

To Make Sumitomo Electric a Company Where Women Can Work at Their Best

While the birthrate is declining steadily in Japan, it is a social challenge to secure quality human resources. Sumitomo Electric also recognizes the significance of supporting women in playing important roles and developing themselves. To this end, it is crucial to establish an environment where they can continue their career through various events in their life. This fifth Stakeholder Dialogue was held for discussions with active female employees to gain an understanding of the current situation and present challenges so that we can further help women play important roles.

■ Outline of the Stakeholder Dialogue

Date: June 5, 2015 (Fri.)

Venue: Tokyo Head Office of Sumitomo Electric Industries, Ltd.

■ Participants

Masatoshi Nakata (General Manager, Human Resources Department, HR & Administration Division)

Miwa Kunii (Manager, Diversity & Inclusion Promotion Group, Human Resources Department, HR & Administration Division)

Keiko Iwai (Group Manager, Quality Control Group 1, Yokohama Production Department, Lightwave Components Division, Sumitomo Electric Device Innovations, Inc.)

Kokoro Miyake (Business Legal Group, Legal Department)

Risa Tachibana (2nd Sales Group, 2nd Sales Department, Sales Div. (Eastern Japan), Automotive Business Unit)



■ After joining the Sumitomo Electric Group

Kunii: I am Kunii from the Diversity & Inclusion Promotion Group of Human Resources Department, and will be your moderator today. I have mainly been in charge of supporting women in playing important roles since October 2014. First, please introduce yourselves.



Nakata: I am Nakata, General Manager of Human Resources Department. I look forward to hearing you freely exchange ideas today.

Iwai: I am in charge of quality control of optical communication devices at Sumitomo Electric Device Innovations, and have been a section manager for almost two years. I have three children.

Miyake: I am in charge of legal affairs of the environmental energy team in the Business Legal Group of Legal Department. This is my 11th year in the company.

Tachibana: I am a sales staff member in Automotive Business Unit. This is my fifth year.

Kunii: Next, please tell us why you joined Sumitomo Electric, as well as your impression of the company after actually joining it.

* The titles/posts of the participants are those at the time of the stakeholder dialogue.

Miyake: When I was looking for a job, I wanted to work for a company in which I can be involved in international projects, which is a manufacturer offering products that contribute to society and which has a sound foundation so that I can work there for a long time, as the three main conditions. Another key to selecting a company was its systems and education programs that would make me grow. After joining Sumitomo Electric, I was assigned to Overseas Contracts & Legal Affairs Department, and also had an opportunity to work overseas. I have never felt discriminated against based on gender but feel that all of my aims have been achieved.

Tachibana: I had wanted to be in charge of sales since my college days. During my job hunting, however, I focused more on what people were working in the company than on what job I wanted to do. I remember that the atmosphere in Sumitomo Electric was very good. I am now working in a sales team with the support of senior and junior colleagues. I feel that the environment is better than expected.



Iwai: I also joined Sumitomo Electric because the representatives of the company in the company information session made a good impression. While 22 years have passed since then, I have never thought that my choice was wrong.

Kunii: Ms. Iwai, you have been a section manager for two years. Do you still feel that the atmosphere of Sumitomo Electric is good?

Iwai: I am in charge of management while all of the other four members in the section are older than me. I have support from them in various ways, and feel that the good environment remains unchanged.



Significance of female workers to play important roles

Kunii: Do you think that your presence as a woman in your department has any impact on the workplace?

Iwai: I think that what matters is not gender but proper communication.

Miyake: I do not think that the presence of women has changed the surroundings either. In the meantime, our department has a working mother, and she is working reduced hours. We help her work efficiently by, for example, trying to hold meetings within her working hours. Her presence may be creating a sense of teamwork.

Tachibana: I am working in Utsunomiya Office, and two of the roughly 50 workers in the office, including me, are female employees for main career track. I sometimes take 20 male workers or so with me to give a presentation. My impression

is that people outside the company tend to think that Sumitomo Electric is a company where women are working energetically, rather than those within it. I also hear about women who actually want to join our company.

Kunii: While I am the only female manager in the HR groups at present, I think women's perspective can be introduced in a meeting even with only one female participant.

Nakata: There is a trend to support the success of women in the workplace throughout the Japanese society. I hope that all female workers are conscious of aiming to be leaders.



Various challenges are becoming visible

Miyake: I am now pregnant and going to be a mother next month. I will need to work reduced hours later. As it inevitably affects my work, I am nervous about whether I can do my job satisfactorily. I hope there is a teleworking system although it is difficult to introduce it shortly. Meanwhile, our department has no female section or group manager like Ms. Iwai, so it is not very clear what career I can develop in the future.



Tachibana: I sometimes talk with my boss about my career, but it is about career over the span of one or two years. I cannot envision my career plan from a long-term perspective at present either.

Kunii: Flexible ways of working are very important. We plan to start a teleworking system for the employees who need to engage in nursing care or childcare, as well as pregnant employees, on a trial basis in October 2015. As teleworking is allowed once a week in the plan, the system is aimed at expanding job opportunities for those who can work if teleworking is available, rather than supporting workers in balancing work and life.

Miyake: I hope that the teleworking system is also used by men, as well as women.

Iwai: To support childcare, we also have the reemployment system. I assume their family situation is a key to working women. My personal view is that working at home is difficult to introduce. There is an issue of whether payment should be based on working hours or merit. It will be also unrealistic to introduce the system for factory staff.

Kunii: It is not good to give an impression that only women receive attention either.

Iwai: What level of responsibility they assume is an issue when women work as members of society. It is difficult to keep balance between work and childcare.

Tachibana: Although I cannot imagine me raising a child now, it is likely that I will later consider how I can use the systems to balance work and childcare at the turning points of my life.



Communication is important

Kunii: Motivated women sometimes shift their focus to home life temporarily, but some of them cannot shift it back to work later. It is so wasteful, I think. As I also have children, I have experience that I could not apply for a business trip or interesting project because of childcare. Superiors of employees who are raising children should not determine that such employees cannot work for a new project, for example, on their discretion but ask the employees about their intentions first. Communication is difficult but important.



Tachibana: I try to make communication first instead of waiting for it. As I work longer, I feel the importance of this attitude more strongly.

Miyake: There are circumstances related to various life events for women. Still, I hope that women are actively invited to join a drinking party or other event that is precious opportunities for communication.



Iwai: I cannot join a drinking party often because I have to make adjustment with my family in advance.

Nakata: There should be more opportunities for employees, including women, to talk about their career plans and share various situations and feelings.

Tachibana: Our department organizes lunch parties because general staff, assistants and dispatched workers cannot attend drinking parties at night.

Nakata: That is a good idea also because quite a few men do not like alcohol.

To make Sumitomo Electric a company where women can take more active roles

Kunii: What roles do you want to play in Sumitomo Electric in future?

Tachibana: I hope to be a role model for junior colleagues. While steadily dealing with the processes of marriage, childbirth and child rearing, I want to keep working to serve as a guide.

Miyake: While I have learned practical skills to work at a satisfactory level, I am now going through the life events of pregnancy and childbirth. I want to consider them positively, and seek a more efficient way of working with focus on quality.

Iwai: I have already experienced the life events of marriage, childbirth and child rearing. While the short-time work system was not in place at the time of my childbirth, we now have various systems to help women continue to work. I want to disseminate the fact.



Nakata: Gender issues are problems unique to Japan. In the Sumitomo Electric Group, the ratio of female workers is higher overseas, and many women are playing important roles from a global perspective. In the future, we have to solve the challenges related to gender in Japan, and men also have to change the culture and their way of working. I assume that changes in the way of working among white collar workers will allow women and non-Japanese to work more comfortably.



Kunii: Sumitomo Electric has arranged systems to welcome motivated persons. We would also like to enhance the support programs continuously.

Nakata: I identified many issues that I had not noticed through this exchange of views. I would like to keep working to solve them, and maintain management activities to help employees find their various jobs rewarding. I hope to have your cooperation.

