



Research on Support for Redesigning Working Lives for Middle-Aged and Older Persons with Disabilities

(Research Report No.159) Summary

[Key Words]

Middle-aged and older persons, redesigning working lives, considerations provided by companies, remaining issues, company survey, actual case, physical disability, intellectual disability, mental disability, visual disability, hearing disability, physical motor disability, internal disability, higher brain dysfunction, developmental disability, early-onset dementia

[Points for Practical Purpose]

This report defines support for redesigning one's working life as promoting redesign of one's working life by having the employer provide consideration to the impact of the disability itself and changes in the environment as the employed persons with disabilities reach middle-age or older age. Then grasp the actual situation through the questionnaire survey etc. and organize the points of support.

We hope that the "Key Points for Redesigning Working Life," which was compiled by organizing the results of hearings based on the results of the questionnaire survey and focusing on the employment cases of middle-aged and older persons with disabilities, will be fully utilized by employers' organizations and employers, as well as administrative agencies, organizations concerned, and employment support organizations.

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2 Research Period

FY 2019 through FY2020

3 Composition of the Research Report

Chapter 1: Research Methods

Chapter 2: Actual Status of Employment of Middle-aged and Older Persons with Disabilities

Chapter 3: Analysis of the Points to Consider Necessary for Redesigning Working Lives

Chapter 4: Hearing Survey

Chapter 5: Comprehensive Study

4 Background and Purpose

Although the proportion of middle-aged and older persons with disabilities in the workforce remains relatively low, the aging of the entire society is progressing, and as a result, the number of middle-aged and older persons in the workforce is expected to increase. Under these circumstances, especially for middle-aged and older persons with disabilities, the decline in their fitness, changes in their physical condition, and changes in their living environment due to aging may pose challenges and make it difficult for them to continue being employed. Therefore, it is necessary for workplaces to make improvements in terms of employment management, such as reviewing job descriptions, devising work processes, reassignment, and making working hours more flexible, so that persons with disabilities can continue to work stably for a long time if they wish. It is also necessary to examine various ways of working until retirement and to provide support for a smooth transition to life after retirement.

This research conducts company surveys, etc., and collects case data of support for redesigning working lives with the objective of understanding the actual status of issues unique to middle-aged and older persons with disabilities in work force, efforts to improve these issues, and examining effective support measures. In addition, a collection of case studies will be created from the collected cases and widely disseminated to facilitate the expansion of support for redesigning working lives of middle-aged and older persons with disabilities.

In this research, "middle-aged and older" refers to "45 years and older," and "redesigning one's working life" refers to "promoting redesign of one's working life by having the employer

give consideration to the impact of the disability itself and changes in the environment as the employed persons with disabilities reach middle or older age.”

5 Method

(1) Document Research

In order to proceed with this study, we collected information from previous surveys, researches, and materials. The main points of discussion are summarized as a preface to this report.

(2) Questionnaire Survey of Companies

The survey was conducted by mail using self-completed questionnaires from 7,000 private companies with 30 or more full-time workers, selected by stratified sampling based on company size, industry and region in accordance with the Japan Standard Industrial Classification. (Survey period: From April 1, 2020 to May 8, 2020.) The content of the survey focused on the considerations that companies provide (57 items) and the issues that remain even after providing considerations (53 items), and the survey items were prepared with reference to the survey items of previous surveys and researches.

(3) Hearing Survey

For the purpose of collecting case studies on redesigning working lives of middle-aged and older persons with disabilities, companies were selected by referring to the information provided at the Local Vocational Center for Persons with Disabilities and expert hearings. The content of the hearings included transitions in job descriptions and working conditions, issues that arose and measures for improvement, and policies for redesigning jobs in the future. The duration of the hearing was about one hour.

6 Survey Content

(1) Actual Situation with Employment of Middle-aged and Older Persons with Disabilities

We conducted a questionnaire survey of companies on redesigning the working lives of middle-aged and older persons with disabilities, and received responses from 1,239 companies. Among the 744 companies that responded to our survey and employ persons with disabilities, we confirmed that more than 70% of the companies, regardless of location, industry, or company size, employ middle-aged and older persons with disabilities. We also observed that the proportion of middle-aged and older persons with physical disabilities was higher, and that the proportion of persons with mental disabilities and persons with intellectual disabilities was lower, in that order.

As a consideration, we confirmed the employment of middle-aged and older persons with disabilities in about 80% of the companies that employ persons with disabilities. However, given

that more than 90% of the companies that employ workers employ ordinary middle-aged and older persons, we surmise that the percentage of companies that employ middle-aged and older persons with disabilities was not particularly high at the time of the survey.

In addition, among companies that employ persons with disabilities, about 40% exclusively employ persons with physical disabilities, suggesting that companies that exclusively employ persons with physical disabilities, who have a higher percentage of middle-aged and older workers than other disability categories, may need to prepare for further aging in the future. On the other hand, compared to other disability types, the percentage of middle-aged and older persons with intellectual disabilities who are employed is low, and we inferred that the number of middle-aged and older persons may increase in the future as the population ages. Although the proportion of middle-aged and older workers aged 45 to 49 is high for the mentally disabled, which is different from the proportion of middle-aged and older workers for the physically disabled, we surmised that, as with the physically disabled, companies employing the mentally disabled may need to be prepared for the aging of their workforce.

(2) Analysis of Considerations Necessary for Redesigning One's Working Life

Regarding the kinds of work done by middle-aged and older persons with disabilities, those with intellectual disabilities had the highest percentage of occupations in transportation, cleaning, and packaging, while those with disabilities other than intellectual disabilities had the highest percentage of clerical occupations.

(Considerations)

A questionnaire survey was conducted to obtain responses on the considerations (57 items) for middle-aged and older workers and middle-aged and older workers with disabilities in companies. By organizing the results, the following points were identified.

- ① The most frequent considerations for middle-aged and older persons with disabilities and middle-aged and older persons in general are "further devise of work content" and "further health management."
- ② The item of consideration for middle-aged and older persons with disabilities that has high frequency in common among all disability types is "promoting a better understanding of disability in the workplace."
- ③ Specific considerations that are frequently cited for each type of disability shall include the following.
 - "Consideration for rest, such as making it easier to take leave and allowing breaks during work," for persons with internal disabilities, mental disabilities, developmental disabilities, higher brain dysfunction, etc., whose disabilities are believed to require consideration for controlling fatigue.
 - "Health management in the workplace by occupational health staff" for persons with visual

disability, hearing disability, speech and language disability, internal disability, higher brain dysfunction, and other disabilities that may require consideration in collaboration with professionals due to the possibility of disability or disease progression with aging.

- "Easy-to-understand instructions on work procedures" for persons with hearing disabilities, intellectual disabilities, mental disabilities, developmental disabilities, higher brain dysfunction, and other disabilities that may require considerations for information assurance and cognitive functions.
- "Understanding changes in visual acuity" for persons with visual disabilities.
- "Consideration of written and silent mouthing in the workplace" for persons with hearing disabilities.
- "Improvement of operating facilities in the work environment" and "Improvement of toilets, rest areas, cafeterias, etc." for persons with physical disabilities.
- "Assignment of assistants to perform tasks" for persons with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities.
- "Structurization to facilitate work" for persons with intellectual disabilities, developmental disabilities, and higher brain dysfunction.
- "Consideration of working hours through shorter working hours" for mental disabilities.
- "Positive feedback on daily work performance" for persons with developmental disabilities.

In order to identify qualitative differences in the considerations for middle-aged and older persons with disabilities and middle-aged and older persons in general with regard to "devising further job content" and "further health management," which were common and frequent considerations for middle-aged and older persons with disabilities and middle-aged and older persons in general, we extracted the characteristics of relevant cases from the "Collection of Best Practices for Improving Workplaces Concerning Career Advancement of Persons with Disabilities and Coping with Problems Associated with Aging" and the "Collection of Best Practices for Improving Workplaces for Continued Employment of Middle-aged and Older Persons with Disabilities," which were developed and published in the past by the Japan Organization for Employment of the Elderly, Persons with Disabilities and Job Seekers (JEED). As a result, we surmised that even in cases where consideration is shared between these middle-aged and older persons with disabilities and general middle-aged and older persons, it is important to provide careful procedures and devices for middle-aged and older persons with disabilities that consider their disability characteristics and other factors.

Next, as for specific considerations for middle-aged and older persons with disabilities, we identified considerations specific to each type of disability based on the characteristics of the disability and "promotion of understanding of disabilities in the workplace" common to all types of disabilities from the questionnaire survey. In the same manner as above, we extracted

characteristics from the collection of best practices for workplace improvement, and confirmed that "necessary information on disability characteristics and considerations is managed in a centralized manner and updated on a regular basis," etc. as a unique consideration for each disability type based on its characteristics. In addition, as a consideration related to "promoting a better understanding of disabilities in the workplace," common to all types of disabilities, we confirmed "visualizing the accumulation of considerations for disabilities" by compiling record sheets of discussions between persons with disabilities and persons in charge of employment management regarding reasonable accommodations.

In particular, "promoting a better understanding of disability in the workplace" is not a consideration that is important only at the time of employment before reaching middle or older age (including the stage when a person becomes disabled in mid-career), but is also important to provide continuously because the disability situation may change due to the progression of the disability, etc., or the work environment may change due to the transfer of surrounding employees during continuous employment.

Regarding these thorough and continuous approaches, while there are some cases where companies are developing their own systems and designing their own systems, there are also cases where the active use of external organizations lead to considerations and improvements in issues. We assume that we will have to take the measures we have been implementing for middle-aged and older persons with disabilities one step further, and have surmised how effective it would be to make active use of external organizations in addition to the company's own independent efforts in such cases.

In addition, in the collection of good examples of workplace improvement, we found a case study of a company providing trainings on life planning that is not limited to any age group as an effort to take life after retirement into consideration in order to take measures on the issue of employees with disabilities having a vague sense of anxiety about their future lives, such as after retirement and the aging process, which leads to a lack of motivation and enthusiasm for their current work and resignation. However, from the free comments in the questionnaire survey, we observed opinions that there is a limit to what the company can do when issues other than working life arise, such as living alone or the stress of caring for family members. In addition to devising considerations for the current situation, we also surmised the need to seek collaboration with external organizations as a way to deal with a wide range of issues in the future.

(Remaining Issues)

In the questionnaire survey, we obtained responses to the issues (53 items) that remained even after consideration was given to middle-aged and older persons with disabilities.

We found that the percentage of remaining issues varied depending on the type of disability,

ranging from around 20% for persons with physical disabilities to over 40% for persons with intellectual disabilities, mental disabilities, developmental disabilities, and higher brain dysfunction.

Looking at the most frequent remaining issues by disability type, the following issues were identified as issues that correspond to the characteristics of each disability.

- Setting the content of work according to the person's ability and "setting work hours that allow the person to work without strain" for persons with physical disabilities other than speech and language disabilities
- "Deteriorated eyesight" for persons with visual disability.
- "Deteriorated motor function" and "location change by walking and using transportation systems" for the physically disabled
- "Maintaining relationships through appropriate communication" and "understanding instructions and content of speech" for persons with hearing, intellectual, and mental disabilities
- "Communicating one's intentions" and "processing speed of tasks and work" for persons with intellectual disabilities
- "Instability of disability status," "coping with mental stress," and "handling a return to work after a long absence" for persons with mental disabilities.
- "Concentration" for persons with developmental disabilities
- Forgetfulness" for persons with higher brain dysfunction

In addition, we conducted a cluster analysis of the remaining issues for all types of disabilities, and identified eight clusters: "Life after retirement," "Basic habits that support working life," "Issues that are difficult to see in the workplace," "Mental and physical health issues," "Mental support," "Basic occupational skills," "Deterioration of physical functions," and "Labor management". We confirmed that there were still issues in a wide range of areas when we looked at the overall picture.

(Correlation between Considerations and Remaining Challenges)

Next, we cross-tabulated the clusters of eight issues with the consideration items that had a high frequency by disability type. As a result, the following task clusters were identified as having relatively high rates of remaining issues even after providing consideration across disability types: ① "basic occupational capabilities," which consists of items such as concentration, communication, and work motivation; and ② "mental support," which consists of items such as instability, poor physical condition, stress, and forgetfulness. The results of the survey were as follows.

As a study, we assumed that the implemented considerations led to some improvement in the issues, since the remaining rate of issues was around 20% in the case of the persons with

physical disabilities. On the other hand, for persons with physical disabilities other than speech and language disabilities, we confirmed that a common issue was the setting of work content appropriate to the person's abilities. We inferred that it is necessary to continue to give consideration, such as, changing the work content according to the situation. We confirmed the impact of increasing severity of disability among the visually impaired and the physically impaired, and the continuation of existing communication challenges among the hearing-impaired. Therefore, we inferred that it is necessary to confirm the challenges in working life due to current disabilities, regardless of whether the status of disability has changed or remained constant. On the other hand, for persons with intellectual disabilities, mental disabilities, developmental disabilities, and higher brain dysfunction, the rate of remaining issues was more than 40%, and the issues considered to be disability characteristics were the top remaining issues. Therefore, we surmised that it is necessary to assess the disability characteristics of each person with disabilities and continuously monitor the status of issues related to their disability characteristics.

Also, although the rate of use of outside organizations differs depending on the type of consideration, when the frequencies of all consideration items are added up, the overall rate of consideration mainly by the company is about 80%, while the rate of consideration with the cooperation of outside organizations is about 20%. Therefore, it was inferred that while companies employing middle-aged and older persons with disabilities are taking measures such as devising additional job contents to cope with remaining issues, they should be aware of the possibility that issues will continue or newly arise, and consider the feasibility of updating the content of consideration through the use of external organizations before assuming that no further consideration can be given by the company.

(3) Hearing Survey

Using the results of the hearings, we organized the actions to take on the concrete issues, focusing on "basic vocational capabilities" and "support for mental aspects," which were the issue clusters with a high percentage of remaining issues even after giving consideration across all types of disabilities. The hearings were conducted with employment managers and middle-aged and older persons with disabilities (hearing-impaired, intellectually-impaired, mentally-impaired, and developmentally-impaired, respectively) who are currently employed at the four companies. In addition, hearings on retirement cases were conducted with persons with early-onset dementia and their families. From each of the hearing cases, we extracted the points of response to the issues.

We summarized the responses to "basic vocational capabilities" and "support for mental aspects," which were clusters of issues with a high percentage of remaining issues even after consideration across all types of disabilities, by making a list of the hearing contents. As a

result, "consulting" was identified as a key word in all the hearing cases. As a study, the common points of the relationship between persons with disabilities and companies regarding "consulting" are:

- The person with disabilities himself/herself has a clear intention to continue working.
- On the other hand, the employing company understands and accepts the person's intention to continue working, respects the person's intention and supports the person's feelings through discussions, and takes concrete actions that include approaching outside organizations.

We believe that the interaction between the two may lead to persons with disabilities maintaining their motivation and maximizing their vocational capabilities, even if they still have issues, and suggest the necessity of continuous consultation and dialogue and the importance of utilizing outside organizations as corporate efforts.

In addition, in the case of the resignation of a person with juvenile dementia, the company was supportive of the person's continuing to work from the time of the onset of the disease while he/she was still employed and although he/she had been receiving treatment during that time, he/she left the company after consulting with an outside professional about his/her future life plan and available systems in light of the additional anxiety about his/her safety due to the progression of the disease and the burden on his family. This suggests the importance of consultation with outside specialists while still employed.

(4) Comprehensive Study

Based on the results and discussion above, we would like to discuss what the hearings revealed as the key points of support for redesigning working lives for middle-aged and older persons with disabilities.

First, **maintenance of motivation to work**. Although issues with aging, such as confusion about work perspectives due to disability progression or midlife disability, changes in living environment, and maintenance of personal relationships, are individualistic, some impact on work motivation was common. This suggests that it is important for companies where middle-aged and older persons with disabilities work to have continuous consultation and dialogue with them so that they can maintain their desire to continue working even if their motivation to work declines at times.

Meanwhile, the choice of post-retirement life is also expected to be individualized. In order to determine how to draw up one's own life plan, in addition to information gathering by the individual and his/her family, companies where middle-aged and older persons with disabilities are employed should consider providing a wide range of information related to life, such as medical care, welfare, and nursing care for middle-aged and older persons with disabilities, respect the wishes of the individual, be sympathetic to his/her feelings, and take concrete

actions, including approaching outside organizations.

Second, **promotion of devising work content**. In response to the impact of "basic vocational skills," which was one of the clusters of issues with a high percentage of remaining issues even after consideration across disability types, we can assume that changes in the disability status of middle-aged and older persons with disabilities who are currently employed, or the emergence of issues, may require a further step forward in devising work content. We confirmed that some of the approaches taken by companies with middle-aged and older workers with disabilities are change of the content of their work, introducing telecommuting to cope with declining physical strength and changes in mobility, setting working hours according to their abilities, and developing their abilities in anticipation of changes in their duties by conducting in-house training, etc. In the course of the approaches by the companies, we found that supplementary measures were being devised through the use of goal management sheets, etc., to monitor the status of job performances, the use of memos based on the disability status, and visualization of work procedures. Since it is expected that support for devising work content shall be supported by the expertise of job coaches, it is suggested that effective support be considered through the placement of job coaches who are belong to companies, collaboration with job coaches assigned to external vocational rehabilitation organizations, and the use of settlement support by welfare services for persons with disabilities.

In addition, **health management should be enhanced**. For middle-aged and older persons, health management based on aging is important, at the same time, more detailed measures are required because of the possibility of changes in disability status. It is suggested that companies with middle-aged and older persons with disabilities in their workforce consider effective supports such as obtaining information from the persons themselves, conducting stress checks based on their cognitive characteristics and feeding back the results, accompanying them to medical institutions, and utilizing support for returning to work at medical institutions and regional vocational centers for persons with disabilities in the event that they take a leave of absence due to ill health, etc.

Lastly, **utilization of external organizations**. From the results of the questionnaire survey and the hearings, it was confirmed that companies employing middle-aged and older persons with disabilities give various considerations according to their disability status, etc., and have been promoting flexible individual measures and support for the continuation of their working lives, based on the wishes of the persons with disabilities who want to continue working. Although the results of the questionnaire survey indicate that efforts to provide consideration and tackle issues are mainly done in-house, the hearings confirmed that the active use of external organizations leads to the provision of consideration and improvement of issues. On the other hand, at companies that do not use external organizations or provide consultation, it

could be that the workplace adjustment of middle-aged and older employees with disabilities who are still employed is stable, but on the contrary, the existence of a sense of trouble in redesigning the working lives of middle-aged and older employees with disabilities may be obscured. Moreover, we believe that these companies are not using external professional organizations and professionals simply because they are not aware of their existence. Hence, we suggest that it is necessary to promote cooperation with external organizations by increasing public awareness of various systems, contents of support, and functions of specialized institutions and professionals at the contact points of administrative institutions, etc., which are likely to be used for various administrative procedures, and by actively disseminating information from specialized institutions and professionals.

In a separate chapter of this report, in addition to the current status of networks outside the workplace in terms of vocational life redesign for middle-aged and older persons with disabilities, corporate culture within the workplace was examined to figure out how the considerations and remaining issues of working-life redesign affected the work of middle-aged and older persons with disabilities.

7 Relevant Research Outputs

Research on the Employment Promotion and Employment Stability of Persons with Disabilities in the Aging Society, Research Report No. 97, 2010