

CHAPTER II

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF JAPANESE HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

In order to properly respond to the changes in environmental conditions mentioned earlier, how should the HRD react? To grasp this problem the characteristics of Japanese HRD system should be made clear.

As has been mentioned the training system that has supported the post-war Japanese economic growth has been based on OJT (on-the-job training). OJT in this context means a training method that trains less skilled workers during work and it is definitely not limited to passively watching other people work and learning from it, that is, OJT is not a synonym of "sitting by Nelly". Structures preventing OJT from becoming like "sitting by Nelly" is built into the workshop organization and this context of the structure should be made clear so that the characteristics of Japanese style HRD can be identified and the pertinent guideline for HRD from now on can be grasped.

A crucial condition for establishing OJT as a effective learning method has been the high educational level and popularity of secondary education, which has provided the readiness for worker's continuous leaning. Other conditions can be put as follows:

1. Motivating factors for self development at work
2. A view of labour as a mean to achieve human growth through work, and role allocation based upon individual abilities
3. The practice of long-range, fair evaluation of occupational capabilities
4. Planned and systematic training for key persons in charge of OJT
5. Mutual cooperation among employees is facilitated.

(1) Motivational factors promoting self-development

To set up an effective learning system the first condition is to provide motivation for self-development. It

is clear, that a situation where people aspire for self development is crucial for effective learning.

The practice of training the needed technically skilled people within the company has had a great role in backing up this motivation. (note 3)

In pursuing their goals companies have arranged their inner roles and positions in a pyramid-like shape. When technical skill development occurs within a company, the vacant posts at the higher levels in the pyramid are filled with people from below. Thus, as people can expect to be elevated into higher positions they are eager to acquire qualifying skills. During the post war high-growth period company organizations expanded and many vacancies emerged in the top layers of companies. This clearly contributed to the upward aspiration of employees.

- (2) A view of labour as a means to achieve human growth through work and a flexible role distribution based upon individual abilities

Labour is a tedious way to earn ones living, but at the same time it is also inner-directed activity which gives an opportunity to self-actualization and participation as a member of society. Various attitude surveys reveal, that Japanese workers have a tendency to see life fulfillment in the process of performing their tasks. This kind of view of labour tends to bind employees closer to their work. (Table 2-1)

An important thing here is whether the work includes factors that contribute to human growth. If tasks are simplified to the extent that people cannot be devoted to their work a learning function cannot be expected in the work as such. (note 4)

The methods of scientific management, including standardization and division of work into narrow repetitive tasks have been used to increase productivity in Japan too. However, there are hardly any companies that have tried to separate thinking from doing and allot it to specialists by means of work organization arrangements. On the contrary,

there are a lot of firms that utilize flexible arrangements based on individual abilities and aptitudes and plan for enlargement of skills. Further, small group activities like QC circles and ZD movement have had a important role in creating more enriched jobs. (note 5)

(3) Fair long-range evaluation standards of occupational capabilities

It cannot be denied that educational records play an important role in determining positions and roles within companies. However, the educational records are most important in recruitment and initial selection. After the hiring individual ability and skill gains more weight in the evaluation system.

If this is seen from the point of view of wage and salaries, it is clear that the work type and educational background-based differences in wage and salaries are smaller in Japan than in Western countries (Figure 2-1,2). Further, in Japan evaluations are not made on apparent, short-term accomplishments, but rather on potential, long-term abilities and prospects and this affects also the determining of wage and salary levels (Figure 2-2).

This kind of wage system tends to strengthen a sense of fairness and also strengthen individual leaning towards long-range goals.

(4) Planned and systematic training of key persons in charge of OJT

It should not be overlooked that not a few companies make great efforts in implementing the formal in-company training system for skilled workers that by the means of classroom training aims at upgrading the abilities of foremen and supervisors. Some employers have carried out so called authorized in-company vocational training under the authorization of the prefectural governor. Authorized vocational training is the initial training carried out according to the

standards set by Ministry of Labour. Its aim is to train new recruits to be versatile workers with technical knowledge as well as basic skills. The number of those who have received this in company executed, officially approved training has, since the inauguration of the system in 1947, reached one million persons.

Key skilled workers trained under this system serve as technicians and workshop supervisors, lead OJT and small group activities and further shoulder the role of intermediators between skilled workers and engineers. These key skilled workers have also served as outside controllants in subcontracting firms, thus contributed to the diffusion of skills and technologies within the Japanese industrial structure.

Further, this system has become an object of social respect and contributed to leading the brighter junior high and senior high school graduates into technical occupations in the industrial sector (note 7).

(5) Mutual cooperation among employees

In a work organization backed by prospects of long term stable employment the cooperative relations among employees also serve as to make the OJT more functional.