

Organizational Strength and Individual Career: A Qualitative Study on Individual Career Formation in the Newspaper Industry

Hiromi Cho and Kuniko Ishiguro

Abstract—This study analyzes an individuals' career development as well as strength of the organizations in the newspaper industry in order to find a source for guiding the strength of the organization, because the newspaper industry has a significant impact on public opinion and society.

Testimonies, which had been taken from ten interviews in two national newspaper companies in Japan, were analyzed.

There were some notable differences in corporate culture between the two companies. One had a considerably "free" culture whereas another was "bureaucratic." These organizational differences were considered to affect reporters/writers whose article subsequently influences public opinion. In both companies, employees had a strong pride and identity as journalists, working in a professional enterprise. One factor enabling a formation of an enhanced organization with a sense of unity might be that journalists with the highest level of intelligence and business accomplishment ability work in Japanese newspaper companies. At the same time, this might be because people having strong motivation and sense of mission for newspaper production joined the company.

Index Terms—Corporate culture, interviews, Japanese newspaper industry, journalists' career development, organizational strength.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study analyzes an individual's career development as well as strength of the organizations in the newspaper industry in order to find a source for guiding the strength of the organization.

The authors conducted research about career formation in newspaper publishing companies in 2013, because the newspaper industry has a significant impact on public opinion and society, and a lot of local newspapers in addition to national newspapers have continued to be read by the people in Japan. The original purpose of that previous study was to understand career formation in organizations with a focus on special professions, such as reporters and editors working in a special department [1]. In their research in 2014, the system for personnel promotion of two major national newspapers was analyzed from the viewpoint of the personnel change in the organization, and it was found that the lifelong employment system and seniority system existed with regard to the profession in the newspaper industry.

Based on these results from the previous study in 2014 [1], we further developed qualitative research focusing on individuals who operate in newspaper organizations.

II. PERSONNEL SYSTEM OF JAPANESE FIRMS/CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NEWSPAPER INDUSTRY

Many studies have paid special attention to employment systems, such as lifetime employment, seniority, and the enterprise-based unions, as something peculiar to Japan [1]-[3]. Comparing with employment systems in foreign countries, Sato indicated four points regarding the Japanese employment system as follows [2]. 1) It promotes skill formation in versatile workers through "on-the-job training" and "a wide range of rotation" [4], [5]. 2) It is widespread in an internal labor market where wages rise through many work steps and length of service. 3) It is organized as a community that makes workers of the enterprise members of "the community." 4) An employee's identity is determined through their connection to a company rather than through their individual occupations, such as a specialist or a skilled worker.

Because enterprises valued market strategies as a response to economic depression and slump of the Japanese company for 20 years since the 1990s, Morishima proposed that companies neglected to improve organizational structure, which previously was strength of the Japanese company [3]. Morishima also points out that the weakening of an organization leads to a weakening of solidarity in the workplace, a decline in workplace vitality due to a decrease of motivation in employees, and along with it, a functional weakness of on-the-job training due to a decline in workplace communication and solidarity. In order for Japanese companies to recover long-term competitive power, it is necessary to strengthen fundamental processes, such as the communication within the company and reliance among employees. At the same time, while encouraging individual employees' autonomous creativity, such creativity should be systematized by an effective leader's leadership, and both individuals and organizations should always aim at enterprise transformation [3].

As for the trend in the newspaper industry in Japan, newspaper circulation has been sluggish for the past 15 years after peaking in 1997, and "an aversion to newspapers" has developed [6], [7]. Two important characteristics of the Japanese newspaper industry are "the press club system" and "the individual home delivery system."

The general organizational structure of Japanese

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Hiromi Cho is with the Department of Media and Communications, Toyo University, Tokyo, Japan (e-mail: cho@toyo.jp).

Kuniko Ishiguro is with the Faculty of Foreign Studies at Bunkyo Gakuin University, Tokyo, Japan (e-mail: kishiguro@bgu.ac.jp).

newspapers can be roughly divided into two areas: 1) divisions or bureaus related to news reporting, writing, editing and editorial, and 2) those related to operations such as advertising, sales and management. Under the editorial bureau, there are various divisions such as Political, Economic, Social, International, and Culture. It is not unusual for large Japanese newspaper companies to locate several bureaus in provinces across Japan, around the world, with additional head offices in Japan. On the other hand, there are some operation related sections: sales, advertising, human resources, finance, corporate planning. Various career paths are standard for people who work as journalists: generally spending a lifetime as a reporter/writer, becoming a manager, changing over to a free-lance journalist [8]. Employees involved in news reporting/writing/editing, and employees related to the business follow in a separate career path in each field.

In the following chapters, careers built by journalists in Japanese newspaper companies are analyzed and discussed.

III. METHOD/DATA

In this study, the authors investigated two national newspaper companies in Japan — Company A and Company B — and conducted interviews with five participants from each company. Company A has daily circulation of 8 million, the 2nd largest newspaper company in Japan as well as in the world. Company B's daily circulation is 3.5 million, the 3rd largest in Japan, the 4th in the world [9], [10]. Both companies have published newspapers since the 1870s and have a long history [11], [12]. These two companies were chosen for this study because of high sales, nationwide distribution, and possible access to employees for the authors.

Five interviewees at general manager level or higher who are considered to have a lot of experience were selected from each company.

A ninety-minute semi-structured interview for each person was conducted in a company designated meeting room in July 2014 for Company A, and August 2014 for Company B. All the conversation during the interviews was recorded with an IC recorder, and transcripts were made immediately after the interviews.

Analysis was carried out by noting similar/dissimilar points between the two companies, especially, in 1) an academic background and a career path in the company, 2) motivation for joining the company and continuing employment, and 3) attitude toward the company and the newspaper industry.

IV. FOUR NOTEWORTHY TOPICS FOUND IN THIS STUDY

In this section, four noteworthy topics will be analyzed by quoting the testimony of each interviewee in the two companies: 1) motivation for joining the company and continuing employment, 2) career path in the company, 3) job training, and 4) corporate culture.

A. Motivation for Joining the Company and Continuing Employment

Finding employment in a newspaper company is considered to be a high hurdle because a variety of abilities such as knowledge, reporting, writing, expression skills and high motivation are required. As shown in Table I, interviewees in this study have extremely high educational backgrounds, and all of them, except one, graduated from the department of law or the department of social sciences.

One remarkable thing found by this study is that all the interviewees in both Company A and Company B chose their job at the newspaper company with a clear sense of purpose even though events that triggered joining the company had varied. They have a strong sense of mission to disseminate various information to society through the newspaper, and to make society better. These are their testimonies:

TABLE I: INTERVIEWEES' BACKGROUND AND CAREER PATH

	Name ID	Age	Graduates	Major Career Path
Company A	A-1	Late 50s	Law/ high ranked university	editorial, business, publication
	A-2	Late 50s	Social Sciences/ high ranked university	publication
	A-3	Late 50s	Social Sciences/ high ranked university	editorial, publication
	A-4	Early 50s	Law/ high ranked university	sales, advertising
	A-5	Late 50s	Law/ high ranked university	editorial, publication
Company B	B-1	Late 50s	Arts/ high ranked university	editorial
	B-2	Late 50s	Law/ high ranked university	human resources
	B-3	Early 50s	Law/ high ranked university	editorial
	B-4	Late 50s	Law/ high ranked university	editorial
	B-5	Late 50s	Law/ high ranked university	(hired in mid-career) editorial

A-1: I think... I, after admission to the university, began to think about the profession. I have thought

from my high school days that I had to have connections to society. An occupation I would take

was... I had vaguely imagined having some contribution to society. In addition, I liked to... and had an aptitude for writing.... (omission).... Generations shortly before me experienced high school dispute. Because my junior high school and high school are located at the same campus, I was aware the dispute. And I felt something.... rather than getting a job in an ordinary large company or a government office by studying a little harder, I began to think about the connection with society.

B-5: The year that I entered the university was in April 1975, and the Vietnam reunification took place on April 30 of the same year. Although the student movement had already subsided in Tokyo, it was intense in Kansai area (west side of Japan).... (omission).... A feeling that being nonpolitical was bad still remained... (omission).... Among people my age, there was a feeling that it was strange to graduate normally and to join a prestigious company. Perhaps, becoming a journalist was one of the choices in order to make the world better, ... which might be a youthful impetuosity. Surely, I had such a passion in my mind at that time.

Graduating from the Faculty of Law, A-4, who was aiming initially at the bar examination, has been in charge of the business department rather than the editorial department, but he aspired to join a newspaper company with attitudes similar to all of the interviewees.

A-4:I came across a good teacher of the Code of Civil Procedure. Well, I learned from him that it was a big power of jurisprudence to increase the sum total of social justice. Because the “sum total of social justice” was fresh expression for me, since then, I had somewhat begun to change my wish into becoming a journalist.

Thus, journalists had a clear sense of purpose and motives for joining a newspaper company. Although, of course, there might be an incident reducing their desire to work during the long years of occupational lives, they haven't regretted their job selection. A sense of mission as well as self-confidence that they are transmitting opinions/information to society and exerting an influence were observed through the interviews in this study. In particular, when questioned concerning their increase or decrease in willingness to work, they answered that they put significant values on how well they had done their work and how much they could contribute to make society better where justice is democratically respected, rather than on their personal promotion or a post reassignment.

About the role that today's newspaper plays in a society in which digitization has been developed and the position of the newspaper has been changing, B-4 answered as follows:

B-4: I think that information is the basis of democracy in Japan, and it is indispensable in order

to keep democracy. I'm going to work hard so as to be able to give information on this level, somehow on a better level. I hope that readers understand it.

B. Career Path in the Company

This study, by tracing each interviewee's career, found that everyone has experienced quite a lot of reassignment. The person who has experienced transfer the most was B-1 in Company B with 15 transfers, including 10 house relocations. Many of the employees who belonged to the editorial bureau were reassigned to a bureau in the head office after having served in local provinces. From the middle stage of their careers, 10 years later, they were placed in various bureaus such as editorial or publishing. Some of them, from the early stages of their careers, worked in the publication department. Frequent relocation has often been taking place in both Company A and Company B. Although there existed a fixed route of career to some extent, not all reporters and writers necessarily built a similar career.

When asked if assignment to a local province at the early stage of a career is intended as job training, A-1 answered:

A-1: That's right. Generally, we agree that it's a time for training. Well, that might be speaking in retrospect.... What we do is just do the work that was given in front of our eyes. In case of Company A, after having worked at two local provinces for five or six years, we work, for example at the society, the economic or the political division in the editorial bureau, at the head office. It is like an ascetic training until we reach a certain level as a reporter/writer by covering national newspaper matters of stories or themes.

At Company B, a similar career path existed, with employees assigned to two editorial bureaus at two different head offices, or if possible any bureaus in 5 different head offices.

B-2: We call it “two editorial bureaus at two different head offices,” and let new employees experience as much as possible. Because we have five head offices in Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Seibu and Hokkaido, it is almost a custom to perform the personnel transfer among these five offices. We work at as many head offices as possible.

As already found by a previous study done by Ishiguro and Cho in 2014, there was a rough model of a career path promotion in the newspaper industry that included various types of relocations. B-2 in the personnel department explained the promotion speed in Company B as follows:

B-2: Yes, that's right. They join the company at around the age of 23. Since our company also accepts mid-career change, some persons join our company in the late 20s. As for the position, the first executive position would be sub-director who is called vice-manager of a division. A person with

early promotion will become a sub-director in their early 40s, therefore, most people will be a sub-director from their early 40s to late 40s.... (omission).... Then, we become a director in late 40s.

It was a habitual practice in both Company A and Company B that managers of each division or the line and staff determined personnel changes by looking at each person's ability and skills. The employees accepted, as a natural thing, the habitual practice of personnel changes according to a request by the company. They regarded it as an opportunity for growth, and step up the career ladder.

Each line and staff had the power to make decisions on personnel changes.

B-3: ... In the case of editors, the editorial bureau basically considers their personnel changes. The Personnel Department do not manage it unitarily.

Authors: Each line and staff do it all?

B-3: Yes, that's right.

Asked how employees took the personnel changes that a line and staff performed, interviewees took it positively.

A-5: I think that it is happiest to go to the place where I am asked for. If you tell me to come, I would say right away, "Thank you so much." I have never rejected offers.

When asked whether there was a system such as putting out a request for a personnel change, B-3 said:

B-3: There is a request survey investigation once or twice a year. We hand it in to a director at each bureau. (omission) Generally, almost no request passes although it would have been referred. Perhaps, it might be more often that a director in a head office or chief see our performance, and choose a person.

When one's own personnel hope did not come true, B-4 explained the importance of one's intention at the time of being hired.

B-4: (If a person had clear motivation when hired, he/she can get over an obstacle. A person having unclear motivation) comes to hate the job. Perhaps, they lose what they are working for. It is almost impossible to wish for and be assigned to a workplace according to one's choice. We learn the foundation of journalism at first in a place which is naturally different from our hope. (omission) Then, as long as one's motivation is clear, he or she would begin to think by themselves what they can do for their future career not matter what environment they have been placed in. Unless holding a clear vision, he or she will lose sight of why they are

doing hard work. (omission) It is often the case that those kind of people leave the company or change occupations.

B-2: Human resources are rich, and I think there is in-house competition in this company. (omission) Talented people are very abundant, which is one aspect of this company.... There is a competition among considerably high-level people, and all the members may not always do the things that they wish.

In Company A, there was a division of the fast track, such as the political, the economic and the social division in the editorial bureau, and there was a career route, which led to the generalist and the management positions. A-5 talked about their corporate culture, which respects other career paths equally, and the multiple-track personnel promotion system of his company.

A-5: It looked more like Kasumigaseki (a euphemism for the Japanese government departments) in the past than in these days... the "annual principle," we always worried about who had been succeeding most in promotion among those who had joined the company in the same year. Thus, Company A is bureaucratic. It is a place where many of the employees care about such things, although we had paid more attention to it in the past. An interesting thing is that there are various accidents and happenings somewhere in our lives and those force us to deviate from the way which we had thought.... (omission) ... Moreover, the path from which we deviate is not the single track personnel promotion type like other enterprises adopt. Some person may think a president is great, some person may think an editor-in-chief is great, another may think an editor whom they respect is very great. A person whom we respect is different depending on the person. It is because everyone does not necessarily want to become a president. As mentioned a little while ago, many employees want to become a specialist.

C. Job Training

How do people who work in a newspaper company acquire skills and competence, in forming a career? As mentioned above, the ten employees who were interviewed in this study, except A-2 who had worked as a part-timer in Company A from school days and B-3 who had belonged to a newspaper research center at a university, had not taken a journalism course or special training for work at a newspaper company. However, special training was not carried out, except general training by hierarchical levels and management training, in both Company A and Company B regardless of departments. With regard to job training, all the interviewees answered that there was only on-the-job training.

A-3: There isn't any. If anything, it's on-the-job

training. I had no journalistic knowledge when I joined the company. In those days, we didn't have to attend classes at the university, unlike now. If someone says that I learned a lot in various ways through club activities, I agree I might have learned.... But I think I didn't have such knowledge. In particular about the economy, I'm sure I didn't have so detailed knowledge.... (omission).... Well, it was basically on-the-job training. Also, it was books that I read by myself.

B-5: That's right. I haven't been taught anything, it has been said to be "new literature" or "journalism," though. In the field, I was taught in the field. Training in the field. That was the only thing. There was nothing. It was systematic. But I felt something with my skin that it was the point that I must do the best. We had to do something this way when taking news material.... (omission).... It was the unwritten law that was instilled in my body.

D. Corporate Culture

When asked about the corporate culture, interviewees had a clear understanding of a corporate culture of their own. Company A was a liberal organization having a bureaucratic portion which was known widely by the general public, while Company B had the freest corporate culture among the newspaper companies.

Authors: What corporate culture does Company A have?

A-3:Looking from the outside, Company A is said to be bureaucratic relatively. It is certain that Company B has the freest corporate culture. Yes, Company B is free, and Company C has a comparatively tight controlled organization.... (omission) Company A does not encourage individual initiative as much as Company B. Rather, it is organizationally controlled.

Authors: What does it mean for the individual action in the editorial bureau? What is the difference between organizational action and individual action?

A-3: After all, it is the tone of a story. It is individual action when gathering news material, and all newspaper companies do the same. As for an editor's opinion, however, we follow the direction of our company's argument, but in Company B, reporters seem to write whatever they feel. They can write in their own way. On the other hand, in our Company A, there is no rule by the company that we must follow the tone of editorial opinions, but there is a custom that we write an article with thinking about our company's editorial tone. In the case of Company C, it is almost a rule to write articles within the frame of the company's editorial tone. This is my personal impression, but

I'm sure this is the case.

Authors: What is a point that you are attracted by Company B?

B-2: Well.... It is difficult to say a good or bad point of Company B without comparing it to other companies. Let's see... air.... I mean atmosphere.... it is the air... I may call it flow.... I don't feel uncomfortable. It's hard for me to explain exactly.... People in general often say that it's called the corporate culture or a free atmosphere. Although I don't know whether it is right expression or not, I can live in the space in this company without feeling any sense of incongruity....(omission).... I seldom feel stress to come to the company on a daily basis.

A question about feelings toward his company was asked quite bluntly to A-5.

Authors: Do you like your own company though you have been working for a long time in the company?

A-5: Well.... there is a favorable aspect. There is a tough aspect, too. Umm... I think that there are quite various kinds of people here. It's hard to judge from appearance.

Authors: Do you have something like loyalty for the company?

A-5: I think I don't.... but I may have.... (omission).... Let me see.... People are independent minded, but they have the company's best interests in mind. I'm sure that everyone in Company A likes Company A, but somehow they don't speak very well of their own company as a corporate culture.

In this way, the interviewees did not have loyalty in the sense of working for a company or following a company's orders, but it was possible to observe pride in their corporation from all interviewees.

V. ANALYSIS: A DISCRETIONAL WAY OF WORKING FOR INDIVIDUALS / A TRADITIONAL JAPANESE-STYLE EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE FOR THE ORGANIZATION

Testimonies, which had been taken from the ten interviews at Company A and Company B, were analyzed paying attention to four points: 1) motivation for joining a company and continuing employment, 2) tracks of a career, 3) job training after joining a company, and 4) corporate culture.

There were some notable differences in corporate culture between the two companies. Company B had a considerably "free" culture whereas Company A was "bureaucratic." These organizational differences were considered to affect

reporters/writers whose article subsequently influences public opinion.

In terms of circulation ranking in Japan, the difference between the two companies was slight, 2nd and 3rd place, but the actual circulation size of Company B remained half of Company C's. This difference was confirmed by this study in that Company A was considerably higher level than Company B, especially in salary and the number of staff.

Some similarities between the two companies, on the other hand, could also be found: the educational background of employees, motivation for joining the company, job training in the company, and the self-confidence that they were doing significantly important work to disseminate information to society.

In both companies, a tangible side of the company (such as the organizational structure and the personnel management system), so called a Japanese-style employment practice, and another side of the company, which was the actual operation and a discretionary way of working and thinking for individuals, were found in this study. Employees had a strong pride and identity as journalists, working in a professional enterprise.

The above findings of this study were consistent with Morishima's claim that an enhanced organization could be formed in an atmosphere, in which individual employees' autonomous creativity was respected sufficiently, and members were doing significant work for a society based on a strong sense of mission [3].

One factor enabling a formation of an enhanced organization with a sense of unity might be that journalists with the highest level of intelligence and business accomplishment ability work in Japanese newspaper companies. At the same time, as mentioned so far, this might be because people having strong motivation and sense of mission for newspaper production joined the company. Due to these notable characteristics, they could learn work even only with on-the-job training, and, thereby, they made it possible to produce high quality newspapers. Moreover, they could develop their skills, despite frequent job relocations, which they perceived as part of their training.

Compared with other industries, it is said that newspaper publishing companies produce only one outcome, the newspaper, which is a very particular aspect. Quite a lot of people were working for the one product -- for instance, 5,000 employees in Company A and a little less than 3,000 staff in Company B. Thus, even though it was divided into some departments such as the editorial department and the business department, and each department was subdivided further, the product was not completed even if anyone section was missing. It was apparent that a newspaper could not be produced/sold without organizational unity, autonomous creativity and high business accomplishment ability.

In this way, this study proved that the current newspaper publishing companies created and combined well two elements: individual performance, which was supported by ability and autonomy, and the traditional Japanese employment management style. It could be said that these two core elements supported the newspaper publishing companies although their corporate cultures were different

those of more typical organizations.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study analyzed mainly two points from interviews with five employees from Company A and five employees from Company B: an individual career and the organizational strength.

Comparing the two newspaper companies, there were more similarities than differences. Each interviewee spoke about their work and career in the interview. Details of the day-to-day operations, such as tension from the workload and chasing deadlines, and the impact that their work had on society, were discussed in the interviews.

The high level of motivation and the commitment to work of each journalist as revealed in the interviews provides useful information to people aiming to enter the profession.

The newspaper industry is also standing at the crossroads of the age of digitalization of newspapers. By what strategy can newspaper publishing companies embark into this new era? At this time, individual creativity, a sense of unity as an organization and bold mobility might be required for the journalists. Little research has been done in the area of the newspaper industry. This study of journalists' careers and organization in the newspaper industry provides many worthwhile suggestions in considering structure of corporate organization of Japan. Further accumulation of data and analysis must be pushed forward.

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Hiromi Cho is a professor in the department of Media and Communications at Toyo University in Japan. He received his Ph.D. degree in mass media from Michigan State University in 2000. He is a board member of many academic associations including Japan Society of Directories. His research interest is in media economics.



Kuniko Ishiguro is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Foreign Studies, Bunkyo Gakuin University in Tokyo. She completed her Ph.D. degree in the School of East Asian Studies, University of Sheffield in 2008. Her research interests include the development of human resource management strategies, sociology of work, career development, organizational behavior and gender relations in organizations.