

A Scheme for Improving Lifelong Vocational and Educational Training with Reduction of Working Hours

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I. Overview

Through the stages of economic development, there have been unceasing efforts for reducing the working hours along with encouraging the industries and increasing the income level. Reducing working hours had mainly targeted to secure workers' safety and welfare in the early stage of industrialization, but today it entails for workers to ensure the quality of life and take full advantage of their leisure time as productivity and industrial structure become highly advanced.

On 23 October 2000, the Korean Tripartite Committee (KTC) comprised of representatives from labor, management and government sectors fundamentally compromised on reduction of the legal working hours from the current 44 per week to 40, and the government is set to submit its own bill on a five-day workweek system to the National Assembly in February next year. When it comes to the implementation of reduction in working hours including the five-day workweek system, however, there have been little studies that systematically analyze how to take full advantage of extra time in terms of life-long vocational and educational training.

This research is focused on the feasible five-day workweek system. It aims to survey the needs and potentials of workers on the vocational education and training with upcoming work-hour reduction and provide policy suggestions for expansion of lifelong vocational and educational training with the reduction in working hours. The suggestions are based on exploring the current situations of night and weekend educational training at

the institutes for lifelong vocational education and training, capacity and willingness to provide the educational training programs that correspond to the reduction in working hours.

II. Research contents

This research consists of five Chapters. Chapter I describes objectives and methodology of this research, and Chapter II provides theoretical discussions on work-hour reduction and capacity building including its socioeconomic influences. Chapter III overviews the current situations of vocational and educational training with work-hour reduction, and Chapter IV provides suggestions for expansion of life-long vocational and educational training with reduction in working hours followed by summary conclusions in Chapter V.

III. Suggestions for expansion of lifelong vocational and educational training

This research provides basic directions in facilitating lifelong vocational and educational training with work-hour reduction as following: expansion of worker-led educational training; diversification of educational training programs and scope extension of assistances; expanding opportunities for life-long vocational and educational training to those who have been relatively alienated in the previous projects on capacity building; expansion of information infrastructure for life-long educational training; reinforcement of public awareness on human capacity building through life-long educational training, and on enhancing the quality of life; expansion of trade unions' and workers' participation in the projects of educational training as well as strengthening the partnership between the labor and the management.

Following these basic directions, major roles of three sectors (government, employers, and trade unions/workers) and institutes for educational training in order to expand the life-long vocational and educational training with work-hour reduction are as follows:

1. Government

First, the expansion and facilitation of incentive pay system for taking training courses is directly connected with the work-hour reduction and facilitation of lifelong educational training. Present workers are required to induce agreement from their employers in order to achieve such benefits of incentive pay for taking training course, but most of employers hesitate to grant the agreement. Under these circumstances, the government should make efforts to ensure the viable implementation of incentive pay system for taking training courses.

Second, the scope extension of assistance for lifelong educational training and the level of assistance require active discussions to pragmatize it. It is expected that the demands for less relevant programs to the current job will be expanded and such programs will increase when the work-hour reduction is implemented, and extra time during the week or the educational training courses by weekend are facilitated.

Third, a systematic and substantialized information infrastructure should be established. Once an information infrastructure of educational training is set up, it will enhance the reasonableness in the process of choosing the institute of educational training and courses thereby encouraging the educational training market.

Fourth, an early introduction of financial support system for workers' learning, which is currently under discussion, and its settlement are required in order to expand trade unions' and workers' participation in the projects of lifelong educational training.

Fifth, constant surveys, analysis and studies are necessary about the influences of work-hour reduction onto the lifelong educational training, and the results should be reflected to the future policy strategies and implementations.

2. Employers

First, employers should make efforts to eliminate or address the various factors that prevent workers from participating in the capacity building as well as to generate the overall conditions in order for work-hour reduction to contribute to the facilitation of

educational training.

Second, employers may enhance the workers' awareness of educational training in general and increase the budget for educational training. The small sized businesses to which supporting capacity is not allowed can publicize the supportive system such as incentive pay for taking training courses by employment insurance for their workers, and guide them easily access the requisite papers and certification procedures if necessary.

Third, employers should recognize the trade unions and workers as their partners and encourage them to participate in the human capacity building. The outcomes of human capacity building can be far more successful only when both trade unions, workers and employers mutually recognize each other and collaborate than the employers initiate it ex parte. In this vein, employers are expected to switch their mind and awareness.

3. Trade unions and workers

Previously, trade unions and workers have relatively shown passive approach toward life-long educational training. However, as the society is rapidly shifting into a knowledge-based information society and the labor market becomes highly flexible, the significance of lifelong educational training is more increasing. Thus it is indispensable that workers best use of the work-hour reduction as an opportunity for self-development in terms of building their own careers and enhancing the quality of life.

Trade unions can actively involve themselves in workers' lifelong educational training and skills development thereby improving the employment conditions.

Moreover, trade unions can take advantages of financial support system for workers' learning, which is currently under discussion, and nourish workers' awareness on educational training.

4. Institutes for lifelong educational training

The development and management of educational training process should correspond to the demands of educational training users. To do so, institutes for lifelong educational

training can implement systematic research on the demands of either workers or the unemployed about educational training in extra time during the week or weekend courses, and based on these results they may establish strategies for educational training and manage the institutes.

These institutes can also speedily provide users of educational training with more accurate and sufficient information on the characteristics of each institute or the contents of the educational training programs.

Public institutes for educational training should establish and manage a center for capacity building sponsored by relevant agencies for those non-regular workers who have been relatively isolated from the lifelong vocational and educational training, and the indigent class.