

## 5-3 Roundtable Discussion between Executive Officer in charge of HR Development and Young Employees

### Thinking about working at Asahi Intecc -- Human resource development to enhance organizational capacity --

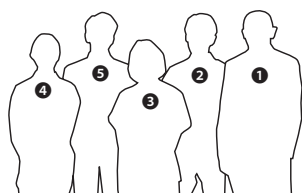


Asahi Intecc Group has been promoting value penetration and human resource development through the basic principles of “Challenge,” “Practical Competence,” “Self-Support,” “Global Best,” and “Creative Manufacturing Group.” By fostering human resources who have diverse perspectives and can think from various angles, we aim to improve organizational capabilities appropriate for a global company. Five employees from different years of employment and positions gathered and talked passionately about their true feelings about working at Asahi Intecc while sharing their specific stories. As we enter a transitional period where we are enhancing our organizational capabilities and as the importance of human capital is growing, we will present the real Asahi Intecc seen by our employees.

#### Why I Joined the Company

##### ■ Participants

- ① Shinjiro Ootani, Executive Officer
- ② Tomoki Ichikawa  
CV Section, Product Development Group
- ③ Mariko Imai  
Seconded to walkey Inc.
- ④ Kanako Nishio  
EVT Section, Product Development Group
- ⑤ Ryoya Abe  
Corporate Strategic Office



**Ootani:** Today, I invited young employees like you who are currently active in the company to hear various voices and opinions about working at Asahi Intecc. First of all, please introduce yourself and tell us how you joined Asahi Intecc.

**Ichikawa:** It's been 11 years since I joined the company as a new graduate. I am currently the senior project lead-

er of the plasma project in the CV Section Guide Wire Development Team in the Product Development Group of the Brand Business Unit. I was interested in medical device development because I did research related to medical device development when I was in university. A senior member of the same research laboratory joined Asahi Intecc, and as I learned a lot from him when he occasionally visited the laboratory, I became more interested in the company, which led me to join the company.

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**Imai:** I joined the company mid-career and this is my fourth year. I have been seconded to walkey Inc., a subsidiary that provides training services dedicated to walking, which was established as a new business. I am in charge of all back-office operations and lab operations. I am the only mid-career employee among today's young members. Asahi Intecc is my third company after working for a chemical manufacturer and a consulting company after graduating. The reason why I was interested in Asahi Intecc was that when I looked at an environment in which I could grow, I felt that a manufacturer with technological superiority, niche products and a high profit level was attractive. Also, the company's business scale were still in the growth stage, and I thought that I could gain various experiences in addition to routine work.

**Nishio:** This is the sixth year since I joined the company as a new graduate. As a deputy team leader, I am developing a whole range of guidewires for peripheral vascular therapy. I am close to Mr. Ichikawa in that I was originally interested in medical care. After studying manufacturing in the Faculty of Engineering, I wanted to engage in medical care as a manufacturer, and I became interested in Asahi Intecc, a medical device company. Also, I wanted to join Asahi Intecc because I heard a lot of things from my senior member in the research laboratory at the university who had joined the company.

**Abe:** It's been three years since I joined the company as a new graduate. In the Corporate Strategic Office, I mainly work on business management, and I work in a

wide range of areas, including the preparation of this integrated report and ESG related work. I wanted to be an administrative worker in the business management field, so I didn't job hunt focusing on a specific industry. I studied accounting when I was in college, so I thought I could be more useful in accounting and numbers, so I pursued a job in fields where I could improve my expertise. The reason I applied to Asahi Intecc was that my father had been working for a medical-related company, and I found Asahi Intecc while researching the industry. I also applied to other companies and received several job offers, but when I received a job offer from Asahi Intecc, I was strongly persuaded that it would be a very valuable experience to work in the Corporate Strategic Office while looking at the entire company. I decided to join the company because I thought it would be a valuable opportunity to be entrusted with such work from a young age.

**Ootani:** I joined the company mid-career, and this is my 21st year. I used to work in the fund management department, but I was later seconded to overseas plants and the acquired subsidiary Toyoflex. I am currently the head of the Human Resources Development Group.

#### Difference with Image before Joining the Company

**Ootani:** Mr. Ichikawa and Ms. Nishio are engineers, you both have university seniors in the company, and you are interested in medical manufacturing. Since joining the company, have there been any differences



compared to the thoughts you had when you were a student?

**Ichikawa:** I didn't have a clear image of the company, so I have never been shocked. I had heard that I could be entrusted with various tasks from a young age, and consequently, I could report directly to the top management, but I was surprised that it was more than I expected.

**Nishio:** I thought I was only working on product development, but I was very impressed by the fact that I had a lot of opportunities to meet doctors at the hospital training, and I felt a difference on the positive side. There are many opportunities to actually see the techniques in the hospital, and so I not only manufacture products but am also able to see the way that they are actually used. I thought that if I could imagine the final use scene of the product, I would be able to feel a strong sense of satisfaction in manufacturing.

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### Corporate Culture where Young People Can Take on Challenges

**Ootani:** Some have said that it is rewarding because you are entrusted with the work from a young age. I think that Asahi Intecc can be summed up in one word: “entrusted.” Mr. Abe and Ms. Imai, how do you feel about that kind of corporate culture?

**Abe:** Before joining the company, I was told that the office I will belong to is not so large for a rapidly growing company. Because of that, I imagined there would be a lot of work, but my honest first impression was that there was more to do than I had imagined. Doing everything from a young age can be tough, but on the other hand, there are many opportunities to grow while working, and I think it has been a great experience. In other companies, there may be some tasks that young people are not in charge of, but there's no room for such leniency in our company, which, I think, are good and bad points. As for me, I'm glad that I can feel myself growing.

**Imai:** I heard from various directions that Mr. Abe has been working hard since his first year at the company. There are few people who join the Corporate Strategic Office from the first year.

**Abe:** The year I joined the company, the company decided to produce the first integrated report, and I was able to be involved in its production. It was the first time for the company to work with the integrated report, and even though I was a new employee, I was able to think on my own and proceed with the work, so

I think I was in a blessed environment.

**Imai:** When you start from zero, you need to think about the necessary actions and the elements by yourself. I am currently seconded to a newly established subsidiary, but there was no particular manual, so I had to think about what I should do. I was seconded about one year after I joined the company, but I think the characteristic of Asahi Intecc is that it allows you to challenge yourself in a new environment even if you don't have much experience in the company. It's been a little less than two years since the business was launched. Although it's difficult to think by myself every day, consult with others, and figure out what steps I should take to reach the goal, I think it's a rewarding job. After listening to Mr. Abe's story, I thought there was something in common with my own work.



**Nishio:** In the Development Division, I also feel that I can be entrusted with many things. In fact, from the winter of my first year at the company, I was in charge of a new product, and as I had little clinical knowledge, there were times when I felt like I was fumbling around. Last year, I finally finished the development of the product I was in charge of from the first year, and looking back, I feel that I have grown quite a lot. As a growing company, Asahi Intecc is constantly developing new projects, so there are relatively many opportunities for young employees to take charge of product development. I believe it will lead to the growth of young employees.

**Ichikawa:** It's true that we can be greatly entrusted with development. There are many young employees. When I joined the company, there were many seniors who were close in age. Even if you are entrusted with your work, you can get sufficient degree of support, so I think you are in an environment where you can consult someone easily when you are in trouble. My seniors who are close in age supported me and I could easily talk to them, which gave me mental support. I feel that it is a great asset that I can collaborate well with my seniors who are now in different departments. Compared to the Development Division, there are not many people in the Corporate Strategic Office where Mr. Abe belongs, and you are young even among young employees.

**Abe:** Administrative departments have a small number of employees. Recently, young people have joined, but I have the impression that their ages are certainly older



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compared to the ages of those in the development departments.

**Ichikawa:** In the case of development work, even if it is a new product, the development process is structured, so it is easy to consult with senior staff to proceed with the work. After listening to Mr. Abe, I thought it was great that you were entrusted with production of the first integrated report for the company in your first year.

**Abe:** In the first year, my boss, who was responsible for the integrated report, led me, and I started with checking the details and checking the manuscript. Now, I participate from the basic part of the plan and make various proposals, especially in the ESG-related part. As I grow, I can do more things, and as a result, I feel that I am entrusted with various things.

**Ootani:** I had empathy with Mr. Abe and Ms. Nishio, who said that although it was tough, you could feel that you had grown. As Mr. Ichikawa said, I think an environment with a support system is good also for the company in order for young people to be active. As for HR development, I would like to make it possible for the company and people surrounding young people to support an environment where they can take on challenges.

#### Learning from Hard Experience

**Ootani:** I think that there are some difficult parts and some barriers you feel as you challenge new fields and areas. Can you tell us how you have overcome those situations and are you still trying to overcome them?



**Imai:** Regarding my job, there is a form of lab for personal training, and I find it difficult to work with people who have different business terminology and backgrounds that I had never encountered in my entire career as an office worker. For example, while there is a certain direction that we want to take as an organization, I am struggling to get along with other people, such as sole proprietors and trainers, who have honed their specialties with pride, and to lead them to the same direction we want to take as an organization. What is obvious to one side is not obvious to the other side at all. I think I started to imagine deeply from a broader angle about when I talk to people, such as what I should say to this person to make things work as an organization. After all, work begins with the peo-

ple. Even though I have a hard time communicating with them, I am very happy when I feel that they have grown, as they have come to see the whole, not just the individual. Thinking of the parts that I have helped with, I think that I am in an environment where I can learn a lot even though I sometimes have difficulties in dealing with others.

**Nishio:** The performance required for product development is determined to some extent, and the main flow of my work is to design to take advantage of that performance. As it is a medical device, safety is also a big issue in addition to performance. It shouldn't be that safety cannot be ensured by focusing on performance. I had a hard time designing the product to be good in terms of performance and safety. When it comes to overcoming barriers, I think the most motivating thing for me personally is imagining the product I made being sold and actually being used to help people. I feel a responsibility, but even more so when I think about how I've helped people by creating a device that saves lives, and it makes me want to try again, even if it's hard.

**Ichikawa:** I also belong to the Development Division, so I sympathize with Ms. Nishio's words. In the past, there were many things that individuals could do, especially with regard to guide wires, and when times were tough, I could manage it if I worked hard by myself. But as the scale of project and the scale of development expand, I feel that there will be many things that cannot be done by individual efforts. Now, I am blessed with people around me, and with the support of my project

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members and superiors, I feel that I am able to overcome the difficulties eventually. I think I need to create such an environment for others so that I also can support them.

**Abe:** The department to which I belong does not manage a specific segment, but has a role of looking at the entire company from a bird's eye view. Therefore, I am conscious of not being too tied to a segment or function, and moving the work around so that it is optimal for the entire company. In addition, I am often directly involved with on-site people in the business departments, but if I proceed with my work without assuming or knowing the information about what on-site people



are doing and how they are acting, I will not be able to close the gap. I would like to start from fostering a culture and building a relationship of trust so that I can understand what others want to say and also make them understand what I want to say. And I want to do work that can complement each other.

### Organizational Issues

**Ootani:** The key words in your talk were “contribution to medical care” and “work is interaction with people around you.” I would like to ask you about “interaction with people around you.” You mentioned earlier about the easiness to consult. If you feel the easiness of collaborating with people around you, or if you feel any issues, please speak frankly.

**Abe:** Asahi Intecc is my first company, so I don't know much about other companies, but overall I have the impression that there are many kind people in the company. If I may say so myself, I am aware that I am entrusted with important work even though I have only been with the company for a short time. Even if I act on my own initiative, it is acceptable if it is meaningful as a job, and I feel that various people are helping me without being displeased. In a typical company, young people may not be allowed to act on their own initiative. In that sense, I think there is a corporate culture of meritocracy.

**Ichikawa:** I also feel that it is easy to do things in the Development Division. There are many young people, but no matter what age group you are, people are

willing to listen to you without being rejected. We also report directly to management. Being close to management gives you tension, but it also gives you a sense of responsibility. The issue is that there isn't a place to communicate with the departments that I have little interaction with in my work, so I sometimes feel work barriers and a distance from them in terms of enthusiasm to the product.

**Nishio:** I interact with various departments in my work, but I think there is a culture where people in charge can communicate directly with each other without being rejected. Speaking of issues, some of the departments involved are so busy that I often lose contact. I also sometimes feel a difference in the sense of distance and temperature.

**Ootani:** During your talk, I was impressed by the closeness to management. Even if you are young, you probably have experience in reporting, and I think one of the characteristics of our company is its closeness to management with respect to the company's hands-on approach and commitment to manufacturing. Please tell me how it looks from your perspective.

**Ichikawa:** Personally, I can report what I am individually working hard on as my achievements, so it doesn't bother me. If only the top management reported, I think it would be difficult to see what each person was doing. That's not the case in our company. There is a culture where people who are working hard are evaluated properly, and I feel the gratitude.

**Nishio:** Like Mr. Ichikawa, I have also many opportunities to report directly to the upper management. By

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doing so, I can be recognized, and it gives me a sense of being in charge of the project. When I talk to people in the upper management, I feel that management has a deep understanding of development. When I get a precise and pointed question, I feel that I am being listened to after the management understand the details to some extent.

**Ootani:** It means that young employees can feel that the management is also practicing the hands-on approach advocated by the company.

**Abe:** As you both said, because we are close to management, I feel that they understand us and we are properly evaluated not only as a team but also as individuals. I have many opportunities to learn what management thinks and what they care about, and I feel that this has led to my growth. On the other hand, an organization has a pyramid-like structure, so if interactions are too direct and too close, there is a danger that the organizational structure will collapse. In order to operate the company successfully, I think that it is important for management to seek the results as a whole organization while looking at each individual.

**Imai:** I communicate directly with the president of the parent company in the form of reporting from a subsidiary I am seconded to. In addition to the fact that there are no black boxes in which we cannot tell what is going on, I can assure that there is no discrepancy between the two parties' perceptions, which makes it easier for me to report as a reporter.

**Ootani:** Thank you very much. I think the sense of

distance or direction of the organization is one of the issues for the company to grow further. As a company, there are various things we need to think about in order not to lose our current strength. Next, please let us know about other keywords, "contribution to medical care," especially from the two of you involved in development. Is contribution to medical care a significant driving force in doing development work?

**Nishio:** Personally, that's the biggest thing. Even though it is indirect, I feel strongly that I am involved in the treatment. I feel that my contribution to medical care is that doctors use our products and it leads to the treatment of patients. It is also a great motivator to receive direct praise from a doctor, saying, "It's a good wire."

**Ichikawa:** I completely agree with Ms. Nishio. When I participate in academic conferences or hospital training, I feel pleased when our products are used to treat patients successfully. If it is a product that I have developed, I feel more strongly about it. When things don't work out, or when it looks like something can be improved, I feel a sense of responsibility to make it better.

**Ootani:** What about those who are not directly involved in product development? Is working at a medical device manufacturer that contributes to medical care rewarding?

**Imai:** Even if you are not directly involved in the manufacturing field, if you believe that working at a company that makes the products that help save people's lives is beneficial to people and the world, you can take pride



in your work, even if it is an administrative job. I sometimes feel envious of those who are directly involved in development, but I hope that we, who support such people, can have the same feeling.

### Work-Life Balance and Ease of Working

**Ootani:** That means you all can work with a sense of satisfaction. Then, in terms of work-life balance and ease of working, are there still areas that are lacking?

**Nishio:** Because I work flextime, I feel that it is easy to maintain a good work-life balance because I can go home early even if I have a fixed schedule. I can also take summer vacation flexibly and freely, so I can take long consecutive holidays when I like.

**Ichikawa:** I also use the flextime system. I think it's

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very easy to work because I can adjust my working hours according to my private life. I can also commute to work avoiding the morning rush. In addition, many of my colleagues are taking childcare or maternity leave, and even after taking the leave, they return to work as usual, which gives me a sense of security.

**Abe:** As both mentioned, I think it is a comfortable working environment. Lunch at the company cafeteria is delicious, there is a gym at the company, and flexible working is also possible, so I think an environment where we can work healthily is in place.

### Education and Training System

**Ootani:** I think that our company has currently less education and training than other major companies. On the other hand, since our employees can take on various challenges even when they are young, I think, unlike training, there is a place for experience through so-called OJT. If you have any opinions or requests for company education and training, please let us know.

**Abe:** The official company training is certainly less than other major companies. However, the company has set up e-learning as a place where in-house training is possible, so there is an action of preparing and developing the necessary items by ourselves. There are various programs on the development side, aren't there?

**Nishio:** Yes, there are various technical programs.

**Abe:** I believe that each department internally prepares content that they think is necessary as knowledge and

education of each department, and the voluntary deployment of such content in the form of e-learning is in line with our hands-on approach. In response to the instruction to raise the management accounting level especially for sales managers, I created e-learning content on the basics of management accounting and deployed it throughout the company.

**Imai:** I think major companies offer a lot of training for employees in their first or second year and for managers in their first year, but I don't think our company offers that much training yet. However, I have the impression that the company invests in their employees sufficiently. I felt that the training I took the other day was rich in content. Regarding uniform training programs offered by major companies, they often offer such opportunities, but some of their content is not so rich. I have the impression that our company makes substantial investment in the training programs.

**Nishio:** I feel that the company invests in employees sufficiently in the fact that all new employees are trained at overseas factories. I went to the Thai Factory for three days of training last month. I think it was very fulfilling with a solid schedule so that I could see everything in the large factory and various facilities. I think it is beneficial that all new employees at Asahi Intecc, including those in management and sales as well as development, go to overseas factories for training and have the opportunity to learn about important production sites for a manufacturer.

**Ootani:** Even pushing the hands-on approach, it would be nothing but talk without such a corporate culture

and system. Factory tours were not held for three years owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, but were finally resumed. Including the new employees who couldn't go before, we are now doing the on-site training step by step. It will take about two more years to catch up with the regular schedule, but we will deal with it as necessary training.

**Abe:** Because employees of the administrative departments do not have many opportunities to come into contact with products in their daily work, there are some employees who wonder what a guide wire is or what the core technologies are. As I felt this way too, many of our employees have finally come to understand what the products are like by actually visiting a local factory and seeing the products and the manufacturing process. I believe that overseas factory training is a valuable opportunity also for employees of administrative departments to deepen their understanding of the company and to become motivated.

**Ichikawa:** Even though there is not so much training, I feel that the merit of getting into the field earlier is very large. I believe the best thing is to be able to learn from the front line earlier. I went on overseas training before it was cancelled owing to COVID-19. I was very grateful that the training period was set up not immediately after joining the company but at different times when necessary. When it comes to products, there was also hospital training. There are relatively many training programs that can be taken actively besides passive training, so I have almost no problems with the training.

**Ootani:** I think there are two types of education and

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training. One is training for trainees to make them understand the basics that become a foundation for them, and the other is training for trainees to actively and voluntarily receive training opportunities to provide them with growth opportunities. I think that both are necessary. As mentioned earlier, compared to other major companies, we cannot yet say that our training system is fully in place, but we would like to assess what is necessary and develop it. As long as the personnel system and education and training are carried out as they are in textbooks, the company does not need the HR Development Division. I believe we have an HR Development Division internally to do what our company needs. As HR Development Division, I think it is necessary to listen to the opinions of people, determine the direction the company should take, and implement the training that is truly necessary. I hope that you will continue to express your frank opinions, not limited to opportunities like this.

#### Issues for the Future

**Ootani:** Lastly, I would like to ask you about the issues of the company, what you expect from the company, and your thoughts on how you would like to play an active role in making the company one you wish it to be like.

**Abe:** As far as the administrative departments are concerned, I feel that the system is still insufficient in various aspects. It may be because the company is growing rapidly, but there is a chronic labor shortage,

and the organization and people are not catching up. I feel that there have been quite a few situations in which specialists in each department have managed to work as hard as possible. However, at the current scale, there are many areas that cannot be addressed, and I think they are becoming organizational issues. As for myself, I would like to contribute to the improvement.

**Nishio:** Development often needs to collaborate with other departments such as pharmaceutical affairs and quality assurance. In doing so, I sometimes feel a sense of distance arising from differences in roles. Before I joined the company, there was a project system in which several people from various departments participated and were in charge of one product. Currently, however, development is divided vertically into development, process, pharmaceutical affairs, and intellectual property, so I feel that communication takes a little longer. If we have systems and mechanisms that allow us to work more closely with related departments, and if we can change the way we work, we will be able to do development work more smoothly.

**Ichikawa:** I sometimes feel the same way. There are things that cannot be done by development alone in order to do and create new things, so I think it would be good to have a company-wide system to deal with them as well as a system and mechanism that everyone can work together in for that purpose. Also, technology sometimes precedes from the desire of creating better products. So I would like to ensure that all employees have a common understanding of what product should be created, and that all employees have a

firm grasp of various needs, not just technologies and seeds, so that they can work strategically.

**Imai:** It may be associated with what we have talked about so far, but one thing I feel is that things are made up of key persons rather than an organization, so I think that organizational development and individual growth are essential for the future. Second, I have the opportunity to work with people in charge in various departments, such as development, production technology, and quality control, but the opinions of departments are emphasized instead of the overall optimization, and the final goal is sometimes blurred. I think it is a problem and difficulty due to the increase in scale, but I think people who manage properly will become more necessary.

**Ootani:** As Asahi Intecc alone has grown to a scale of more than 1,000 employees and revenue has exceeded 100 billion yen, our organizational structure and capabilities are lagging behind. I felt this from today's discussions with you and this is one of the challenges we are facing. I believe that we are in a transitional period to change that, and I would like to respond to areas that can be improved as HR development. Today, there were the key words "contribution to medical care" in your talks. As we can see in our company's corporate philosophy and purpose, we are conducting our business on the basis of contributing to society by meeting the required needs with our unique technological capabilities, including medical and industrial equipment. Not only the people involved in product development and production, but also the company



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as a whole, including indirect departments, can work in unison to realize the needs of suppliers and doctors around the world and contribute to them. This roundtable discussion made me realize once again that it is linked to our commitment to technology. As Asahi Intecc continues to grow further, I believe you are the people who will play an important role for the company. I expect you to continue to become more actively engaged in your work for the company.

