

Empirical Study on the Capability Approach: Examining the Quality of Life of Unmarried, Non-Regular Female Employees

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This study has two objectives. The first objective is to design and provide an example of a research method utilizing the capability approach. The capability approach was proposed by economist Amartya Sen and developed by his coresearcher Martha Nussbaum and other researchers. This approach focuses on the functionings (beings and doings) that can be accomplished with goods, rather than considering the amount of available money or goods. Further, it focuses on whether people are able to achieve the necessary functionings of life, rather than whether they are satisfied with their lives. Therefore, the capability approach is positioned as a new approach that differs from conventional methods to study the quality of life that use income and satisfaction as indicators. Although the concept of the capability approach has been widely discussed and researched, there is a paucity of empirical studies on this concept because of its operability. The application of the capability approach to empirical research is expected in a variety of research areas. We believe that by conducting an empirical study on the capability approach and presenting its advantages and disadvantages and the problems that emerge in the process of this study, we can significantly contribute to the development of quality of life research.

The second objective of this study is to analyze the quality of life of unmarried, non-regular female employees using the capability approach and compare the quality of life of these employees with that of regular female employees based on employment status to identify the following: First, we identify the content and achievement of the functionings required by unmarried non-regular female employees in their lives. Second, we identify the causes of difficulties in life faced by unmarried, non-regular female employees in terms of a lack of life resources and their inability to convert resources into achievements. Third, by comparing the employees' range of capabilities to exercise their freedom of choice, we identify how their employment type restricts non-regular employees' freedom of choice functionings. To identify the second objective, the following research and analysis were carried out: First, a workshop survey was conducted using the brainstorming method to determine the overall number of functionings required by unmarried, non-regular female employees to live their lives. Subsequently, using the list of functionings obtained from the workshop, an individual interview

survey was conducted to determine the employees' achievement of the functionings required for life, available resources, and the characteristics of the employees' ability to convert resources into achievements. Finally, a case study was conducted to compare the differences in the range of capabilities between non-regular and regular employees to clarify the characteristics of non-regular employees. All the surveys were conducted on 12 non-regular and 8 regular employees. The participants were recruited using snowball sampling.

The results of the surveys revealed that unmarried, non-regular female employees require the following functionings in their lives: working to earn an income, eating to satisfy hunger, sleeping to relieve physical and mental fatigue, relieving stress, and gathering information. Unlike regular employees, non-regular employees required functionings related to job search since they often wanted to change their jobs and apply for full-time employment. On the other hand, their lack of responses to functionings related to emotional expression and coexistence with nature suggests that non-regular employees may experience difficulty in recognizing the necessity of these functionings. Further, the interviews revealed that only one-third of non-regular employees could achieve the functionings necessary for life compared to regular employees, that is, the range of functionings available to non-regular employees was narrower than that available to regular employees. The resource that most of the non-regular employees lacked was time, followed by money. Further, non-regular employees experienced more deficiencies in money and time than regular employees. The ability to convert resources into achievements was found to have three components: (1) motivation, (2) skill, and (3) knowledge. The lack of motivation was particularly noticeable among non-regular employees. The study also revealed that the ability to convert resources into achievements is a factor that determines which of the available functionings a person chooses to perform. Hence, it can be considered an important factor in the exercise of the life management skills necessary for the formation of life initiatives. The results of the case study by employment status reveal that non-regular employees have fewer functionings to choose from and are less capable of achieving those functionings than regular employees. The inability of non-regular employees to choose functionings was influenced by the informal nature of their work, due to which they lacked money, lacked the educational opportunities afforded to regular employees, and experienced difficulty in maintaining a long-term outlook on life as a result of their short, one-year-long employment contracts.