

S-face

SFC makes the future through researches

**“Yurui” communication
that changes people
and organizations**

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Katsuhiko Ogawa**

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Various experimental initiatives based on the keyword “Yurui” (*)

Without setting detailed rules or appointing any leaders, approximately 150 NEETs have assumed office as company directors. NEET Co., Ltd. is the least profitable company in the world with annual sales of 920,000 yen.

Based on the concept of an “enjoyable town” proposed by active high school girls (JK, short for *Joshi kosei*), the Sabae City, Fukui prefecture Office JK Section has drawn attention for its “Yurui urban planning.”

Project Research Associate Yujun Wakashin has become a controversial figure in various circles with mixed reviews for his successive projects that are all very experimental and fitting to present-day Japan.

Former Executive Director Katsuhiko Ogawa of the Keio Research Institute

at SFC spoke to him to uncover the ideas and aims behind the projects that have drawn such attention.

* “Yurui” refers to a state where things are not fixed or managed rigidly, but are connected and held together as a whole.

Bringing together 150 NEETs^(*) to establish a company where everyone is a director—is this for real?

Ogawa: There are, in fact, many unique projects that you have undertaken in your research. Of these, you seem to disregard the sales performance of NEET Co., Ltd. What is the aim of doing so?

Wakashin: While this is not limited to NEET Co., Ltd., my research, in general, aims to encourage communication between people and organizations, and in particular, to draw out the spontaneity and diversity of human beings. To that end, I am focusing on providing facilitation and communities that are non-managerial and non-instructional. In short, I strive to achieve “Yurui communication.” Bringing NEETs together to form and operate a company is one such initiative, as well as an experiment.

Ogawa: Specifically, what types of business are they engaged in, and in what type of organization?

Wakashin: First, once they are employed, they are no longer NEETs. That is why all 150 of them are directors of the company. They have no base salary, and are not “employees.” The registered purpose of the business is “all businesses,” and they engage in businesses or provide services that may or may not be immediately profitable, and do what they wish to until they tire of it, as long as they enjoy it. A representative business is the “Rental NEET” service, where NEETs lease themselves out for 1,000 yen per hour. This service has drawn much attention.



Ogawa: “Rental NEET” has a strange ring to it. (Laughs) To date, what kinds of services have the rental NEETs provided to their customers?

Wakashin: They do anything as long as it does not violate any laws. There have been requests to queue together with the customers at highly popular stores, converse with them at cafes, and even to assemble plastic models.

* Not in Education, Employment or Training

The “yurui sense of belonging” that has created a mysterious spirit of loyalty to the company

Ogawa: In truth, NEET Co., Ltd. is generating profits, isn’t it?

Wakashin: No, not at all. Annual sales in 2014 were a mere 920,000 yen. (Laughs) The original motive behind setting up the company was not to have adults prompt them to do something productive, but to have them experiment with their own motivation to create something, and find out what they can do when they come here involuntarily.

Ogawa: That is to say that the aim of the business is not to provide NEETs with job opportunities.

Wakashin: Yes. I have no intentions of rehabilitating them into society. Rather than bringing them closer to the traditionally ideal image of members of society, the significance of the initiative lies in how we develop an inherent sense of purpose and motivation that prompts them to work hard for values that are completely different from conventional values.

Ogawa: Even with external motives such as salary and status, NEETs may still not

have the desire to work.

Wakashin: That is right. On the other hand, what is of interest is that despite being such an unprofitable company, most of the members did not quit when we renewed the list of directors in the last previous year. Instead, I even feel a sense of loyalty toward the company growing among them. This is not because of a reward given to them in return for their sacrificing themselves for the organization. Rather, I believe it was born of a “Yurui sense of belonging” through their involvement and free participation in that community.

JK, the representatives of “yurui citizens,” will change the adult society

Ogawa: The Sabae City Office JK Section initiative, in which female high school students participate in the revitalization of the town, has also been widely covered in the media.

Wakashin: The most important point about the JK Section concept is to create an atmosphere where normal citizens who have never even thought about urban planning (I call such people “Yurui citizens”) can enjoy themselves. JKs are the representatives of these “Yurui citizens.”

They do not have rigid mindsets, such as ideas about the revitalization of towns and development of community frameworks, that professionals and citizens who are strongly interested in community activities tend to have. I believe that creating a situation where adults who tend to consider urban planning in terms of theory are swayed by “Yurui JK citizens” can develop new communication and a sense of “softness” in the community.

Ogawa: Indeed. This means that “Yurui citizens” produce “soft chaos.” The result is changes in regional societies.

Wakashin: Yes. More than 20 projects and activities were created in a year, and covered close to 100 times on TV and in the newspapers. However, more than these PR effects, I think that the greatest results that we have reaped through this initiative were the awareness on the greater importance of learning together over teaching, the birth of a collaboration that goes beyond generations, and changes in the adults in the community. These were achieved by taking the bold step of making young people the central players, and to sway adults through that.

“yurui,” a word that is well-suited for everyday trial and error

Ogawa: How do you regard the “Yurui communication” that you have proposed?

Wakashin: It is often said that “Future communication should not be one-directional, but should be interactive,” or that “We should engage in proactive communication.” However, such concepts, imported from overseas, do not fit perfectly with the sense of trial and error that we go through in everyday life here.

Ogawa: It is true. People do not say “JK” in the United States. (Laughs)

Wakashin: When I explain the concept of doing things together to the NEETs and JKs, I always use the term “Yurui.” I think that it is a superb expression. I am not involved in these projects in a paranoid or rigid way, but neither do I just leave them completely alone. Although there are some connections, we do not make decisions for them on methods and answers that are easy to grasp, but ponder over them together. That is my idea of “Yurui.”

“Yurui communication” is the “learning while teaching, teaching while learning” of the modern times

Ogawa: Even so, does it not require considerable patience to put your idea of “Yurui communication” into practice from the standpoint of leaders and teachers?

Wakashin: I think that it is necessary to let go of the mindset that the instructor has to have the answer. In truth, when I consider problems together with the adults who work with the NEETs and JKs, the exhausting but unproductive thought process often goes on for a long time. After a while, however, they begin to think for themselves. Perhaps it is because they have no choice but to think on their own. Then, they begin to trust those of us who are thinking together with them, and eventually engage in a discussion on equal grounds about their ideas and thoughts. Once this switch is turned on, they will begin to take spontaneous action. Of course, there are also situations where this process takes quite a lot of time.

Ogawa: That is precisely the concept of “learning while teaching, teaching while learning” propounded by our founder,

Yukichi Fukuzawa. Put it in the words used for the philosophy of the Keio University Shonan Fujisawa Campus (SFC), it is to identify problems rather than to solve them. Many of your initiatives go beyond the concepts of a “teaching party” and a “party that is being taught.” In the sense that all the people who are involved in the project learn from one another, it is truly putting the idea of “learning while teaching, teaching while learning” into practice.

Continuing to explore the “spaces” of communication through light-hearted trial and error

Ogawa: Don’t you have any thoughts of creating “spaces” for Yurui communication at SFC?

Wakashin: Our current education system is one that is focused on problem solving, and follows the framework of certain military organizations whereby the teacher stands at the lectern and issues instructions to students. Moreover, even though everyone talks about how much they dislike such organizations and systems, they all become nervous when it comes to quitting. Even as

they say that they do not want to be managed, they wish to be managed. It is a complicated situation.

Ogawa: There is no unifying force. Complete freedom is the same as a lack of freedom.

Wakashin: I believe that rather than searching for answers somewhere, it is vital for us to create “spaces” that allow us to continue searching and exploring in a light-hearted manner even though we do not know what the answer is. I think that SFC is an institution that allows us to conduct such research. I aim to make full use of this campus and develop various research projects going forward.

Ogawa: In future, there are plans at SFC to carry out an experimental education program called “Miraisozoku.” In this program, teachers and students stay together for two to three weeks to tackle certain themes, and attempt to gain something through the experience. I think that the new style of communication that you have pointed out to us today can also provide many hints and ideas for such new educational initiatives.

Sabae City Office JK Section



Despite the conventional concept that people can only attain adulthood if they are educated and managed by adults, this project takes a bold step in granting the leadership to youths, and creates opportunities for them to engage in activities together with adults, putting into practice the concept of “learning while teaching, teaching while learning.”



NEET Co., Ltd

NEET Co., Ltd. is a company where all its members (close to 150 NEETs) have assumed office as directors of the company. Without setting detailed rules or appointing any leaders, this company is founded upon the bold concept of letting its members engage in trial and error, starting with nothing. It generated sales of just 920,000.



Profile

Yujun Wakashin

Project Research Associate, Graduate School of Media and Governance, Keio University. He is also a graduate of the Master’s program in the same graduate school. He specializes in communication theories between humans and organizations aimed at drawing out an inherent sense of purpose and diversity in people, and industrial and organizational psychology.



Profile

Katsuhiko Ogawa

Former Executive Director of the Keio Research Institute at SFC, and Professor, Faculty of Environment and Information Studies, Keio University. He is also a graduate of the Master’s program at the Graduate School of Engineering, Keio University. He specializes in communication design, theories of Internet society, and human interfaces.

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Job-hunting Outlaw Recruitment/ Narcissist Recruitment

No education or training is provided in Job-hunting Outlaw Recruitment/Narcissist Recruitment business. The parties concerned create a “soft chaos” environment where they can speak and express themselves freely, and make connections between their own “maniac” selves and other people, as well as with the society.

