and 1-c
Fig. 3. Results of the Analysis of Hypotheses 2-a, 2-b, and 2-c

Fig. 4. Results of the Analysis of Hypotheses 2-d and 2-e