

# Empowered JAPAN Webinar Report



Empowered JAPAN Executive Steering Committee was established in 2018, "To realize a world where everyone can work and learn, from anywhere, at anytime." To promote the true value of workstyle innovation including telework, the committee has been coordinating symposiums in both Tokyo and regional cities. And in collaboration with various local governments, Microsoft, and partners, the committee has been serving as an advisor to provide telework training for both corporate and individuals. In response to the spread of infection of corona virus (COVID-19) and the government announcement on February 25, 2020, which included the request to citizens to telework, the steering committee made the decision to launch a series of free webinars starting from March 17, 2020, to provide practical information for individuals and organizations across the nation, to telework and/or practice online education.

## Category :

Learning from case studies companies

**Date :** April, 15, 2020

**Speaker :** Toshiki Hirayasu

Director, Solution Development Group 2  
Digital Solution Development  
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Corporate Product &  
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Born in Osaka.

Joined SoftBank after building career in Nippon Information and Communication Corporation and Microsoft Asia Ltd.

After holding a key role as Sales Director of Kansai region, he led the launch of solution product sales support division.

Starting from the latest fiscal year, moved to a newly established division to support customers' data driven management.

Mr. Hirayasu also promotes the planning of telework solution to drive workstyle innovation, and launched a workshop (LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®) to promote mindset reformation and team building. Certified facilitator of (LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®)

## SoftBank Way of Workstyle Innovation (Telework)

As of April 18, 2020, the end of the COVID-19 pandemic remains unpredictable. At SoftBank Corp., only those employees who are involved in the communication service maintenance are working, and others are in self-quarantine. Mr. Hirayasu who belongs to the Corporate Sales department is teleworking. "Currently, most of us are required to work from home, however, the original meaning of telework is flexible working hours and various locations including home, mobile work, satellite office, etc." (Mr. Hirayasu)

The role of Mr. Hirayasu is to promote work-style reform plans within SoftBank and provide services to client companies. He is also a certified facilitator of LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®, which is a tool suitable for team building and vision sharing.

The Japanese government enforced the Act on Work Style Reform related bill on April 2019. According to Mr. Hirayasu, the reason behind the nationwide promotion of work-style reform is because the country has entered a super-aging society while the labor population is decreasing. If the issue is left unaddressed, the society-wide sharing of the burden will increase, and the economy will become sluggish. We must reform the workstyle, and produce maximum value efficiently in a short period of time.

The Corporate Sales department at SoftBank has been exploring "work-style reform" for about 20 years. The company's current slogan is "Smart & Fun!" It means that by taking advantage of IT, we make our work smarter and more efficient to the maximum, while enjoying work and improving ourselves.

"Since the implementation of the work-style reform bill, the number of inquiries from customers after 20:00 has decreased dramatically compared to before. I believe the overtime of workers is declining all over Japan. Nevertheless, the sales and performance of each company remain steady. It means that productivity is improving." (Mr. Hirayasu)



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According to Mr. Hirayasu, the release of the iPhone changed everything. At that time, the iPhone was expected to be used for entertainment such as music, however, SoftBank started using the iPhone for business early on. With the strong leadership of Mr. Masayoshi Son, in 2012, the company removed all landlines in the office. At the same time, the company started making business proposals using the iPad, and had been moving towards a paperless environment.

"We have an environment which allows us accessing apps and data in cloud anytime, anywhere. In other words, mobile work has reached a mature stage." (Mr. Hirayasu)

On the other hand, if we look at the entire country of Japan, the issue of long working hours is improving, however, teleworking in various workstyles and techniques of HR for keeping talented individuals require improvement. According to a survey taken just before the spread of COVID-19, only 13.9% of companies adopted telework (partially and fully).

What are the requirements for adopting telework? Mr. Hirayasu explained that reforming the awareness of employees was necessary in addition to the development of IT and systems.

"Clients often say that 'only' SoftBank can go paperless because we are skill-full of IT tools. But the truth is that 'even' SoftBank can go paperless. Imagine when you sign up for a phone contract. Information and communication service companies are flooded with papers for contracts, etc. My desk used to be buried under papers, too. But now, there are only a few printers and they are rarely used." (Mr. Hirayasu)

Mr. Hirayasu recalled that the biggest event that promoted reform of awareness of SoftBank employees was the removal of all landlines. "It was a revolutionary change. We no longer had to handle phone calls, and were able to concentrate on our work. Changing communication tools means a chance to reform the organizational culture, and as a result, it leads to reform awareness of individuals." (Mr. Hirayasu)

However, Mr. Hirayasu pointed out that simply advancing telework may cause communication insufficiency. Compared to face-to-face communication, the amount of information exchanged is inevitably less.

In the past, recruiting new graduates, employment for life, and working overtime were the style of Japanese companies, and employees guessed the perspectives of an organization and built relationships through "drinking parties" within a department. However, in recent years, the number of mid-career recruitment has increased, and occasionally, projects are carried out by a cross-departmental team. When telework is introduced in that situation, the objective of a project may not be thoroughly understood, team members cannot get to know each other, and communication between them will be jeopardized.

"In most of the companies in the U.S., there are always employees with different backgrounds working together. When they start a new project, first, they start with team building. Management recognizes the importance of communication. I think Japanese companies also need to incorporate a task to vitalize communication in the future." (Mr. Hirayasu)

Mr. Hirayasu uses LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY®. It is a tool for team building and brainstorming using LEGO which many of us played with when we were children.

"In the traditional brainstorming method, only the opinions of people who speak out loudly are taken into consideration, or some ideas are chosen as a result of compromise. However, using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® helps to highlight what each member really wants to say, and share without misunderstanding." (Mr. Hirayasu)

Mr. Hirayasu emphasized that if we conduct proper team building, we will be able to bring out the best in Japanese workers and their perceptive abilities.

"We just need to think about what task is required to vitalize communication and habituate it. I am convinced that teleworking will be rooted in Japanese companies." (Mr. Hirayasu)

