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
Dec 24th 2016 | TOKYO, The Economist

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 Matsuhiyo Ozawa, a director of the Institute, which specialises in this sort of course. (...) 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. 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. (...) 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.