

Roundtable
Discussion with
External Director and
Female Employees

Women's Challenges as a Force for Corporate Growth

The Sanki Engineering Group steadfastly promotes the appointment and advancement of women as a force for driving its own sustainable growth. Eight female employees representing various fields of Sanki Engineering joined with Tamami Umeda, an external director appointed in 2022, in a roundtable discussion to talk about the empowerment of women, respect for diversity, the appeal of the construction industry, and job satisfaction.



■ While change in mindset is still necessary, improvements in the workplace environment are progressing

— How do you view the current state of the working environment and the status of women as an aspect of a diverse workforce?

Kaneda: Ten years ago, after returning to the Company following childcare leave, I moved from the Sales Department to the CSR Department. While it was common at that time for women at Sanki Engineering to leave the Company after getting married, now with the constant evolution of employee programs and evaluation systems, all women return to work after childcare leave. In this environment, I believe that we are in the process of exploring and creating better work styles for the future

through trial and error.

Kawano: In terms of the prevailing understandings of workforce diversity, which includes women, I feel that Sanki Engineering is a little behind. I don't think we are using diversity as a weapon; I believe that we are covering for each other to do our best.

Kaneko: In fact, there are persistent gaps in the balance of male and female employees. For example, less than 20% of Chubu Branch employees are women. And there are particularly few women in technical positions.

Ohashi: When I joined the Company, there were no systems such as special leaves for childcare or nursing care, or sliding work hours, and I strongly feel that improvements have been made to the systems supporting childcare and returning to work. I hope that female managers will be selected purely for the content and results of their work, and not just for having more of

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them. It is often said that we need to serve as role models for encouraging the professional development of women, but I think they should grow freely at their own pace without feeling pressured.

Kozawa: The construction industry is facing a difficult time for hiring, regardless of gender, and is entering a period in which securing human resources will be harder than ever. The scarcity of female engineers was mentioned earlier, and I recognize that the challenge is greater than simply supporting women's opportunities to work on construction sites. We also have to essentially change the way construction is done, regardless of gender.

Sakamoto: Traditionally, construction sites entailed hard work with long hours, making it difficult for women to hold down a job. In recent years, however, work-style reform has made considerable progress even at construction sites. Now that work has become easier, regardless of gender, due to worksite improvements, I anticipate that women will have more opportunities to actively participate in the industry.

Fujino: When my first child was born, the general expectation was that I would then quit. Now, when I see my junior colleagues confidently saying that they are going to take childcare leave, I feel that we have shifted into a better period of time. Most of the younger generation, regardless of gender, fully understand that they have an obligation to work and the right to take time off. On the other hand, only some older workers grasp the concept of how things have changed but still follow the deeply rooted traditional ways of doing things, so I think that the reform of awareness still needs to be addressed.

Mugitani: While I felt it was difficult to take leave several years ago, it's easier now to do so at one's own discretion. Although we still work overtime, I feel that employees in general are becoming aware of working efficiently.

Umeda: I feel the overall direction of empowering women in the workplace has become clear, as systems have been established to balance work and childcare and a target has been set for the ratio of female managers. On the other hand, women still tend to hesitate in pursuing promotions. Part of this may be an unconscious bias affecting men's best intentions, causing women

to lose opportunities for growth and taking the next step to becoming a manager. Even though the need for women's advancement is generally understood, women themselves may need to speak up more to further instill this awareness throughout the workplace.

■ An Environment Where Women Can Thrive Benefits Everyone

— What do you think about the impact of women's active engagement in the Company?

Fujino: Women account for less than 20% of employees in the Facility Systems Division where I work. As the number of women in the division and those at partner companies has increased in recent years, it has become easier for women to be heard, and I feel that the atmosphere has been changing. Suggestions and requests for improvement originating from women are now being adopted, so the Company as a whole seems to be becoming more open.

Ohashi: I'm currently in the Field Engineering Planning Department, but when I used to work at construction sites, women were still in the minority. That type of work is physically demanding, and sometimes men are needed, for example, to carry heavy materials. It's also true that some men aren't suited for heavy labor, so gender differences are only one aspect in addition to personal aptitude. But I personally believe that men tend to be better at planning, while women are generally better at getting things done.

Kozawa: I think that men today have an advantage in construction site work styles. When I hear in the course of contract work that workers are sometimes asked in the evening to finish up by the next morning, it seems that men with physical advantages and more experience on construction sites are more capable of handling the request. Nevertheless, an environment that requires workers to overexert themselves must be improved first, and there are significant benefits to having more female leaders on-site. The increasing number of women working for prime contractors is evidence of gradual change.



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● **Kanae Mugitani**
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Kaneda: Modern leadership styles emphasize dialogue and listening and require a collaborative approach that respects the opinions of team members. This approach is highly compatible with the way many women communicate. Therefore, I think the emerging trends are making it easier for women to demonstrate leadership.

Kawano: I think it's easier to approach female managers than males. Currently, only 2.4% of managers are women, and this situation tends to make women hesitate before seeking management positions. I myself once turned down such an opportunity before finally becoming a manager, although I decided to accept the position in the hope that I could open the way for others. I feel that the Company as a whole needs to become more supportive in this regard.

Kaneko: Although I wasn't a manager at the time, I was once directly acknowledged for the accuracy and care I had demonstrated for documents submitted in response to a construction work order, which led to winning the job. While that made me happy, I also realized that attention to detail is a strength too, as many women around me are just as meticulous in their work.

Mugitani: With the increasing participation of women, more perspectives have been available than ever before. Women notice things that men have a hard time seeing because of their different perspectives, and I think that women can also contribute to revitalizing communication. On the other hand, when I examine my own career, I sometimes feel I still have hurdles to overcome as an engineer. I work with CAD in the Design & Engineering Department, but I originally came from a humanities background. It's not uncommon for women in design to have a background similar to mine at our company, though I sometimes think that presents a rather high hurdle to becoming a site manager or to being in a senior position.

Ohashi: Many women have experienced similar challenges as Ms. Mugitani in pursuing their careers. But I think people require management skills and don't necessarily have to be well versed in everything.

Sakamoto: I was transferred to the Tokyo Branch as an accounting section manager this year, after having worked at the Corporate Communications Department

for over a decade. There are many things I don't know anything about, but I am able to get by with the help of my supervisors and section staff. Even in areas in which I lack competence, I can get through with teamwork. I think it is important to communicate with those around me.

Umeda: An environment in which it is easy for women to actively participate will also enable everyone to work comfortably. With the ongoing decline in population, sustainability requires changing the system itself so that everyone, regardless of their personal attributes, can easily and naturally play active roles. Men will also come to realize the hard work women are doing in their jobs, housework, childcare, and nursing care. I believe that your daily efforts and ingenuity will establish you as the key to promoting diversity and securing diverse human resources at Sanki Engineering.

■ The Appeal of the Construction Industry: It Produces Visible Results

— What makes your work rewarding?

Ohashi: I was in charge of on-site construction management, so when a building was completed, I felt a great sense of satisfaction and accomplishment because the results were quite visible.

Fujino: I was also recently involved in the management of a project with a short deadline, and upon its completion, I also experienced a deep relief that defied description. The client's expression of gratitude for meeting an extremely challenging request made me feel it was all worth it. In retrospect, I think I've always been working for the joy of such moments.

Kaneda: During a time when women were rarely involved in proposal-based sales, I took part in a project to renovate surveillance camera equipment in a large building. My inclusion as a woman on the team brought about an unexpected change in the hierarchical structure unique to the construction industry. There was a sense of unity that transcended traditional barriers, allowing me to experience new perspectives and the power of

cooperation due to diversity. I felt that I may have been able to change the conventional concept of construction projects a little, and that's what motivates me now.

Mugitani: In my 20s and 30s, I was stationed on-site drafting construction drawings. I felt a sense of accomplishment when my drawings were used for construction for the first time. This experience helped me grow, thanks to those around me. I currently work on a variety of projects using CAD and find satisfaction in contributing to the sense of completeness within the group.

Kaneko: I think being directly thanked by clients reinforces the sense of contributing to the Company, but back-office employees do not have many opportunities to interact with clients. I happened to be blessed with such an opportunity, but I think words of encouragement and appreciation from supervisors and executives make you feel that you're in some way contributing to the Company.

Kawano: The Procurement Division, where I work, handles materials and equipment as well as specialized construction work for our sites nationwide. It is always nice to receive their appreciation for our efforts to reduce procurement costs at appropriate prices. It's very rewarding to hear the field side of our business operations express their thanks and tell us how helpful we've been since they are essentially our customers.

Kozawa: When the General Affairs and Human Resources Division revises the personnel system, employees are naturally confused about how to respond to the changes, and not everyone is happy. Even so, I'm very happy when I hear people say thank you or how glad they are for not quitting. Since taking on my current position, I've become more aware of how stakeholders view Sanki Engineering, and I feel rewarded by being entrusted with important work.

Sakamoto: In the course of working with many employees in my previous department, I have noticed many attractive aspects of Sanki Engineering, such as the kindness of its employees, how they value connections with people and sincerely deal with customers, and how proud they are as engineers. I strongly feel that I want to convey this both within and outside the Company, and

that has been a source of my motivation.

Umeda: In my long years in government, I experienced that even when new policies are introduced, issues remain with no end in sight. So what I appreciate about the construction industry is that you can see the results within a set period. I was impressed by how you all feel great about achieving goals as a team while exchanging opinions with stakeholders inside and outside the Company. Furthermore, even if you feel like you are in a sense biting off more than you can chew by pursuing a higher position, you will gain a fresh point of view and broaden your perspective even in the same workplace, and I'm sure that you'll all find the experience rewarding.

Kawano: In terms of empowering women in the workplace, there is a need to increase the number of women in managerial positions and immediately below that level. At the same time, we should not feel too pressured to serve as role models. We should simply be steadfast in doing what we can and should do. I felt this again through this dialogue with all of you.

Mugitani: I gained many insights from this discussion, and I was stimulated and reassured by the fact that each of us is struggling in different positions. The concerns of younger women must be different, so why not create more communication opportunities, such as setting up a mentor program on women's advancement? I hope awareness of women's advancement at Sanki Engineering will increase through a variety of actions, including trial and error.

Umeda: From today's discussion, I feel that everyone here is sincerely facing work challenges while closely monitoring their respective situations as well as and those around them, which seems to be associated with a strong awareness of work styles. I could also sense everyone's love for the Company. Now that the need for women to play an active role has become widely recognized, I think there is no reason to give up on the challenge as long as you have the ability and the opportunity. I want to view today as an opportunity to share experiences and insights, and to think together about how we can create an environment that makes it easy for women, and ultimately everyone, to play active roles at Sanki Engineering.