

CPO Seminar on "Human Resource Development" Held at Saudi Aramco

A Customized Program-Overseas (CPO) on "Human Resource Development" was held from October 9 to 13, 2010, at the Yanbu Refinery in Saudi Arabia.

1. Background

This seminar was realized in response to a request from a participant of a regular course on "Training Management" (TR-17-10) implemented in December 2009. The participant, a manager in charge of training in the Yanbu NGL Fractionation Department at Saudi Aramco, made the request after returning to Saudi Arabia and obtaining the approval of his company. JCCP obliged, and this became the first seminar on human resources to be held in Saudi Arabia.

2. Lecturers

Mr. Hiromasa Tanaka (Professor, Meisei University)
Mr. Hideki Otsuka (Human Affairs Dept., JGC Corp.)
Mr. Akio Hoshino (Training Dept., JCCP)

3. Seminar Overview

The seminar was held over a five-day period. Following an opening seminar, a lecture on "Japanese-style HRM and Corporate Training" was held on this day and half of the next, and provided an overview of HRM and HRD issues. The latter half of the second day was spent on a lecture titled "Kaizen General," which



Opening speech by the director of the Yanbu NGL Fractionation Department



Participants of the seminar after the closing ceremony

focused on "creating a Kaizen mind" as a perspective of training-related programs. The third and fourth days featured a seminar on training theories by Professor Tanaka, and the last day was devoted to an introduction of the personnel system employed by JGC Corporation and its corporate training activities. Finally, the seminar ended with a closing ceremony.

4. Details of the Seminar

[Day 1 and first half of Day 2]

"Japanese-style HRM and Corporate Training"

The seminar began with an opening speech by Mr. Mohammad N. Al-Naghash, Director of the Yanbu NGL Fractionation Department.

Then, a lecture was given for a day and a half on Japanese-style HRM and corporate training, divided into the following four parts.

- (Part 1) History of Japan and the Japanese mentality
- (Part 2) Japanese-style organizational teamwork and the substance of Japan's high economic growth
- (Part 3) Characteristics of Japan's human resources and the reality of corporate training
- (Part 4) Recent changes in Japanese society and companies and future corporate training issues

Throughout the lecture, there were many questions and comments from the participants, which at times developed into active discussions among them and set the tone for a highly successful program.

[Latter half of Day 2]

“Kaizen General”

The goal of this lecture is to provide knowledge of the Kaizen concept and the unique Kaizen mind of the Japanese people. It explained the process of introducing Kaizen activities, the “5S” method of achieving Kaizen, and “The Toyota Way” as an example of the result of accumulating Kaizen efforts, to examine what is needed to establish a “Kaizen mind” in the workplace. Most of the participants seemed new to the principles presented and listened to the lecture with strong interest, in their capacities as refinery trainers and managers.

One of the participants noted that the Kaizen concept is similar to the “Six Sigma” strategy he learned about in a previous training program and asked to be allowed to introduce it, so the lecture was suspended for several minutes while the participant introduced the strategy to the other participants.

[Days 3 and 4]

“Training Program Planning and General Training Theories”

This lecture is a regular program of the JCCP course on Training Management, which is given by Professor Hiromasa Tanaka of Meisei University over two days. It introduces the comprehensive knowledge needed to implement education and training, including survey methods for training needs, training program designing, and evaluation of training results. Owing in part to Professor Tanaka’s proficiency in English, the lecture was a very well-received and high-level program that captured the participants’ strong interest.

[Day 5]

“Personnel Management System and Training System in an Engineering Company”

The lecture began with an overview of the personnel system at JGC Corporation with a focus on the company’s current salary and evaluation systems, and also covered employees’ career path structure in the engineering company. After the first four days of lectures on an overview of HRD and training theories, this was the only lecture that introduced the reality of corporate training in specific terms.

After all of the programs were completed, the seminar closed with a closing speech by Mr. Husain M. Asiri, Operations Division Superintendent, Yanbu NGL Fractionation Department, and the presentation of completion certificates by A. Hoshino.

5. Summary

(1) The group of participants comprised 24 high-level employees above superintendent level and below manager level in charge of training. They came to Yanbu to attend the seminar from Saudi Aramco’s head office and its refineries and terminals located throughout Saudi Arabia. From the beginning to the end of the seminar, they displayed earnest attitudes and frequently asked questions, raised new issues, and sought the lecturers’ opinions. As mentioned earlier, their questions and comments at times stimulated active discussions among themselves.

(2) We assumed that the Middle East countries, and particularly Saudi Arabia, are much more “Americanized” than Japan. Therefore, we thought that an (American-style) “performance-based work environment” had already taken root in Saudi Arabia, compared to Japan, because it was only about ten years ago that Japanese companies began reviewing their seniority system, which had been an important factor in Japan’s rapid economic growth. In this respect, we were worried whether information concerning present personnel systems in Japan would provide helpful knowledge to Saudi Arabia.

There was no need to worry, however, as the participants gave full and concentrated attention to the lectures on Japanese-style HRM and HRD, which seemed to capture their interest as new concepts. In addition to raising many questions and expressing their views, they also engaged in active discussions among themselves. Moreover, practically all participants took an active part in the seminar—whereas in most cases only a certain handful of participants engage in this type of active behavior—and demonstrated the high level of Saudi Aramco’s employees and their outstanding English skills.



Discussions during a lecture presentation



Small seminar at Yanbu Industrial College



Students asking many questions after the seminar

6. Small Seminar at Yanbu Industrial College

The team of Japanese lecturers gave a special small seminar at Yanbu Industrial College, a regional college located in Yanbu City, on the night of the fourth day of the seminar. The faculty and students of the college, as well as HR managers from local companies, were invited to attend. It was held in response to a separate request from Saudi Aramco based on the wishes of the university aiming to achieve globalization.

Held in a large auditorium at the university, the seminar drew an audience of more than 100 faculty members, students, and other interested parties. After A. Hoshino and Prof. Tanaka gave short presentations, a surprising number of people took part in the subsequent Q&A session. The two major questions were the following.

- (1) How do Japanese companies retain outstanding personnel?
- (2) What are the differences between an individualism-oriented organization and a teamwork-oriented organization?

There were more questions than could be answered in the allotted time of the seminar, and because of this, many participants came up to the podium to ask questions after the close of the seminar. They mainly asked the following (replies omitted).

- (1) What is the best way to create teamwork?

- (2) How is Japan able to treasure its traditional culture while at the same time developing modern scientific technologies?
- (3) What is important to continuing Kaizen?

The lecturers were impressed with the participants' pure drive and enthusiasm that was clearly evident in their eyes and behavior, qualities we are seeing less of in Japan today. With a large population of such young people, Saudi Arabia is certain to develop into an even greater power.

7. Observations

Yanbu, the city we visited for the seminar, is situated on the western coast of Saudi Arabia, north of Mecca and Jeddah, facing the Red Sea. It is a regional city comprising a large industrial zone, which has developed from its origin as Saudi Aramco's shipping terminal, and quiet towns. This was the Japanese lecturers' first visit to Saudi Arabia, and it exposed us to a world of Islam that is unlike that of other Middle East countries.

After the seminar, we visited JGC Gulf International, a local subsidiary of JGC Corporation located on the eastern coast of the country in Al-Khobar, to hold an exchange of information. The sight of the large city that differed from Yanbu opened our eyes to another aspect of Saudi Arabia.

<by Akio Hoshino, Training Dept.>



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