

Changing Structure of the Quality of Manpower Required for New University Graduates: Analysis of the Interviews with Corporate Recruiting Staff

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By recruiting new graduates collectively, which has been one of the Japanese employment practice, companies have recruited new graduates for their future needs, and assigned them to various departments according to their aptitudes after providing basic training. Therefore, the basic abilities necessary for all positions were evaluated during the recruitment process, and the job-specific abilities would be evaluated after recruiting. However, after the burst of the bubble economy, companies have changed their policies for new graduates from massive recruiting to small number strict selection. It is said that even new graduates have been required to have “Ready to serve abilities”. Generally speaking, “Ready-to-serve abilities” refer to the abilities that can fulfill the needs of positions without any training. To fulfill the needs of positions, not only the abstract basic abilities but also the job-specific abilities are necessary. Have companies begun to require job-specific abilities to new graduates? If this is not true, are the abilities that companies require being conveyed exactly to students? This study researched these two tasks based on the results of interviewing recruiters. The abilities in this study refer to all the requirements for evaluation during the recruitment process, including personality, attitude, and motivation etc.

The research was conducted between July and September in 2005. The 42 well-known leading companies that cooperated in the interviews were all established before 1992 and had headquarters in metropolitan areas, and were composed of construction, manufacture, business, finance and service industries. Of these participants, this study analyzed 40 companies that had been recruiting students of humanities or social sciences or liberal arts informally until the start of the next term. In the interviews, the recruitment staff of those companies were asked the following seven questions about the activities where the companies employed the new graduates who majored in the above disciplines of 4-year-universities and how they are assigned in career-track jobs. 1) The recruitment process from the first contact with a student to giving him a job offer. 2) The abilities that determine whether the candidate is qualified or not in each phase of recruitment. 3) The specific indexes and methods which are used to confirm whether the abilities are found or not in the candidates. 4) Whether the current recruiting methods and abilities have changed since the beginning of 1990's. 5) The reasons why the recruiting methods/abilities have (or have not) changed. 6) The abilities of candidates to be evaluated are requested to be divided into the basic abilities necessary to all positions and job-specific abilities. 7) The relationship between the requirements on the job advertisements and the abilities mentioned in the interviews. The interviews' contents were analyzed as follows.

For task 1 of “Clarify whether companies have requested ‘Ready-to-serve abilities’ from new university graduates,” this study set two opposing hypotheses, and showed the cases from the research results corresponding to each hypothesis. Sixteen companies fell under hypothesis 1-1 of “Companies have either increased the standards of basic abilities from the new graduates, or added more advanced abilities.” Of the 16 companies, there were seven companies that increased the standards of the basic abilities that are required from new graduates, and there were ten companies that added new basic abilities. There are three companies corresponding to Hypothesis 1-2 of “Companies have requested job-specific abilities as well as basic abilities from new graduates.” For these companies, new graduates were handled not only as generalists but also as specialists. However, these 3 companies emphasized more basic abilities than job-specific abilities. From the above, it can be said that companies have become to emphasize advanced basic abilities instead of job-specific abilities.

For task 2 of “Compare the abilities evaluated during the recruitment process and the requirements in the

discourse”, hypothesis 2 of “The structure of abilities that are evaluated during the recruitment process matches with the requirements in the discourse” was studied with the following methods. In the past, the author analyzed words and phrases included in the recruiters’ comments for hiring new graduates which were appeared in the company directories for job hunting in 1971, 1986 and 2001. The results showed that the requirements from the companies in the discourse consisted of “general wordings,” which have been continuously used by many companies for many years, and “fashionable wordings,” which were used by many companies only for specific times. From 1971 until 2001, the meaning which fashionable wordings carry as a whole have evolved from “Aptitudes” of academic performance and basic abilities and common sense to “Posture” for achieving goals with curiosity, and from 1986 to 2001, the “guts-oriented mentality” aspect has been replaced with accomplishments that the graduates have actually achieved something. If hypothesis 2 is correct, the basic abilities evaluated in the recruitment process should match “general wordings” or “fashionable wordings” which were used by many companies in the year of 2001. Here, this study first listed the basic abilities evaluated by the companies from the interviews, and defined the top four abilities (“Intellect,” “Communication ability,” “Intention to set a goal and achieve it” and “Appearance”) as the “four elements of the basic abilities.” It can be explained that “Intellect” is the base for “Setting a goal and achieving it”, and “Appearance” and “Communication ability” are necessary to get help from others and support from customers by the process of achieving the goal. Also, the added abilities and the raised standards for the abilities, both found in task 1, matched all the “four elements of the basic abilities.” Furthermore, by comparing the “four elements of the basic abilities” with the requirements in the discourse, this study found that only the “Ability to set a goal and achieve it” and “Appearance” were the matched elements. Within “Intellect”, “Logical thinking” was included in “fashionable wordings,” but “Academic level” and “Smartness” were not included. Within “Communication ability,” “Self-assertiveness” was included in them, but “Cooperativeness” and “Self-disclosure” were not included.

Consider the above analysis results. This study suggests the possibility that there is a recognition gap between companies and students. The mass media that is the main information source for students in searching for jobs has been emphasizing the “Ability to set a goal and achieve it.” The abilities that do not appear in the mass media are taken as if they were unnecessary to get a job, despite the fact that they are emphasized more in reality as the basis of the “Ability to set a goal and achieve it.” Consequently students are very actively engaged in schoolwork, club activities or part time jobs to talk about “Experiences what you have done on your own” in the job interviews. University life is becoming the means of getting a job more and more. In the future, if the job-specific abilities are emphasized, universities will become more like a preschool for employment. However, there might be the abilities that cannot be obtained from the university life as the means. Also, it could be assumed that the experiences of devoting themselves to the activities for their own sakes contribute to their vocational lives. So long as companies require the vocational training from universities, the companies are obliged to convey what they really want to the universities and students. Then, both universities and companies should address themselves so that the young people might spend their students’ lives as an objective in stead of a means of getting a job