

Creating a Workplace that Accepts Diverse Values and Encourages Independent Actions

The Nikko Group is promoting eight measures* to achieve human resource development and job satisfaction improvement, which is one of its material issues. We believe that these measures will increase the number of human resources who can embrace diverse values and act independently, enabling the Group to realize its long-term vision. The manager who spearheaded the measures at the human resource division and four employees consisting of two Japanese and two foreign nationals discussed the achievements so far and future tasks. *Eight measures (see p.72)

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Promotion of diversity

Matsuyama: The Human Resource Department is implementing personnel system reform and other measures to achieve human resource development and job satisfaction improvement. One of these measures is the promotion of diversity. We aim for an environment where every employee accepts diverse values, recognizes each other, and demonstrates their ability to realize the Vision to the maximum extent. Japanese men used to account for more than half of the employees in many workplaces. Now, the number of female and foreign national employees is increasing. From the standpoint of a foreign national employee, did you experience difficulties when you first joined the company?

Nguyen: Initially, I struggled to understand technical terms in Japanese and felt stressed because of the language barrier. However, my seniors and colleagues explained them to me each time, which was helpful. Gradually, I was able to perform my work without difficulties. In addition to language, foreign national employees are also greatly bewildered by some workplace practices. Therefore, it is essential to have an environment where we can ask questions without hesitation to those around us.

Kanokwan: In my case, I did not have specialized knowledge of asphalt plants and struggled to learn the industry's technical terms. I used to visit customer plants together with sales staff and deepened my knowledge by learning on the job.

Tatsukawa: I work in sales at the Mobile Plant Business Department in Hokkaido. The male-female ratio in my department is 50-50. I do not feel any gender discrimination, and I feel comfortable working there. Having said that, I had difficulty gaining specialized knowledge of crusher. I was also a little surprised by the long travel time, given that I am often on business trips covering a wide sales area.

Matsuyama: Starting this year, the Technology Development Department has been accepting students of Indian Institute of Technology as interns. Mr. Hamabe went to India and interviewed students who wished to do internships in this country. Until now, Nikko had emphasized Japanese language skills in hiring foreign national human resources. What kind of changes were there in the workplace when interns were accepted regardless of Japanese language proficiency?

Hamabe: We decided to accept a total of seven Indian students in two batches this year. They enthusiastically asked us how they could use their skills at Nikko. This has also provided Japanese employees with more opportunities to communicate in English, increasing their motivation for learning English conversation. Initially, they relied on translation tools, but they have now become more confident even when talking about technical matters. At first, we had concerns about accepting interns who could not speak Japanese. However, I now feel that there have been positive workplace changes from accepting diversity.



Tatsukawa: I visited a construction machinery trade show in Munich with customers and I went to KLEEMANN, the manufacturer of the crusher offered by our Sales Department. During the visits, I felt the importance of communicating in English on specialized topics. I am thankful that the Company has a system that supports employees who want to master English conversation.

Nguyen: It is a major change that we can take more flexible paid holidays. If we try to go home during Japanese holidays, the price of air tickets will be very high. It is helpful that we can take holidays flexibly. I feel that my identity is also respected, as my name is now displayed alphabetically rather than in katakana on the company portal.

Kanokwan: I am also using holidays for oshikatsu (supporting one's favorite celebrities) to refresh myself (laughter).

Hamabe: When I joined the Company 10 years ago, there were almost no female or foreign employees. Now, diverse human resources are working at the Company as a matter of course. As a greater emphasis is placed on efficient work style, I also feel that workplace attitudes have changed considerably.

Act independently

Matsuyama: Nikko aims to nurture independent human resources and encourage employees to take on challenges without fear of failure. Please tell us about your initiatives.

Nguyen: The development of plant products for the ASEAN market was a new endeavor for Nikko. We went through many trials and errors in the product design process. There were some failures, but I feel that Nikko has a culture of supporting employees taking on challenges.



Hamabe: The R&D Center follows the policy of taking on challenges without fearing failure and learning from it, and we are proactively pursuing new initiatives. We have a mechanism in place to avoid repeating a mistake: We accumulate knowledge of what we learned from failures in a database, which is shared by the team. Positive failures are recognized, and we have an environment in which we feel encouraged to take on challenges.

Tatsukawa: When I was in charge of preparing KLEEMANN's new product catalog, I received solid advice from my superior, which enabled me to complete it. I found it immensely rewarding to be assigned to an important job.



Kanokwan: Feedback and advice from superiors are a big encouragement. Even if I fail, they point out what I should do next time, which I feel has helped me grow.

Matsuyama: Human resource development training emphasizes the importance of acting independently. How are you practicing it?

Tatsukawa: When we offer a new product, we often do not have people who are well versed in it. So I look it up by myself to deepen my understanding of it. We are also making sure to accurately grasp the requests of Japanese customers and convey them within the Company.

Kanokwan: The competition with the Chinese and Korean manufacturers is intense in the Thai market, so I am finding out the product strategies and marketing methods of our rival companies by myself. I am proactively participating in trade shows to expand my network outside the Company. If a seminar recommended by someone I met there appears to be beneficial, I would ask my superior's permission and participate in it.

Hamabe: On the basis of the agile development practice, we are promoting information sharing within the team to solve problems. As young employees are increasingly becoming project leaders, we place importance on employees' autonomous and passionate attitude to work.

Overseas assignments and expectations on global human resource development

Matsuyama: The Nikko Group has been striving to nurture global talent to become a leading company in the Asian market. What was your reason for choosing to work abroad, and what kind of support system would you like the Company to provide in the future?



Nguyen: I joined a local Japanese company in Vietnam after graduating from a university there. I was inspired by what Japanese engineers on a business trip told us and wanted to learn about the latest technologies in Japan. In the future, I want to leverage what I have learned in Japan for the development of the Asian region.

Kanokwan: Since childhood, I have been very much interested in Japanese culture, and I studied Japanese at a university in Thailand. I wanted to work at a Japanese company to use my Japanese language skills. I am delighted to work at Nikko.

Tatsukawa: I want to learn more languages because we handle products made by a German company and have many opportunities to use English. My interest in overseas countries grew even further through my business trips to Germany. There is a strong impression that Nikko is a manufacturer that caters to Japanese customers. If we convey that the Company offers opportunities to work overseas when hiring, we might receive more applications from those interested in going abroad.

Hamabe: You might hesitate about an overseas assignment if you have children. However, you will be less worried if you have experience in working overseas even during a short period while you are single. In the future, we may have more employees who can be posted abroad with family.

Kanokwan: Japan is very safe and convenient, but the excitement and stimulation you feel in other Asian countries is something you cannot experience in Japan. I hope that as many people as possible will experience foreign culture because doing so definitely broadens their view.



Matsuyama: We are considering the introduction of an overseas trainee system in which young employees will work for a short period at Nikko's overseas base or at a supplier outside Japan. We hope that if the number of employees with overseas experience increases, the number of employees who wish to work overseas will also increase. However, departments will need to work efficiently with each other so that their operations are not affected by the absence of dispatched employees.

Hamabe: As interaction with international interns and foreign national employees has increased, English has become more familiar and it has become easier to consider taking up overseas assignments. In addition to increasing the number of Japanese employees with overseas experience, we need to support foreign national employees so that they can learn in Japan and succeed in managerial positions at overseas bases in the future.

Nguyen: If more such opportunities are available, I would definitely like to take advantage of them. There will also be more applications from highly skilled foreigners if we can build a track record.

Issues upon achieving growth in the Asian market

Matsuyama: What are the issues that Nikko must overcome to achieve growth in the Asian market?

Nguyen: Competition with Chinese and Korean manufacturers is intense in the Asian market. Nikko products are superior in terms of quality and performance, but they are at a disadvantage in terms of cost and delivery period. I believe that we need to strengthen our competitive edge, including the speed of decision-making.

Kanokwan: The needs of Asian customers often differ from those of Japanese customers. We need to respond closely to local requests.

Hamabe: Building a trusting relationship with local customers is indispensable for expanding sales in the Asian market, including China and Thailand. We need to develop a structure where local hires are brought to Japan, nurtured here, and returned to their countries to play active roles. Interns from India are a new initiative based on this idea.

Tatsukawa: One of Nikko's strengths is maintenance services the Japanese market. In the Asian market, we can also differentiate ourselves through customer services if we can offer remote support from Japan using AI.

Matsuyama: Today, we were able to hear straightforward and meaningful opinions from all of you. The Human Resource Department will continue to support the development of a workplace where all employees work with enthusiasm and a sense of security.