Unique recruitment methods

Japan uses different recruitment methods to the ones you are accustomed to in your own country. It is therefore necessary to carry out your job hunting activities with a full understanding of the differences in scheduling, selection methods, recruitment standards, and other such elements.

What Does Job Hunting in Japan Entail?

- Job hunting activities in Japan are carried out in a style unique to the world.
- Overseas students come under the same banner as Japanese students and are recruited in the same way.
- Nearly all foreign-owned companies in Japan follow the same style of recruitment as Japanese companies.

Features of Job Hunting in Japan

- Bulk Recruitment of New Graduates
  
  The term “recruitment of new graduates” refers to the employment of people who recently graduated from university, graduate school, vocational schools and other such schools, and who are seeking employment for the first time. Job hunting activities in Japan involve this unique style of recruiting new graduates, and the recruitment method adopted by companies involves the bulk recruitment of students who are scheduled to graduate every year, so companies commence their recruitment activities while the students are still studying at school.

- Joining the Company in April
  
  The school year generally starts in September in most countries of the world, but in Japan students generally start at university and vocational schools in April and graduate in March. Because of this, students in Japan who graduate in March join a company and begin working from April 1.

- Job Hunting Schedule
  
  Many companies in Japan commence their recruitment activities in accordance with the same schedule. Job hunting activities are also started earlier in Japan than overseas. Students who are scheduled to graduate in March 2020 commence their job hunting activities from March 1, 2019.

- Employment Examinations
  
  In addition to math, Japanese, English and other written examinations, and examinations such as Japanese essays set by Japanese companies as part of their recruitment programs, a minimum of three different interviews are required.

Corporate Culture in Japan

- Lifetime Employment System
  
  The lifetime employment system refers to the style in which a person is employed by the same company from graduation until retirement (60 years old, although this differs between companies). Although this is not clearly stated within employment contracts under normal circumstances, it is customarily expected in Japan that new recruits and companies tacitly agree to this.

- Seniority-Based System
  
  This refers to a system in which employees are assigned positions and pay increases in accordance with the number of years they have worked for the company and their age. The system is based on the prerequisite that employees will accumulate work skills and knowledge over the longer they work for the company and the older they get, and that these skills and knowledge will be reflected back on the company performance in the long run. Recently more and more companies switch to a performance-based system after a certain period of time.

There is a tendency for the evaluation standards used by overseas companies and Japanese companies during recruitment activities to differ. A large number of overseas companies use a performance-based system that bases their promotion and pay-rise standards on each individual’s capabilities, work record and results, and they seek employees capable of being effective immediately at the point of recruitment. The standards for evaluations are consequently based on university and college majors, knowledge, and the skills potential employees have learned during internships, etc.

On the other hand, many companies in Japan still follow the lifetime employment system and the seniority-based system, so they seek employees who display qualities indicating that they can be relied on to develop well after entering the company. The list on the right represents the results of a questionnaire asking companies what qualities they place emphasis on during recruitment. Japanese companies evaluate communication skills, individuality, cooperativeness, spirit of challenge and other potential capabilities above academic results, specialty, and language skills.

Potentiality-Based Recruitment

The term “potentiality” refers to the qualities a person displays for future improvement and growth. This is a method of recruitment that evaluates a person’s potential capabilities and future prospects at the point of recruitment instead of skills and knowledge that can be used for immediate effectiveness. Japanese companies maintain effective training programs for new recruits joining the company, and they tend to recruit human resources based on predictions of their future potential, as opposed to immediate effectiveness.

Job-Based Employment and Membership-Based Employment

Job-Based Employment

A style of employment that limits duties and place of work, etc. The main feature of this style of employment is that job description is clearly defined and that capabilities are evaluated in accordance with skill levels as specialists. The continuation of employment and treatment are determined in accordance with job continuity and job performance, and it is the most common style of employment overseas. It enables companies to secure capable workers with high levels of expertise. However, because workers are on a contract basis covering a specific area of work, contracts are terminated without the workers being reassigned to other work in the event that the duties they perform are no longer required due to changes in the company’s financial status or policy. This means that workers are at risk of becoming unemployed.

Membership-Based Employment

A style of employment that does not limit duties, place of work, or working hours. The main feature of this style of employment is that people are evaluated in accordance with their ability to perform all duties as generalists. This is a style of employment typical in Japan in which companies offer unlimited work in exchange for stable employment and treatment. Companies employ large numbers of graduates in bulk, provide OJT (On-the-Job Training) and internal training courses to ensure that they have the knowledge and experience necessary to perform their jobs. The main feature of this style of employment is that the jobs and workplaces they are assigned are not predetermined, so they can be relocated to any position at the discretion of the company. Owing to this, there is a possibility that recruits will not be assigned to the job and workplace that they desire. This style of employment means that the jobs offered in employee recruitment information are listed as “general work”.

Company Evaluation Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Skills</th>
<th>Individuality</th>
<th>Cooperativeness</th>
<th>Spirit of Challenge</th>
<th>Integrity</th>
<th>Stress Tolerance</th>
<th>Sense of Responsibility</th>
<th>Logical Thinking</th>
<th>Problem-Solving Skills</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Flexibility</th>
<th>Potential</th>
<th>Reliability</th>
<th>Creativity</th>
<th>Expertise</th>
<th>Common Sense</th>
<th>Academic Achievements</th>
<th>Language Skills</th>
<th>Overseas Study Experience</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How to Conduct Job Hunting Activities

Hypothetical Job Hunting Schedule for FY 2020
(This schedule varies by each company, so be sure to gather related information in a proactive manner.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job Hunting Schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Take an internship (P30)</td>
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</table>

What does "employment in FY 2020" mean?
"Nendo," or the fiscal year, is the annual division established for the purpose of identifying specific goals. Most Japanese companies regard April 1 to March 31 of the following year as the fiscal year. With regards to this, since hiring activities may run on a different schedule than that of the fiscal year, companies will generally record hiring numbers in the fiscal year the hired persons actually start working. For example, college juniors may start job hunting in the fall of 2018, but will not be able to enter companies until 2020. Therefore, many companies will note them as being employed in 2020. The information on job hunting websites will also be listed as "2020." The title of this guidebook is also labeled "2020" as the information pertaining to job hunting is geared for positions that start in 2020.

University Schedule
- Periodic test
- Summer vacation
- Periodic test
- Spring vacation

What you should prepare for conducting job hunting activities

- Begin preparing before the start of PR activities and selection activities to be fully prepared before beginning your job search.
- Self-analysis and evaluation (P9)
- Industry and corporate research (P13), examining job types (P19), visiting alumni (P28)
- Application form tips (P42)
- Interview tips (P53)

Information sources and content to be gathered

- University career center
  - Corporate recruitment information
  - Individual consultation for job hunting
  - List of graduates
  - Job hunting reports from former international students
- Newspapers
  - Job hunting trends for the current academic year
  - Japanese social trends (economics and politics)
  - World affairs
  - Job information
- Books and informational magazines
  - Industry trends
  - Screening test preparation
  - Information from recruiting companies
  - Katsha Shikiho (Japanese Company Handbook) and Gyokai Chizu (Map of the Business World)
- Internet
  - Corporate recruitment information
  - Requesting information and starting applications
  - Applying for seminars
  - Word-of-mouth information
  - Quarterly job hunting journal
- Public Offices
  - Job-opening information cards not available at university
  - Internship information
  - Information for foreign nationals
  - Individual counseling on finding employment

The keys are when you start and gathering information!
Begin job hunting activities early and acquire enough information to allow you to act efficiently. This is the key to successfully finding employment in Japan.
First, let's look at what you need to do and when you need to do it.
What Japanese Companies Expect

Before starting your job hunting activities, it is important to know what Japanese companies expect of international students.

Reasons for hiring international students

There are three main reasons why Japanese companies hire international students. The first reason is to secure excellent human resources regardless of their nationalities. The second reason is to hire important human resources that serve as a bridge to the global business world. The third reason is for diversity, to secure human resources with different cultural backgrounds. The companies aim to stimulate their organizations by deliberately securing employees with varied backgrounds.

From Survey on Career and Retention for International Students (Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry, 2015)

Level of Japanese language skills required for international students

Japanese companies focus mostly on the Japanese skill levels of international students engaged in job hunting activities. These job seekers must submit application forms and attend interviews since these are required steps of the hiring process. However, since companies consider interviews to be very important, it will be difficult for an applicant to acquire a job offer if their listening or conversation skills are lacking. More than 90% of Japanese companies expect international students without any English skills to be at Japanese Proficiency Level N1 or above at time of hiring. Although few in number, there are also some companies that will hire English speaking international students at the N2 level.

From Survey on Career and Retention for International Students (Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry, 2015)

Skills which employers consider to be important when hiring international students

Japanese skill is considered most important by companies when hiring international students. The second most important skill is thought to be communication skills. Companies also consider vitality and enthusiasm to be important. Vitality is defined as one’s strength to overcome hardships and obstacles whereas enthusiasm makes people want to enter the company. When looking at each industry type, a trend can be seen in the manufacturing industry where importance is placed on professional skills and English skills.

From Survey on Career and Retention for International Students (Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry, 2012)