

Learning the essence of Japan's management of technology

In its continuous promotion of technology development and innovation in member countries, the APO, in collaboration with the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry and Japan Productivity Center, organized a multicountry observational study mission on the Management of Technology (MOT), 22–26 June, in Japan. Senior technology managers, R&D researchers, and consultants heard lectures and case studies and made site visits to observe Japanese expertise in MOT, R&D, and innovative product management systems.

In the keynote lecture on The Role of MOT in Japan, Prof. Hiroshi Miyanaga, Tokyo University of Science, introduced the example of the Suica electronic cash card. Suica originated in 2001 as a prepaid card for train tickets on the East Japan Railway Company. It now can be used for travel and entertainment tickets, taxi fares, and purchases from vending machines, convenience stores, and other retailers. The Japanese e-money market currently tops ¥1 trillion, which is possible through contactless radiofrequency-identification technology developed by Sony. Prof. Miyanaga asserted that, “The essence of MOT is how to develop a concept from a simple prepaid to a multifunctional card.”

Professor Robert Kneller, Research Center for Advanced Science and Technology of the University of Tokyo, suggested establishing technology transfer offices (TLOs) in universities and research institutes. Major roles of TLOs are deciding which technologies or inventions are commercially viable, marketing them to private companies, and assisting in product-to-market development. That idea was attractive to many participants, especially those from government research institutes.

Participants visited four Japanese companies. CEO Seigo Honme of Elionix Inc., which is dominant in lithography and scanning electron microscopy, advised identifying niche markets through collaboration with major companies and



Professor Miyanaga (standing) introducing Japanese MOT

advanced research institutes. At Kao Corporation, a manufacturer of a variety of general consumer and chemical products, participants learned how a strong corporate culture generates innovative products. Under the motto “Consumers Decide on the Quality of the Products,” Kao encourages all company divisions to participate in the process of product development. At Bayer CropScience Yuki Research Center, a world leader in crop protection, R&D Director Claude Lambert explained the active role of the marketing team in new product development. The visit to the Yokohama plant of Nissan Motor Co., Ltd. illustrated product management in a major corporation.

The mission ended with a half-day workshop in which participants exchanged views on how to apply advanced Japanese MOT systems in their own enterprises and countries. 🌀