

Employee  
Round-table

# What Should Yokohama Rubber Do to Build a Trusted Identity within Society?

In 2017, Yokohama Rubber will commemorate its centennial anniversary. To become a “trusted and contributing member of the global community” by then, what does it need to do right now? Tomorrow’s company leaders came together to talk about Yokohama’s future.

Date March 1, 2010  
Venue Yokohama Rubber head office



## Young Employees’ Vision for the Future of Yokohama Rubber

Yokohama Rubber upholds as its CSR management vision the goal “to build a trusted identity as a contributing member of the global community.” In order to realize this vision, what should we work on going forward?

The year 2017 is a landmark year that marks Yokohama Rubber’s centennial anniversary, and is also the targeted fiscal year for the medium-term management plan “GD 100.” This round-table was put together with the intention of having Yokohama’s younger employees, the future leaders of the company, talk with each other about the future vision they have for Yokohama Rubber. A total of 20 employees assembled and actively engaged in a discussion about what they thought Yokohama Rubber represents now and what it should represent in the years to come.

Participants were chosen from various departments across the organization, including administration, tire distribution, tire engineering and production, and multi-business. Six out of the 20 participants were women, and average working experience was 10 years. It was a diverse group, with representatives from personnel, sales promotion, overseas services, production control, R&D, and quality assurance.

Also in attendance as an observer was Hideto Kawakita, CEO of the NPO IHHOE.

## What Does Yokohama Rubber Represent?

The round-table format consisted of everyone separating into four groups of five people each and proceeding with a discussion centered on three different themes. The theme of the first session was: “What does Yokohama Rubber represent?” Breaking down the discussion into three categories—products and business activities, corporate culture, and employees—participants shared their own thoughts, both positive and negative, about what Yokohama Rubber represents today.

Next, the discussion’s focus shifted to the year of Yokohama Rubber’s centenary, 2017, and what the employees wanted the company to represent at that time. Comparisons were drawn between the Yokohama Rubber of now and the future, and a debate was had over what aspects of Yokohama Rubber should be kept and what parts should be changed. The second session’s theme was: “What does it mean to be a trusted and contributing member of the global community in 2017?” The first issue to tackle was to determine what is meant by a “contributing member of the global community,”

and what images such a company should evoke. Participants were asked to think in concrete terms, and start the process of agreeing upon a common vision. One group envisaged the company from the standpoint of the various stakeholders: customers, employees, local communities. Another group drew upon the first session, breaking the discussion into keywords such as products, business activities, and people. All discussed, albeit from different angles, the nature of an ideal company and what company they should aspire to create.

So that everyone could share what had been discussed thus far, representatives from each group then reported on the ideas that came up in the first and second sessions as well as the general flow of the debate. The discussion then naturally progressed into the third session’s theme: “Taking advantage of Yokohama Rubber’s unique identity, what issues should be tackled moving forward?” Taking into account the ideas proposed by other groups, here the participants exchanged ideas about what initiatives they should pursue and specifically what measures and approaches would be required of the company to address the problems that were explored in the first and second sessions and to realize the ideal corporate image. From various angles—products, business growth,

the state of corporate structure and human resource development, and community relations—they explored the issues that Yokohama Rubber needs to tackle going forward.

## Carrying a Company “Core” into the Next Century

Lastly, representatives from each group gave another presentation, this time on the general content of discussion in the third session. Mr. Kawakita then provided his feedback on the entire round-table discussion.

“The years ahead will be an era in which Yokohama Rubber will be required to show its uniqueness in the ways it does business and through its position in society. In order to do that, it is important that it maintains a “core” that defines its identity.” Continuing, Mr. Kawakita remarked, “As Yokohama grows, you need to regularly reassess the “core” that society is seeking from you. This will require that you research the trends of other companies and maintain a broad perspective. And I want all of you to be creators of new value, value that will allow you to say in 2017, ‘Our general strategy in the next century will be no different than the last.’” A few employees could be seen nodding intently to these words.



“We need a framework that makes long-term development and research possible.”

Group A started their discussion by extracting ideas from each other about what Yokohama Rubber represents in terms of its strengths and weaknesses. For products and business activities, while some commended their “distinctiveness” and “brand strength,” others pointed out problems: “Research and technology development spans are too short. There are too few long-term projects;” “There’s no collaboration between departments.” With regard to corporate culture and employees, “seriousness” and “freedom” stood out the most, but some suggested such strengths were leading to “laxness” and “weakened competitive spirit inside and outside the company.” One employee said that “few personnel transfers between departments” is also a problem.

In the second session, participants thought about what aspects of Yokohama Rubber they wanted to keep and worked to develop a “shared vision of the company as a contributing member of the global community.” Many voiced the need for persistence in such efforts as “keeping promises made to customers in all situations” and “developing honest relationships with business partners.” There were also many ideas that envisioned a reformed

Group A



**Li Hua**, Sales Promotion Group, Tire Overseas Regional Business Planning Dept.  
**Masayuki Fujita**, Consumer Appliances Group, Tire Production Control Dept.  
**Jun Matsuda**, No. 3 Research Group, R & D Dept.  
**Shintaro Matsumae**, Purchasing Section 1, Corporate Purchasing Dept.  
**Kaori Mitake**, Sports Logistics Management Section, Sports Business Division

personnel system, one that “has an established program for evaluating personnel based on personal experience and skill sets” and has a “higher number of women in management positions.”

Discussion in the third session focused on three keywords—business, human resources, and local communities—to address the problems that came up in the first two sessions. A number of specific ideas were proposed: “Establish of a cross-departmental working group to come up with long-term product development plans;” “Make new business investments that aren’t fearful of risk;” “Make the internal standards, etc. the common language of the entire company” “Hire locally, but include training at overseas operations.” “Promote business activities using simple, easy-to-understand language.”



“Increasing employee diversity will raise our competitiveness.”

In the first session, Group B started off their discussion with a search for keywords that represent Yokohama Rubber in each of the categories of “products,” “employees,” and “corporate culture.” More than one participant mentioned “investment in developing environmentally friendly products, such as tires with low rolling resistance.” On the other hand, some raised the issue that “for good or bad, because of our serious corporate culture, we’re not good at turning the wealth of technologies we possess into competitive advantage.”

In the second session, participants tried to create in their minds a clear picture of Yokohama Rubber as a “contributing member of the global community” in 2017. The vision of the company as a supplier of outstanding products in the environmental field was summed up in the statement, “Low rolling-resistance tires are so common that when someone says ‘environmental performance’ they mean ‘Yokohama Rubber.’” A wide range

Group B



**Yasuhiko Araki**, TPMSG, TB Tires Product Planning Dept.  
**Akira Kuramori**, R&D Group 1, Tire R&D Dept.  
**Yugo Nagase**, Facilities Development Group, Industrial Products Production Technology Dept.  
**Miyuki Hirao**, Human Resources & Labor Relations Group, Global HR Dept.  
**Katsunori Fuwa**, PC Marketing Group 1, Sales Promotion Dept., Yokohama Tire Japan Co., Ltd.

of other forms of contribution were also discussed, such as “complete energy self-sufficiency at our company plants.” Some proposals extended beyond environmental issues to include “contributing to job creation at our overseas locations.” In response to the query of what aspects of the present Yokohama Rubber should be kept to achieve the “ideal Yokohama Rubber,” the very first to be mentioned were “the great working atmosphere” and “caring for people.” Someone else recommended taking the “seriousness” pointed out in the first session and “utilizing it to create competitive advantage.”

Among the proposals discussed in the third session, most salient were requests for greater personnel exchange internally and externally, by holding cross-departmental meetings or increasing opportunities for employees to attend tradeshows. Also, the group nodded in agreement in response to the suggestion that they could acquire a greater variety of ideas by increasing the number of foreign employees and expanding the diversity of personnel at workplaces in Japan in tandem with the expansion of business abroad.

“We should seek to be loved by communities and valued by the world.”

Group C employees expressed their thoughts about what Yokohama Rubber represents in each of the three categories, followed by a discussion over which of the qualities that were mentioned should be kept and which should be dropped by 2017. Qualities to be kept were product innovativeness, a business structure that pursues core businesses without spreading itself thin, and also the “human” side—an indomitable spirit and pleasantness toward people. The session concluded with agreement over the need to overcome “approaches that stop at partial optimization” and an “overly relaxed atmosphere.”

A major theme of the second session discussion on the “ideal Yokohama Rubber in 2017” was the goal of raising the company’s reputation and popularity both at home and abroad. Everyone agreed with the opinion that Yokohama Rubber should be a company that is welcomed by society in Japan, that

Group C



**Hiroki Uchida**, Asia-Pacific Section, Tire Overseas Sales & Marketing Dept. No.2  
**Takayuki Shiraishi**, Design Group 2, Tire Designing Dept. No.2  
**Yutaka Tatsuno**, Quality Assurance Group 2, Aerospace Products Quality Assurance Dept.  
**Harumi Horiguchi**, Finance Group, Corporate Finance & Accounting Dept.  
**Masaki Yamamoto**, Technology Group, Sports Technology Dept.

acquires a certain degree of recognition at its overseas locations, and that contributes to the communities surrounding its plants and offices. There were others who pointed out that becoming “a company its employees can be proud of” as a result of these actions and that “achieving a certain degree of profit” are also important.

In the third session, the group discussed measures Yokohama Rubber should implement for “customers,” “potential customers,” and other stakeholder groups. The conversation became even more energized at the mention of the need to improve communication and PR methods, one proposal for which was the creation of different web pages for different age brackets. Also, as part of a more creative effort to establish more connections with people that are not direct customers, one idea proposed the creation of PR media directed at children. All expressed approval at the opinion that by doing so they could show children a company that will make them say, “I want to work there.”

“We should provide ‘high added value’ that’s rooted in environmental sensitivity.”

Group D focused on “becoming a contributing member of the global community” and “giving society high added value” as major discussion themes. In the first session, employees coaxed ideas from each other about “Yokohama Rubber’s uniqueness” now and in 2017. Taking the “creation of high added value” as a key phrase, the group engaged in a discussion of comparisons between present and future: from “consistently marketing products that benefit society” to “a wider variety of products;” from “serious and bright employees” to “employees who have strong implementation skills;” and from “a warm corporate culture” to “a warm but disciplined corporate culture.”

Discussion in the second session brought up the various stakeholders—customers, employees, the international community—and explored them from the angle of “becoming a contributing member of the global community” and “giving society high added value.” The question was raised mid-conversation about what “high added value in 2017” should be. After some deliberation, the group concluded that “sensitivity to the environment will continue to be the foundation.” Based on an

Group D



**Hiroko Okuno**, Materials Development Group, Industrial Products Technical Development Dept.  
**Tatsuya Kayama**, Overseas Service Section 1, Tire Overseas Technical Service Dept.  
**Miyuki Saikawa**, Tire Materials Design Group 2, Tire Materials Development Dept.  
**Hirokazu Setoyanagi**, Planning Group, Planning Dept., Yokohama Continental Tire Co., Ltd.  
**Yousuke Miyazaki**, Safety & Health Management Dept.

awareness of environmental issues, a consensus was reached with the “provision of high-quality, affordable, environmentally friendly products” to customers, and that the “environment” will be a key word in relation to the international community, the world as a whole, and future generations.

The third session saw a range of proposals for initiatives to achieve “becoming a contributing member of the global community” and “giving society high added value,” including “make all products ‘eco products,’” “develop creative technologies and products,” and “pursue higher quality by ‘eliminating quality problems’ and ‘doubling product life spans.’” Subsequently, one participant pointed out that investment in manufacturing equipment and enhancing employee education will be important factors in implementing these initiatives.

