

Diversification of Oman's Economy

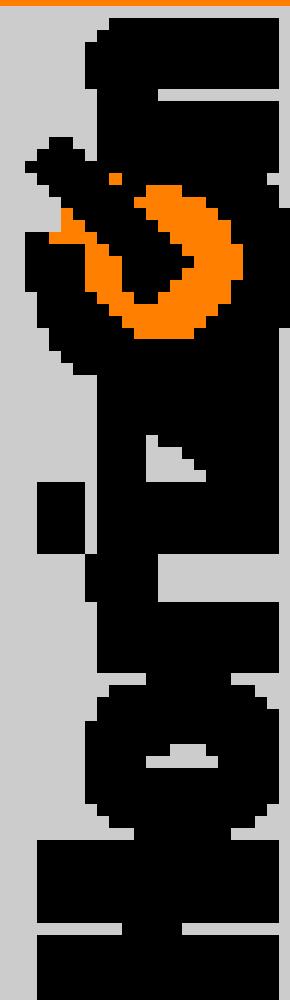


Horizon

Department of Public
Relations and Information
Sultan Qaboos University

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What we can do

With the advent of so called globalization, everyday, millions of people cross international borders, and this has led to the spread of infectious and insect borne diseases from one country to another. There are numerous health problems that are of such magnitude that they have a global political and economic impact. Global health refers to health problems that are best addressed by joint actions and solutions—solutions that involve more than one country. Because global health problems can move across national borders, countries can learn from one another's experiences, both in how diseases spread and in how they can be treated and controlled.

Delivering a talk on Global Health at the College of Medicine & Health Sciences at SQU, Dr. Sibu Saha, Chairman, Directors Council, Gill Heart Institute, University of Kentucky School of Medicine, USA, pointed out that global health matters to everyone, not just to those living in developing countries. It is important that we address global health issues for the humanitarian, equity, and direct impact reasons.

In 2002, while life expectancy at birth reached 78 years for women in developed countries, it fell back to less than 46 years for men in sub-Saharan Africa, largely because of the HIV / AIDS epidemic. For millions of children today, particularly in Africa, the biggest health challenge is to survive until their fifth birthday, and their chances of doing so are less than they were a decade ago. This is a result of the continuing impact of communicable diseases. At the same time, 36 million deaths each year are caused by non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and chronic lung diseases.

World Health Organization has ranked the Sultanate of Oman as first in the world for its highly efficient health system and for effective and competent utilization of the available financial resources in health services. Oman was also rated eighth for providing the most comprehensive health care at the world level. It would be worthwhile if Oman could actively engage in sharing its experiences with other countries and international organizations in combating the latest challenges in global health.



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Big Turnout for Family Day



A large number of people including employees, their family members and children, and SQU students turned up at the 8th Family Day, organised by the Social & Cultural Activities Section of the Department of Public Relations & Information at SQU. The event was held on March 7, under the patronage of H.E. Dr. Ali bin Saud Al Bimani, the Vice Chancellor. Several senior academicians and officials attended the event. The organizers were extremely pleased with this year's big turnout for this annual event. Hundreds of students, employees and their children came out to the Male Sports Complex to enjoy an afternoon of fun and informative activities.

The inflatable slide and jumps face painting and henna, live characters, and puppet show offered ample fun for the kids gathered at the venue. Another attraction was a magic show that entertained kids as well as adults. In the Communities Corner section, expatriate employees decorated booths to represent the history, social context, religions and cultural aspects of their own countries. Around 11 countries including Germany, France, Italy, Russia, Azerbaijan, Pakistan, India, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, and Syria were represented. A few booths provided the traditional food items of the respective countries to the visitors. Mohammed Salim Al Gheilani, Director of the Department of Public Relations and Information, said that the aim of this events is to encourage expatriate employees from different countries and their families to meet each other and get together with an array of cultural and entertainment activities. "The Family Day activities reflect the heritage and culture of the representing countries through the employees".

SQU Receives Iranian Diplomat



H.E. Ramin Mehmanparast, Iran Foreign Ministry Spokesman visited Sultan Qaboos University recently with a view to strengthen ties between Iranian higher educational institutes and SQU. H.E. Dr. Ali bin Saud Al Bimani, Vice Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University, and H.H. Sayyidah Dr. Mona bint Fahd Al Said, Assistant Vice Chancellor for External Cooperation, received the Iranian diplomat.

Both sides reviewed the existing collaboration between SQU and Iranian universities and agreed on extending the partnership to more universities through exchange of faculties, students and collaborative research in different fields including science, engineering and Islamic sciences. At the beginning of the discussion, H.E. Ramin Mehmanparast gave an overview of the higher education in Iran and expressed his keenness to see Omani students studying in Iran under scholarships from his country.

Career Fair Concludes



As many as 58 organizations from the public and private sectors in Oman participated in the Career & Training Opportunities Fair, organized by the Centre for Career Development at Sultan Qaboos University. The opening ceremony of the event was held under the patronage of H.E. Sheikh Khalid bin Omar Al Marhoon, Minister of Civil Service.

The Center for Career Guidance at SQU started organizing the annual Career & Training Opportunities Fair over 14 years ago, as part of ensuring the provision of job opportunities or training to the students and graduates of SQU at all levels of undergraduate majors. Another objective of this event is to build excellent relationships between the local, regional and international employers. The exhibition annually receives a large numbers of requests for participation from local and international companies, and is witnessing participation of more than 65 organizations from the government and private sectors. The organizations are selected on the basis of the number of positions available and their suitability to the qualifications and skills of SQU graduates.

The Fair acts as a meeting place for the university students and the private and public sector organizations to be updated on the availability of job vacancies, training opportunities and training programs. It also helps to educate students about work atmosphere in the private sector through direct communication with HR managers. For the prospective employers, this is an opportunity to know the academic level, skills and competencies of the university students and establish a direct contact with the university through the Centre for Career Guidance.

Japanese University Seeks Ties with SQU



H.E. Dr. Ali Al Bimani, received in his office, Prof. Kitaoka Shinichi, President of the International University of Japan. They explored the possibility of tie ups between the two universities through student exchange. Dr. Ali Al Bimani gave an overview of SQU, its academic programs, and alignment of the programs with the job market requirements in the country and abroad.

Prof. Kitaoka Shinichi said that the academic programs in International Relations and International Management offered at the Japanese is a unique opportunity for students to deepen their understanding of the policy sciences and area studies, using cutting edge information and communication technologies.

Diversification of Oman's Economy: Issues that Need Attention

The Vision for Oman's Economy: Oman 2020 aims at carrying out a substantial transformation in the structure of the national economy by developing a multiplicity of income sources. According to some experts, the need for oil sector most often seen as a depleting sector is a misnomer in the diversification field. Both oil and non-oil sector ought to be so linked as to sustain the Oman economy both on her indigenous resource, oil, and to develop the non-oil sector along with this, not in marginalization of the resource-based rich and reliable oil sector. Three senior academicians from the Department of Economics & Finance of the College of Economics & Political Science at SQU, share their views on diversification of the national economy.

Consequences Matter: Prof. Masudul Alam Choudhury

According to Professor Masudul Alam Choudhury, economic diversification means both product and risk diversifications that come about by expanding the allocation of economic resources, such as budget, markets, international export penetration, and diversity of sectors over which the resources and development can be spread out with many participating investors and stakeholders. "But economic diversification has also a very important consequence. This is generating complementary linkages between producing sectors. Such a design of the economy with healthy linkages between sectors causes each sector to use the output of other sectors as inputs to produce its own end products. As the products of inter-relating sectors increase, so also stakeholders like investors and financiers", he said.

According to Professor Choudhury, the development planning data in the Sultanate show that a good deal of sectoral linkages in output, employment, and capital expenditure exist. But the momentum in this direction is yet far from being above reproach. "The issue surrounding economic diversification then manifests a question: What is meant by a development planning based on diversification from oil to non-oil sector? In the language of sectoral linkages and the appropriate technology to increase the diversity and extensive stakeholding of products and risk, it is illogical to separate the linkage between these two sectors. Instead, what ought to be done is simply to diversify the end use of oil production in the private sectors. Then with the support of the private sector in this direction, it is expected that both oil and non-oil sector will increase together. The development and social impact of such complementary development by linkages causing product and risk diversification will also deepen for the common good of enterprise. The financial sector referred to above will revert into its better linkages with the resource-based sectors. In such a development scenario an over all economic diversification of Omani economy can come about", Professor Choudhury concluded. (Ref: Choudhury, M.A. & Hossain, M.S. (2006). Development Planning in the Sultanate of Oman, Chapters 7-9. Lewiston, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press.)

Issues behind the numbers: Prof. Arthur T. Denzau

Diversification of the Sultanate's economy has been a policy priority since 1995. Vision 2020 contemplates an increase in non-oil exports to 13% by 2020, and 2012 data suggest it is around 11% now. According to Professor Arthur T Denzau, these figures sound very good, but there are serious issues behind the numbers, considering the question "How much diversification has actually occurred?"

Professor Denzau observes that two types of diversification have occurred in Oman. "The first is what many might thing of when the term is used – the growth of firms in industries unrelated to its oil and gas production. Some of this has occurred, but even more of the second variety has occurred – growth in industries that utilize the oil and gas production as inputs. This latter diversification is most obvious in the Sohar Aluminum refining firm- refined aluminum is over 60% energy, and Oman is using its relatively cheaper energy resources here. Further, large amounts of oil and gas production are being used as feedstocks for petrochemical production, a great deal of which is exported with additional value added by Omani production. Notice that both these successes depend critically on the availability of cheap energy or petro feedstocks". Professor Denzau concluded his remarks with the question "Will these efforts be enough, especially if oil and gas production fail to keep rising, as contemplated in the diversification plans?"

Moving towards more competitive economy: Dr. Azmat Gani

Associate Professor Dr. Azmat Gani is of the opinion that there has been increasing realisation among the policy makers in Oman to diversify its economic base. "Oman has taken stronger steps towards gradually improving its business environment, and in particular, allowing more private sector participation in the real economy as well as more private investment incentives and activities, all essential foundations for a diversified economy. This has created the right environment for increasing the levels of domestic and foreign investment as well as opportunities to increase its output", he said.

Dr. Gani further said that recent statistics indicate that Oman is moving towards a more competitive economy, setting the right foundations for diversification. Further impetus to economic diversification is a result of Oman's long-term vision of progressive development, allowing the growth of the non-oil sector such as tourism and light manufacturing, privatization of the state owned enterprises, and investment and modernization of infrastructure. Oman's macroeconomic policies are sound too which is facilitating its diversification initiatives". Dr. Gani said that Oman's efforts in maintaining stable prices over the long-term are commendable. Oman has kept a check on its inflation that has averaged 3.1 percent annually for the 2000-2011 periods. This is also a reflection of its low imported inflation through consumables, much of which are imported from cheaper source markets with low border and beyond the border costs. Overall, Oman is on the path of liberalising and shaping an outward-oriented competitive economy with positive welfare implications in the short to medium term", Dr. Gani said.



Women Outshine in Medical Labour Force in Oman

In the last four decades, there has been considerable increase in the number of female students in Omani medical colleges leading to a concomitant increase in women in the medical labour force in the country. According to Srilekha Goveas, Assistant Professor in the Department of Management, Waljat College of Applied Sciences, who has done a study on how women outperform men as doctors in Oman and across the world, Omani women think that the health sector is a suitable place for women to play an important role in society.



Srilekha Goveas

Goveas further said that, the increasing growth and feminisation of the medical profession has taken place since the accession in 1970 of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. "His vision and leadership have overseen major growth and transformation in Omani health care; he draws on Islamic teachings to underscore the expanded role that women should play in Omani society and to emphasise his support for women's rights. Omani women are thus encouraged by their monarch's commitment to national welfare, and are eager to participate in all aspects of their nation's growth", she said.

The number of active medical students in the College of Medicine & Health Sciences at Sultan Qaboos University, the only state owned university in the country, is 974 out of which 576 (around 60%) are females. According to the statistics from the Deanship of Admissions and Registration at the university, in the year 2012 alone, 157 students were enrolled in this college out of which 105 (around 67%) are females. The Oman Medical College, a private medical university run in partnership with West Virginia University, USA, opened in 2001 with only 69 students, 68 of them girls. By 2010, out of a total of 866 students spread over in its Bausher and Sohar campuses, 744 (86%) of them were girls. Also the available Omani Ministry of Health (MOH) statistical data shows that, in 2009, 57% of MOH doctors were women.

Srilekha Goveas further said that this feminisation of the Omani medical profession could be attributed to many factors such as encouragement from His Majesty, and favourable conditions in the country: a low crime rate, availability of transport, safe accommodation, schools and institutions of higher education. "It is also possible that certain qualities inherent in women, which make them better doctors, could be another factor in the growing feminisation of this profession".

Evidence suggests that women doctors typically adopt a democratic style of communication that fosters collaborative relationships. They discuss treatment options, elicit patient's preferences and engage patients in making decisions. "Female doctors' communication style tends to be sensitive and they offer more emotional support and encouragement and reassurance to their patients than their male counterparts", Goveas said.

The strengths that women demonstrate in patient-centered care may lead to important improvements in the effectiveness and outcomes of care. Studies have demonstrated that patient-centered communication between physicians and patients can enhance outcomes of care, including patient adherence to treatment recommendations, biological outcomes in chronic disease, and patient satisfaction. The Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) in the USA now requires that physicians demonstrate effective communication skills and female doctors are likely to meet or exceed these standards. The ACGME also requires physicians to have the ability to work effectively with others in a health care team or medical professional group. Several recent studies of leadership style indicate that women empower other team members to develop their potential, act as role models by gaining the trust and confidence of colleagues and take an interest in the personal needs of their staff.

Stressing on how women doctors outshine in medical field, Goveas said: "Evidence suggests that women are well-equipped to satisfy both of these elements of patient-centered care in their one-on-one relationships with patients. Several studies by Swiss and American researchers have shown that female doctors tend to be more encouraging and reassuring, use shared decision making, ask more psychosocial questions and spend more time with patients than male doctors. It was seen that the female patients were most satisfied with their women doctors since they expressed concern and empathy and were extremely reassuring. More and more medical schools are offering courses that teach young doctors how to offer better counselling and prevention advice, implement shared decision-making and pay increased attention to how an illness and its treatment are affecting a patient. These skills have been found to be present more often in female physicians".

"Since certain inherently female qualities, such as empathy, sensitivity, encouragement, caring, nurturing, and reassurance, seem to make women better doctors, more and more women are entering and being successful in the medical profession. Feminisation of the profession will positively affect patient care and health care systems, as well as the profession itself", Goveas added.



New Procedure for Heart Valve Replacement



The Heart Team consisting of cardiologists and cardiac Surgeons and Cardiac Anaesthetists at Sultan Qaboos University Hospital successfully carried out an advanced procedure for aortic valve replacement on four patients aged over 75 years. The procedure called Trans catheter Aortic Valve Replacement/Implantation (TAVI) is a minimally invasive approach to implanting an artificial heart valve inside a constricted aortic valve. This approach is for patients who are too high risk for conventional aortic valve replacement surgery. This is for the first time in any hospital in the Sultanate that this heart valve replacement procedure is done. H.E. Dr. Ali bin Saud Al Bimani, the Vice Chancellor of SQU visited the four patients who underwent TAVI at SQU Hospital recently.

Dr. Hilal Al Sabti, Cardiac Surgeon and Deputy Director General of SQU Hospital for Clinical Affairs and the team leader of the heart team, said that during the valve replacement procedure, the Physician inserts the catheter (a tube) through an artery in the groin (Trans femoral approach) or a small incision between the ribs (Trans apical approach). "The artificial valve is compressed and fed through the catheter until it reaches the aortic valve. A balloon expands the artificial valve within the patient's diseased aortic valve

and the catheter is removed. The new valve replaces the old, increasing blood flow throughout the body. Trans catheter techniques allow our team to perform the valve replacement procedure while the patient's heart is still beating, eliminating the need for a "bypass" machine and its associated risks", he explained.

Dr. Adil Al Kindi, Cardiac Surgeon at SQU Hospital said in the conventional procedure, or the open heart surgery requires stopping the heart and putting the patient on heart lung machine until the replacement is done. "The incision is also quite large down the center of the sternum. Usually conventional open heart surgery is not advisable among patients who have high risk due to old age and other factor. TAVI involves only catheter based procedure with the help of fluoroscopy to avoid large incisions", he said.

Dr. Mohamed Al Mukhni, Senior Consultant Cardiologist at Royal Hospital, who is also a member of the team of physicians that performed the procedure at SQUH said that even though TAVI is becoming a common procedure in cardiology worldwide, it makes up only a small percentage of the total aortic valve replacement procedures. In minimally invasive cardiac surgery, including TAVI, the hospital stay is very limited. In most cases the patients are discharged on the same day of surgery", he said. Dr Adil Barakat Al Riyami, Consultant Cardiologist had added that if we were to send these patients aboard for this procedure, the cost will be very high.

The physicians said that a conventional open heart surgery takes at least 4 to 6 hours whereas TAVI is often completed in less than two hours. Inoperable patients who undergo TAVI have improved heart function, survival rates and quality of life, compared to patients who do not receive a new valve and continue with standard medical therapy such as medicine to treat the aortic stenosis and a procedure to stretch the opening of the aortic valve.

US Medical Experts Deliver Talks at SQU



Sultan Qaboos University Hospital and Oman Society of Lipid & Atherosclerosis (OSLA) jointly organized a symposium covering two topics namely cardiovascular diseases and global health care, presented by two noted international speakers from the University of Kentucky, USA. Dr. Sibu Saha, Professor of Surgery and Biomedical Engineering, and Chairman, Directors Council, Gill Heart Institute, Cardiothoracic and Vascular Surgery at the University of Kentucky, gave talks on two different topics: "Global Health Care" and "Lung Cancer: A surgeon Prospective". Dr. Thomas F. Whayne Jr., Professor of Medicine, Cardiology, Gill Heart Institute, spoke about current concepts and controversies in the prevention of cardiovascular diseases and lipid management.

In his talk, Dr. Sibu Saha said that health care is still a big challenge for developing nations. "Poverty, inadequate health care infrastructure, economic disparity, shortage of health care providers, rise of non-communicable diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, trauma, etc., pose a big obstacle to global health care", he said. Dr. Saha underscored the

importance of evidence based practice of medicine in order to provide quality in health care at reduced costs. He lauded the achievement of Oman in health care sector pointing out the reduced infant mortality rate, universal coverage of health care services, increased density of hospitals and treatment facilities and adequate number of health care professionals.

Talking about lung cancer, Dr. Saha said that this disease is the most common cause of cancer related death in the United States. He presented a number of case studies in his institute and elaborated on minimally invasive surgical procedures, advances in chemotherapy and robot assisted invasive surgery for treatment of lung cancer. He added that smoking is the biggest risk factor in the case of lung cancer prevalence.

Dr. Thomas F. Whayne Jr., in his presentation, said that heart disease is the most common cause for mortality rates in women in the United States. "Coronary Heart Disease is the major health problem in women. The mortality rate due to cardiovascular disease is 1 in 2 where as in the case of breast cancer it is only 1 in 29 patients. Once myocardial infarction (heart attack) occurs, women do worse than men. In hospitals, mortality rate of women below fifty years with heart attack is twice that of men. Coronary heart disease in young women appears to be in an especially malignant form", Dr. Whayne observed. He emphasised on advanced screening procedures and precautionary measures to control the prevalence of heart diseases in women.

Dr. Hial Al Sabti, Deputy Director General of SQU Hospital for Medical Affairs, said that the visit of the US physicians is in pursuant to the visit of and SQU delegation headed by H. E. Dr. Ali bin Saud Bimani, Vice Chancellor, to the US medical institutes in 2010. "Both SQU and the University of Kentucky are keen to further strengthen academic and research collaboration and exchange of medical professionals and students", he said.

Muscat Book Fair: Does it Need Improvement?



Dr. Ali Saif Al-Aufi



Mr. Neil Mcbath

The 18th edition of the Muscat International Book Fair was marked by loads of books and titles. The Fair may be successful in terms of the volumes displayed and sold and turnout of book lovers from across the country. Still, there is a question which resonates: Does the Book Fair need further improvement in certain spheres? In this article, two academicians from SQU, Dr. Ali Al Aufi, Assistant Professor in the Department of Information Studies at the College of Arts & Social Sciences, and Mr. Neil Mcbath, faculty at the Language Centre, review the Muscat International Book Fair that concluded recently.



Lacks Innovation and Technological Adaptability: Dr. Ali Saif Al-Aufi
Muscat Book fair is identified as one of the most annually attractive events taking place in Oman. I personally always care about giving it a visit and sometimes two or three visits in a row but not this year where I found myself paying a short single visit with nothing at hand. Through years, I find

nothing much has changed except confined expansion in size, but the fair largely remains traditional in ways books are compiled, presented, marketed, and delivered.

We now live in a digital era where information becomes ubiquitous and abundant and people become enticed by the digital flow of information that is profoundly enhanced by the interactive mobile technology and social networking tools. Unlike the case in the Arab World or most developing countries, changes in the habits of making and publishing books as well as changes affecting the patterns of reading have been receptive by a wide group of people. The introduction of tablets such as iPad and Amazon Kindle has revolutionized the patterns of reading. As such, I have been expecting innovations and creativity in promoting digital materials or devices, at least with one or more publishers or vendors from the Arab World during the 2013 Muscat Book Fair.

The majority of the Arabic-based intellectuality is hindered from publicity as it lacks accessibility and findability in the digital shift, not to mention other dominant scholarly problems such as lack of originality, accuracy, and intelligent and theoretical contribution. Other issues are also related to the political instability and lack of institutional encouragement.

Books Not for Sale with National Exhibitors: Mr. Neil Mcbath

This year, as usual, the Muscat International Book Fair was arranged so that official national exhibitors were in the tent on the right of the entrance, English-language publishers and exhibitors were in the tent to the left, and the main hall was reserved for Arabic language publishers – or so it seemed. If there is a criticism of this arrangement, it must be that the national exhibitors frequently confine themselves to displaying a few specimen editions of books, none of which are for sale. Bahrain and Qatar are particularly prone to this approach, and that is unfortunate. Many visitors will make impulse buys, but they will balk at the idea of ordering a book at a fair, if the same book can probably be ordered online. Once again, moreover, the Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research was a no show. This is to be particularly regretted, because in the early years of the Muscat Book fair, ECSSR publications gave every indication of selling well.

In the English language tent, two distributors stood out this year. The first of these was Goodword Books, an Islamic publishing house based in New Delhi. This company publishes a wide range of Islamic and devotional books, but it has carved out a particular niche for itself by reissuing classic orientalist texts. Long out of copyright, books like H.A.R. Gibb's Travels of Ibn Battuta; H.C. Lea's Moriscos of Spain; Their Conversion and Expulsion and Stanley Lone-Poole's Muslims in Spain are all available at absurdly low prices. For the casual reader, or for the student who is looking for an introductory overview, these books are invaluable, and can be bought for the price of a pizza.

The second publisher is Motivate, from the UAE. This company usually brings out one or two new titles a year, but they are not cheap. This year's offerings were the UAE businessman Khalifa Ahmed al Habtoor's Autobiography, and a large, lavishly illustrated, coffee-table book called Footsteps of Thesiger, by Adrian Hayes. Unfortunately, the hardback version of this book cost OR 20-000, while the paperback version was OR 13-000. The book follows Hayes as he literally retraces Thesiger's route from Salalah to the coast of the UAE, via the Empty Quarter. The illustrations are beautiful, however, but for me the book was particularly interesting because it contains the latest photographs of two of Oman's living treasures, Salim bin Kabina and Salim bin Ghabaisha.

These two men, who were wild teenagers when they joined Thesiger in 1950, have actually aged remarkably well. There is still a fierceness to Salim bin Kabina; even in his 70s he would be a formidable opponent. The long-haired, careless smiling Salim bin Ghabaisha, by contrast, has mellowed into a short, comfortably stout elder statesman, his neat, snow-white beard fringed with henna.

And then came the surprise of this year's Fair. Searching the aisles of the main hall for other treasures, I came across the stand from Brunei Darusalaam. Many of their books were written in Bahasa Malaysia, but to my delight I found The Arabs and the Art of Translation, a collection of papers by Arif Karkhi Abukudairi. Priced at an incredibly low OR 1-600, this was too good to leave behind. And this year's bargain will bring me back to the Muscat Book Fair in 2014, In'shallaah.

Straight Talk

Horizon: Could you briefly explain the unique features of Japanese corporate culture in contrast to the western corporate culture?

Mikami: Japanese companies think of their employees as generators of profit, as we don't have natural resource to sell from the beginning. Our only reliable resource is human power. So we do not consider personnel expenditures to be a cost, traditionally, but rather an investment in their people. This is completely different to present accounting and Western model, as in theory, accounting requires that people be recognized as assets, but in reality, methods to measure and quantify people's knowledge have not yet been developed. So as an alternative, compensation is booked as a cost. Japanese companies, in their management approach, intuitively take into consideration the limitations of today's accounting, but struggle with globalization's pressure on the other hand. They try to fill this gap by their revenue saving as a buffer. Under this thought process, knowledge is generated in double approach in Japanese corporate culture. One is classic Western type R&D, science based top-down style with elite exclusive education. On the other hand, Japanese original style is bottom-up approach from shop-floorism and professional craftsmanship by ordinary workers. The Japanese company believes that it is not just theoretical business strategy, but the quality of the actual tasks performed by workers, that creates competitive advantage. And they think scientific theory doesn't cover all of our world's phenomena. This is reality. There is a big gap between just knowing or talking, and being able to do. As the conclusion of this philosophy, we blur boundary between blue-collar and white-collar. We of course have academic approach R&D, but at the same time, in-house corporate education system to workers in long term view. And as a conclusion of this, small income gap between executives and workers is also Japanese corporate culture.

Horizon: Accordance with natural laws is a feature of Japanese culture. Could you explain?

Mikami: It comes from long term trust oriented economy and family like culture not only in companies management, to public sectors, even between competitors and clients, counterparts like between banks and companies. And as for individuals, mutually-facilitated order in people has brought up from childhood in each family's education, our daily life, schools, everywhere as daily custom. This is very natural for Japanese people. For example, we clean up our class rooms and tools by ourselves, as even from observing dust and trash, we can find which working process by ourselves brought waste. Self control in hygiene is taken as the first step to see things and think solution. Everything has back and front, merit and demerit, this is reality. Just doing easy thing, enjoyable thing is not well balanced we naturally think.

Horizon: How do the Japanese workforce regard fairness and honesty in business dealings and personal conduct?

Mikami: For us, taking pride in working is natural which comes from Edo periods' samurai spirit. They start to see their work as a place to hone their character, experientially acquired knowledge with reality is equally valued as paper work or sophisticated knowledge acquired by education. Naturally we feel mental health to do so. Some historians mention that this has its origins in samurai culture, in which warriors refined their characters through battle and training.

Horizon: How would you comment on gender equality in Japan with regard to corporate management?

Mikami: The Japanese corporate system is tied to traditional family values: the husband earns a living to support the family, while the wife takes care of the household duties and child rearing. As a result, even now the number of female executives in Japan is far lower than in other advanced industrial economies. Japan is often criticized for this. But working women's ratio is increasing basically. In Japanese society, women intuitively take mother's function not to be simply categorized by income competence, so to achieve work-life balance, not only women themselves, but also Japanese government try to develop women's new alternative working style and industry. Perhaps, gender equality should be defined not only from business aspect, but also from biological functions and so on. Japan has some cutting edge cases already. Intellectual service with home-working, using Skype and on-line network which is completely same as the present companies working style except they don't go to office. These cases are not developed by limited number of elites, nor government but by ordinary people. We have tried to find out solution in bottom-up approach to cope with reality, always. Gender equality solution in more detail definition, more suitable to reality, or each country's family system, would be one of our challenge.

Mariko Mikami

Mariko Mikami is an independent journalist based in Japan, and covers industrial development and solutions in socio economic system transformation. She has written books on mega bank accounting comparison between Europe, US and Japan, M&A human resource strategy comparison between US and Japan, Middle management aging problem in Japan, and so on. She is a committee member at Ministry of Economy, Technology and Industry (METI), associate professor at Shinshu university, providing lecture at several graduates schools in MBA course and policy management course. Mikami also works as an anchorperson in Economic TV program, which she engages from program planning and launching, including national broadcasting company NHK. Mikami gave a talk at SQU on Japanese corporate culture.

