

PLUS Group Future Prospects and Sustainability



From left to right

Takayoshi Funayama, Sustainability Implementation Group, Corporate Division

Hikaru Hashimoto, Sales Division, Furniture Company

Tadahisa Imaizumi, President & Chief Operating Officer

Kurumi Harada, Marketing Division, Stationery Company

Miho Suzuki, Logistics Operations Division, PLUS Logistics Corporation

Yuki Ishizawa, Tokyo BtoB Solution Sales Division, JOINTEX Company

The PLUS Group is pursuing sustainability by further evolving its social optimality approach based on PLUS no kokoro. Four young and mid-career employees who strive to achieve social optimality in their daily work discussed such topics as the value they deliver to stakeholders, the issues they perceive, and their thoughts on materiality with President Imaizumi and Mr. Funayama, GM of Sustainability Implementation Group.

What value do you deliver to stakeholders on a daily basis?

Funayama

Ms. Suzuki, you're in your third year with the company and are a team leader. Is there anything you emphasize in your daily work?

Suzuki

The logistics center where I work is facing the same serious labor shortage as other industries. Automation is progressing, spearheaded by the shippers, but of course manpower and teamwork are still necessary. Accordingly, as a leader in shipping work, I think it's important to create a more comfortable working environment by actively communicating with members of my team outside of work so that they'll want to continue working at our logistics center for a long time.

Imaizumi

There is a particular need in the logistics field now for efforts

and recommendations to create better work styles and more comfortable environments, isn't there? A comfortable working environment is directly linked to quality, so I admire your awareness of this issue.

Suzuki

Thank you very much. I hope to keep things running smoothly and facilitate constant improvements to quality.

Ishizawa

Logistics is essential for the services we provide. I'm sure that means a huge amount of pressure, but you're always a tremendous help to us in JOINTEX Company.

Funayama

What kind of value do you feel you deliver in your work, Mr. Ishizawa?

Ishizawa

My work is connected with nursing care, an industry that is faced with the issues that it involves a lot of responsibility but is very hard work and wages are low. As a company that provides



I want to incorporate materiality into my actions and contribute to PLUS' evolution.

Yuki Ishizawa



services related to nursing care, we want to contribute to solutions for those issues. As a sales rep for Smart Nursing Care, our mail-order service for people involved in nursing care and welfare facilities, I'm currently responsible for the account of one of our biggest customers in Japan. I would like not only to deliver value through our services, but also to solve issues in the nursing care industry as a whole via synergies with the knowledge and influence of our customers.

Imaizumi

In the past, nursing care facility managers, caregivers, and occupants were users who had little interaction with the PLUS Group, but they have become important customers as a result of the way we have expanded our business while solving problems one by one. Going forward, I expect that our relationship of mutual trust will be become even stronger and we will be consulted more and more, enabling us to provide various services and forms of value. Ms. Harada, which stakeholders do you emphasize in particular when it comes to delivering value?

Harada

I'm mainly in charge of developing file products at the Stationery Company so my highest priority is providing value for the end user. I engage in development work with the desire to amaze the customer, to give them satisfaction when they use the product, and to open their eyes to new possibilities. I think it's important in development work to grasp the "now" of all our targets based on the changing times. To grasp the "now," it's essential to be understanding and tolerant, and to think about what is being expected of us. I don't think that's an issue for me alone, and I sometimes feel keenly that new value cannot be provided unless all members of the same team share the same perspective.

Imaizumi

Which issues are you currently grappling with?



I want to deliver to the end user the enthusiasm I feel for the product.

Kurumi Harada

Harada

When you work out costs and specifications in the development process, you sometimes start to lose sight of the customer you originally envisioned and the aim of the development, don't you? Sometimes I find it frustrating that I can't convey to the buyer how

good the product I developed with such enthusiasm is, and who it is targeting.

Imaizumi

In the stationery industry, a product generally passes through the hands of a buyer and a retailer before it reaches the end user, so your Scale 10 affection for the product may become a Scale 8 to the buyer, a Scale 7 to the retail store, and only a Scale 3 reaches the end user, don't you think? I feel that's not just a Stationery Company issue, but one that faces the entire Group. I think we must develop products with an eye on the sales floor and the end consumer, and see for ourselves how they're actually used. It is a difficult and challenging mission to deliver to the end user all the enthusiasm we pour into our products, but it's a very rewarding endeavor, isn't it? At the monthly development meeting I can see that you're tackling that challenge, and I'm impressed by your perseverance.

Harada

As a developer, I want to balance the specs and profits, and to convey my enthusiasm and feelings properly. That's difficult to do, but is also my motivation. I would like to continue to communicate closely with colleagues who are aiming for the same goal, such as members of the design, quality and sales teams.

Funayama

Ms. Hashimoto, you also work in a location close to the end user. What kind of value do you try to provide?



Materiality is a theme we should bring to life in Group interactions.

Hikaru Hashimoto



Hashimoto

As a project manager, I'm in a position to directly solve our customers' office-related issues. Our customers face a wide range of challenges, such as revitalizing communication and going paperless. However, they want to improve their company by transforming their offices, and they expect a return on investments in their offices, so we strive to meet those expectations. The trend recently is for a return to the office after the COVID-19 pandemic, which means there is an increasing need to improve the office environment and raise a sense of belonging, so I feel that surveys and interviews with actual workers are becoming increasingly important. In addition, on the customer side, there are an increasing number of cases where project teams that include young employees are being created, leading to the need to create offices that utilize opinions and needs that had remained uncovered up until now. In the course of this work, I strongly feel that the PLUS Group must be selected by the end user. In addition to our brand image, I think details such as design and functions are becoming important as well.

Imaizumi

In your work as a project manager, you need to communicate

with many other involved parties besides the customer, don't you?

Hashimoto

Yes, there are many other people involved. In-house these include the designer, the site supervisor and the sales team, and externally the owner and business operator of the building where the customer is tenanted, and the customer's suppliers. I take their respective positions into consideration and I try to communicate with the awareness that I am "representing the customer."

Funayama

Ms. Suzuki, you also said that you place importance on communication. Is there anything that you feel to be a challenge?



I want to continue striving to create a more comfortable work environment.

Miho Suzuki

Suzuki

If I sense differences in the quality and quantity of communication among employees, I make a point of stepping in and communicating my opinions to create a more open environment. Wireless communication is used in logistics sites, so "verbal contact" is very important.

Ishizawa

We've been working to stimulate communication within the Group for a while now. For example, various groups have been created at Headquarters, and gatherings are held if there are any employees who are new to the company.

Hashimoto

There's a counter in the kitchen where we can stand and chat, and there is plenty of lively conversation by the lockers in the backyard, so I do feel that it's an office where there is a lot of informal communication. Recently organizational changes led to new people joining us, so we've been working to deepen friendships among new members. I think that communication will continue to become more active through bottom-up initiatives.

Imaizumi

Adopting the company system has made speedy management possible, and it's easier to create bottom-up movements as well. In fact, various employee-led projects have been created to solve internal issues, and I feel that PLUS no kokoro has taken root.

What are your feelings on the PLUS Group's 14 materialities?

Suzuki

To be honest, I didn't know much about sustainability until I was asked to join this discussion, and I wondered what I should talk about. But when I saw the topics listed as materialities, I realized



I really felt that the materialities are regarded as perfectly natural since PLUS no kokoro has become widespread.

Takayoshi Funayama

that even I was tackling them on a routine basis! It made me think that I could probably do my job with a greater awareness of them, and I'm looking forward to going into work tomorrow.

Imaizumi

That's great. I'm delighted to hear that.

Ishizawa

They didn't feel new to me either. The work I'm in charge of is itself a materiality initiative, and I've also been involved in initiatives connected with regional revitalization, so even when I first saw the materialities they seemed perfectly natural to me.

Funayama

23 of your more senior colleagues held a series of discussions in the process to designate the materialities, and they narrowed them down from a list of hundreds of themes. I'm really delighted that young members say they see the materialities as perfectly natural, and it makes me think that PLUS no kokoro has become widespread.

Imaizumi

In October 2022, JOINTEX Company, the company to which Mr. Ishizawa belongs, concluded an agreement on the supply of goods in times of disaster with Iwanuma City, Miyagi Prefecture, where the JOINTEX Tohoku Center logistics base is located. We've concluded disaster agreements with many other regions as well, and make a broad range of contributions to disaster prevention measures of local communities.

Hashimoto

Regarding the agreement with Iwanuma City, I was surprised how a slight change of perspective on things we already have can lead to action that helps the local community. I also agree with all the materialities, and when I heard about the agreement with Iwanuma City I got the impression that it opened up a new approach to materiality.

Harada

Like Mr. Ishizawa and Ms. Hashimoto, I agree with all 14 materialities. Up until now, when I heard the word "sustainability," only things like cutting CO₂ and reducing food loss sprang to mind. But when I saw the items on the materiality list, I realized that my own work is also deeply connected with sustainability as well. For example, when junior high and high school students visit our company, I interview them about the stationery products they actually use on a daily basis. When I ask them if there's anything they want to ask me, I'm bombarded with questions like, "Why did you choose your current job?" and "What do you enjoy about your work?"

Imaizumi

Students have a surprisingly wide-ranging outlook on life and sometimes ask questions that astonish us, don't they?

Harada

Yes. It's a very good experience for the students, and it makes us



really want to develop products that live up to their expectations. This virtuous cycle encapsulates the materiality “Promoting partnerships with local communities,” doesn’t it?

Funayama

I sometimes get thank-you letters from schools and students that have visited the company, and in a letter I received the other day it said, “I got a job in development because I became interested in product development when I heard you talk about your jobs.” I think it’s great that what Ms. Harada and her colleagues do during school visits has guided a student, and I think it counts as “Future-oriented human resource training.” When it becomes more widely known, I think PLUS Group employees will probably feel an even greater sense of job satisfaction.

Please tell us your reactions to what you’ve heard today

Harada

I found it inspiring that Ms. Suzuki, who is in her third year with the company, has a sense of responsibility as a leader and is working to create an environment where everyone can work comfortably. Going forward, I want to try and create a comfortable work environment for my team members so that we can create even better products and services. Also, hearing about the activities of other companies and their social significance, gave me a strong sense of the PLUS Group’s value to society. The theme of the discussion was perspectives we have in our work and which materiality they come under. I myself made new discoveries while we were talking, and I thought it was a very meaningful session.

Hashimoto

Listening to the words of members from various different companies inspired me too. I was also impressed by how many members were involved in identifying the materialities. I understood that sustainability implementation is an axis for lateral initiatives across the Group, with no boundaries between in-house companies and Group companies. I felt that if we use materiality as a theme for interactions, we can work together to tackle issues and enjoy taking action.

Suzuki

I felt very nervous today, but really enjoyed listening to more senior colleagues that I don’t usually have a chance to talk with. Their enthusiasm for their work shone through in their words, and made me want to try harder like them, and to do my very best.

Ishizawa

I really enjoyed listening to what everyone had to say on various topics. I agree with what Ms. Hashimoto said about it being important for members of all ages and with a wide range of

values work together on materiality as a team drawn from across the entire Group. I intend to incorporate materiality into my own work as well, and translate that thinking into action. I believe that materiality is something that constantly evolves along as a consequence of the growth of the PLUS Group and its members, so I’d like to contribute to that growth and evolution.

Funayama

From these animated discussions, I think you’ve all gained a deeper understanding of sustainability and the materiality of the PLUS Group, and I’ve learned a lot from you as well. Specifically, what Ms. Harada and the president said about “delivering to the end user the enthusiasm we pour into our products” comes under the materiality of “Disclosure of product information.” We had classified “Disclosure of product information” under “defensive” (issues that might lead to risks for the company), but while listening to what they said I came to feel that creating mechanisms to deliver the enthusiasm of the developer comes under “aggressive” (issues that lead to business opportunities for the company). Thoroughly pursued defense turns into an aggressive strategy and becomes a strength. This realization was a tremendous gain for me.



In sustainability implementation, it’s important to take ownership of all tasks and consider them carefully.

Tadahisa Imaizumi



Imaizumi

The 14 newly-specified materialities have been abstracted from an inventory of PLUS Group business contents. Going forward, in addition to thinking about how they apply to our own work, as members of the PLUS Group we need to actualize what we ourselves can do. With regard to the disaster-related initiatives that JOINTEX is enhancing, for example, Stationery and Furniture should think about how they might get involved. In the case of Stationery, a good way might be to think outside the box and suggest tools that would be useful in the event of a disaster. It doesn’t matter whether or not it’s related to your own work; the important thing is to see it as PLUS Group work and take ownership of it. Materiality can be a source of support when taking ownership of your work, so let’s all work together on materiality initiatives as a united Group.