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White-collar blues

In Japan, a new kind of business school is retraining jaded salarymen

Increased longevity means that lifetime employment isn't lasting the distance

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The Institute of Social Human Capital in Tokyo is an unusual sort of business-training school. Those who attend it (two-thirds are men) have mostly quit or taken redundancy packages from big Japanese firms, and are trying to start again (...)The way to prepare them for a second career is to get them interacting as individuals, not as corporate workers or business partners, says Matsuhiko Ozawa, a director of the Institute, which specialises in this sort of course. (...)

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For years, the salarymen rode a career escalator that rewarded them less for skills than for loyalty and doggedly hard work. (...)During the post-war boom years, firms took on workforces of permanent employees, who were hired for life. All that was needed to get paid more was to grow older.

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In return, the employers' extravagant demands had to be met. Salarymen could not refuse a transfer—often at a few days' notice—to a subsidiary hundreds of miles from home. Children grew up largely without fathers. (...).

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The salaryman remains stubbornly dug in across most industries. Mr Abe has promised as part of his growth-boosting reforms to give more rights to those at the bottom of the hierarchy—part-time and temporary workers with much lower pay—but has stopped short of radical steps, such as legislation to make firms give equal pay for equal work.