

ATTITUDE ON WORK-LIFE-BALANCE PROBLEM AMONG MALE FULL-TIME WORKERS IN JAPAN CONSIDERATION FROM THE FRAMEWORK OF “SUBSTITUTABILITY” AT HOME AND “EMPLOYABILITY” AT WORK

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Abstract

The objectives of this research were 1) clarifying the factors that influence the WLB awareness and decision-making of male full-time workers by interviews and 2) building a conceptual framework (a 2-by-2 matrix) based on the findings from the interviews. A total of 17 male graduate students working full-time at a company participated in the study. In-depth interviews revealed two factors that they are concerned about when deciding to take childcare or elderly care leave: which is role substitutability at home and employability at work. Role substitutability is defined as a concept that expresses the degree to which another person (e.g. Person B) can substitute the role of Person A at home, or the degree to which the role of Person A and the role of Person B are interchangeable. Employability is “the sum of the ability to enable labor mobility and the ability to be exerted within the company and enable continuous employment (Dan, 2003)”.

This research then developed a 2-by-2 matrix using high-low levels of substitutability and employability. When categorizing the results of the interviews into the four quadrants of the matrix (Quadrant A to D), several key findings are identified.

Based on the analysis of the matrix, conclusions and some future implications are stated at the end of the paper.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Male Full-time Workers, Substitutability at Home, Employability at Work

Introduction

The Japanese Cabinet Office (2007) defines work-life balance (WLB) as “everyone-young, old, male or female-being able to

develop the degree of balance he or she desires to have between various life activities such as activities at home, at work, in the community, or those involving self-development”. As the Japanese government actively grapples with

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WLB, there is a sense of crisis for the society that has valued already established traditions of how work is accomplished (e.g., regular, lifetime employment by men). With its population decreasing and aging, Japan is challenged to maintain a labor force, and doing so requires workplaces capable of adopting diverse ways of working (Iki, 2012). This can be considered an intentional movement to develop a vital society that is rich in diversity by promoting and realizing WLB.

More than ten years have passed since a government-led initiative to re-evaluate the ways of working has been reflected in specific policies and established among workers. Statistics, however, depict difficulties and persisting problems with respect to consistency in the workplace. In particular, a large number gap still exists between men and women in both work and home domains with respect to the forms of employment and work hours, wages, time spent on housekeeping, and rate of acquiring time off for child-rearing (see “2014 Employment Equality Basic Survey”, Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare).

One reason this gap still exists is that Japanese WLB policies have, from the outset, been positioned as relating to the employment of women and the declining birthrate. According to Iki (2012), tracing of the initial WLB policies from the 1970s through the 1980s shows that the initiative was applied from the point of view of the “well-being” and “employment” of female workers, such that its focus was solely on women. Even with the perspective of gender equality that was popularized in the 1990s, there was rarely an opportunity to encourage men to use the WLB policies. Given this history, the foundation of WLB was regarded as “for women” or “for the family”. Such a concept or policy that applies to certain workers could be the cause of the gap that emerged. In addition, a bias in the choice of research subjects, based on this history of WLB policies, could have contributed to the creation of this gap.

Given this background, research of WLB in Japan focuses mainly on understanding

the conditions under which WLB policies are introduced and implemented at businesses. If more than a certain proportion of workers consider WLB as “for women” and “for home life”, these numbers could affect people who would like to use these systems.

As previously mentioned, the Cabinet Office states that WLB issues involve “everyone— young, old, male or female”. However, as noted, only workers who experience childbirth, child-rearing, and caretaking are viewed as candidates for WLB, which changes the proportion of workers. For example, in many cases, those who use the WLB policy and practices at a company have regular employee status, but according to an “Employment Structures Basic Survey” by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, 55.2% of female workers are non-regular employees, an overwhelmingly high number in comparison to the 19.9% of male workers who are non-regular employees. A labor survey from that same ministry (end of August 2012) indicated that since less than half of the Japanese working population are women, the percentage of workers able to access various systems for the purpose of childbirth or child-rearing is less than 25% of those employed. On the other hand, it has been calculated that male workers with regular-employee status make up at least 40% of the workforce. Moreover, more than 90% of administrators (section chiefs and above) are male workers (Gender Equality Bureau-Cabinet Office, 2014).

These numbers indicate that many Japanese workplaces are still dominated by male workers (more specifically, male full-time workers) who do not consider WLB issues as their “own” business in most cases. Therefore, in such workplaces, the equations such as WLB = problems for female workers, WLB = problems of persons in charge of house chores, or WLB = problems of childcare support, still persist, which may bring some negative impact on those who actually want to use the system. It is necessary to clarify why the above equations are widespread and why WLB is still perceived as “others’ business” for many male full-time workers.

Research Objective

Based on the problems and challenges discussed above, the objectives of this research is 1) to clarify the factors that influence the WLB awareness and decision-making of male full-time workers, and 2) to build a conceptual framework (a 2-by-2 matrix) based on those factors. First, a series of interviews were conducted for male full-time workers about WLB issues, mainly focusing on questions about taking leave for childcare and nursing care. The intention of the interview is to identify factors that affect their decision-making of taking/not taking childcare/elderly care leave. Based on the factors identified from interview results, this research develops a conceptual framework to classify and explain various attitudes and behaviors of full-time male workers toward taking leave.

Research Methodology

Interview Methods

The interview in this study consists of two phases, in which the results of the first phase are followed up in the second phase.

Phase 1: The first phase of the interview was from December 12, 2014, to February 9, 2015. The 13 participants (called “interviewees” hereinafter) were working full-time graduate students at the graduate school that one of the authors belongs. The sampling method was as follows: to select male students who work full-time from the student list of 2014 at the graduate school. The author asked to solicit their participation through email and to interview those who gave their consent.

Phase 2: the second phase of the interview was from September 30, 2015, to November 12, 2015. There were 13 participants (9 repeaters from the first phase & 4 new participants). The sampling method was almost the same as the last one: to select male students who work full-time from the student list of 2015 at the graduate school. The author asked to solicit their participation through email and to interview those who gave their consent.

All interviews in Phase 1 and Phase 2 were conducted face-to-face in the author’s office at the graduate school, Tokyo, Japan. As the interview was designed to analyze the attitudes and behaviors of the interviewees without their conscious awareness, questions were not sent to participants prior to the interviews. Additionally, because some may consider questions concerning financial dependents, family structure, child-rearing, and caretaking to be intrusive, explanations were made, and informed consent was obtained before the questions were asked. Interviewees were free to respond as they chose to the questions centered on basic information, such as how many years they had worked and in what area and whether they had used or planned to use various types of personnel systems. Once they had answered these questions, they were asked what may have influenced their answers, and the reaction of the interviewee was observed as these questions were being asked. However, since the interview subjects were males and may have had a limited interest in WLB if the interviewee had little to say, the interviewer asked another question. Notice the sampling method in both phase 1 and phase 2 was not random so results from the interview cannot be generalized.

Results And Analysis

Since there are 9 interviewees that were overlapped with Phase 1 and Phase 2, there are in total 17 ($13+13-9=17$) interviewees in this research. Detailed information regarding the demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 1. First, more than half of the interviewees were working in manufacturing, information technology (IT), or construction, and the other half worked in areas such as pharmaceuticals, trade, or food products. Their years of work (or total years of employment when job changes had occurred) varied greatly, from less than five years to more than 35 years. However, most interviewees worked at the same companies between 10 and 25 years. Of the 17 interviewees, 2 were in

upper management (board members), 6 were in a middle management position, and 8 were in lower management position. Sixteen out of 17 have worked as engineers or had started their careers in technical/engineering areas.

Of the 17 participants, fifteen have an obligation to support their family (e.g. either

children or parents), and 13 have children. Five interviewees mentioned that their spouses did not work and four told that their spouses worked part-time or contracted, and two told that their spouses worked full-time (but some of them are currently taking childcare leave).

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of the Interviewees in Phase 1 and Phase 2

Interviewee no.	Phase	Education	Years of work	Positions at work				Industry			Not married	Work status of their partner				w/child(ren)
				Upper Mgt	Middle Mgt	Lower Mgt	Employees	Manufacturing	IT	Others		w/o work	work as full-time	work as part-time	N.A.	
1	1	College	21			•		•				•				•
2	1	High S	25	•						•					•	•
3	1	Univ.	11			•		•				•				•
4	1	Univ.	39	•				•							•	•
5	2	Univ.	11		•				•					•		•
6	2	Univ.	26		•				•					•		•
7	2	Univ.	7				•		•				•			
8	2	Univ.	18		•					•				•		
9	1&2	Univ.	30		•					•					•	•
10	1&2	Univ.	13			•				•		•				•
11	1&2	Univ.	13		•				•					•		•
12	1&2	Grad S	6			•		•				•				•
13	1&2	Univ.	23			•				•					•	•
14	1&2	Univ.	4		•				•		•					
15	1&2	Univ.	18			•				•			•			•
16	1&2	Univ.	17			•				•		•				•
17	1&2	Grad S	10			•				•	•					

Substitutability at Home

As mentioned in the previous section, the main questions that the author asked the interviewees were as follows: 1) have you ever done/planned taking childcare/elderly leave? and 2) Why/why not you’ve done/planned to take the leave? In the first phase of interviews, reasons had some variations in terms of not taking the leave. Sample answers are: “I did not know that there was a leave policy itself”, “No one in my workplace took it”, etc. However, 10 out of 14 (with children) answered that they did not take the childcare leave because their

wife did not have work at that time. Together with the answer by the interviewee who took leave because nobody except me was available to support my wife, the point of this question is whether someone can take over the role of interviewees at home (replacement of roles). In other words, the availability of the role or the substitutability of the role as caregivers can be the axis for studying the use of childcare/elderly leave.

In fact, the answers of the interviewees were logically consistent all the time in terms of availability or substitutability. For example,

interviewees who want to take a vacation in the future but find it difficult or they won't plan to take say, "because I have a partner who takes care of our kids (so that no need to take the leave for me)", and "because my wife and I divide roles at home—I earn money and she raises kids", and so on. These answers may mean that their role at home (e.g. taking care of children and doing house chores) is substitutable. This research then will refer to it as "substitution of roles at home".

Substitutability at Work

It has been observed that in the 1st phase, interviewees often mentioned the substitutability at work as a reason for taking/not taking childcare leave and hardly mentioned the substitutability at work. The interview in the second phase then explored how substitutability in the workplace could affect the decision to use the leave. The results show that very few use the substitutability of roles in the workplace as a criterion for taking leave. In contrast, substitutability of roles at work was rather their reason for "not" taking childcare leave, than taking leave. Even more interesting is their contradiction regarding the interpretation of substitutability of role at home. For example, every interviewee answered that their substitutability of role at home is low when asking about the substitutability of their roles "as a father" and "as a husband" at home. First, they answered that they did not take the childcare leave because someone instead of them can take care of their kids and do some house chores. In the second phase, however, they said that their role as father/husband at home is not substitutable. When the author pointed out the contradiction, interviewees suddenly found that their answers were not consistent. However, most of them could not clearly explain the contradiction.

Looking back at all the interviews, however, there are clues to explain this contradiction. Though the purpose of this study was to find out what male full-time workers think about WLB, the contradiction could be explained once we move away from the

concept of WLB. It means that for male full-time workers, the decision to use WLB-related leave is not based on the balance between work and family life. As is clear from the above, most of the interviewees are so-called "breadwinners" of their home, and many of their partners are not working (at the time of childbirth and childcare). In this case, work exists as a base for them, not the factor to balance with family. In fact, they speculated that their role as a "father" and "husband" would be a monetary pillar and that they would consider it separate from their daily housework and childcare roles. These ideas are very different from those of female workers, and the authors think they are the most important points revealed in this study.

Employability at Work

So, what are the factors for male full-time workers that determine the use of childcare/elderly-care leave? What has become clear from the interview is the HR appraisal and career transparency. Table 2 shows that in response to the question "whether or not to take parental leave in the future", both reasons for taking it and reasons for not taking it are somewhat related to personnel evaluation. For example, the reasons for taking leave are "I do not care much about the declining performance evaluation due to the use of the leave" and "There is no heavy pressure because I am not dependent on the company".

On the other hand, reasons not to take leave include "I do not want to miss an interesting job while taking a leave, I don't think to take it because I'm worried whether I can return to my job properly after taking leave, and I will be negative for evaluation once I plan to take leave". All the reasons clearly indicate that personnel evaluations and subsequent careers are factors in determining the use of leave. In other words, reasons for using and not using the leave are related to the uncertainty of the personnel evaluation which arises from the subsequent ambiguity of one's career image. Also, most of them would not take leave if the level of uncertainty is high.

Summarizing the analysis of these factor influencing WLB in the workplace. interviews, we found that uncertainty about Employability will be discussed in detail in the one’s work, that is, employability, is the key next section.

Table 2 Results of the Interviews in Phase 1 and Phase 2

Questions	Answers
<p>Having taken a childcare leave (14 interviewees)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Yes (1) for 2 months ● No (13) but took 2-day off for childbirth (1) 	<p>Reasons for “Yes”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I did not have access to support of non-family for my childcare. ● I could not get help from others such as parents. <p>Reasons for “No”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● My wife was a full-time housewife. ● My wife was taking childcare leave at that time. ● I did not know the company policy that I (as a male worker) could take childcare leave. ● There was no such leave policy in my company at that time. ● I hadn’t even thought about I was applicable to take such leave. ● No one on my floor took it. ● I had a partner who takes care of our kids (so that no need to take leave). ● My wife and I had a division of roles – I earn money and she raises kids.
<p>Plan to take a childcare leave in the future (11 people including those who currently have no family)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Depending on (3) ● Yes (2) ● Want to plan - but maybe difficult (6) 	<p>Reasons for “Yes” (multiple reasons)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● No hesitation to taking leave. ● No one other than us can take care of our kids. ● I do not care much about the (human resource) evaluation down due to the use of these leave. ● There is no heavy pressure regarding performance downgrade because I am not dependent on the company. ● (I would not stay long at this company so) I do not care much about performance downgrade due to the use of leave. <p>Reasons for “No” (multiple reasons)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Would be difficult when considering a current job and position. ● I do not want to miss an interesting job while taking leave. ● My performance would be downgraded if I plan to take leave. ● I don’t think I need to take. ● My wife and I had a division of roles – I earn money and she raise kids.
<p>Having taken an elderly-care leave (17 people)</p>	<p>Yes (0) No (17) - but I limit my (geographical) area of work for supporting my parents with my brothers and sisters (1).</p>
<p>Plan to take an elderly-care leave (17 people)</p>	<p>No clear answer to the question, but they said the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I have never thought about it because my parents are in good shape now. ● I have never thought about it because nobody has taken the leave in my workplace. ● I rather must quit my job when I face this problem in the future. ● I would outsource it because elderly-care seems long-term and endless. ● I would end up relying heavily on my wife and my brothers and sisters to take care of my parents.
<p>How to deal with subordinates who ask to take/plan to take the leave (17 people)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I would deal with it positively and favorably (17). <p>However,...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Considering the size of my company, it would be a huge loss when one worker will take paid leave. ● It would be doubtful whether I could support the subordinate to make it happen. ● It would be difficult for me to decide - would depend on the types of jobs that the subordinate is in charge. ● From a fairness perspective, there would be some challenges for me regarding performance evaluation of the subordinate in the future. ● Even if I know it is valid and is necessary to take leave for parents and children, I will consider it (negatively) when evaluating the subordinate.

Framework Development

Based on the analysis above, this chapter develops a 2-by-2 matrix that consists of the two axes: substitutability of role at home (High-Low) and employability at work (High-Low). The following sections explain the two concepts one by one.

The substitutability at home

A role is a patterned characteristic of social behavior (Biddle, 1986), and in many cases, people are simultaneously responsible for multiple social roles (e.g., husband, father, a section chief, an employee). How one understands their role is somewhat influenced by 1) facing yourself and the meaning of his/her existence and 2) feedback from interacting with others in a social environment. This is because a role is not only an inwardly oriented idea but also largely influenced by feedback obtained in a social environment through interaction with others (Riley & Burke, 1995). In this regard, how one sees his/her role is synonymous with how one sees oneself. Also, roles do not exist independently but exist in a relationship with other roles (often a relationship with a counter-role). For example, the role of being a man or being a Japanese person exists only when there is a role that is not so (e.g., a woman, an American, etc.). In this way, it is the role identity that clarifies the role expected (expected) in the process of building and shaping one's own role (Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-McIntyre 2001).

In this research, role substitutability is defined as a concept that expresses the degree to which another person (e.g., Person B) can substitute the role of Person A at home other than work, or the degree to which the role of Person A and the role of Person B are interchangeable. Considering the process of role identity formation, there are two factors that determine the level of role substitutability (High-Low): individual introspection and social (external) environmental factors. A highly substitutable role can be the role that is not conceptually psychologically to the

individual, not so important, or not strongly conscious. In some cases, the environment surrounding the individual may not find much expectation or value in such a role.

If having a highly substitutable role, individuals may not recognize (or not notice) that the role is significant. In contrast, the role would be highly substitutable if people in charge see it as insignificant. The case of interviewees who said they did not know if they could take a childcare leave may consider their role at home somewhat substitutable. In fact, the interviewee who was told by his wife to keep working, as usual, may see his role as a father for a newborn baby as substitutable.

On the other hand, when having a role with low substitutability, individuals may consider that there is an expectation and a sense of value in playing such a role. In case the interviewee who took childcare leave for two months has some expectations from his wife. He then considered his role as a father quite significant and not substitutable. Also, since the role is "somewhat influenced by facing yourself and the meaning of his/her existence", there are cases where a person himself wants to add value to the role and fulfill it. Some of the interviewees who answered to take the leave in the future may see it as significant.

Employability at Work

Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth (2004) describe employability as a job-specific adaptation that determines the career of individuals and facilitates employment opportunities. Employability does not guarantee the employment of individuals since the ability can promote their movement between companies as well as within a company. However, in general, employability can be considered as "the ability to be employed". Dan (2003) describes this ability as the sum of "the ability to enable labor mobility" and "the ability to be exerted within the company and enable continuous employment". In other words, it can be said that it is a combination of "value inside the company" and "value outside the company".

It is relatively easy for highly employable people to leverage their skills and knowledge outside of their current company. Professionals, such as IT engineers, lawyers, and accountants, have relatively high levels of employment mobility, as skills and knowledge are more likely to be valued in the external labor market. On the other hand, people with low employability are cases where the “ability to enable labor mobility” or “value outside the company” as described by Dan (2003) is low or unclear. Although the labor market in Japan is now becoming active in some industries (e. g. IT engineers), mid-career recruitment has not yet reached the level of other countries. In this regard, most workers in a company have relatively low employability.

In cases where the value of the human resource is easily recognized outside the company, it is considered that skills and values are “visible” and “generalized”. Both the employer and the hired share their values, making it easier for both parties to plan their careers. However, most Japanese companies conduct personnel evaluations based on their years of experience that is associated with the ability to perform their duties unique to a particular company as well as the level of skill accumulation that is difficult to visualize and generalize. In this case, especially in the external labor market, it is difficult to determine the value of the ability or the ability to be used by other companies. The so-called “adverse selection” created by the asymmetry of information prevents trade in the labor market from being fluid. This is probably the main reason why the mid-career recruitment market has not developed in Japan.

This information asymmetry is occurring not only in the labor market (outside the company) but also within the company. If it is not clear what criteria are being evaluated, workers will behave as little as possible to their disadvantage. At the same time, it is highly probable that they would consider daily actions and judgment done by many people as the basis for their own judgment, the possibility of choosing unknown behaviors and judgments

is extremely low. Since it is considered that male full-time workers are often responsible for the family budget (as a breadwinner), the asymmetry of information on personnel evaluation between labor and management is considered to have a great impact on the utilization of the system. When analyzing the results of this interview from the above perspective, interviewees who answered that they would not use the WLB policy and practices due to personnel evaluation and subsequent career uncertainty can be under the information asymmetry.

When analyzing the results of this interview based on the discussion above, interviewees concerned with performance evaluation and the uncertainty of their careers after that can be under the information asymmetry. For example, some people cannot make decisions to take leave because they are not clear about their performance evaluation “after” coming back from the leave. On the other hand, interviewees who are clear about what kind of evaluation they have in the workplace or who think that they have high employability fall into the opposite category. The interviewee who answered that he would take a vacation as he wants in the future because “I don’t really care about the (personnel) evaluation down due to the usage of such (childcare) leave” would be a person in high employability.

The 2-by-2 Matrix

As mentioned, the levels of employability at work and substitutability of roles are important determinants of the use of childcare leave. This section develops a 2-by-2 matrix to explain 4 decision patterns (A to D) that are made by the high-low combination of employability and substitutability (Figure 1).

Quadrant A

It is assumed that male full-time workers who fit this quadrant see themselves low in employability at work and high in substitutability of roles at home. Among these cases, interviewees who think that someone

other than themselves can play a role in the home as well as mentioned some levels of concern regarding the impact of taking leave on their performance evaluation would fall into this quadrant. For example, the case where they answered “I didn’t need to use the leave because my wife is a full-time housewife” as well as “it would be difficult when considering a current job and position” are categorized in Quadrant A.

It seems that, for interviewees categorized in Quadrant A, the key point for decision making would be whether they use the expression such as “do not need to use” the leave when considering WLB. Since they have

someone who will play a role at home (instead of them) at that time or in the future, they do not (did not) take risks (meaning taking leave). In this study, most interviewees fall into this quadrant, which leads to the assumption that many full-time male workers with families in Japan might fall into this quadrant. In fact, there are many answers such as “I didn’t even know that there was the leave policy for us” and “I never thought that the leave policy would apply to me”, etc. Those answers indicate that the interests in WLB and its policies are not high for them, which is another feature of the full-time male workers in Japan.

		Employability at work	
		Low	High
Substitutability at home	High	Quadrant A Low Employability × High Substitutability “ <u>Won’t</u> take a leave” Low awareness of WLB problems	Quadrant B High Employability × High Substitutability “ <u>Can</u> take a leave” Low awareness of WLB problems
	Low	Quadrant D Low Employability × Low Substitutability “ <u>Cannot/Have to</u> take a leave” High awareness of WLB problems	Quadrant C High Employability × Low Substitutability “ <u>Will</u> take a leave” High awareness of WLB problems

Figure 1 2 by 2 Matrix of Employability and Substitutability

Quadrant B

It can be inferred that male full-time workers who fit into this quadrant (Quadrant B) recognize that they have high in employability and substitutability at home. Interviewees who answered such as “I don’t care about downgrading by taking leave for my kids”, “I’m not dependent on the company, so I’m not overwhelmed with the evaluation result”, and “I don’t intend to continue my current work” fall into this quadrant. In these cases, workers do not pay particular attention to the impact of the use of leave on their own personnel

evaluation and subsequent careers, since they think that they recognize their market value and the possibility of being employed by other companies. Employees who are in the quadrant must be confident of themselves and, as a result, they believe that they are high in employability. Consequently, they use the words such as “I can take leave when I need it”.

It seems that, for interviewees categorized in Quadrant B, the key point for decision making would be the confidence in their employability. There are no worries for them regarding the impact of taking leave on their

performance evaluations or future careers unless they can precisely recognize it. In addition, whether they have any other person who plays their substitutional role at home is not the main point for them when considering taking the leave.

Quadrant C

In terms of Quadrant C, those who fit into this quadrant recognize that they have high employability at work but low substitutability at home. For example, interviewees who consider their role at home is valuable and irreplaceable as well as they do not care much about evaluation results (downgrade) may fall into this quadrant. The basis of the judgment for people in this quadrant would be whether they voluntarily use the leave. Since they have no concerns about their career and evaluation, and they highly value their role at home, they will use the practice (leave) without any hesitation.

In the interview, there were no cases that exactly fit this quadrant. However, an interviewee who has a spouse with full-time work replied that he requested a transfer to a department that could allow his work schedule to be more flexible to take care of his baby. Although this case did not use the actual leave, it may be applicable to the case of the C quadrant in that it is possible to change jobs to the ideal workplace due to his high employability. Another interviewee who limited the area of work and provided care for parents in cooperation with their siblings would also apply to this quadrant. Furthermore, an interviewee of unmarried said that he would take childcare leave in the future and would not care about evaluation results.

Quadrant D

In terms of Quadrant D, those who fit into this quadrant recognize that they have low in both employ abilities at work and substitutability at home.

This quadrant infers that people who see their role at home as irreplaceable would take leave even though their employability

seems low. For example, the interviewees who answered “I was not in an environment where my spouse and I could get help other than our family” are categorized in the quadrant because he was a bit concerned with his performance evaluation (downgrading). Also, interviewees who said they wish they could take leave would also fall into this quadrant. Most of the time they do not (cannot) take leave even though their substitutability at home is low.

When considering the use of leave, the basis of the judgment for those in this quadrant would be whether they are available to take leave (rather than whether they voluntarily use the leave). An example of answers such as “I wish I could take leave, but in reality, it’s difficult” falls into the category. In addition, this quadrant also includes the case of “use unavoidably” with no choice at that time since there is nobody who takes a part of his role at home. Those who use the word “unavoidably” are in fact concerned with their performance evaluation and future career. Though they just ended up taking it, they use it carefully considering any possible negative effect on their evaluation. In this regard, people in Quadrant D pay much more attention to WLB policy and practices than those in any other quadrant.

Discussion

Findings from the Quadrant

When categorizing, it can be found that most interview results fall into Quadrant A. People in the quadrant generally have low employability and see themselves as highly substitutable at home. They have very little incentive to actively use leave due to the asymmetrical information regarding their performance evaluation and uncertainties in careers. Fortunately, at the time of the interview, they had someone (mostly their spouses) that alternatively took a part of their role at home, so they did not have to decide to use it. As mentioned, they see their role at home as a “breadwinner”, not a person with child-rearing and house chores. Then their

interpretation of their role at home (as breadwinner) has a large impact on the level of awareness regarding WLB policy and practices. The interviewees or people in Quadrant A seem to have no problem at a first glance, but there is a major problem behind them, which is the low level of awareness regarding their WLB issues at home. First, it is important to recognize that Quadrant A is built based on an unstable premise. In modern society, the probability that an individual can continue to work until retirement is relatively low. In addition, the so-called nuclear family is becoming more prevalent, and it is no longer normal that other family members such as grandparents can support child-rearing and house chores. Furthermore, they will soon face a serious problem called elderly care once they “graduate” from their childcare responsibility. Different from child-rearing, elderly care takes a long time and has no certain “graduation” point. At the time of elderly care, they themselves tend to have their own health problems and will have difficulty supporting their old parents. If their awareness of WLB issues remains low at this point, it may not be possible to handle the issue of elderly care. In fact, there are many cases in which male workers have troubles related to elderly care alone or quit their jobs without consulting with the workplace in Japan.

In this interview, most of the interviewees were in their late 30s to early 40s. Their generation has been the core cohort of the organization for at least the next 15 years, which means that most of the workplaces will be dominated by male workers with low WLB awareness. This condition may have some negative impact on the understanding and penetration of the WLB policy and practices. Even if the WLB problem is urgent among the younger generation, WLB practices such as childcare leave may not be utilized if there is a problem with the understanding and response of the boss.

However, the most important issue is dealing with people in Quadrant D, who wish to take leave without any concern of performance

evaluations (downgrading). This is because, according to the survey by Sato and Takeishi (2004), about half of the male participants with child-rearing wanted to take childcare leave, and about 10% had a strong hope to spend more time with their children. It means that there is a certain portion of male workers who have given up on their roles at home as well as giving up taking leave from the perspective of low employability.

Conclusions

The objective of this research is 1) to clarify the factors that influence the WLB awareness and decision-making of male full-time workers and 2) to build a conceptual framework (a 2-by-2 matrix) based on those factors. First, a series of interviews were conducted for male full-time workers about WLB issues, mainly focusing on questions about obtaining leave for childcare and nursing care. Based on the interview results, the research develops a 2-by-2 matrix to classify and explain attitudes and behaviors of the male workers toward acquiring a system.

Though findings from the interview cannot be generalized considering the sample size and method, they revealed that employability at work and substitutability of roles at home seem to be critical criteria for interviewees in terms of taking childcare (and elderly-care) leave. Employability is especially a matter of concern because it is closely related to career transparency. Past studies and surveys have already pointed out that male workers tend to be more attached to their careers (Taga, 2018). The study found that, in addition to the career itself, the transparency of performance evaluation that affects careers has a significant impact on WLB decision-making. In addition, analysis of the interview results revealed that for them “work” is the axis for maintaining their family and not a factor of “balancing” with their family issues.

Furthermore, the most interesting point is that interviewees generally considered their role at home as a breadwinner, and they

separate it from the role of performing daily housework and childcare. Rather, securing their employment may be more important for them than playing a role at home as a father or husband. This logic cannot be explained by previous studies conducted on the premise that “work and family/home should be balanced for childcare and housework”. This is because these studies do not take into account the cognitive difference in perceptions of men and women regarding “roles at home”. There might be male workers who recognize their role at home as the role of doing daily housework and childcare (especially in younger generations this way of thinking may be common), but the logic mentioned above would stay as the majority in an organization at least several years from now.

The mechanism that explains attitude toward taking leave clarified in this study differs from the mechanism in previous studies in that it incorporates personnel evaluations and career transparency as explanatory variables. This difference is developed on the premise of a society (mainly Western society) in which both father and mother have full-time jobs as well as the premise that this is the fundamental premise that work and family should be balanced regardless of gender. However, there are countries in which not all mothers work full-time, and society expects mothers to play a different role from that fathers. Researchers are advocating the need to focus on male workers to carefully consider how changes that occurred in Japanese society affect male workers’ societal and economical change is affecting male workers (Ikeda et al., 2018). The results of this study were valuable in that they highlighted the unique perspectives and ideas peculiar to male workers.

To address these issues, this research proposes the need to present a clearer career plan for full-time male workers, specifically the need to develop role models. As mentioned above, many male full-time workers are breadwinners for their families. Even though the number of dual-career couples will increase in the future, a major criterion to take leave for male workers would not change if

nothing were done to change their attitude toward WLB. For dealing with it, it is important for companies to reduce uncertainty or asymmetric information regarding the performance evaluation and career path in order to make them clarify what kind of change (or not) will occur in their career. Under the pressure of diversity management, companies try to develop career plans and role models for female and minority workers. However, the diversification of career plans not only for females but also for male workers would foster a variety of perspectives/values that would reduce the number of workers who give up taking leave. Having various role models in an organization may be a powerful as well as a persuasive tool for prevailing new work styles such as shortening working hours and work sharing.

It is important that a clearer career path should be provided together with 1) a device for increasing the transparency of personnel evaluation and 2) the device for clarifying individual duties (job description), which in turn can be translated into a visualization of individual employability. In general, it is difficult for companies to clarify performance criteria because it is closely related not only to internal systems such as salary, salary increase, and hiring/firing but also to external systems such as the labor market. In addition, it is possible to lose excellent human resources by increasing employability. However, In the process of clarifying job and employability, the evaluation axis would shift from “person him/herself” to “position”, which would promote another shift from in-house career competition and fairness discussion to a matter of individual career selection. Performance evaluation based on “position” leads to the acceptance of workers who are expected to work in various ways and leads to the increase of diversity in the workplace. As a result, workers who want to use childcare or elderly care leave will feel less regretful, while workers who do not use it will be able to work without feeling unfair. Also, it may provide solutions for the answers in the interview: “I do not take leave if it

affects my evaluation” and “It is difficult to allow leave for (subordinates) depending on the job”.

As Takeishi (2011) emphasizes, companies can expect to see results only when both the introduction of WLB policies and how they are implemented are considered. Companies must do more than simply analyze the opinions of users and should investigate the workplace environments that foster the view that the policies are easy to use. In other words, it is important to also look at how management, such as colleagues and supervisors, view the policies. This survey reveals the awareness of and attitudes towards WLB of male workers, who constitute at least 40% of workers and upwards of 90% of management levels. In doing so, we obtain considerable insight into their thoughts about WLB and how the workplace systems are implemented (used).

For Future Research

According to the past survey regarding the use of childcare leave, survey items such as “performance evaluation and treatment are appropriated” are not scored high for both persons with leave and those without leave. As is clear from the 2×2 matrices, the performance evaluation and treatment may not be the main issue for male workers who use it. However, when we pay attention to male workers without leave, who are the overwhelming majority at work, there would be a possibility to have different results if the survey questionnaire includes other items such as “spouse plays a role instead”, “feels unnecessary”, “low levels of understanding at work” etc. It means that they would not open their concerns regarding performance and career to the public. For future research, it will be necessary to investigate the effects of personnel evaluations and rewards more carefully on taking leave.

In addition, regarding the various WLB systems, it may be necessary to once again consider an operation method that is easily accepted by full-time male workers. The

interview revealed that male full-time workers showed considerable resistance to leaving work. In many cases, this is a natural reaction given that they consider themselves as breadwinners. In other words, if there are only two options for them, “use” and “do not use” the leave, it would virtually be the same as they have one option (= do not use).

Recently, the Japanese government has promoted male government officials to take a one-month leave without a bonus reduction (Nihon Keizai Shimbun, 2016). However, this type of promotion would not solve a fundamental problem, it would rather deteriorate the perception of fairness among workers regarding performance evaluation, which will make it harder for them to take leave for their children. It is necessary to think about how to operate the WLB practices from the perspective of workers who believe “work is the base” and “work is not a factor to balance with family”. The key is to increase options (e.g. reduced working hours, flex time, hourly leave) somewhere in the middle of whether or not to use leave for male full-time workers.

Continuing the study focusing on those with experience of childbirth, childcare, or elderly care is necessary for the development of WLB research. Under the recent severe economic and employment situation, companies are under pressure to introduce WLB policy and practices as a part of the “relationship between work satisfaction and daily life” and “productivity increase” (Cabinet Office, 2011). As mentioned earlier, research and policy proposals focused only on those with experience may widen the perceptual gap for WLB between those with it and those without it.

In Japan, where the birth rate is declining and the population is aging, the importance of workplaces that enable diverse work styles is becoming more important in the future. If workers must use employability at work and substitutability at home continuously as criteria for taking leave, companies will face a tough time for attracting and retaining talented workers because workers in the future

would highly unlikely work at the expense of family and vice versa. In this regard, clearly stating various career plans and providing role models for all workers at work would become an effective measure to reduce the risk of unnecessary exhaustion or the risk of losing talented human resources that may play a central role in a company. It is important to carefully understand the Japanese way of thinking and characteristics and to reform the consciousness in implementing WLB policies and practices.

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