

Can we create human resource legacies in the Tokyo Olympics?

[2016.12.7]

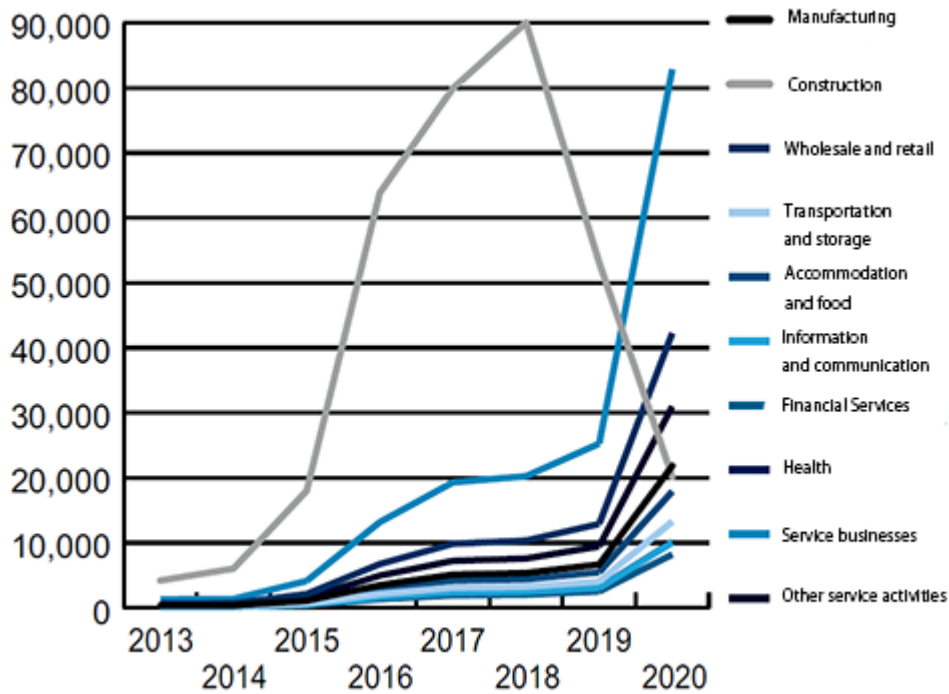
In the previous column, the author reviewed how legacies were created in the 2012 London Olympics and the recently ended Rio Olympics. While emphasis was laid on intangible legacies such as people and culture in both cases, this trend was more prominent in the London Olympics. Unlike developing countries, developed countries cannot expect much development of infrastructure or associated economic impact through the Olympic Games. London therefore used the Olympics as an opportunity to solve social issues, and successfully promoted diversity and inclusion through employment.

Unique challenges for the Tokyo Olympics

As a mature city, Tokyo is expected to take full advantage of this opportunity to create human resource legacies. It is important, however, for Tokyo to develop an original legacy plan, rather than imitating previous efforts in a superficial manner. Japan is facing a declining population, and expecting a steady decrease in its working population. Moreover, the Tokyo metropolis is very different from Rio de Janeiro, which is a developing city, and also different from London, which is a mature city but still expanding, both economically and in population.

It is worth revisiting the need for 815,000 workers generated by the Tokyo Olympics ([see the previous column](#)). This need is distinguished by its large-scale, temporary nature. If Japan were in a stage of economic expansion, the human resources mobilized to meet such a large-scale need would be utilized in the subsequent economic growth. But what, then, of the situation where the productive population is decreasing and no substantial growth in economy can be expected? In addition, Japan's current lack of human resources limits its ability to meet the need for more workers for the Olympics. Thus, even if we can overcome this lack of human resources, it will be difficult to maintain the employment of the workers once recruited. These are the challenges unique to the Tokyo Olympics, compared with London and Rio.

Fig. 1: Simulated need for human resources in different industries



Volunteers as additional main players in the Olympics

These challenges, however, offer a chance for vibrant reform. Approaching the Olympics as an opportunity to solve issues faced by the industry and civil society of Japan, as a nation promoting the "dynamic engagement of all citizens," will hopefully create unique human resource legacies, and demonstrate to the world an innovative way to host the Olympics in a mature city.

Volunteer initiatives should be first on the list of human resource legacies of the Olympics. As in the London and Rio Olympics, volunteers will play an important role behind the scenes in Tokyo; and the need for more than 80,000 temporary volunteers will offer a great opportunity for volunteer activity.

A super-aging society should embrace the participation of many elderly volunteers who can utilize their skills and free time in the service of good causes. As Japan strives to achieve the "dynamic engagement of all citizens," it is necessary to promote voluntary activity in addition to paid work. Using the opportunity of the Olympics, we can develop significant human resource legacies for sustaining the civil society beyond 2020.

The social system for supporting voluntary work may also change. Just as we saw an increase in the number of companies introducing voluntary work-leave systems after the Great East Japan Earthquake, it is hoped that more companies will encourage workers to

take leaves of absence for volunteer work during the Olympic period.

Olympic human resource needs in three main areas: construction, security, and tourism

The Olympics also provide an opportunity to reform various industry sectors. The following discussion focuses on construction, security, and tourism, which are typically impacted significantly by the Olympics.

In the construction industry, where the greatest need for human resources is expected, both the work force and investment had been in decline until several years ago. There is also a structural challenge, in that 34% of construction workers are aged 55 or over, and there is a chronic shortage of human resources (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism: <http://www.mlit.go.jp/common/001121700.pdf>).

The Employment and Skills Legacy program was implemented in the London Olympics to use the investment in construction as an opportunity to create human resource legacies. The program, which aimed to provide training and job opportunities mainly for London's unemployed, helped to address the increased need for human resources, and simultaneously created a human resource-related legacy for supporting continued employment and outplacement after the Olympic period.

The London Olympics were also used as an opportunity to change the image of the construction industry. While, previously, many thought that construction work was dangerous and exclusively suited to male workers, British perception of the industry has since begun to change after high safety standards were applied to the construction of the stadium and other sites, and employment targets were set for female workers.

The Japanese construction industry, in its turn, should make a concerted effort to review working conditions, means to develop human resources, and means to improve the image of the industry to overcome the shortage of human resources. Efforts are in fact being made to create construction sites more amenable to women workers; and there is a great opportunity for the construction industry to improve its image through the Olympic construction sites in Tokyo, as they are drawing significant public attention.

- Development of a "trisection human resource portfolio" in London and Rio

The security industry is likely to face a still more severe labor shortage than the construction industry. A large number of security workers will certainly be needed during the Tokyo Olympic period, but the overall need may vary significantly depending on the precise nature of the security measures taken. London and Rio adopted the approach of a trisection human resource portfolio, in which defense and police personnel (public sector), private companies (private sector), and volunteers (civil society sector) played different roles, as required, to flexibly meet the need for human resources.

As a result, many volunteers participated in security activities. In Tokyo's case, by using the Olympics to showcase the active involvement of female and younger workers, the security industry may successfully alter its image and expand the scope of recruitment.

Creation of a human resource legacy is also expected in hotels, restaurants, and other hospitality businesses, which will draw increasing attention through to the Olympic period. The service industry, which already has difficulty in securing workers, will face even stiffer competition in acquiring human resources through to 2020; and what is required is not merely quantity, but quality.

In Rio, there was difficulty in securing English-speaking staff, and many foreign tourists flocked to English-speaking information desks and volunteers. As the number of foreign tourists visiting Japan is expected to increase dramatically in Olympic period, it is clear that service personnel will have to be able to respond to multiple languages, including English and Chinese. Thus, in addition to improving the skills of existing workers, it may be necessary to provide working conditions amenable to homemakers and seniors who are not available as full-timers but have valuable skills in this regard.

Preparation of a plan as a key to creating human resource legacies

As discussed above, while the large-scale, temporary need for human resources created by the Tokyo Olympics presents a significant challenge, it also provides a rare opportunity to solve issues in the Japanese labor market. Failure to effectively procure related human resources can disturb not only the management of the Olympics but also ordinary business activities. However, if we effectively develop and utilize such human resources, we can expect qualitative changes in the labor market, such as improved productivity, better use of hitherto unexploited labor resources, and improved perceptions of industries.

Olympic legacies in mature cities may take the form of changes in people's awareness and behavior, in addition to tangible legacies such as infrastructure development. As exemplified in the case of London, it is necessary to prepare a meticulous plan to create such intangible legacies, in a way similar to developing infrastructure. With the Rio Olympics now over, there are less than four years left to prepare for the next Olympics, in Tokyo, and there is an urgent need to prepare plans for creating related human resource legacies. In subsequent columns, the author will discuss specific projected human resource legacies for volunteers and respective industries.

Koumei Ishikawa (Visiting Researcher, Recruit Works Institute)