

# Positioning Vocational Training and Recurrent Education as "Lifelong Learning"

Vocational training and recurrent education have been regarded as important issues for the past several decades, but outcomes have been limited in these areas.

What do we need to do in order to create effective mechanisms that adapt to changes in society and technology?

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### Creating New Frameworks for Vocational Training and Recurrent Education – The Necessity for Urgent Responses to the Era of the "100-year Lifespan"

Noriyuki Yanagawa

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Keywords...Era of 100-year lifespan, rapid changes in the business environment, importance of improvement of skills, prior examples in Northern Europe, ambitious initiatives in Singapore, regional and in-situ initiatives

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### Positioning Vocational Training and Recurrent Education as "Lifelong Learning"

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Professor, College of Economics, Rikkyo University

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Head of Business & Development, TRR

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Michael Fung

Deputy Chief Executive Officer, SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG)

Keywords...Rapid change in skills, longer working life, transition to "lifelong learning model," SkillsFuture, "4 + 20" model, strong collaboration with stakeholders

#### Entrench mechanisms to allow "learning" to be visualized

Satoko Tatsumi

Chief Researcher, Recruit Works Institute

Keywords...Further study by working people, outcomes/returns commensurate with investment in further study, made-to-order further study, output-oriented further study, adult learning, Lifelong Learning

#### Universities will provide further study that meets the needs of their region

Takebumi Kirihara

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Keywords...Recurrent education, collaboration between universities, local governments and local companies, "custom courses," requirements on academic disciplines, further study that leads to career advancement

Interview period : December, 2020

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About this Issue

# Creating New Frameworks for Vocational Training and Recurrent Education

– The Necessity for Urgent Responses to the Era of the "100-year Lifespan"



**Noriyuki Yanagawa**

NIRA Executive Vice President/  
Professor, Graduate School of  
Economics, The University of Tokyo

The term "100-year lifespan" is now used quite naturally in Japan, and we are entering an era in which the majority of people, even if they work until retirement age, will be expected to then work in a second career. Additionally, the environment surrounding companies is changing rapidly; the number of people who voluntarily change jobs is increasing, while at the same time, the number of people who have no choice but to change companies or industries is also increasing. Japanese society is already becoming one in which it is no longer natural to continue working at one company for one's entire life.

Against the background of these changes, the importance of "recurrent education," education that allows workers to learn the skills necessary for new jobs and for new companies, is being emphasized. This stems from an awareness that workers need to acquire new skills and new knowledge in order to adapt to a new environment and flourish in it. Even if a worker continues to work for the same company, upgrading their skills is important to their ability to play an active role in that company. Vocational training and recurrent education are essential from this perspective also.

However, because long-term employment has been a fundamental assumption in Japan, we have relied on in-house education and in-house training for skill development, and while the importance of vocational training and recurrent education is strongly recognized, there has not been adequate discussion of the type of mechanisms that we need to create in this area, and everyone concerned seems to have adopted a "wait and see" attitude. This issue of "*My Vision*" therefore considers what specific points should be focused on when creating mechanisms for recurrent education, and what should be focused on and considered salient factors in the creation of such mechanisms. Our interviewees in this issue are domestic and foreign experts with a considerable degree of experience in the fields of recurrent education and vocational training.

## Participation of Labor and Management to Reflect a New Vision

In the area of recurrent education, Northern European policies are well known as providing pioneering examples. Takashi Suganuma, a Professor at Rikkyo University, informs us that Denmark's vocational training program was jointly created by labor and management, and that private-sector labor unions and employers' organizations are also involved in its operation. The acquisition of new qualifications through vocational training allows workers in Denmark to find jobs with good conditions, which is significantly different to the situation in Japan. Professor Suganuma indicates as a problem the fact that labor and management in Japan do not share a vision for the reorganization of the Japanese labor market in the future, nor for the best direction for new labor and management relations.

Ulrika Wiklund, Head of Business & Development for TRR, a non-profit foundation that provides reemployment support services in Sweden, explains how TRR supports workers whose employment has been terminated or who will be subject to being laid off in making the transition to new employment. TRR counselors offer advice to enable the worker to choose a career autonomously; the organization also matches workers with relevant job information, offers individual guidance, and

provides further study programs. TRR provides a full range of services, including offering financial assistance representing 70% of the worker's pre-dismissal income and short-term subsidies for education, for a support period of up to two years. Ms. Wiklund explains that these mechanisms are funded by revenue from employment premiums based on collective agreements.

## **Meeting Diverse Needs / Providing Incentives for Further Study**

Michael Fung, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of SkillsFuture Singapore, discusses Singapore's ambitious initiatives in the area of lifelong learning. In Singapore, a decline in the labor force exacerbated by the aging of the population is a serious issue, and the need to make education and training systems flexible in order to meet diverse needs throughout life has become clearly highlighted. In this case also, strong partnerships between multiple stakeholders including governments, industry bodies, and labor unions, are an important factor. Dr. Fung also discusses very interesting initiatives such as a system started by the National University of Singapore that allows students with a four-year bachelor's degree to return to the university and improve their skills at any time over the next 20 years.

On the other hand, as Satoko Tatsumi, a Senior Researcher at Recruit Works Institute, points out, in Japan there is still the problem that it is difficult to discern outcomes and returns that are commensurate with the time and money invested in further study, and this is a factor that impedes progress in the use of further study and recurrent education among working people. Dr. Tatsumi indicates the necessity for "output-oriented" vocational training and recurrent education that emphasizes the utilization of what is learned in the individual's actual work, and for services that recommend the type of further study that is necessary for the individual, and how they can put what they have learned to use.

## **Regional and In-situ Initiatives**

Takebumi Kirihara, a Lecturer at Ibaraki University's Social Collaboration Center, introduces a recurrent education program commenced by Ibaraki University in fiscal 2019. The program offers courses featuring curricula designed to meet the specific needs of the region, which are individually coordinated with local companies and local governments, and Mr. Kirihara tells us that the level of student satisfaction is high. There is a great need for students to acquire the basic perspectives and ways of thinking that universities can provide, and Mr. Kirihara indicates the importance of universities that are strongly rooted in their respective regions providing basic education that meets the needs of their region in collaboration with local governments and local companies.

As this suggests, while Japan may be semi-fumbling towards a conception of the type of content that is appropriate and the type of mechanisms by which recurrent education should be conducted, most people would not deny its importance. I strongly hope that the type of recurrent education that is required at every location can be realized as soon as possible, and that the meaningful initiatives implemented in Japan and the other countries discussed in this issue will serve as a reference.

Professor Yanagawa is an Executive Vice President of the Nippon Institute for Research Advancement (NIRA), and a Professor in the Graduate School of Economics, The University of Tokyo. He holds a Ph.D. in Economics from The University of Tokyo, and specializes in contract theory and financial contracts. Professor Yanagawa is a member of the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy.

Expert Opinions

## A Danish Vocational Training Program Created Jointly by the Government, Labor and Management



**Takashi Suganuma**

Professor, College of Economics,  
Rikkyo University

Denmark has a policy of "flexicurity" that brings together the establishment of a highly flexible labor market ("flexibility") with the protection of workers through social security ("security"). Vocational training, which the Danish government considers to be a highly effective strategy, occupies a particularly important position within this policy orientation.

The particularly noteworthy characteristic in the case of Denmark is the fact that labor and management have cooperated to jointly create a vocational training program. The government's Council for Basic Vocational Training, which is made up of representatives of labor and management, considers the type of skills that will be needed for the Danish economy in the future, and constantly reviews vocational training guidelines on this basis. Following these guidelines, local vocational training schools create

vocational training programs in cooperation with labor unions and employers' organizations. This mechanism makes it possible to discover new essential skills and effectively develop the abilities that are suited to them.

Labor-management collaboration is also an integral aspect of the operation of vocational training schools. The majority of Denmark's vocational training schools are public facilities owned by the municipality (Komune), but representatives of labor and management are members of the board of directors. Skills acquired in training programs jointly created by labor and management are fairly evaluated in the labor market.

Because the acquisition of a new qualification through vocational training will enable workers to find a job with good conditions, they have a strong incentive to take the training. The outcomes of training can be reflected in wages because labor and management have historically developed job descriptions that evaluate wages by expressing workers' skills and experience using objective indicators. The fact that they are provided with benefits to ensure their livelihood while undergoing training is also appealing to workers.

By contrast, Japanese vocational training emphasizes the power of the private sector. It therefore tends to be entrusted to private vocational schools, and there is no joint development by labor and management of the skills that the society requires. As a result, there is a high level of uncertainty with regard to how skills that are acquired will be evaluated in the labor market. In addition, the scale of public vocational training schools is small, and there is little involvement by labor and management in their operation. Because of this, training programs are updated infrequently, and there is a low level of skill training that anticipates changes in the economy and society. At the root of this is the fact that Japanese labor and management have not been able to share a vision of how to reorganize the Japanese labor market in the future and of the best direction for new labor-management relations. It is clear that Japanese employment practices, which have been based on advancement by seniority, lifetime employment, and on-the-job training, have reached a deadlock. It is to be hoped that labor and management will take a broad perspective and jointly discuss the type of labor-management relations and the type of labor market they will seek to create.

Professor Suganuma teaches in Rikkyo University's Faculty of Economics. A specialist in social policy, he conducts research on Denmark, which is attracting attention as providing a new model of the welfare state, and studies the potential restructuring of social security systems and the labor-management relations and economic structures that can support an advanced welfare state. Professor Suganuma completed his graduate studies at The University of Tokyo, and holds a Ph.D. in Economics. He took his current position in 2005, following terms in positions including Assistant Professor at Shinshu University and Assistant Professor at Rikkyo University, and was the Dean of Rikkyo University's Faculty of Economics from 2017 to March 2019.

Expert Opinions

# Achieving Results Through a Commitment to Autonomous Career Choice



**Ulrika Wiklund**

Head of Business & Development,  
TRR

TRR is a Swedish job security council. It is a non-profit foundation providing services that support workers who have been made redundant or laid off in realizing their next direction, for example finding new employment. TRR is based on a collective agreement between private companies and trade unions. We cover approximately 950,000 white collar employees of approximately 35,000 companies, and we typically provide support for about 13,000 employees per year.

TRR's strength is the fact that we provide support to both workers and companies. We are able to start discussions with the HR department and management personnel of a company that intends to reduce its workforce at a very early stage, and commence providing support for employees to transition to new employment before they have been let go. Intervening in a situation in which workers will be made redundant at the earliest possible stage, based on the principle of "striking while the iron is hot," is the key to a smooth transition.

TRR does not have a one-size-fits-all approach to the provision of support for worker transition. We have three types of approach: the worker might find a new job, start their own company, or engage in further study. We provide support based on these three paths, while clarifying the wishes of the individual. It is always based on individual needs. TRR counsellors specialize in the provision of advice that allows the individual to make their own autonomous career choices. In order to maintain the quality of counselling, we have started our own internal TRR Academy, and in addition we collaborate with partners including the International Coaching Federation (ICF), a specialist coaching organization, and Great Leaders, a specialist training organization that fosters trust and motivation.

During the period of provision of support (a maximum of two years), the worker will be matched with employers that are recruiting based on the information that TRR gathers, in addition to being provided with a variety of other services. In parallel with individual coaching and guidance, they receive services that suit their needs and circumstances from among workshops, webinars, further study programs, skill-enhancing activities, and more. The provision of steady financial assistance during this period is also attractive. In addition to receiving financial assistance representing 70% of their former salary, short-term subsidies and government loans for study are also available. This means that the workers experience minimal financial anxiety.

All of these services are made possible by insurance premium revenue based on collective agreements. Adequate funding is the reason that TRR has financial muscle. More than 90% of TRR's clients will decide on their new path within six months following the commencement of support. A majority achieve equal or higher salaries or positions as they had in their previous job, and user satisfaction is therefore high. The trust, commitment, and results obtained in this way are TRR's core values.

Ms. Wiklund has overseen labor law and negotiations at the Swedish job security council TRR for many years. She has held a variety of executive positions for 10 years, including Head of Negotiation and Regional Officer. TRR specializes in assisting private-sector white-collar workers already in the labor market to find a new direction, while state-run job centers primarily focus on the long-term unemployed and young people who have dropped out of school. This separation of target groups gives the two a complementary relationship. TRR provides a variety of services, different learning programs and workshops, in order to meet the needs of its clients. Ms. Wiklund holds a Master's degree in Law, with a major in labor law.

## Expert Opinions

# In the Era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, a Lifelong Learning Model is Essential to Our Systems of Education and Training



**Michael Fung**

Deputy Chief Executive Officer,  
SkillsFuture Singapore (SSG)

As a consequence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and increasingly rapid changes in jobs and skills, workers are expected to have to update and refresh their skills on average six times throughout their working lives. In Singapore in particular, an aging population is exacerbating the shrinking of the workforce, making lifelong learning and skills development important factors in enabling workers to remain employable for a longer period of their lives. In order to respond to this situation, it will be necessary to realize a transition in education and training systems to a lifelong learning model that is able to flexibly adapt to the diverse needs of learners throughout their lives.

SkillsFuture is a national movement launched in 2014 in Singapore to develop the skills, passion and contributions of every individual towards an advanced economy and inclusive society. Building upon four decades of workforce development efforts, the government, institutions of higher education, employers, and others have been collaborating to realize such a lifelong learning model. For example, institutions of higher education offer short-form modular courses enabling working adults to acquire skills in eight emerging domains – data analytics, finance, tech-enabled services, digital media, cybersecurity, entrepreneurship, advanced manufacturing, and urban solutions – at basic, intermediate, and advanced levels. Among these initiatives, the National University of Singapore has moved to a model of “4 + 20” for its undergraduate education, whereby students graduating with a 4-year bachelor’s degree can come back to the university for the subsequent 20 years to upskill themselves. Singaporeans pursuing these diverse learning opportunities are provided with financial assistance on course fees. In addition, all Singaporeans (aged 25 and above) are given a SkillsFuture Credit of SGD500, which can be used for some 20,000 courses.

A regular annual national survey indicates that the training participation rate is increasing. In addition, 8 in 10 Singaporeans who attended SkillsFuture-funded courses last year found that their training helped them in their work. One of the factors in the success of the movement is its promotion across a broad range of skills, including foundational digital skills. For example, the National Taxi Association has supported close to 10,000 taxi drivers to pick up essential digital skills such as using e-payment applications. Cross-collaboration with multiple stakeholders, involving government agencies, industry bodies, unions, enterprises, and education and training providers, is another factor in the success of the SkillsFuture movement. One example is the development of the Skills Frameworks. To date, over 30 Skills Frameworks have been rolled out for sectors such as aerospace, electronics, and financial services.

Education and training systems need to be even more agile, flexible and innovative than before. A truly effective lifelong learning system cannot be delivered by the public sector alone. A multi-stakeholder approach is required. Everyone needs to play a part in building up a responsive and effective skills ecosystem in the spirit of the lifelong learning paradigm.

Dr. Fung is a specialist in human capital, education and skills development. He oversees the development of Singapore's continuing education and training systems at SkillsFuture Singapore, a statutory body under the jurisdiction of the Singapore Ministry of Education. He is also the organization's Chief Human Resource Officer and Chief Data Officer. Dr. Fung is also a Senior Adjunct Fellow of the Singapore University of Technology and Design, and President of the Higher Education Planning in Asia Association (HEPA). He served in positions including Director of Planning and Institutional Research at Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) and Senior Advisor in the Office of the President before assuming his current position. Dr. Fung is well-known as a leader in fields including university strategic and academic planning and the assessment of institutional effectiveness. He holds a Doctorate in Education from the University of Southern California's Rossier School of Education.

Expert Opinions

## Entrench Mechanisms to Allow “Learning” to Be Visualized



**Satoko Tatsumi**

Chief Researcher,  
Recruit Works Institute

Why are education and recurrent education not making more progress among working people in Japan? This is because the majority of people have few opportunities to experience the benefits of further study at work. With the exception of IT engineers and individuals in certain other occupations, workers will not find new positions or realize pay increases as a result of receiving vocational training or education, and it is therefore difficult to see any outcome or return that is commensurate with the time and money invested in further study.

Until the 1990s, it was assumed that individual career development would take place within an organization. Today, however, as symbolized by the term "career autonomy," there is an emphasis on the idea that each individual independently creates their own career. What should recurrent education look like in such an era?

Much vocational training and recurrent education in Japan is based on the premise of a number of students acquiring a set of skills together. Most of the associated frameworks are provided as a “package” type, in which the content to be learned is predetermined. The transition should be made to a "made-to-order” type, allowing each individual to learn by combining what they specifically need. In addition, many programs are offered as "input-oriented” types, with an emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge. These should be changed to "output-oriented” types that emphasize the utilization of what is learned in actual work. Rather than shrinking further study in order to fit a template, it will be necessary to fit further study to the needs and purposes of the individual.

However, there may also be people who are not aware of what they should learn in order to develop their careers. If a person does not know what kind of further study is necessary for them and how to use what they have learned, they will find it difficult to learn via either the custom-made or output-oriented types. In past surveys conducted by Recruit Career, less than 30% of respondents answered that they knew what they should learn\*. In order to respond to these cases, it should surely be possible to develop a service that analyzes worker movement data and indicates the type of further study necessary to move on to the next stage and the career prospects to be expected, and makes appropriate recommendations, as has already been trialed in online further study courses such as Coursera.

In Japan as elsewhere, it will become easier for workers to select the type of further study they need if there is a range of choice with regard to what they learn, how they learn, and options in relation to the period in which they learn, and if they are clearly shown that further study and their career are linked.

\* Recruit Career, "Happiness at Work Survey" (2017)

Dr. Tatsumi is a Chief Researcher with Recruit Works Institute. She conducts surveys and research focusing on careers, career education, and adult further study (further study for working people and recurrent education), around the theme of the connection between work and learning. She is also a member of committees convened by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

Expert Opinions

## Universities Will Provide Further Study That Meets the Needs of Their Region



**Takebumi Kirihara**

Lecturer, Ibaraki University  
Social Collaboration Center

Ibaraki University commenced offering recurrent education in fiscal 2019. At that time, we established the "Ibaraki Roundtable concerning Recurrent Education for Working People," a forum for universities, companies, and local governments to exchange opinions on the best direction for adult education, and we created mechanisms to allow the opinions of the region to be reflected in further study programs.

As recurrent education for working adults, we established three streams: "open courses," organized mainly around conventional extension lectures; "specialized courses," which set specific themes such as the environment or multicultural understanding and themes based on policies implemented by local governments, etc.; and "custom courses," which enable content to be customized. Of these, the custom courses allow curricula to be tailored in coordination with local companies and local governments. The provision of opportunities for customized further study when local companies and other entities have understood what the university can offer means that our students have a high level of satisfaction.

For example, following careful advance discussions with Sekisho Corporation, a general trading company in the region, we gained a detailed understanding of the company's issues and strategies, and we are now offering broad-ranging related content, such as teaching methods of gaining knowledge of the regions and markets into which the business is expanding. The aim is to have the habit of thinking for oneself take root through academic study, rather than providing students with the purpose-driven "how-to" practical training provided by consultants.

I feel that there is a great potential need for students to acquire the basic perspectives and ways of thinking that universities can offer them in each of the three streams. What students are seeking is not something that represents a hobby separate from work, but they are also not engaging in further study in order to acquire qualifications, change their job, or seek reemployment; they seek further study that will enable them to improve their career in their current job. For example, we had a case in which a person in a technical managerial position took a course in order to systematically acquire knowledge in fields such as business administration, which would be useful for the type of duties that must be performed by a manager. Universities can meet such needs by presenting a wide range of subjects. Students have commented that further study has changed their work style, the quality of cooperation in their workplace has improved, and the way they use time has changed and their work-life balance has improved.

I believe that one of the roles of a university rooted in its region is to provide fundamental education that meets the needs of the community through recurrent education in collaboration with local governments and local businesses. Our aim is to develop human resources who will be the pillars of Ibaraki Prefecture in the future in cooperation with the government and industry.

Mr. Kirihara is a Lecturer at the Ibaraki University Social Collaboration Center, where he oversees recurrent education. From 2018, he was involved in preparations for the opening of Ibaraki University's recurrent education program in 2019. Making frequent visits to local businesses and local governments, he deepened understanding of recurrent education, and identified the potential needs of various regional stakeholders for recurrent education. Mr. Kirihara took his current position following a long period as a teacher at Ibaraki Prefectural High School, and terms in positions including as an Assistant Counselor in the Senior High School Education Division of the Ibaraki Prefectural Board of Education, the Principal of Ibaraki Prefectural Oarai High School, and the Principal of Ibaraki Prefectural Mito Commercial High School. During his period of employment in high schools, he was also a long-term member of the Board of Education in addition to serving as the Principal of a commercial high school, and as a result he has close ties to local governments and industries.

This is a translation of a paper originally published in Japanese. NIRA bears full responsibility for the translation presented here.  
Translated by Michael Faul.

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