

Viewing Asahi Kasei’s Intangible Assets from an External Perspective Yuko Maeda, Outside Director

Co-creation across different fields leveraging three-sector management



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Asahi Kasei’s corporate culture of valuing people creates outstanding intangible assets

I would like to describe what I see as two particular strengths of the Asahi Kasei Group. The first is that it is a company where valuing people is deeply ingrained. Having witnessed a variety of initiatives that leverage the company’s intangible assets to a high level in different fields since becoming an Outside Director, I am even more aware of this strength. The idea of valuing people is also epitomized by Honorary Fellow Dr. Akira Yoshino, laureate of the 2019 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for his invention of lithium-ion batteries, who has contributed to Asahi Kasei for many years.

The second is that Asahi Kasei has abundant intangible assets, which stem from its history of operating a diverse array of businesses. Its core technologies are an example. The polymer material technology developed in its Material sector is employed for various products in the medical business in the Health Care sector, where this technology helps strengthen the competitiveness of the business.

Continuous enhancement of core technologies and proactive use of them in different fields are only viable with the enthusiastic involvement of human

resources in each of these endeavors. The same can be said of all the company’s intangible assets. Asahi Kasei’s culture of valuing people serves as the basis for developing and maintaining these human resources, and I believe that its three-sector management allows them to promote intangible assets in different fields to make full use of the company’s technologies.

A prime example of this culture serving as a powerful tool for strengthening intangible assets is the development of digital personnel. Asahi Kasei operates a digital personnel development program for all employees to enable them to acquire the skills necessary for promoting digital transformation (DX). Today, frontline employees leverage digital technology autonomously to engage in R&D, process control, productivity improvement, and other activities. Simply developing human resources in dedicated departments to promote DX will not advance DX on the front lines. I sense that Asahi Kasei is raising the level of the entire company by developing all employees as digital personnel based on its deeply ingrained idea of valuing its people.

Expanding intangible assets by combining different perspectives

I believe that these efforts make it all the more important for Asahi Kasei to promote strategies that better enable its abundant intangible assets to contribute to corporate value, fully leveraging its strengths going forward to transition from product sales—where the superiority of products determines results—to a solutions business that helps address issues from a customer-oriented perspective. For instance, I view the provision of data-driven services using the monitoring system of Recherche 2000 Inc., of Canada, which Asahi Kasei acquired in fiscal 2020, in the field of ion-exchange membrane chlor-alkali electrolysis, as a positive example of how transitioning to a solutions business produces results.

I know from my long experience of acting as a bridge between companies and universities that such interactions with different fields are the key to gaining fresh business perspectives. Original ideas, unconstrained by specialist knowledge, are indispensable to the creation of new businesses from different perspectives other than the pursuit of technology. In industry-academia collaboration, the involvement of academics in design thinking in the exchange of ideas can create unprecedented innovations, for example.

I believe that to capitalize fully on the advantages of operating businesses in three sectors, Asahi Kasei must collaborate with external parties more proactively while boldly invigorating the mobility of human resources within the company. For instance, I think that providing employees with the opportunity to gain new perspectives, such as enabling human resources from R&D to return there after gaining the experience of establishing businesses in business divisions, would further advance the strengthening and integration of intangible assets and the creation of new business models.

With that said, these initiatives are only possible thanks to other strengths of Asahi Kasei, such as its ongoing refinement of high-level basic research and technological capabilities. I look forward to seeing the company further utilize the advantages of its three-sector management to create new value by heightening efforts to promote co-creation and integration among human resources who contribute to continuous technological advancement by exhaustive research and those who spur business innovation through original ideas.