

*Roundtable Discussion*

## Creating an Environment That Encourages Employees to Take on Challenges

The Toho Gas Group is creating an environment that encourages employees to take on challenges, including the establishment of systems supporting their growth. Young employees playing active roles in various fields, including those actually taking advantage of these systems, talk with the manager of the DE&I Career Development Support Group in our Personnel Department about their experiences, the challenges they face in the workplace, and what is required to create an environment that encourages the taking on of challenges.

### The Appeal of Toho Gas Lies in Its Culture of Taking on Challenges and Respect

**Mizuno:** What do you find appealing about Toho Gas in your daily work?

**Shibuya:** What I find appealing is something that is common to both my previous position at Toho Gas Network and my current position in the Carbon Neutral Development Department, and that is a strong sense of ownership with regard to company objectives. Employees view the organizational mission as a personal challenge and work together with those around them to achieve it. I think our corporate culture fosters enthusiasm and a sense of unity, which in turn drives us to strive for higher goals as a team—this is one of the major appeals of the Group.



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**Ueno:** I think the most appealing aspect of our company is its atmosphere, which enables us to voice our opinions regardless of supervisor–subordinate relationships. When I first joined the Company, I was unsure about expressing my point of view as a new employee, but my supervisor encouraged me to “just say what you think,” which made it easier for me to voice my opinion. The New Product Development Group I belong to is, as the name suggests, involved in the development of new products, and as members of this group, we proactively exchange

*I think a flexible workplace, where relationships of trust can be built, provides me with great peace of mind when taking on challenges.*

### Akari Mizuno

Manager  
DE&I Career Development Support Group



opinions regardless of age or length of service. The opinions of young employees are respected, and their ideas are sometimes turned into products or new projects. My sense is that Toho Gas is an organization that values the success of young employees in achieving their goals.

**Ashikaga:** I have experience working in fields such as commercial sales and renewable energy development, and throughout my career, I have felt that our corporate culture has consistently encouraged the taking on of challenges. However, rather than blindly taking on new challenges, we also carefully hedge risks, which is characteristic of Toho Gas. I believe this balance between challenges and stability is one of our distinctive features. In the Power Business Promotion Department, I work with many mid-career hires from a variety of backgrounds. The ability to freely voice opinions and engage in frank discussions without regard for seniority makes for extremely pleasant interactions and leads to the rapid promotion of business.

**Mizuno:** I am a mid-career hire in my seventh year, and my first impression was that Group employees were very kind and helpful. I previously worked as an attorney at a law firm, and this was my first experience working in the corporate world. I was very anxious at first, but my colleagues took the time to explain the organizational structure and operations to me in great detail. After joining the Company, I consulted with my supervisor regarding my desire to expand my experience as an in-house lawyer by serving as a standing member of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations. My supervisor went to the Personnel Department on my behalf, and my request was approved. I was impressed that the Company was willing to listen to and support employees who are serious about their career goals. I feel that this flexibility, and the ability to build trusting relationships in the workplace, provide tremendous peace of mind when taking on new challenges.



*Utilizing the internal recruitment program has greatly expanded my career opportunities.*

### Ryota Ashikaga

Power Business Promotion Dept.  
Renewable Energy Group No. 2

## Enhancing Systems to Expand Employee Career Options

**Mizuno:** It appears that the keyword “challenge” is the common denominator in everyone’s comments. In terms of a framework for taking on career challenges, the Company established systems that support employees in taking on challenges, including our internal recruitment program and field work programs at overseas locations. What were your impressions after actually using these systems? Are there any systems you would like to use in the future?



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**Ashikaga:** I joined the Company with the intention of pursuing a career in the Commercial Sales Department, but after learning about other departments, I became interested in trying a wider range of work outside of commercial sales. As my interest in the power business grew, I took a chance and applied for an internal job posting. This resulted in a transfer, leading to the work in which I am currently engaged. I am also able to leverage the colleague network and knowledge acquired during my sales career, and it is extremely useful to engage in work while maintaining connections across departments.

**Mizuno:** After joining the Company, as employees learn about the various types of work we engage in, they may discover a type of work they want to try, and this system provides very good opportunities to make that happen.

**Ashikaga:** I agree. In taking advantage of the internal recruitment program, I feel my opportunities for career development have greatly expanded.

**Shibuya:** In 2024, I took advantage of a three-month overseas field work program. Since joining the Company, I have been involved in gas-related on-site work, and my motivation had me wondering if Toho Gas's unique know-how could be expanded overseas. My on-site work involved formulating and verifying hypotheses, which yielded positive results, filling me with a great sense of confidence. The process of forging my own path was the most valuable lesson I learned, and it has also given me an opportunity to think about how I can apply this experience to my work. Going forward, I hope to use my overseas field work experience to achieve further growth in overseas business.

**Ashikaga:** A senior colleague in the same department who recently participated in overseas field work noted, "It was a tough but very meaningful experience." How was it for you, Mr. Shibuya?

**Shibuya:** The toughest part was facing situations in which I didn't know what to do. There were no established procedures, no name recognition for Toho Gas, and no connections in the local area. Despite arriving with an enthusiastic attitude, I initially struggled knowing where to begin, feeling overwhelmed by the gap between my aspirations and reality. However, through trial and error—hypothesizing, testing, and refining approaches to identify who to approach and how to gain their attention—I gradually began to see results. While each day was challenging,

*I also want to utilize this system and think more deeply about my career while being inspired by people outside the Company.*

### Moyu Ueno

Sales Planning  
New Product Development Group



looking back, I believe those three months were truly a rewarding experience, providing me with a significant sense of accomplishment.

Since returning to Japan, I have been offered an appointment overseas and am currently preparing for the new position. The experience I gained through overseas field work has been invaluable.

**Ueno:** Although I have yet to use these systems, I am interested in systems that support learning outside the Company, including studies at graduate schools in Japan and abroad, as I hope to obtain an MBA and develop skills in business planning and other areas.

My department comprises a diverse group of people of various ages, genders, and backgrounds, and I feel that every day this diversity creates new value. I believe that the more diverse one's background, the better the output produced, and I want to take advantage of these systems and think more deeply about my career while being inspired by people from outside the Company.

### Promoting Further Utilization of Systems

**Ashikaga:** The internal recruitment program is a good system, but one that requires understanding on the part of the person leaving the department, as well as the person joining the department. I feel that sharing the best solutions for the Company as a whole among all relevant parties, including managers and executives, will lead to smooth system operations.

Also, rather than suddenly transferring to an entirely new position, my sense is that it would be beneficial, for example, to provide opportunities to experience work in other departments once a week. If there were a system in place enabling people to easily try other jobs of interest, more people would be encouraged to take the first step.

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**Ueno:** While the Career Challenge and other systems are in place, there are issues with providing information to employees. There are still not enough opportunities for young employees to learn about these systems. If we increase opportunities for employees to actually experience the atmosphere and work in other departments, and maintain a system that enabled young employees to easily participate, they would develop an awareness of the type of work performed by other departments. This would likely encourage more people to make use of the internal recruitment program and other measures. I think the key is to create an environment where young people can easily access the system.

**Mizuno:** Apart from systems, it is important to provide opportunities to learn and places to gain experience. For example, holding roundtable discussions and other events where employees are able to share their experiences of using the Career Challenge system will help make the program feel more familiar and personal.

**Ueno:** I agree, that is exactly how I feel.

**Shibuya:** I also think it is extremely important to follow up after these systems are used. I myself have experienced some of the difficulties mentioned earlier. After transferring to the overseas business division, for instance, there were moments when I felt anxious about whether I was really contributing to the Company in the new environment. I think such concerns are inevitable when taking on challenges, but I felt that having support and consultation services available after utilizing the system enabled me to use it with peace of mind, which led to better results.

**Ashikaga:** Regarding overseas field work, if there were an option with a slightly lower hurdle, it would be easier for people who are interested in going abroad, but for whom participation is difficult at the moment due to family situations and other circumstances. This would give more employees opportunities to take on challenges.

### Making Challenges the Norm

**Mizuno:** The system is still in its infancy, and this is precisely why we believe there is room for flexible development. What I heard from everyone was that you feel you need more opportunities to learn about the Company and the work in which we are engaged in order to take on new challenges. In addition to the various systems, we want to increase the number of people who think positively about these systems through the provision of opportunities to learn about the work conducted in each department and at each Group company, as well as hearing directly from people who have experienced career challenges.

As we have only just launched these systems, there are still few users, placing significant pressure on initial participants such as Mr. Shibuya. If more people were able to easily utilize these systems, the responsibility would be better shared and we would see significant results.

**Ashikaga:** By sharing positive feedback, those who have utilized the systems will encourage others to consider trying them as well. I also would like to share my experiences with those around me and encourage newer employees.

**Ueno:** In terms of internal recruitment, I think it would be good for the workplace to send out a message saying, “We really want you to come work here.” I feel that if messages are sent from

both those creating the systems and those on-site who benefit from them, a culture of taking on challenges will take root more firmly throughout the Company.

**Shibuya:** It's very encouraging to have the opportunity through today's roundtable discussion to exchange opinions with all of you who are working so diligently in your respective fields. I hope we can continue to support each other in taking on challenges and move the entire organization in a better direction.

*Providing support and consultation after using the system makes it easy to use with peace of mind, which I think leads to better results.*

### Keiichiro Shibuya

Carbon Neutral Development Dept.  
Carbon Neutral Development Group No. 1

