

# Maintaining Diversity in Policy-Oriented Research: Alternatives of Work-Life Balance Measures for Gender Equality in Japan

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## 1. Problem

Policy-oriented research often suffers from overconcentration on a narrow topic. For instance, research on gender equality in Japan has concentrated on the effects of work-life balance (WLB) measures on continuous regular employment of women in their childrearing stage. Although we have already compiled negative evidence indicating that there has been no increase in women's continuous regular employment despite expanding WLB measures [1], we are still spending a large amount of resources on WLB research. Overconcentration reduces diversity and the capacity of social sciences to make appropriate contributions to public issues.

This problem partly arises from a defect in the PDCA (plan-do-check-act) cycle model, which policy-oriented research is always based on implicitly. It offers no motivation to break the cycle. The cycle is merely a repetition of fine-tuning in a production process to achieve the given goal, as is naturally expected given that the root of PDCA was a product management system used in private companies [2]. There will thus be no chance to set another goal, to discover a new research topic, or to appeal to the public to overwrite the fundamental philosophy behind the policy.

## 2. Solution

I put forward a proposal for a new framework for policy-oriented research: "ideology-institution dynamics with causal modeling" (IIDCM), a framework upper-compatible with the PDCA cycle. Like the PDCA cycle, IIDCM assumes a cycle between consideration of ideology (what we perceive and think about the real world) and observation of social phenomena in the real world. In addition, IIDCM offers a schema to analyze ideology as a system of interdependent beliefs about how the real society is, how the ideal society should be, and what we should do according to the social status we occupy.

In the IIDCM framework, the researcher sets policy goals after consideration of interdependent beliefs constituting ideology. Different ideologies give different policy goals, as well as different concrete measures. The researcher should also consider existing normative beliefs in a specific social institution, which sometimes let people act against the given policy goal. These features of IIDCM let researchers have a bird's-eye view of the dynamics of ideology and institution and write diverging scenarios for possible future societies, taking into account whether the policy goals are achievable, what the feasible measures are, and how we can solve by-product problems.

## 3. Case studies

In this paper, I will introduce three issues for gender equality in Japan: negative evidence against WLB policies and how the focus of WLB research has recently shifted [3], debates on reforms of the divorce system and redefinition of core beliefs about "equity" between (ex-)spouses [4], and expected effects of universal child benefit and opposition by "traditionalists" [5]. I will locate the current state of these issues on the IIDCM framework, find normative constraints in legal/political discourses, and discuss what scenarios are probable in the future.

(See <http://tsigeto.info/15x> for details)

## References

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