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Toward a “More Vital and Reliable JAIF” Interview with New JAIF Vice Chairman Hattori

The Japan Atomic Industrial Forum (JAIF) underwent considerable reorganization recently upon the 50th anniversary of its establishment, with a new slate of board members installed at the regular general meeting held at the end of June. In that shakeup, you, Mr. Hattori, assumed the post of Executive Vice Chairman. In recent times, people have complained that they “JAIF's real face is hard to see.” What will change in the future, and how?

Hattori: Upon my assumption of the vice chairmanship, I sent an e-mail to the entire staff of JAIF, asking them to pay heed to the following three points in the pursuit of their work.

Firstly, I told them that “now is the time for action” on reform. Over the past two years, a broad range of discussions has taken place clarifying the mission of JAIF and the direction that it should aim for, leading to the revision of its organization and framework. From now on, we must build upon those discussions and achieve the realization of the goals that have been laid out. Measuring our progress using the so-called cycle of PDCA (plan, do, check, action), the “planning” stage is over, and now is the time for “doing.” The world is constantly in motion, and we need to produce results in a quick and timely fashion, leading to concrete actions, so as to meet the expectations of the public concerning JAIF's reforms.

Secondly, in the “doing” stage that we are now in, the important thing for us to do is to improve and maintain quality. We must clarify where the responsibility for a certain task lies, asking who and what a proposal is for, and prioritize our goals, always keeping in mind customer satisfaction (CS). To put it differently, it is necessary to pursue both greater “selection” and “concentration” in

our work. In that process, JAIF cannot let itself get self-satisfied or complacent when prioritizing tasks and ideas, but rather must listen to the voices of its clients (i.e., all of society, including JAIF members), as that will benefit the domestic nuclear power industry as a whole, and, by extension, all of Japan. One of our roles, then, is to carry out that sort of backstage work.

Thirdly, the main thing in improving and maintaining quality is communication. Through the act of transmitting information, added value is created, and that value is further heightened in a reciprocal exchange of ideas. JAIF acts not only as a coordinator but as a “game maker.” We ought to aim for higher operational quality by boosting our coordination and cooperation with the various stakeholders who surround and support us: namely, various organizations, institutions, and individuals.

One of JAIF's important roles is to make appropriate policy recommendations based on the actual current situation of the nuclear power industry. Recently, more and more organizations and individuals have come to actively make comments, opinions and proposals on that subject. How can JAIF distinguish itself from the rest of that crowd – not merely becoming just “one of them” – and maintain its special weight?

Hattori: The answer to that question goes back to what I said about “quality”: it is an issue of the public credibility of JAIF's assertions. It's not good enough for us merely to make a list of the necessary items of debate, but to present a firm opinion on each and explain the grounds for our opinions: we need to be accountable for what we say.



Executive Vice Chairman Takuya Hattori

To that end, it behooves us to clearly spell out the roles and division of responsibility among the related institutions and individuals that exist both inside JAIF and without. For instance, JAIF has a powerful partner in the form of the Japan Nuclear Technology Institute (JANTI) regarding the issue of ensuring the appropriateness of regulations affecting nuclear power plants (NPPs). More scientific and rational regulations are required, and to that end, we take the data that JANTI collects on NPP safety and maintenance-related management, and convert them into a more readily usable form as we supply them to the national government and/or private operators on a third-party basis.

As far as JAIF is concerned, then, one backbone that undergirds our accountability is the kind of solid data corroboration provided by JANTI. In a certain sense, we produce the “needs” and JANTI the “seeds,” and the smooth interlocking of such a “double-wheeled cart” serves as the driving force that underscores our organizational credibility.

You strongly emphasize the fact that the key to achieving higher quality is enhanced communication. What are your thoughts on how to better go about transmitting information and deepening communication?

Hattori: Japanese are not so good at getting their ideas across. First of all, we must tear down JAIF's structural walls of vertical organization, thus enhancing smoother communication internally, and deepen the cooperation and coordination between each division. At the same time, it is important to engage more actively with people on the outside who have outspoken or opposing opinions. In addition, to achieve better communication, it is imperative for us to maintain a proper level of information, otherwise no one will treat us seriously. We need to do our homework about all the themes we deal with, thereby bettering ourselves.

Meanwhile, I'd like to rectify the tendency, often found in the transmission of information about nuclear energy, of being so textbook-like and dry. Whenever a trouble or incident occurs, the pressure is on to “supply all the raw data,” but that really means a desire by people to get unembellished information in a timely fashion and in an understandable way. When describing a trouble or incident to the public, for example, we cannot just simply supply schematic diagrams and leave it at that, but rather have got to instill in ourselves the desire to be understood by the other side, maintaining an awareness and making the effort to supply drawings “with a human touch.”

I think all commuters have had this experience before, but when a train stops with the passengers stuck inside, it is important for the operators of the train to maintain a sense of thoughtfulness toward the passengers – putting themselves in their shoes and considering their feelings – by keeping them informed in a timely way about the reasons for the train's having stopped and the prospects of getting moving again, along with the intermediate stages of progress. As far as JAIF is concerned, I would like to create a culture where communication is intensified with all the actors within the industry as well as with the public.

At any rate, I will attempt to manage JAIF in a spontaneous and unassuming fashion, turning it into a more open, vital, and

reliable sort of organization with a weightier presence.

By the way, how do you view the present condition of nuclear power in Japan, where everything is said to have reached a “new stage?”

Hattori: From the very beginning, the development of nuclear energy in this country has been characterized by a certain mismatch between the conceptions lying in people's minds and the actual situation, and that has been a cause of the current

stagnation in a lot of instances. Above all, in Japan's case, the industry has been protected by the national government's convoy-fleet approach, and it is bumping against limits now since nuclear power did not mature here as a business. However, that can be said to be a good thing, as those deficiencies allow us now to reorganize and start over. But the important thing is to move forward only after a reflection has been made of past mistakes, and it's essential not to let nuclear power get “bubbly” (i.e., overambitious) once again.

Interviewer: Hidemasa Naka (nuclear energy journalist)