

"The Ideal Work-VA (work style and workplace) We Create" Declaration - Digital + Resilience + Human Assets Well-Being -

As the G7 countries are facing a slowdown in the working-age population, it is a common challenge for the G7 countries to maintain economic vitality by focusing on human capital, for which "people" are becoming increasingly important. It is crucial to invest in human capital in line with social and economic changes, and to create an environment where people can play an active role according to their motivation and abilities regardless of gender, age, or other factors.

The past industrial revolutions have gradually freed humankind from labor and progressively improved the well-being of workers. Amid the fourth industrial revolution, the emergence of innovative artificial intelligence and digital technologies such as large language models and generative AI like ChatGPT is expected to improve work efficiency and the well-being of workers significantly. At the same time, it has cast doubt on the sustainability of industries and the nature of labor themselves.

Albeit humanity's experience with the COVID-19 infection has cost us as a society significantly, it has also facilitated the change of social norms in a variety of areas, reforming the way we work, including online conferencing, remote work, and digitization of work practices. Since humanity will continue to be threatened by "black swans (extremely rare events that can happen but are unpredictable or difficult to predict)," preparedness for the threats, response to the actual events, and subsequent resilience are also required.

There is substantial evidence that a diverse and inclusive workplace fosters innovation. Bringing together people with different views and backgrounds increases the likelihood that new ideas and perspectives will be generated and more creative solutions will be found. In addition, an inclusive work environment is believed to promote innovation because it maximizes the potential of a diverse workforce.

The endogenous growth theory established by Prof. Paul Romer, Nobel Prize winner in economics, and his colleagues also states that the investment in and accumulation of human capital serve as the engine of growth, generating new knowledge and ideas and promoting innovation and technological progress. Therefore, this theory indicates the importance of "human capital" and "human assets."

In this context, human capital management in the workplace that improves the well-being of "human assets" is also essential. Moreover, considering the well-being of human assets at the local level is equivalent to considering the well-being of the entire community, including workplaces and workers. For this reason, we in Okayama are promoting the Kibichuo Town Digital Garden Health Special Zone as a cutting-edge example where both working healthcare professionals and patients/residents benefit from digital technology.

Kibichuo Town is working to resolve health and medical care issues in the region through digital technology, utilizing the "National Strategic Special Zones" by the Government of Japan. Specifically, by accumulating medical and health information throughout one's lifetime and utilizing such data and digital technology, the project aims to efficiently utilize limited medical human resources in the region and improve the medical work environment in the fields of "emergency medicine," "maternal and child health," "education," and "mobility". Through these efforts, the town aims to ensure the sustainability of social security, including healthcare, and the achievement of the SDGs at the local level.

We call the best practices the next generation "Work-VA ("work style and workplace"; "VA" means "place" in Japanese)" through the organic fusion of digital technological innovation and social innovation such as work style reform and regulatory reform. We believe that they can be a role model that can be horizontally expanded to other industrial domains

and other regions in Japan and abroad.

To realize these technological and social innovations, creating a synergy between what should be protected and handed over to the youth and what should be transformed over time is necessary. The above can be achieved through the active participation of youth, who will play a leading role in the coming era and are digital natives, and all generations who will benefit.

Based on aforementioned recognition of the current situation, we hereby declare that we will act together as follows

1. Let's create our ideal Work-VA (work style and workplace) where is diverse and no one is left behind!

The ideal Work-VA (work style and workplace) we should create is one that respects the "Vs," such as "value," "veritas (truth)," and "virtue," leverages "virtuality (digital technologies)," and allows all generations to "venture" with "verve," "vigor," and "vividness" in an inclusive and diverse way.

2. Let's listen to youth and realize a way of working that enables anybody to dream about whoever they want to be!

Rather than imposing old-school social norms on the next generation, such as working styles that do not fit the changing times, we should listen to and respect the voices of youth, who are the protagonists of the next generation, and encourage their participation in society, without leaving behind negative legacies. We will realize a society where anybody, including youth, can achieve self-fulfillment by maximizing and realizing their abilities and potential.

3. Let's create a sustainable society resilient to a crisis by combining the good old things that must be preserved with the things that must be transformed in line with the times!

In the spirit of "timelessness and fluidity," we will cherish the essential things that will never be changed, while at the same time incorporating new changes. While preserving our universal spiritual pillars, we will embrace the latest digital technologies and continue to invest in human capital, which is the root of innovation and the engine of social and economic growth. We will, thereby, work tirelessly to transform society, aiming to improve the resilience and robustness of the labor market and society against the next unprecedented disaster or crisis.

4. Let's expand "Work-VA (work style and workplace)" to other industries!

The Kibichuo Town Digital Garden Health Special Zone aims to ensure the sustainability of social security, including healthcare, and to achieve the SDGs at the local level by efficiently utilizing limited healthcare human resources in the region and improving the healthcare working environment through the use of data and digital technology. As a best practice of the next generation "Work-VA (work style and workplace)" through the organic fusion of digital technological innovation and social innovation, such as reform of work styles and regulations, we will expand our activities beyond healthcare to other industrial domains.

5. Let's share our efforts with the world and contribute to achieving the global SDGs!

We will share our efforts for "Kibichuo Town Digital Garden Health Special Zone", which is the best mix of technological innovation in digital technology and innovation in social norms, such as increased work engagement, promotion of decent work, and reform of work styles. We will also contribute to achieving the SDGs at the global level by horizontally and globally expanding our activities so that we can serve as a role model not only in Japan but also in low- and middle-income countries striving to achieve the SDGs.

In order to realize and mainstream these actions, cross-sectoral leadership, including youth and children, labor, healthcare, and digital, is essential. Therefore, we look forward to relevant discussions and commitments at the leaders' level, including at the G7 Hiroshima Summit to be held on May 19-21, 2023.