

TO IMPROVE TOGETHER: RAILWAY SPECIFIC AND GLOBAL SAFETY MANAGEMENT THAT IMPROVE SAFETY REGULATION WITHIN AND BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONS

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1. Introduction

Considering rapid changes in society, such as the falling population, JR East Company has put forward a long-term management policy in order to achieve the goal of JR group management vision “Move Up 2027” which shifts its focus from railway-based services to people-based services. Furthermore, the Company will publish management information on railway lines with small number of passengers, and aim to discontinue loss-making railway lines, separate infrastructure from operation in transport system, and finally change mode of transportation to buses. It is unprecedented that the government will oversee this discussion from now on while it has been considered that the issue was between railway companies and local governments.

In order to respond to changes in the social environment, the management formulates policies but there is a gap between the policy and the work-site operation. Employees aiming to become train drivers used to work as station staff, train conductors, and train drivers in that order then they retire as train drivers. And this way through experience they are well trained and nurtured safety. Placed transfers that aim to create generalists who will manage everything however are evidence that the company is not making safety a top priority. Therefore, how to build a safety culture will be an issue in the future workplaces.

In another words, however work styles and organizational structures may change, the fact that safety must be the number one priority and people are the ones who maintain safety is not going to change. Our presentation is about improving safety despite all those changes from the worker's perspective.

2. Company measures (work style)

JR East Company has proposed two specific measures. The first measure is about flexible work styles in work-site operation. For example, train drivers and/or conductors will also work as station staff on the same day, and the station staff will also work at the kiosk and carry out planning work which used to be the task of employees at the branch office.

2. Company measures (re-structuring of the company)

The second measure is about the re-structuring of the entire company according to its long-term management policy.

In the future, the number of branch offices may be further reduced or abolished. We anticipate the bipolarization of the company: headquarters which will be the brain and work-sites will take care of everything else.

Until now, workplaces were divided by systems/duties such as stations, drivers, equipment sections, and planning department. Such workplaces were divided for their specialized work and specialized training which build a safety culture and safety specialists, but in the future, they will be a single organization. Amid changes from safety culture to business fusion, collaboration, and cooperation, it is our mission as a union to maintain our safety culture and ever improve safety.

3. JREU's point of view (awareness of issues regarding the implementation of measures)

The company is gradually changing the worksite operation from the work style that has been engaged in the main work at the field organization to the "flexible work style" and calling it "coordination and cooperation" by so doing shifting responsibility for various planning tasks carried out by originally the planning departments of branch offices to everyone. In addition, the Company is going to re-structure at all field so that "flexible work style" can be applied to anyone. In another words, changing the system and structure aligned with the way of work is being promoted by the two measures. As a result, being a part of committees or projects that are currently being carried out for self-development purposes will also be considered the main work.

Now, in the workplace, due to the "flexible way of working", employees carry multiple tasks. For some driver's shifts, overtime work is sometime required before coming to work or off-duty, however, the more things you must do, more time you will need to finish them, which leads to even more overtime work at the very same time the supervisor tries to prohibit overwork! While basing the main duties such as driving trains, they became worried that they must participate in committees and projects. As a result, they must also proceed with their duties at home and off-time. In fact, they are actively communicating with each other using Teams and LINE on personal smartphones. So, there are many concerned that taking on projects etc. is a heavy burden both mentally and physically.

Railway safety can be protected by teamwork. However, the environment has become such that planning work is emphasized, and an awareness of competing to obtain evaluations has been fostered. It can be said that it is also a situation where the culture of safety-first collapses. Various events have occurred already and it is not surprising that a fatal accident could occur at any time.

3. JREU's point of view (frequent occurrence of events leading to fatal accidents)

Here are some examples. The first one was occurred at Kinomiya Station on November 19, 2021. The direct cause was that the train watchman did not issue an evacuation order even though he saw the alarm system indicating train approaching. The train driver acted immediately yet the train stopped 50m beyond the construction site. A construction worker was barely evacuated as a site manager grabbed his shirt and pull him away from the train. As the investigation went, we found that the train watchman was working with anxiety due to not having enough training and another factor such as the lack of distance to confirm the arrival of trains.

On the day of the accident, the notice for employees of the branch office was announced saying that one of the background factors was that the train watch man was worried about other tasks and not focus on the immediate task. This information, however, was deleted in the alert issued on November 25th.

The second was a series of incidents where construction workers entered the vicinity of the tracks when the train was approaching and they were nearly hit by the train between Futaba and Namie on December 1, 2021. The reason for this was the use of an application that grasps the running position of the train for the purpose of customer guidance. Because this application has a time lag, we never use it when entering the track. Workers were aware that this application doesn't work yet still used it.

The third one was occurred on January 24, 2022, at the Makuhari Rolling Stock Center. What happened was the shunting vehicle hit the repair depot. This type of work is a special task where a worker sits on the front to guide via radio the driver who gets on the very back. This work is scheduled very rarely at this workplace so they repeatedly requested for training, but the training was never carried out.

3. JREU's point of view (challenges on systematization)

We are concerned that the systematization has progressed while there are no concrete solutions to those immediate problems and the Company takes little notice of the importance of education and training.

JR Kyushu, another JR company, brings us a sense of crisis that we may also become like. While JR Kyushu keeps many local and loss-making lines, due to the impact of the COVID-19 the number of passengers declined even more, and as part of the rationalization of the railway business, the company shifts toward no conductor system on the conventional lines in Nagasaki, Kumamoto, and Kagoshima prefectures which means all railway lines will be switched to the so-called "one-man operation". With the abolition of conductors, JR Kyushu has explained that safety will be ensured by installing cameras at stations and trains, etc. Then the focus will be on how to maintain the convenience for the passengers. In addition, they have announced that they will reduce the number of trains along with the abolishment of conductors, the company expects an annual cost reduction effect of more than 1 billion yen.

In JR East, even long trains (15-car trains) will soon be operated by one person. Especially in the Tokyo metropolitan area, demonstration experiments of automatic

driving are being conducted. In another words, on top of abolishing conductors the company even aimed to have an unlicensed staff member without a driver in the driver's cab. The reality of work-site, however, is that even as mechanization progresses, the burden on workers is increasing, and the incidents continues to occur.

4. Proposal

There is no end to the number of events that raise fears that the safety culture will collapse in this way. JREU understands the basic principle of the railway business, which is “safety first,” from the perspective of workers working on the front lines. We convey a sense of crisis based on the facts occurring at work-sites to the management team at every opportunity we have.

Furthermore, we have established the “five pillars for new measures” and continued to seeing through the aims of the company measures. And our members look ahead to the future workplace and tasks by discussing the issues. In addition, in order to protect safety, to master knowledge and skills of duties and work is necessary. Based on that, clarify the main task in order to ensure safety, it is necessary to implement experienced labor and education and training for each system. Here are our recommendations. I will explain the “five pillars for new measures”.

Five pillars for the JR East new measures

1. The seniority-based system increases wages according to the length of service, which leads to an improvement in the retention rate of employees, which also leads to the improvement of individual technical skills and the succession of skills. Therefore, oppose the abolition of seniority-based wages! Oppose reduction of lifetime wages such as allowances and fixed raise! Do not allow further shift toward ability-based wages. Experienced labor and teamwork are important for railway safety. For example, if wages do not rise according to the length of services but by so called “ability” competition intensify among workers and division among workers will be promoted. In such a working environment, safety will be reduced. It is no longer an environment that can be protected. Of course, as a labor union, we oppose such a thing.

2. Clarify the main work, ensure that experienced labor and training and education for each system are implemented, and ensure safety. Experience is supported by knowledge and skills acquired from safety education and daily experience. If employees uniformly take all kinds of tasks half-heartedly, they will be inexperienced in their respective responsibilities. They will become a group of armatures. It is safe to concentrate on the base work and improve skills. It leads to the improvement of all levels and the inheritance of skills.

3. Ensure sufficient break time, home rest time, and intervals between shifts!
Productivity is improved through company measures, but the mental and physical

burden on workers is increased. In a railway business, it is a prerequisite to understand that people are to create safety and their health must be ensured.

4. Let's fight against the side job during the working hours!

If the side job is not to improve the skills of the person, but to simply fill in the gaps for the part-time workers or their income level is so low that they must do a side job in the first place, then we must oppose it.

5. Let's respect the wishes of the workers and create workplaces and jobs where they can find their work rewarding! Individuals have their own characteristics, and not all employees can demonstrate their abilities in the same way. Securing a work environment that considers characteristics and job satisfaction is the key to safety and service levels will lead to improvement of safety and other service levels.

Conclusion

No matter how much systemization progresses in the future, safety is a product created by people. Danger is always present and we must be aware of it as a fact and trying to minimize it. It is precisely because we can only maintain safety by continuing to make efforts to ensure safety by creating a safety culture. Mistakes made by someone in the workplace means it is possible that any employee may make the same mistake as they have the same education and training background. Because the people who create safety are the people who work in the system, the most important thing is the workplace culture, human resource development, education, and training. The final breakwater is people. But people make mistakes. In order to prevent the mistake becoming a bigger accident, it is also important to find out the exact cause.

Management that prioritizes efficiency and does not seriously face the life-threatening events that are occurring right now shows that "safety is not the top priority" for the company, which should be the most important thing in the railway business.

That is why the more efficiency measures are implemented, the more the labor unions will have to check things from the perspective of workers.

JREU continues to rebuild the safety-first railway culture from the bottom up.

Thank you for your attention

Keywords: keyword 1; keyword 2; keyword 3; keyword 4; keyword 5