

Special roundtable

Diversity and inclusion allow us to evolve into a corporate group that can sustainably create value for the future

The JR-West Group promotes diversity and inclusion (hereinafter “D&I”) in order to maximize the strengths of each employee and continue to create new value. Haruko Nozaki, outside director; Masatoshi Miwa, director and executive officer; Makiko Tada, director (full-time Audit and Supervisory Committee member); and Ayumi Nakayama, general manager of the Diversity & Inclusion Office, acting as facilitator, exchanged opinions on the JR-West Group’s D&I.



D&I as a foundation for addressing change and creating value

Nakayama: We established the Diversity & Inclusion Office in April 2023 and have been promoting D&I in earnest. Ms. Nozaki, you were involved in promoting diversity at Horiba. What was your impression when you became an outside director of the JR-West Group in 2020?

Nozaki: When I interviewed the executive officers, I asked, “Are you really thinking about women’s participation in the workplace?” Everyone gave me a puzzled look and replied, “Of course. Even at worksites and in group companies, operations aren’t possible these days without female employees.” From these words, I felt that they were seriously considering how they could maximize the potential of female employees. On the other hand, the problem is that there are few women in management decision-making. It would be great if diverse human resources, not limited to women, could have more opportunities to be exposed to

the management decision-making process and learn about things like what top management is focusing on.

Nakayama: Ms. Tada, how do you feel about the changes since you joined the company?

Tada: During the Japanese National Railways era, before I joined JR-West, most of the employees involved in management and operations were men. When you look at the diversity of employees working in the JR-West Group today, we have come a long way. But, as pointed out by Ms. Nozaki, there are few women in executive and management positions, and there are concerns that management decisions and values tend to lack variety due to unconscious bias. As we expand our business in the field of life design as well as railways, in order to be chosen by a range of customers, it will be increasingly important to have diverse perspectives in decision-making.

In JR-West’s message on diversity, there was the sentence, “We regard nationality, age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, values, experience in childcare and

nursing care, experience inside and outside the company, and other aspects as important ‘individualities.’ We value the idea of recognizing and respecting each other with respect and empathy.” It’s good to have a broad view of diversity.

Miwa: In creating a new business plan for the post-pandemic era, we formulated the Long-Term Vision 2032 with Our Purpose as a compass for the entire Group (P3, P17). Even though future changes are difficult to foresee, we will respond to changes and aim to continue to provide new value to the world. To that end, I believe that being a diverse organization—having the perspectives of employees from various backgrounds, employees being able to express their opinions freely, and having a corporate culture that properly accepts those diverse opinions—will be the foundation for our ability to respond to change and create new value. To achieve this, we are furthering D&I as one of the pillars of the overall human resource strategy of the Group.

From equality to equity— Mutual understanding and empathy is the premise of inclusion

Nakayama: Ms. Tada, you’ve been a pioneer for female employees. What do you think JR-West’s challenges are regarding the roles of women?

Tada: More women are being hired and more are becoming managers and railway site chiefs, but the overall number is still small. When I was head of the Kobe Branch, I tried to place female section chiefs together as much as possible. This is because when they are dispersed in various workplaces, they become a minority, and it is difficult for them to demonstrate their unique awareness and abilities. At a time when there are still few female leaders, I think it is



necessary to devise ways for women to demonstrate their abilities as a group to some extent.

In addition, some female employees have vague anxieties about their future, such as “I can’t work in the same way as male managers” or “I don’t think I can demonstrate leadership like men.”

Nozaki: It’s important not to leave it as “vague anxiety,” but to break down the elements and analyze them. For example, if you can see whether the cause of anxiety is about working hours, professionalism, interpersonal relationships, or the future, you begin to see solutions.

Anxiety weighs on people differently depending on their position, and it also changes depending on changes in the family situation. It’s important to express your anxieties openly. Then the people around you can face each other’s anxieties carefully, creating mutual understanding and respect in the organization, leading to inclusion.

In highly engaged workplaces, people frequently give feedback such as “You did a good job” and “Perhaps you should try doing it this way next time,” forming relationships in which people recognize each other.

Nakayama: In highly homogeneous organizations, there are many cases where things are communicated based on implicit understanding, but in organizations with diverse human resources, it is effective to communicate more explicitly. This is likely to improve management skills and work engagement.

Miwa: Furthering the participation of women in the workplace is an important issue of diversity. I believe that sustained growth cannot be achieved unless we become a corporate group where female employees can truly play an active role. In order to proceed systematically, we have set a numerical target of raising the percentage of women in

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leadership and management roles to 10% in fiscal 2028. In the process of achieving this target, it’s important to break down and verbalize women’s anxieties. We have been analyzing women’s issues and anxieties from the perspective of age and life events, but on the premise that each person’s anxiety is different, we will follow up on each person by communicating thoroughly and through systems and the support of the surrounding staff.

Nozaki: One aspect of diversity is the idea of equity, which is to firmly support people in different situations. It’s important not only to develop a system that allows anyone to take childcare leave or work short hours, but also to think about what kind of support the person really wants.

Miwa: We have valued providing all employees with the same system based on the concept of equality. But if some people have limitations in a certain area or field, we should address those problems in the future. And based on the idea of equity, or making things fair, we should create an environment where people can have opportunities to take on new challenges and continue their careers.

Making D&I that lets everyone shine
a strength of the JR-West Group

Tada: While there are challenges, there are also points where our efforts are ahead of other companies. For example, hiring people with disabilities. At JR West Iwll Co., Ltd., a special subsidiary, employees are working very vibrantly.

Miwa: The company was established with the aim of enabling employees to recognize disabilities as each other’s individuality and strengths, make the most of these strengths, and play an active and vibrant role. That is exactly

the philosophy of D&I.
Nozaki: The philosophy that all employees play an active role, regardless of whether they have disabilities, is fantastic. We can also praise the high rate of men taking childcare leave. A man I know who works for a media company explained why he took childcare leave saying, “My wife is an employee of JR-West, and she said it would be unthinkable for JR-West employees not to take childcare leave.” The active participation of women is a social issue, and I realized once again that our company has a big impact.

Miwa: The rate of taking childcare leave for our male employees was 54.8% at the end of fiscal 2023, a significant increase from 37.8% in the previous year. To make it easier for male employees to take childcare leave, we hold seminars to hear from people who have taken childcare leave. We have also developed ways to allow easier communication with bosses, such as holding childcare–work support meetings. We have always focused on creating an environment where employees can realize the career they envision, regardless of gender or life stage.

Tada: Firming up the Group’s advanced initiatives will also give us a competitive edge in hiring. If we actively disseminate information outside the company, a diverse range of people will join the Group and become the driving force for creating innovation.

Nozaki: That’s right. D&I is a strength for a company. As each person shines, we will become a group of shining people, and when the JR-West Group shines, Japan will shine too. It would be fantastic to create such a chain.

Nakayama: It’s exciting to think that embodying D&I will become a competitive strength for the company and lead to creating the future of communities.



Turning Our Purpose into a unifying force—
D&I for the Long-Term Vision 2032

Nozaki: As diversity progresses, diverse individualities and values will exist in the organization, and there will be conflicts, but Our Purpose will be the power to unite us. Diverse human resources mean different values and ways of doing work. But if we can work to realize what is set forth in Our Purpose as a common goal, we can create an even stronger organization with rich individuality.

Tada: Our Purpose states “We strive to solve regional issues, starting in western Japan. With the aim of creating a sustainable and vibrant future, we cooperate with our various partners to realize the lifestyles desired by all people.” I joined the company because I wanted to make the world a better place and improve people’s lives. We need diverse perspectives “to realize the lifestyles desired by all people.” By furthering D&I and incorporating diverse values, the JR-West Group can expand the areas where it can provide solutions, in both the mobility field and the life design field.

Nozaki: Our starting point should be a desire to do things that benefit customers and employees, as demanded by government and society. It was groundbreaking to switch from the mindset of “If you work like a man, we’ll let you join

us” to “Differences are our strengths.” Promoting diversity is not easy, but by putting in the time and effort, we can create initiatives that will lead to strengths for our company. Speed is also important. Instead of having the HR division work on diversity alone, we could make more dynamic progress by bringing on board communicative people who can share our thoughts.

Another point that is often mentioned as one of the objectives of D&I is to strengthen governance. Diverse organizations allow you to see things in a multifaceted way, which can also help prevent scandals.

Miwa: Highly homogeneous organizations unknowingly go in the same direction. It’s important from a governance perspective to have a corporate culture that properly accepts diverse opinions of employees with diverse values who ask “Is this really okay?” There are still many things that we must steadily improve step by step, but we will continue to communicate the areas where we are ahead, both internally and externally, so please look forward to it.

Nozaki: Let’s realize D&I that will make everyone working at the JR-West Group shine and will make all stakeholders, including customers and local residents, happy.

Nakayama: We heard many valuable opinions from various perspectives, ideal for this diversity roundtable. Thank you all very much for your time today.