

# Wadachi Computer House

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## ► What is Wadachi Computer House?

Wadachi Computer House is a workplace that was established to help people with severe physical disabilities to make an independent living using computers. There are presently 40 workers with disabilities (hereafter referred to as *Shoin*), most of whom have quadriplegia.

In the 1980's, when work projects for people with physical handicaps were first begun in Japan, most of the work available was some sort of manual labor, and the average wage was only from several thousand yen to ten thousand yen a month. Some *Shoin* have reflected on that time as follows: "Even though I worked all day, my work was only worth a few hundred yen." "I wanted to work to become economically independent." Similar voices were finally united in an attempt to find work besides manual labor that could fulfill this goal of economic independence. In seeking work besides manual labor that would draw upon the *Shoin's* remaining abilities, computer-associated work was selected because it filled this requirement and also seemed to fit the increasing social needs of the time.

In 1984, after *Shoin* participated in special lectures on bookkeeping by professional accountants and workshops on computer use, Wadachi *Sagyosho* (Wadachi Workshop) was established. Although it was not at first recognized by the government, after 1990 it was restructured under the name "Wadachi Computer House" (hereafter referred to as Wadachi) and was officially recognized as a vocational aid center for people with physical disabilities. From 2007, Wadachi's administrative structure was changed according to the new Japanese law to support the independence of people with handicaps (*Shogaisha Jiritsu Shien Ho*) such that Wadachi became a multifunctional-type facility including three separate categories of *Shoin*: those who receive vocational aid (*shuro ikou shien*), referred to as Type A; those who receive vocational continuation support (*shuro keizoku shien*), referred to as Type B; and those who receive daily-life support (*seikatsu kaigo*). Type A *Shoin* are employed under labor contracts.

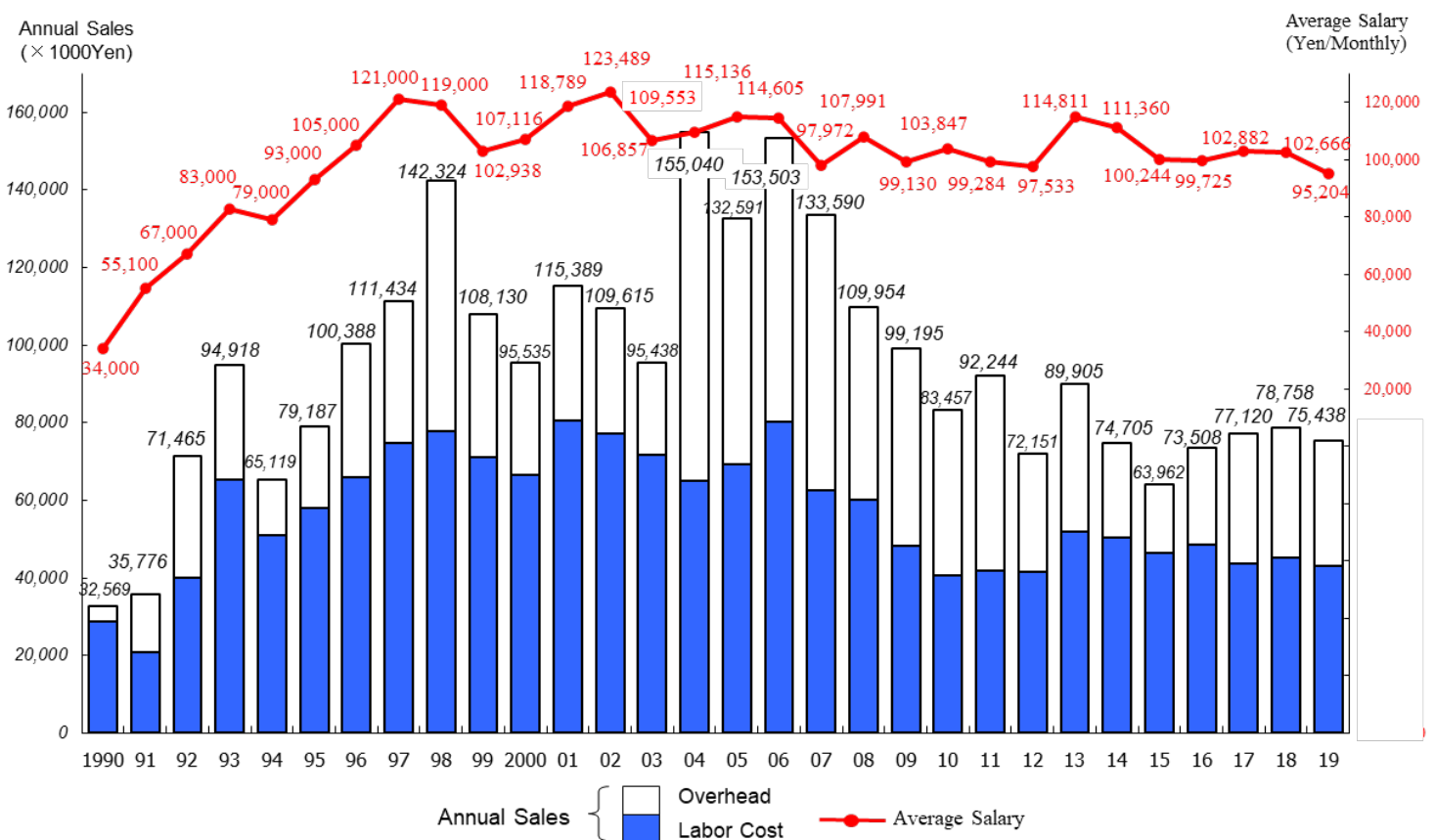
The present content of the work done by Wadachi *Shoin* is extremely varied. Consignments from government agencies, general corporations, and other types of



organizations include data input and processing, homepage production, planning and consulting on projects, calculating, survey analysis, tape transcription, direct mail services, system development, and IT support for the disabled.

Work at Wadachi is decided and delegated according to each person's ability and degree of physical handicap. Wadachi's special feature is that important decision-making is done by the *Shoin* themselves, who play an integral role in all that goes on at Wadachi. Of course *Shoin* make decisions with customers about consulting, project development, and delivery, and they often show better knowledge of the work issues than Wadachi's support staff (hereafter referred to as \**Staff*). *Shoin* also have the opportunity to exercise their abilities in process management as they oversee the speed and accuracy of work done by part-time non-disabled employees. When there is a lot of work to be done (e.g., materials arrangements, field investigation preparation, staff meetings with customers, and deliveries), *Shoin* stay at work until late at night and work on holidays, just as employees in other companies. As a result, during an annual inspection by government officials, Wadachi was warned to shorten the working hours of the *Staff*, but the *Shoin* objected saying, "This institution is not for the *Staff*!"

As a result of Wadachi *Shoin* and *Staff* working in a united effort, Wadachi's annual income has been more than one hundred million yen since 1996, and the average monthly wage for *Shoin* is now more than one hundred thousand yen per month. (See graph below.)



## ▶ The organizational structure and self-management by *Shoin*

Wadachi consists of two business divisions, which are further divided into a total of eleven separate work groups. *Shoin* belong to one of the two divisions and to one or more of the eleven work groups. Since April 2007, when Wadachi's administrative system changed to a multifunctional-type facility according to the new governmental law (*Shogaisha Sougo Shien Ho*) explained earlier, *Shoin* must now receive official permission and documentation from the local government before they can work at Wadachi, thus determining the amount of financial aid Wadachi can receive from the government.

Wadachi also has a sales department under its direct control, where *Shoin* and *Staff* work primarily with sales.

*Shoin* usually work at the Wadachi office, but since introducing IT business, *Shoin* can also work at home. Although working hours are in principle 9:00~17:00, they can be adjusted according to the physical and daily-life conditions of individual *Shoin*.

*Shoin* sometimes work alone and sometimes work in teams. In the case of large jobs, several teams may work together. In the weekly Monday work meetings, individual responsibilities are decided and adjustments are made as progress reports are heard and checked.

Process management, project planning, budget planning, accounting, salary assessment, and decisions concerning admittance of new members are basically under *Shoin* control. Decisions concerning ways of improvement in computer knowledge and skills, such as attending training workshops or inviting instructors to conduct training workshops, are also completely made by the *Shoin*.

## ▶ The role of Wadachi *Shoin* and *Staff*

Mr. B, who has severe cerebral palsy and a speech impediment, requires the use of a wheelchair and needs help with most aspects of his daily life, for example, eating, using the restroom, and so on. He has been a member of Wadachi since the time of its establishment and is its most seriously disabled member. The fact that he taught himself computer programming and received official certification as a computer



programmer clearly shows how hard he has worked. He now develops systems as a systems engineer at Wadachi, working 2 days a week at Wadachi and the other days at his home.

The work of Mr. B varies from developing management systems for golf courses, developing management systems for membership in all kinds of groups, to developing management systems for taxi services. He not only participates from the beginning in all levels of the business discussions, but he also plays an important leadership role in the development of his team. With his understanding of the complicated world of merchandise management, he is able to propose and develop systems that please customers by saving them time. "What used to take full-time staff a month to do in a staring contest with the

account books can now be done by anyone in no time at all.” “We can now take a holiday.” “I have time to read the newspaper again.” Such comments from his customers are what encourage Mr. B.

Although a member of the Wadachi *Staff* accompanies Mr. B to meetings with customers because of his dysgraphia and speech impediment, with the arrival of email and remote maintenance, most of the obstacles in his job because of his disabilities have disappeared. What is now a challenge to Mr. B is that he often has to do more and more correspondence during the major holidays and weekends because of the need to coordinate with his customers’ work schedules.



The reason why Wadachi itself started doing aggregation management began with a comment from Mr. B: “I might be able to develop an aggregation system for questionnaires.” Twenty years ago the work of aggregation meant having to write into the program all the necessary aggregate set ups. In order to do this, Mr. B had to work day and night for days in

order to get the needed aggregation results. After that, with suggestions from his colleagues, the program was improved so that it is now able to be easily set up and handled by many other *Shoin*. Moreover, it is now possible to input, check, and tally several investigations at the same time. These efforts at labor-saving, standardization, and quality control are made good use of in developing systems for customers.

Mr. M is totally blind. He formerly worked in private enterprise but retired because of the gradual lose of his sight. With a desire to do computer work, he joined Wadachi when he was 36. After much searching for what he could do, he found that tape transcription was and continues to be work suited to his abilities.

At Wadachi, there are also various other *Shoin* with different types of disabilities, for example, those with hearing loss, mental disabilities, highly advanced brain-function disorders, among others.

The responsibilities of the Wadachi *Staff* are to find and set up work for each *Shoin* that bring out the best in the *Shoin*'s differing abilities and to ensure that each work project has a system for quality control. Moreover, since *Staff* try to develop new areas of work for *Shoin*, their work is not rigidly fixed but is aimed at being flexible to meet the needs of the *Shoin* thereby helping them become more and more independent.

#### ► **Wadachi as a consulting group making the most of disabled persons’ experience**

Wadachi has worked toward making a secure place of employment for seriously disabled individuals. The source of its inspiration was the movement in Aichi Prefecture among people with disabilities themselves. In the 1970's, discrimination of the disabled was commonplace in Japan. At that time in Nagoya, there was only one bathroom for the handicapped, at a rehabilitation facility. In 1973, the words in a letter to the editor