

Efforts in Human Resources Development at JR West

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Introduction

Since the terrible April 2005 Fukuchiyama Line accident that claimed so many lives and injured hundreds of others, JR West has been making strenuous efforts to create a corporate culture placing top priority on safety so that we never cause a serious accident again. We formulated a Safety Enhancement Plan immediately after the accident and then followed up with the Basic Safety Plan in April 2008. Our final goal after 5 years of effort is an organization that has no fatal passenger accidents and no major workplace employee injuries. We aim to reach this goal by enhancing safety education for employees, developing better work abilities and skills, forming a system for skills transfer, and developing future safety-minded leaders.

This article explains our current efforts in human resources development (HRD).

JR West Education System

The core of JR West's HRD and skills transfer programme is on-on-the-job training (OJT), but group training and self-study

play a supplementary role. Group training consists of training by work rank like that for new recruits and new managers, and training by job such as new train crew education, and later periodic follow-up training. Thorough motivation and post-training follow-up are conducted for group training as a way for the workplace manager and group training instructor to understand the training content from the outset and to confirm the results of training completion. In this way, OJT and group training such as that at the Staff Training Center become closely integrated and more effective.

Implementing Safety Education

In the wake of the Fukuchiyama Line accident, JR West has been working to enhance safety education, making all personnel very conscious of giving top priority to safety and human life. We have also revised all group training curricula to include safety education.

The April 2007 establishment of the Railway Safety Education Center in the Staff Training Center formed the starting point for personnel safety education, making each and every employee systematically learn the safety lessons of the Fukuchiyama Line and other accidents. The Center has two rooms: the study room for the Fukuchiyama Line Train Accident Room and Study Room for Railway Accident History. Training started in FY2007 mainly for train crew, followed by training for all personnel in the business in FY2008. The second round of training for railway business personnel is being held in FY2009, and training for personnel outside the railway business, staff dispatched to group companies, and personnel of group companies has also started.

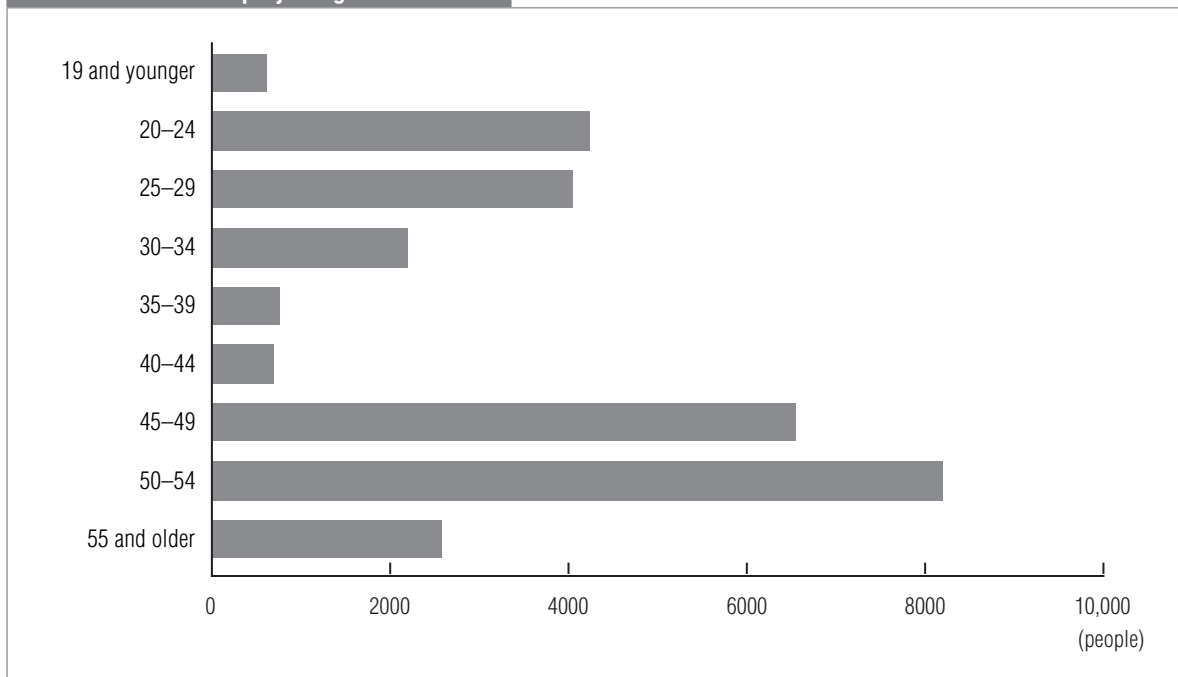
Efforts in Transferring Skills

Skills transfer is becoming a major issue for many companies in Japan as they face the mass retirement of the postwar baby-boom generation accompanied by a smaller



The Railway Safety Education Center entrance

(JR West)

Table 1 JR West Employee Age Distribution

workforce caused by dwindling birth rates. Before JR West's formation in 1987, JNR had frozen recruitment, but JR West restarted recruitment of university graduates from 1988, technical college graduates from 1991, and high-school graduates from 1993. From 2005, the company revised recruitment activities for university, junior college, technical school, professional school, and high-school graduates for the 'railway work' classification, centred on station staff/train crew and engineers. At the same time, some job classifications were opened to mid-career recruitment. However, the age structure of employees is still very distorted with few aged 35 to 44 years (Table 1).

In these circumstances, smooth transfer of skills to employees who joined the company after 1987 is an important issue. The gap in employee age groups must be filled as the *en masse* retirement of veteran employees progresses.

Recognizing this issue, JR West has been concentrating on efforts such as practical skill improvement and leader development since 2000 to constantly maintain safe and stable rail transport, which is the company's primary mission. Taking the April 2005 Fukuchiyama Line accident seriously to heart, we are working strenuously to make skill transfer even more certain.

Preparation of Educational Facilities/Tools

Materials and manuals

JR West is creating training materials and manuals with emphasis on easy understanding by utilizing visual aids such as diagrams and photographs, including the Station Work

Handbook, Clear-cut Operation Regulations, and Mighty 12 Learning Materials (for Track & Structures).

Enhanced training facilities by sector

Practical Training Centers with the same equipment as actual stations have been created at 11 locations for training on stations operations. Additionally, Crew Training Centers have been established in Kobe for conventional lines and in Shin-Shimonoseki for shinkansen lines; these centres run actual trains to practice how to handle emergencies and operations for crews on conventional lines and shinkansen.

Furthermore, a variety of training equipment, including simulators, and computer-assisted instruction (CAI) are being introduced gradually for station personnel and train crews; training on the MARS ticketing system is included too.

Staff Training Center

The Staff Training Center in Suita City, Osaka, is the key facility for group training at JR West where training by rank, development of instructors, instruction and licensing of drivers, and other training led by head office is held. Furthermore, practice lines are being lengthened and double-tracked to enhance practical education with the goal of completing construction by the end of FY2009. More station, crossing, interlocking, and signalling equipment are being added too. When completed, more practical skills training will be possible for individual divisions, and it will also be possible to simulate emergencies more realistically.



Practising on train simulator

(JR West)



Part of practice line under construction

(JR West)

Preparing system and educating instructors

Experts and other core personnel are being developed by group training and one-on-one OJT. After training, they can become instructors and core personnel in areas directly related to operations as required. Furthermore, a specialist system was introduced in April 2008 to use their experience and know-how for technical instruction at worksites.

Preparing systems for teachers and students

We are introducing a system to rehire personnel after mandatory retirement, and recruiting retired employees with broad knowledge and experience as instructors in an effort to develop the skills of junior and mid-level personnel. This recruitment drive is in addition to active recruitment of 1100 new personnel.

For example, in the Track & Structures Division, we are establishing six Track Skills Training Centers (five for conventional lines and one for shinkansen) with practice track equipment at key locations staffed by full-time instructors working to enhance practical education in areas such as track maintenance for new recruits.

Group-wide uniform skills transfer

The group companies and subcontractors play a large role in skills transfer for the railway business as a whole. From that perspective, we are clarifying the individual roles of JR West and group companies to proceed with group-wide uniform HRD for maintenance and improvement of overall railway skills. Such efforts are being made by job rotation between companies and subcontractors according to business structure and roles.

Education by Rank and Cultivating Future Company Leaders

New recruit training

JR West is carrying out training such as that for new recruits and newly appointed worksite managers. The objective of the training includes gaining the knowledge needed for work at each rank, recognizing the roles that need to be fulfilled, and understanding the company's management policies, targets, and other items.

For example, training for new recruits is positioned as important for learning railway skills and instilling the mentality needed as an employee. Specifically, we work on changing recruits' thinking from that of a student to that of a full member of society and on providing knowledge and skills needed in work. In the area of safety education, we are enhancing education in the Railway Safety Education Center along with education in line with practical situations by easy-to-understand methods, such as practical training and visual aids.

Furthermore, we are conducting safety education and mentality/knowledge education needed in worksite management for supervisors, assistant managers, worksite leaders, and management. This training is conducted at job appointment according to responsibilities.

Enhancing worksite communication

Since the Fukuchiyama Line train accident, we have been holding communication training centring on acquiring coaching skills. This training has been held for managers in back-office sections and for personnel such as supervisors and higher managers and instructors in sections directly related to operations so communications between superiors and subordinates at the worksite proceeds smoothly. Furthermore, we have been holding evaluator training as specific follow-up at the worksite, and we have been creating and distributing support tools for people in managerial positions.

Developing next-generation of leaders

We are actively developing leaders so personnel who joined JR West after 1987 can become leaders at the earliest opportunity. This is necessary to close the gap in employee age groups as veteran personnel begin to retire.

Specifically, we have 'junior college' training for selected railway business personnel recruited since 2002. The goal is to advance the careers of highly motivated and ambitious personnel by improving their work-related knowledge and skills. In group training, we focus on basic work-related knowledge and skills, making participants recognize their position as candidate workplace leaders. Those who complete training build-up work experience through job

rotation according to their division development plan.

The junior college was reformed in 2008 into 'next-step training' to bring out the abilities of motivated and energetic junior personnel so they can perform as practical leaders and back-office personnel. Some items added to the menu include general knowledge related to railways, planning work, and problem-solving thinking.

Efforts to Heighten Individual Initiative

JR West encourages self-study as a complement to OJT and group training. As tools for self-study, we have prepared internal and external correspondence training as well as practical certification testing with certification for knowledge and skills directly related to work. We also hold voluntary 'open college' group training where personnel can learn writing skills, computer skills, work improvement methods, and other topics. Many personnel participate in such training.

In addition, the company is preparing an environment where personnel are motivated to improve by providing and expanding the system of one-off merit payments for obtaining certifications.

Future Issues and Outlook

It goes without saying that HRD is one of the most important issues for JR West. We are currently aiming to build a corporate culture that puts top priority on safety. To reach this goal, we are making efforts in a 5-year plan based on the 2008 Basic Safety Plan. We see working steadily towards achieving the final target with steady transfer of skills in the future as being of utmost importance.

By developing human resources to support the company in years to come, we intend to provide safe and reliable transport services for customers. ■



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Mr Makiyama is currently a Deputy Manager in the Personnel Department at JR West. He joined this company after graduating from the University of Tokyo.