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COVER PHOTO

Virtual events keep the ACCJ active during the pandemic
– Pages 8 and 12

THIS PAGE

Schools shift to online classes to keep education going
– Page 24 and 32

5 EDITOR'S DESK Time of Change

C BRYAN JONES

7 PRESIDENT Build a Positive, Local Legacy

PETER FITZGERALD

8 VIRTUAL EVENT Japan Macro Outlook Challenges and Opportunities Beyond the Covid-19 Crisis

JOINT PANEL DISCUSSION
BY THE ACCJ AND THE ASIA
SOCIETY JAPAN CENTER

12 VIRTUAL EVENT Tackling Covid-19

The biopharmaceutical
industry's efforts to develop
new vaccines and treatments

C BRYAN JONES

14 LEADER Sustain Change

Select and refine the
surprise benefits of a crisis

NANCY NGOU

17 CHUBU Two Decades in Nagoya

The story of how the ACCJ's
Chubu chapter was born

MICHEL WEENICK

18 BUSINESS Save OUR SMEs!

Are loans, subsidies, and
tax breaks too little, too late,
too complex to salvage small
companies ravaged by virus?

JULIAN RYALL

24 EDUCATION Stay Home to Study

How teachers, parents and pupils
cope with post-virus classes

C BRYAN JONES

32 PARTNER CONTENT Fall Start?

Japan considers changing
its traditional school year

NIKKEI ASIAN REVIEW

36 HEALTH Mental Health Matters

Expert advice
for expats in despair

C BRYAN JONES

49 J-MEDIA Diet Dailies

- How will coronavirus
impact 2020 tax revenues?
- Will My Number and
bank account linking
be made mandatory?

TRANSLATION OF NEWS
FROM KEIZAIKAI

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TIME OF CHANGE



Christopher Bryan Jones
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As the coronavirus pandemic stretches on, it has become clear that how we live, work, and learn must change. Most people now realize this, but adapting can be difficult.

In our April issue, we talked about working from home and how companies and individuals could adjust to decentralized workflows. A lot has happened since, and the world seems to be easing into this “shelter in place” lifestyle. But it comes at a price.

COPE

Something being felt by almost everyone is mental stress, and it is worsening as the weeks go by and the impact of social distancing grows. Some people are better than others at dealing with stress, but even those normally able to cope may find it difficult right now.

I'm one of those people. Working from home is normal for me, so that isn't an issue. But I don't usually stay in my house for weeks on end, and things that create balance in life are

missing. I have gone months without seeing family and other loved ones. My workload has also exploded, adding greatly to mental stress. And there is no end in sight.

To find out how to manage it all, I talked to mental health experts. You can find their advice on page 36.

CARE

Related to managing the pressures of change is communication. While it is a general rule to be mindful of how our words and interactions affect others, it is especially important in the current situation. One thing that is often lacking in the business world is empathy. At a time when most communication is virtual, it is wise to consider how words come across.

One of the benefits of working remotely for years with a team on the other side of the world is that I learned the importance of clarity in written communications. With a 14-hour time difference, we couldn't just ask a quick question. That skill has helped me immensely over the years. It's an important one to have right now.

LEARN

The other big element of adaptation in my home, as is the case for many readers, is education. With schools forced to close, we have the disruption to our children's lives to deal with in addition to work stress.

My son, who is a third-year student at Gakushuin University, had been in wait-and-see mode since returning from London. Finally, he started the new school year on May 12—online. My daughter, who moved to her mother's place in mid-March to start high school, remains in limbo. Classes are currently postponed until June. And with talk of Japan shifting the start of its school year to September (page 32), who knows what will happen? With this in mind, I talked to area schools about their transition to online learning and the future of education (page 24).

UNDERSTAND

As much as we would like to return to life as it was before, it is not business as usual—and it likely won't be for some time to come. We all want to get through this and find success in the post-Covid-19 world. Working together, being flexible, adapting to change, and not putting excessive pressure on strained infrastructures is a must. Everyone is feeling stressed, so a little understanding can go a long way towards ensuring healthy relationships, businesses, and minds on the other side of the pandemic. ■

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Build a Positive, Local Legacy



PRESIDENT

By Peter Fitzgerald
ACCJ President

Instead of the red light, green light transition we might hope for coming out of the state of emergency, we face a potentially very protracted period of caution. And while this go-slow period will pose new challenges, it may help us avoid squandering the opportunity we've been afforded by these unusual circumstances.

Simply flipping a switch and returning to normal would make it all too easy to stumble backwards and lose the forced progress that's been made in teleworking and workstyle reform. Valuable lessons about maintaining resiliency in a market where business interruptions are a regular and expected occurrence could also fall by the wayside.

It's up to us as business leaders to ensure that the legacy of Covid-19 is more than just human suffering and economic loss.

POSITIVE CHANGE

Around the world—and especially here in Japan—the coronavirus experience has the potential to spur revolutionary change in the way people live and work.

As companies awaken to the surprise that, unexpectedly—perhaps even improbably—they've been able to function without staff coming into the office each day, some may begin to imagine a new way forward.

And as governments begin to recover from the challenge of providing public services from a distance, some may decide that it is preferable to accelerate down the path of digitization rather than retreat.

REMOTE REVOLUTION

But if you're wondering whether businesses in Japan will embrace teleworking in a post-Covid-19 world, now that technology has proven that it's possible, consider this: during the Covid-19 crisis, *ryokan* (traditional Japanese inns) and even some restaurants with private rooms have been offering day-use packages for teleworkers who can't function or find peace and space to work at home. And they're often sold out.

If this revolution is to succeed, it probably won't come from simply injecting Western concepts into Japanese businesses.

Teleworking has become so ingrained in Western business culture that we grapple with challenges on the other end of the spectrum: how to turn off and achieve work-life balance in an always-on world.

In Japanese culture, people have a very different relationship with home and work, and the spaces in between. Simply making technologies available won't change the attitudes and beliefs that drive work culture and practices. And technology won't, in itself, solve the very practical problem of having no space for an office in most Japanese homes.

LOCAL ROUTE

We need to find a uniquely Japanese way forward, weaving technology and culture together to make workplace reform and digitization acceptable and appealing, not just possible. We need to improve in-home Wi-Fi at the same time that we're making it socially acceptable not to put on a suit and take the train each morning. Instead of trying to change the Japanese preference for close management supervision and group-based decision-making, we need to use technology to enable both—but from a distance.

We need to seek hybrid solutions that can support Japanese business traditions rather than replace them, and use technology where it makes sense while preserving traditions that play important cultural roles. So while a switch to digital *hanko* (personal stamps) is highly likely, it's hard to imagine how a videoconference could effectively replicate the hierarchy-breaking interactions that happen in group get-togethers outside the office.

STAY THE COURSE

In a post Covid-19 Japan, it would be as great a mistake to return to the previous ways of working as it would be to assume technology's proven ability to facilitate remote work will automatically lead to lasting workstyle reform.

As business leaders, we can help determine whether the Covid-19 legacy is entirely negative or leads to a better tomorrow. Let's challenge ourselves, as an international business community, to find a way forward that's uniquely appropriate to Japan. ■

We need to seek hybrid solutions that can support Japanese business traditions rather than replace them.

VIRTUAL EVENT

Japan Macro Outlook

Challenges and Opportunities Beyond the Covid-19 Crisis

Joint panel discussion by the ACCJ
and Asia Society Japan Center



Kathy Matsui



Robert Alan Feldman



Jesper Koll

The coronavirus pandemic has forced new complexities on Japan and the response is evolving. Apart from the policy challenges faced by government, businesses are also finding their way through rapidly changing conditions that make planning for the future difficult. On April 24, the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan and the Asia Society Japan Center held a joint webinar to discuss these matters and the outlook for Japan's economy and financial markets.

Three leading Tokyo experts—Goldman Sachs Japan Co., Ltd. Vice-Chair and Chief Strategist Kathy Matsui, Morgan Stanley Japan Senior Adviser Robert Feldman, and Wisdom Tree Japan Senior Adviser Jesper Koll—offered expert assessment of the situation and presented forward-looking scenarios. The goal was to help companies with strategic planning to capitalize on the new opportunities that will emerge from Covid-19.

HERE AND NOW

Koll began the panel discussion by setting the stage and introducing consensus expectations for major economies. He mentioned two points:

- Wide dispersion is observed in the growth forecasts, meaning that we are challenged with great uncertainties
- While both the United States and Japan will experience increases in unemployment, the incoming employment shock is expected to be smaller in Japan, and both countries will see their budget deficit double

Feldman first discussed the difficulties in forecasting diseases, presenting how the actual number of Covid-19 cases in Japan had spiked in late March, despite an improving trend in model predictions. He warned that, although the weekly average of new cases as of late April appeared to be decreasing, we need to be careful. The processes, such as human movement and cluster formation, that generate the bell curve are very random. Therefore, contagion forecasts should be taken with a grain of salt and we should always question the underlying assumptions.

LOOKING AHEAD

As for the economic outlook, an investor survey by Morgan Stanley showed that almost 50 percent of investors expected a return to the gross domestic product levels seen before the outbreak to happen only in the second half of 2021. Morgan Stanley forecasts even slower recovery, as the first effective vaccine will only emerge in 12–18 months. Until then, social distancing will need to be observed. As Kevin Rudd, president of the Asia Society Policy Institute, noted in an earlier webinar, “When the loss can be large, too much too early is better than too little too late.”

On the policy side, Feldman highlighted that fiscal policy interacts with the spread of the disease. He warned that although some US states are now seeking an early exit from social distancing, this option will consequently lead to slower recovery because more activity will contribute to a continued spreading of the coronavirus.

Turning to Japanese policy, he highly valued the early announcement by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe that schools were to be closed and the aggressive target to reduce interaction by 80 percent, as well as Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike's strong and effective statements asking people to stay home despite her lack of legal power to enforce this request. Her efforts to get the national government and surrounding prefectures on board were also praised by Feldman. However, he called for a longer state of emergency—something that has come to pass with Abe's extension through May 31—more testing, including those for antibodies, and mitigation of legal risk in healthcare.

CHINA LESSONS

Matsui discussed the market's response to Covid-19, recent lessons from China, and potential opportunities resulting from the crisis. The Japanese equity market collapsed by more than 30 percent at its worst point, but has since retraced half of that decline, outperforming the rest of the world since March. This indicates that—at least in the investment community—the world is looking ahead.

Some lessons for Japan and the rest of the world may be drawn from China's experience. Much of China had gone into lockdown by late January, and most provinces saw new cases stabilize by mid-February. Beijing then called for a reopening in low-risk areas in March, and there has been a gradual recovery in economic activity since. The industrial sector has rebounded fairly quickly—Chinese steel production, for example, has returned to the previous year's level—while consumer spending has been much slower, implying there is an uneven nature to recovery.

However, there is no major credit crunch as in the 2008–09 global financial crisis, and world governments are providing unprecedented levels of stimulus. Therefore, once new infections stabilize, and lockdowns are relaxed, economic activity should gradually return.

Matsui also shared her views on the next set of challenges beyond the current defensive measures, including the need to stimulate final demand for both consumers and businesses.

In conclusion, she highlighted potential opportunities arising from the pandemic. The crisis has turbo-boostered the need for IT and digital infrastructure for teleworking and education—specifically investments in cloud solutions, networks, data centers, and cybersecurity. The pandemic has also accelerated the shift to e-commerce, the penetration rate of which has been lower in Japan (seven percent of total retail sales) compared with that in other countries (23 percent in China and 13 percent in the United States).

She also noted that, while we all hope to return to “normal,” there is great uncertainty about what the definition of that will be after Covid-19 is under control. Companies are likely to become increasingly pressured to accelerate operational restructuring, mergers and acquisitions (M&A), and industrial consolidation.

BOLD, FAST, AND BIG

Koll pointed out that the global economic policy response to the pandemic has been well-coordinated and massive, very much in line with Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's call for “bold,



Matsui, who is credited with coining the term “Womenomics,” speaking at the ACCJ Women in Business Summit in 2019.

fast, and big” action. However, traditional fiscal policy—public investment or tax cuts—accounts for barely seven percent of the new measures. The vast majority comprises new programs designed to boost private purchasing power through help such as income support, direct handouts, and zero-cost loans. A new financial socialism has been created, and the risks are high that a majority of people will become dependent on government spending and public grants for their livelihood. So, when the pandemic ends, withdrawal from current stimulus programs will become a key new challenge.

A second point made by Koll was that we have not observed a currency shock in the current crisis, with major currencies stable and the Japanese yen rate remaining within the range of ¥105–110 to the dollar. This is an important stabilizer for corporate Japan and indicates that we are moving in the right direction of global coordination.

Koll's third point was that the economic growth path is beginning to diverge. As China recovers while the United States continues to struggle, Japanese corporations are facing a new challenge. With senior managers called back to Japan, many Japan headquarters now face difficulties in managing localized operations in China.



Koll is a frequent speaker at ACCJ events covering Japan's market and economic potential.

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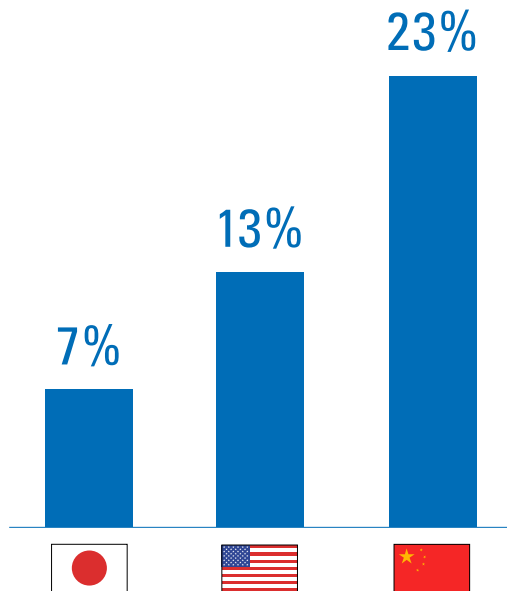
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The crisis has turbo-boostered the need for IT and digital infrastructure for teleworking and education.



E-BIZ UPTAKE



For Abe, balancing the trade-off between the economy and the pandemic has been the top priority, and Koll notes that, since the launch of Abenomics, the number of suicides reversed a two-decade uptrend and dropped rapidly as the economy improved—down to a three-decade low last year. Given the impact that economic well-being has on suicide and other “deaths of despair,” the life-versus-livelihood debate is expected to become more agitated as recessions deepen.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Koll expects that Covid-19 will serve as a catalyst for new opportunities in e-government, healthcare, regional development (medical supercenters and research and development facilities), education, M&A, and more startups.

Abe has mentioned two stages in fiscal support:

- Immediate government support for crisis management
- Longer-term incentives to create new investment opportunities

The second is essential because simply returning to business as usual is unlikely to be the way forward, as Matsui also mentioned.

The initial comments by the three panelists were followed by a Q&A session, which covered issues such as:

- The outlook for consumer spending
- Prospects for the Japanese equity market
- How massive stimulus programs will be funded, including any higher taxes
- Corporate governance
- Japan–China ties amid Tokyo’s urging companies to return to onshore operations

Final comments covered promising areas for immediate investment, including IT infrastructure in healthcare, education, and the energy sector, where enhanced resilience will be important. The pandemic has broken entrenched business practices in Japan and has opened opportunities for change that Abenomics may have failed to incentivize. ■

PANELISTS:

Kathy Matsui: Vice-chair, Goldman Sachs Japan

Robert Alan Feldman: Senior advisor, Morgan Stanley MUFG; Professor, Tokyo University of Science; Asia Society Japan Center founding member

Jesper Koll: Senior advisor, WisdomTree Investments, Asia Society Japan Center founding member





VIRTUAL EVENT

Tackling Covid-19

The biopharmaceutical industry's efforts to develop new vaccines and treatments

By C Bryan Jones

The extreme measures being taken around the world to curb the spread of the coronavirus have severely hampered business activity and personal lives. A return to normal likely cannot happen without vaccines or treatment options, so the race to find solutions for Covid-19 is on.

The American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) is home to some of the world's most innovative biopharmaceutical companies, and on April 30 the ACCJ Healthcare Committee hosted a webinar on the subject.

Entitled Tackling Covid-19: The Biopharmaceutical Industry's Efforts to Develop New Vaccines and Treatments, the presentation by Dr. James Mayne, vice president of science advocacy at the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), provided an overview of the vaccines and therapies in development and explained what it takes to bring a new medicine or vaccine to patients in need—including diagnostic testing, therapeutic approaches, and ongoing research.

DEVELOPMENT

More than 70 vaccine candidates are being explored by multiple entities, Mayne said, and five that are in preclinical testing as of the time of the webinar are supported by, or being pursued in coordination with, PhRMA member companies.

These companies have the experience and capacity to manufacture vaccines at the multimillion-dosage level that will be required to truly protect the population and defeat the coronavirus.

There are also six vaccines already in clinical testing that are supported by PhRMA members. These companies have been able to leverage their technology and previous experience with respiratory diseases, such as Ebola and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), to get a head start on countering Covid-19.

Researchers are taking previously utilized and new approaches to unraveling the secrets of Covid-19. Variables include:

- Administration of medicine
- Genetic information
- Stimulation of antibody response

The more attempts made, the more treatments and vaccines can be put into development, and the greater chance of success.

CLINICAL TRIALS

While testing and development are moving at unprecedented speed—at a clip of months instead of years—the safety is of utmost importance. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued 45 emergency use authorizations for diagnostic testing. Several PhRMA members are among those who have received a go-ahead.

A typical vaccine development program can take as long as 10 years due to the large amount of data required to certify the vaccine as safe and durable for its intended purpose, Mayne explained. The immunity accorded by a vaccine lasts only for a period of time, and the process of testing involves thousands of patients. Because infectious diseases are often cyclical—they come and go with the seasons—recruitment of patients can take time. That's one reason clinical trials are often prolonged.

In the case of Covid-19, the global nature of the emergency has forced the timeline to be dramatically compressed. Instead of a 10-year process, we need to get it done in a year or two, he said.

Progress so far has been rapid. It took just 63 days to get through the preclinical phase—virus identification and sequencing, and information dissemination—before the initial trial with the first vaccine candidate began.

More than 70 vaccine candidates are being explored by multiple entities.

Mayne said that vaccine efficacy demonstrations are also proceeding quickly, with the first wave of larger clinical studies expected this summer. There is hope, he believes, that vaccines can be produced and distributed by the end of the year. Again, establishing the safety of any new vaccine is of critical importance, as vaccines are typically administered to otherwise healthy individuals.

The industry has been working closely with the FDA to develop diagnostic methods of testing as well as serological ones, which are performed on a blood sample rather than using a nasal swab.

There are two general types of diagnostic testing underway:

- Looking for the virus itself
- Searching for antibodies

In the latter case, a patient who has been exposed to the coronavirus should show signs of antibodies produced by the body. However, it is unclear whether the presence of antibodies confers immunity from further infection.

THERAPY

Significantly more players are involved in the development of therapeutic approaches compared with those pursuing a vaccine, Mayne said.

Several hundred trials are in progress around the world. Therapies being tested include:

- Antiviral
- Anti-inflammatory
- Antimicrobial
- Immunostimulant

The last of these works by stimulating the immune system to enable the body to better fight off pathogens. They may be natural or synthesized, and often are used to induce production of a specific antibody, as in the case of a vaccine.

Mayne said that existing approved treatments are also being repurposed in hopes that they can slow, inhibit, or degrade the coronavirus' response and help patients recover.

There are more than 200 clinical trials underway, testing 53 unique investigational therapies from PhRMA member companies. These include:

- Kaletra (AbbVie)
- Actemra (Genentech, Inc.)
- Remdesivir (Gilead Sciences)



DR. JAMES MAYNES
Vice president of science advocacy
PhRMA



Remdesivir has been getting a lot of attention in the United States, and the National Institutes of Health published preliminary findings about the severe cases. Mayne said that the study was placebo-controlled and consisted of about 1,000 patients. A 31-percent-faster recovery time was observed for those to whom remdesivir was administered relative to those who were given a placebo. Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, called this a truly remarkable advance. The FDA is monitoring this data very carefully.

Also being explored are convalescent plasma therapies. These promising approaches use the body's power to generate antibodies against viral infection, harvest those antibodies, and provide them to other patients. These transfused antibodies may help slow or reduce the disease level in the recipient, and the therapy may serve as a bridge between more facile treatments and vaccines.

HUGE RESPONSE

Without a doubt, the pandemic is a massive global challenge that requires a massive global response. Mayne said that the biopharmaceutical industry's global ecosystem of varying but collaborative approaches is powerful and precious.

Mayne added that one of the key challenges is identifying the most promising pathways of the numerous trials, forming the requisite infrastructure, then refining and finalizing the production capability to generate and distribute the vaccines that proved successful.

The good news, he said, is that the pharmaceutical industry, governments, and other stakeholders are being proactive rather than delaying capacity buildup until an effective vaccine is discovered.

"We are witnessing and experiencing the research and development ecosystem in all of its glory," he said in closing. "The coronavirus has demonstrated the strong connection among the biopharmaceutical industry, governments, regulators, investors, and willing patients. It is of great comfort that this ecosystem exists, and we must do all that we can to preserve it and maintain its preparedness to ensure we can respond to current and future powerful threats." ■

Sustain Change

Select and refine the surprise benefits of a crisis

By Nancy Ngou

If it isn't broken, don't fix it. That's how many people think. It is natural human behavior to avoid the unknown and to maintain the status quo. Even as we watch the world around us being reshaped—by things such as rapid technological evolution, demographic shifts, or climate change—it is easier to maintain existing behaviors if the impact is not felt immediately. This is especially true in a culture where the current way of doing things historically has led to success.

Effecting change often requires a disruption that leaves no choice but to do things differently. This could be a positive event such as a city being chosen to host the Olympics or a company moving to a new office. It could be a tragic event such as a financial crisis, an earthquake, or the coronavirus pandemic. These events trigger short-term behavioral changes—our fight-or-flight response—but the impact subsides quickly, and old patterns and familiar behaviors generally return.

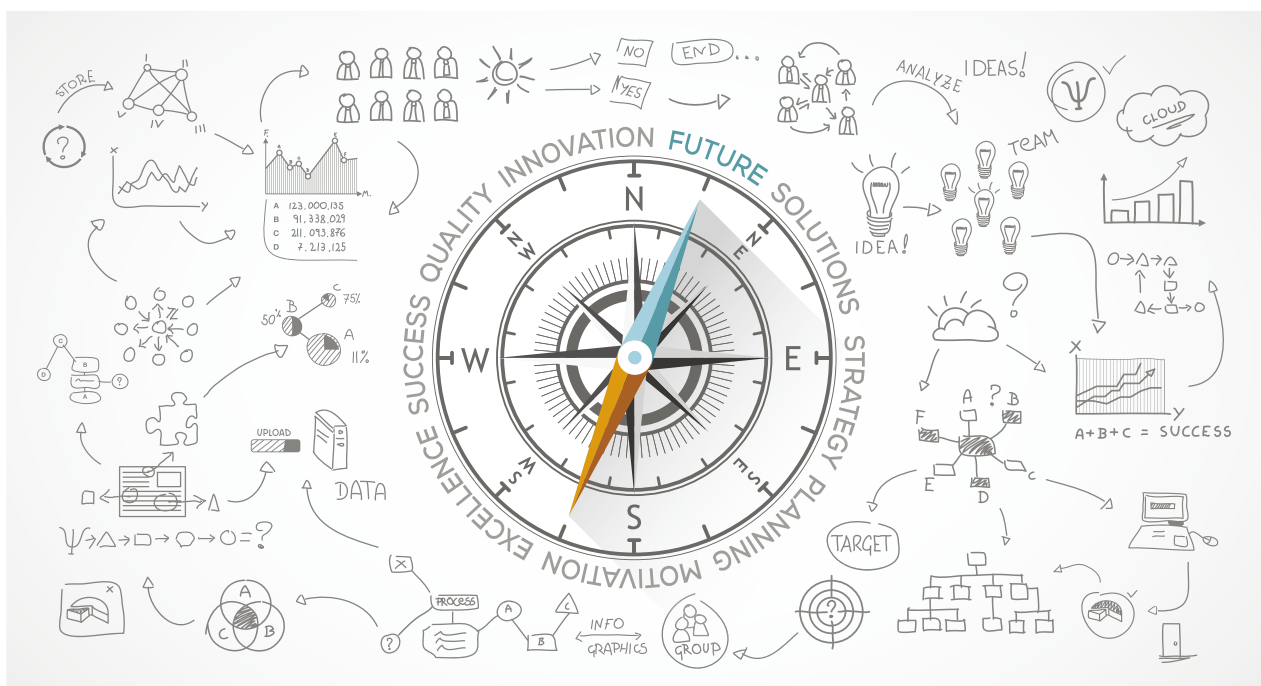
EVALUATE NOW

This does not have to be the case. What changes have emerged during the Covid-19 crisis? Which do you want to continue? By determining the unexpected positive changes that you want to retain, evaluating the effectiveness of the change, and taking deliberate actions during the crisis—and doing this in the context of what will come next and what is desired beyond—some of the positive changes can be sustained.

Think back to just last year and discussions about workstyle reform. What were the reasons people gave for why working flexibly or remotely could not be allowed? Why was going paperless impossible? Then think about how things have changed as we manage the current crisis. After ensuring the health, safety, and wellness of employees, consider what comes next. Take stock of the workstyle and operating changes that have emerged and consider what you want to continue.

Using remote working as an example, take inventory of the behaviors, policies, processes, and technologies that have been implemented to make the change possible. For example:

- Technology: purchased laptops and mobile Wi-Fi routers; adopted temporary policies allowing laptops to be taken home; quickly implemented collaboration technologies
- HR policies: modified rules to allow flexible hours, work from home, extra paid leave, daycare support, and other benefits
- Business processes: temporarily allowing PDF contracts instead of paper ones; suspended the requirement of a *hanko* (personal stamp) or handwritten signature; waiving the need for paper receipts
- Behaviors: teams are innovatively finding ways to work effectively from home; having daily team check-ins; agreeing on tasks and expectations up front; holding virtual coffee or social gatherings



PREPARE NEXT

After the crisis subsides, it would be easy for the temporary policies to lapse and revert to the previous business practices and workstyles. We saw this immediately after the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of March 11, 2011. Many companies adopted remote work policies and some government regulations were eased, but, in most cases, the changes were temporary.

When working from home was recommended at the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, just four percent of companies in Japan were able to quickly make the move. Today, under the state of emergency, about 50 percent of employees can work remotely. The extreme pressures of the crisis led to rapid change in an area that had seen years of talk but little movement.

Don't let this painful period of personal and business loss and sacrifice pass without leaving a positive legacy. After taking inventory of new behaviors and business adjustments, identify how effective each has been and what can be done next to improve them. How well are things working now? What is needed next?

During a time of crisis, it's important to take the pulse of employees, ensure they feel safe, and check that the company is staying true to its values and commitments to people through its actions. This can easily be done by conducting short, periodic employee surveys. The survey can also be used to make employees think beyond the crisis by assessing what is working well now and what is needed next to be more effective. Capture positive stories of unexpected benefits and creative ideas that teams came up with to make things work better.

Have each department or team likewise review what is working well and what improvements are needed. For example, in the urgency to enable remote working, were comprehensive cybersecurity procedures put in place? In the rush to quickly implement collaboration tools, were the best technologies chosen to provide the features employees are seeking?

LOOK BEYOND

Leaders should continue to prioritize caring for the health and well-being of their employees, but, as visionaries, we should look beyond the here and now to create a positive legacy from this disaster.

We are living through one of the most sudden worldwide disruptions to life, business, and economies in human history. Begin planning the next actions now to cement these positive changes and ensure they become permanent practices—the new normal. The result will be an even stronger company and culture, ready for what lies beyond. ■

Nancy Ngou is an ACCJ governor and associate partner at EY Advisory and Consulting Co., Ltd. where she leads the Organizational Change practice, helping companies transform their business and culture.



HOW CAN YOU SUSTAIN CHANGE?

Companies have been wanting to change—to become more paperless, increase flexible workstyles, and encourage innovation, to challenge the status quo, old habits, and traditions. But change can be difficult. Here are some things that can be done now to make the behaviors exhibited during the Covid-19 crisis the new normal for your company.



SHARE THE POSITIVE

Encourage employees to share their positive stories about remote working. This can be done through employee surveys. When things begin to open up again, encourage a balance—don't simply go back to the old ways.



FORMALIZE POLICIES

What changes made to get through the short-term did you find unexpectedly beneficial? Which do you want to keep? Formalize those changes through new policies and procedures that support the culture and workstyle desired.



REFINE AND IMPLEMENT

The quick solutions that were implemented may have proven beneficial, but they may need refinement. Taking inventory and surveying employees is a great way to identify improvements and enhancements that can make the changes last.



CELEBRATE TEAMWORK

The innovation and best practices teams developed for staying connected, inclusive, and managing and developing people remotely to get through the crisis should be highlighted. Celebrate the teamwork to reinforce the connection to the company's culture and values.

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Two Decades in Nagoya

The story of how the ACCJ's Chubu chapter was born

By Michel Weenick

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) Chubu chapter. While it represents a broad cross section of businesses in the region, the chapter's character and leadership have traditionally come from the world of entrepreneurs as well as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). It's this spirit of entrepreneurship that led to the ACCJ-Chubu's creation.

EARLY DAYS

To appreciate the history of the Chubu chapter, it is necessary to go back 30 years to the establishment of the American Business Community of Nagoya (ABCN). This loose-knit group of US companies in the region's largest city was fully supported by the US Consulate Nagoya.

ABCN was founded on two principles:

- Support US businesses in a city that, at the time, was not particularly welcoming to the idea of global business
- Raise the international community's presence in the city through charitable events

The result was a group of about 50 members who met after work once a month at the consulate for beer, pizza, and a presentation. But, more importantly, it was a group that—in its second year of existence—threw its heart into creating a charity festival that lives on today as the annual ACCJ/NIS Walkathon, co-hosted with Nagoya International School.

BIRTH OF A CHAPTER

While the original ABCN leaders came primarily from the US aerospace companies that were establishing their presence in Nagoya at that time—Henry Gomez of Lockheed Martin Corporation and Frank Joyner of The Raytheon Company were founding leaders—the mantle was gradually passed to the group's entrepreneurs.

At the time the ABCN became the ACCJ-Chubu chapter, Robert Roche, the president of then-startup Oak Lawn Marketing



and I, with my own fledgling architectural design practice, were leading the group. Our tight-knit cadre of small-business leaders had grown and prospered by working with each other and breaking down the doors of partners in the region. But the desire to take the next step—to continue to grow and expand our businesses in Tokyo and beyond—was strong.

SEIZING THE MOMENT

If nothing else, entrepreneurs have a keen sense of timing. And despite several previous failed attempts at matchmaking, when the US Consulate's principal officer volunteered to host a meeting between the ABCN and the ACCJ in mid-1999, we jumped at the opportunity.

The ACCJ, represented by then-President Robert Grondine and Executive Director Don Westmore, could not have been more welcoming. The ACCJ was keen to expand beyond Tokyo and Osaka to better represent US businesses across Japan. They also made it clear that a potential new chapter would not only have access to the benefits of ACCJ membership but also the autonomy to shape how Chubu members are supported.

For the ABCN's SME members, this was the next step for which we had been looking. For the larger corporations, it was a chance to consolidate their allegiances, as many already had ACCJ memberships for their operations in Tokyo and ABCN memberships for their teams in Nagoya. With the consent of both ACCJ and ABCN memberships—and a bit of seed money from globally minded local companies such as Toyota Motor Corporation—the ACCJ-Chubu was launched in 2000.

Twenty years later, the chapter continues to represent businesses in Japan's second-largest regional economy and strengthens the ACCJ's value to members through the chapter's legacy of entrepreneurship and spirit of giving back to the communities in which we work and live. ■



Michel Weenick is ACCJ-Chubu governor and was the chapter's first vice president. He is also vice president of architecture & construction at Hilton Grand Vacations.



Save OUR SMEs!

Are loans, subsidies, and tax breaks too little, too late, too complex to salvage small companies ravaged by virus?

By Julian Ryall

The events of the first four months of 2020 have been, quite simply, devastating. The emergence and explosive spread of the novel coronavirus has exacted an appalling toll on the lives and well-being of millions around the world. Inevitably, the impact has spilled over into the economic realm.

Today, with countless businesses shuttered and workers from New York and San Francisco to Tokyo and Osaka laid off or furloughed, owners must cope with situations that most could never have expected to face. Their concerns are numerous and multi-layered, and include ensuring that cash continues to flow, staff are paid, customers and suppliers feel reassured, stock is procured and, of course, the company's products or services remain available.

Fortunately, most governments have realized that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the lifeblood of their economies—particularly here in Japan—and are rolling out programs designed to see them through these difficult times. There have been hiccups—and more will undoubtedly crop up as governments try to provide sustenance on a scale never before attempted—but the political will is at least in place.

TICKING CLOCK

SMEs are arguably among the most vulnerable at a time of economic shock. Business research provider Teikoku Databank Ltd. reported in late April that 69 companies had gone under in the first three weeks of the month, taking the total past 100 since the crisis broke. The majority, it said, were SMEs, with

hotels, inns, bars, and restaurants particularly at risk as people follow the government's advice and stay home to help stem the spread of Covid-19. With job losses mounting and savings dwindling, the public is also motivated to spend less, further hitting companies' bottom lines.

The Teikoku Databank report concludes that many more cash-strapped companies will shut down for good unless financial support is swiftly forthcoming from the government. The finding is supported by an NN Life Insurance Co. survey which reported that 39.2 percent of SMEs said they will be able to stave off bankruptcy no longer than the end of June. Many say they have far less time. It is good practice for both companies and individuals to have enough cash on hand to cover a minimum of three to seven months of expenses in case of an emergency.

"If the current lockdown continues beyond May 31—which I think has a 50 percent chance of happening—then a whole class of SMEs may not survive," said Frank Packard, president of Triple A Partners Japan Co., Ltd, which provides cross-border financial services in Japan. "At-risk companies include, but are not limited to, SMEs operating in sectors such as restaurants, transportation, energy, tourism, hospitality, entertainment, retail, real estate, media, and music.



FRANK PACKARD
President
Triple A Partners Japan Co., Ltd.



THOMAS R. SHOCKLEY
President and CEO
DocuMonde Inc.

“Certainly, current economic conditions are stormy—sharply and suddenly bad for many companies and formerly employed people,” he said. “However, even though we are all facing the same storm, each of us is in a different boat. And we will not all face the same fate.”

Travel document provider DocuMonde Inc. President and CEO Thomas R. Shockley, who is also chair of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan Independent Business Committee (IBC), concurs that as many as 30 percent of Japan’s SMEs—as well as one or two of the nation’s business “powerhouses”—will not survive.

“There will be no ‘inverted V’ return this time,” he told *The ACCJ Journal*. “Rather, it will be a slow growth with a few ups and downs until we can all feel comfortable to socialize freely once again. And that could be as far off as March or April 2021.”

METI PLANS

In early April, the Japanese government outlined measures to help companies in Japan—including foreign-owned ones—that are experiencing financial hardship due to the pandemic. By the end of the month, additional programs had been added, all of which can be seen at the website of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) at meti.go.jp/covid-19

Among the available assistance, METI is offering consultation services, providing funding to companies that want to have their staff work from home, relaxing import and export procedures, and helping cover the wages of employees.

The measures were welcomed in a statement by the ACCJ and the chambers of commerce in Japan of Australia and New Zealand, Britain, and Canada, the European Business Council in Japan, and the International Bankers Association of Japan. But they also proposed other moves to greatly benefit struggling companies. The proposals include:

- Introduction of a grace period for all tax filings and payments
- Deferral of contributions to social insurance
- Extension of net operating loss carryback for losses since January 2018 but before January 2021
- Relief from individual reporting requirements during periods of remote working

Governments have realized that SMEs are the lifeblood of their economies.

The chamber has also set up a dedicated Business Continuity Network section on its website.

“I’ve been keeping abreast of what is available, although it is difficult to know all the details of what applies to my specific situation. But I have a really good accountant that I have complete trust in, and I’ve asked him to keep on top of this for me,” said Steve Bleistein, founder and CEO of Relansa Inc. and a vice-chair of the IBC.

Bleistein says the up to ¥2 million that is being made available as a stimulus is “a start, but that amount will not go far. And I am going to have to assume that more is going to be made available.

“I’m a solo consultant, so I have agility that other companies will not have. But rapid access to credit and stimulus funds would be beneficial to the business and would help to even out some of the periods of instability that are sure to happen.”

CASH CONCERNS

Annie Chang, president of AC Global Solutions Ltd. and a vice-chair of the IBC, said one of her biggest fears is running low on capital and not being able to pay staff salaries. She criticized the government’s response for struggling companies as being “very slow.”

“I’ve been following the Japanese news on the assistance that is available and speaking with my accountant to find out



STEVE BLEISTEIN
Founder and CEO
Relansa Inc.



ANNIE CHANG
President
AC Global Solutions Ltd.



KENNETH GALE
Director
No Borders International
School in Nagoya



MIKE ALFANT
Group chairman and CEO
Fusion Systems Group

the correct information. But I have heard that it is hard to understand and not straightforward,” she said.

One measure that would help Chang’s business would be a government-administered fund to provide financial support, without interest, for SMEs. In addition, the application procedures would need to be simple and conducted online, she said.

Kenneth Gale, director of the No Borders International School in Nagoya, warns that a number of businesses that he is aware of “are hurting” and that many do not have the reserves to stay afloat for an extended period of time.

“Aside from the anxiety and stress, I would say many businesses probably went through a series of phases of different challenges,” he said. “At first, they tried to cut back, then they realized that this is continuing, so the next phase was adapting. Now a lot of us are just trying to maintain where we are.

“Personally speaking, one of the hardest and constant issues on my mind is my staff,” said Gale, who is a vice-chair of the ACCJ-Chubu ICB. “Having about 80 staff staying home and about 15 working, my heart goes out to them. I know they are nervous and fearful, so one of our biggest priorities is not only to serve our student population as best as possible, by switching to online classes, but also to support our staff during these challenging times.”

GOOD INTENT

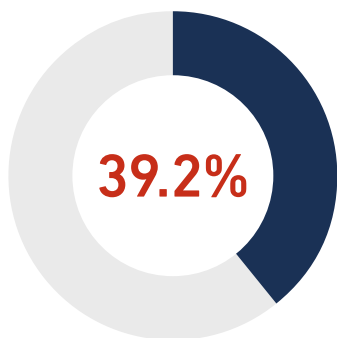
Shockley, whose company operates in the hard-hit international travel sector, has actively been looking into the support that is available. “There is an honest intent to provide assistance in terms of loans and grants,” he insists. “Regrettably, those firms somewhat established—in business for, say, five years plus—will have a greater chance to be supported under whatever programs are finally created. And no matter what is created, there will be problems.”

He fears that many of the loan packages are being snapped up by companies that will only actually need the support in six months’ time, leaving a shortfall for SMEs that need the funds immediately.

“Applying for a loan is, at present, difficult, because we cannot determine if our business model will generate the sums to pay down the loan in the future,” he said. “When the grant guidelines are released, we will apply to ‘buy us some time’ to where we can better understand if we should take out a loan or not. The problem is that by that time—August or September—all the loan support will be depleted. And many SMEs are in the same position. Business prospects will not be at all clear until fall, and we need a package of bridging grants until then.”

The screenshot shows the METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry) website. The header includes navigation links like 'Contact Us', 'Japanese', 'Site Map', 'Main Content', 'Font size', and 'Easy Web Browsing'. A secondary navigation bar lists 'News Releases', 'Speeches', 'Statistics', 'Policies', and 'About METI'. The main content area is titled 'METI's Support Measures for Companies Concerning the Impacts of the Novel Coronavirus Disease'. Below this, it states 'Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry support measures (as of May 1, 2020)'. A message reads: 'We will guide you through measures to support companies by mitigating the impact of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) on companies.' A grid of 15 boxes lists various support measures, including 'Sustainable benefits', 'Support brochure', 'List of financing support', 'Promote telecommuting', 'Telework introduction costs', 'New coronavirus measures assistance business', 'Consultation service for small and medium-sized enterprises', 'Local companies / local information and consultation (JETRO)', 'Countermeasures by trade insurance (NEXI)', 'Relaxation of import / export procedures', 'Request for consideration of subcontracted SMEs', 'Sole proprietor / freelance support', 'Request for consideration of employment, etc.', 'Supporting efforts of EdTech businesses', 'Support information search service', and 'Telework support by companies'.

METI has gathered information about its Covid-19 programs on a single page at meti.go.jp/covid-19



of SMEs said they will be able to stave off bankruptcy no longer than the end of June

SOURCE: NN LIFE INSURANCE CO. SURVEY

STUCK IN THE MUD

Mike Alfant, group chairman and CEO of Fusion Systems Group, concurs that the Japanese government's actions thus far have been "well-intentioned," but are "insufficient and being poorly executed."

"There are too many different schemes for too many different issues—support for teleworking, non-guaranteed loans, furloughed staff, the list goes on. And they are at the national or local level, and it's just confusing," he said. "This is something that needs to be done very quickly and very efficiently, so it needs to be centralized and all laid out very clearly."

Alfant, who chairs the ACCJ's Emergency Disaster Response Advisory Council, used the analogy of a vehicle that is stuck in mud and on an incline to explain how businesses simply cannot afford to come to a full stop. If they do, there may not be sufficient energy to get moving again.

"The longer a business waits, the deeper it sinks in the mud and the harder it becomes to get forward momentum again," he said. "This is the challenge."

There is one solution the government could implement immediately that, he believes, would go a long way to rescuing many companies. The government should simply return the corporate tax paid last year. This could be done in 72 hours, he estimates, on the understanding that companies keep their staff and "stay in motion."

Mary Nishikawa, founder of Lexaly Communications and vice-chair of the IBC, believes that companies cannot afford to rely solely on government support to get through the months ahead. "Businesses that immediately plan for the long term will survive," she emphasized.

"A company needs to consider scenarios of how the virus could spread and create a safety plan. How would the virus be transmitted to you, your employees, or your customers? How would you prevent that transmission?"



MARY NISHIKAWA
Founder
Lexaly Communications

"Those in specific industries should discuss strategies that would work for them and implement them now or when they reopen," she added. "Businesses that bring together large groups of people in close quarters—such as large meetings, conferences, or trade shows—are particularly affected and might not be able to operate as they did in the past until there is a cure or vaccine."

"After that, you need to rethink your business as if it were your first year of operation," she added. "You may need to change your business model and write a new plan. For some companies, bankruptcy and renewal might be the only way out."

Packard, who is an ACCJ governor and chairs the Alternative Investment Committee, said companies need to be proactive in devising strategies for avoiding catastrophe, adding that he is "confused at the expectations of so many people—both here and in the United States—for government support to bail out companies."

"Time is one of the most precious resources for an SME," he said. "In our particular case, I worry about spending time

chasing government support instead of executing business.

Applying for government support programs, such as debt relief, lease rent

abatements, and low-interest loans may work for certain cases, but not for our financial services business.

"Support programs, in my view, will have potentially only one-time effects, and they will not sustain my business. To me, it doesn't make sense to look for government support for our business if such support will have relatively low payoffs and low probabilities.

"I am focused on managing, maintaining, nurturing, and conserving what we do with our existing clients. Managing wisely our time and stretching our imaginations for what we can do to add value to clients—these are the two most important activities for this SME." ■

METI SUPPORT
meti.go.jp/covid-19

ACCJ BUSINESS CONTINUITY NETWORK
accj.or.jp/business-continuity-network.html

ACCJ VS. COVID-19
accj.or.jp/accj-vs-covid-19.html



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RE-WRITE: ACTION!

Tips for delivering better online meetings

By Andrew Silberman



In the film *Cool Hand Luke*, Strother Martin famously said, "What we've got here is a failure to communicate."

In today's world, everyone's an actor. Popular YouTubers teach how to look better on video. This makes sense, because how you look contributes more to a positive response than how you sound or what you say. To make sure you look your best:

- Set your camera at eye level
- Source light in front
- Frame yourself so you won't look too big or too small

But there's more to learn. Start with the difference between a "meeting" and "webinar." Webinars are for one-to-many presentations. A meeting is for interaction. Most "meetings" I've attended are actually webinars with questions tacked on the end. And they work only when the speaker is dynamic and the topic spot on.

This is lost on most speakers. Unless you're a podcaster or DJ who can entertain without an interviewee, ramp up interaction. For example, use the polling function. Polling engages and gives something more to do than sit, watch, and listen.

Use breakout groups. Small groups or pairs. Or one then the other. Discuss: What surprised them? What are they still wondering about? Zoom can create breakouts automatically. And there are other ways to engage, attract, and keep attention for as long as the meeting goes.

Speaking of which, why use all the allotted time? A friend who likes colorful language puts it something like this: "Really pisses me off! There's five or 10 minutes left. We've covered everything on the agenda. Then there's someone who brings up some hypothetical topic that's never gonna happen, and I gotta pee!"

That is an edited version, but I hear him. Just don't end early if you promised a Q&A and someone's waiting with a

question. Let them ask! After answering, end the meeting, but not "for everyone." Those who want to can stay and chat.

THE UGLY

We're on video more than ever, and, just like the Clint Eastwood movie, we're seeing the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Speaking of ugly, have you heard of the "transcribe" option? It records, in text, words spoken during a Zoom session. One recent speaker said "you know" 15 times in less than two minutes. If he were to see his comments transcribed, he would be rightfully mortified. Toastmasters assigns an "um/ah" counter, one member who reports filler words used by speakers. Imagine how you would feel if this was your last sentence:

"Well, you know, the report we have here, you know, kind of shows how we're ah, you know, still growing, but, you know, it's not at all clear, that um, you know, we'll stay on this positive trajectory."

That painful example is, sadly, not an exaggeration. It can be infuriating. The most infamous "you know" video doomed Caroline Kennedy's Senate run. Now, you're not running for a New York Senate seat, but you are running a meeting. And we're watching.

Andy Bergin (friend, coach, and founder of communication coaching provider Speaking Virtually) reminded me to remind you: "It's not the technology that matters—it's the person using the technology that makes the difference." So, in your next action role—that is, your next video meeting—be good, not bad and not ugly! ■



Andrew Silberman is president and chief enthusiast at AMT Group and co-chair of the ACCJ Membership Relations Committee.



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STAY HOME TO STUDY

How teachers, parents and pupils cope with post-virus classes

By C Bryan Jones

Social distancing and the closure of many aspects of society impacts more than just business. Like company executives, teachers have found themselves in rapid-response mode as they look for ways to maintain operations amid a crisis unlike any seen in our lifetimes. These heroes have one of our most precious commodities in their hands: our children.

The coronavirus pandemic will pass and, while the world may never be the same, business will go on. Ensuring that tomorrow's leaders are ready for the challenge falls on schools. While *The ACCJ Journal* has focused a great deal on how businesses are managing the situation, we wanted to know how educators are keeping the gears of future innovation turning. We spoke with eight international schools to find out.

SCREEN-TO-SCREEN

As many teachers pointed out, social interaction is a key part of the educational experience—especially for younger students. This is important not only for learning social skills, such as how to get along and work with others—something critical to future business success—but also for the connection between student and teacher.

Technology can, of course, present obstacles. Teachers, students, and parents may need to adjust to new tools. But apart from the technical hurdles, physical separation is cited as one of the biggest challenges of the sudden transition to exclusively online classes.

“The challenge in delivering distance learning to younger students is even more complex because younger children thrive when they have a social-emotional connection with their teacher,” said Scott Wilcox, deputy head of school for learning at the American School in Japan (ASIJ). “Relationships are critical across all levels, of course, but they’re particularly essential to our youngest learners.”

Aoba-Japan International School Primary Principal Sachiko Otsuka noted that, as social interactions have been limited in the online environment, younger learners can be at a significant disadvantage because they are building foundational social skills during their early years.

“From grade 12 down to as early as grade three, students are able to access and navigate online learning engagements fairly independently. But there is an inverse relationship in general between the child’s age and the amount of direct interaction with teachers that is required for optimal results. Below grade three, we have found that substantial parental involvement has been required in comparison to the older students.”

Horizon Japan International School head Emin Huseynov is seeing the same. “Due to the fact that some younger students are not as proficient in their use of technology as their older counterparts, we consider autonomy as the biggest challenge for primary-aged students,” he said. “They need more parental support, but not all parents are able to give the support required for full access to the online curriculum due to work requirements, number of kids, and other demands on their time.”

Go even younger and you begin to chart new territory in distance learning. Gymboree Play & Music Japan has introduced online classes for those in preschool—something that has required adaptation and creative thinking.

“In our usual classes, we follow the lead of the child and encourage each to explore on their own. This is something our teachers cannot do when leading classes online. Many of our teachers have only experienced teaching at a physical location, so teaching online is new to them,” explained Vice President Nicole Yamada. Gymboree’s distance learning offerings include music for ages 0–6 years, art (16 months–6 years), preschool English (2–6 years) and afterschool English (3–9 years).

Gymboree’s approach is creative. They are using the curriculum from their classes at the physical locations but substituting props—for art and music—with items that families have at home.

“Our online classes started on April 22 and we expect to continue until we open again. However, we are also considering continuing to hold some classes online as well,” Yamada said.

TECHNICALLY EQUAL?

Another concern is access to computers, tablets, and reliable internet service. Not all families have adequate equipment at home, or enough devices for multiple children who need to use them at the same time. And, despite Japan’s technological prowess, there are plenty of apartment buildings in Tokyo where high-speed internet service is unavailable or unreliable.

Many educators cited the lack of technological resources in public schools—and the lack of training for teachers and students in how to best utilize these learning tools—as a key reason why the Japanese education system was largely unprepared for a sudden shift to online classes. It’s an issue that has not gone unnoticed by the government. The administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has said that it wants to make tablets available to all students by 2023.

For the international schools with which we spoke, this is less of an issue. Many took steps years ago to ensure that each student has access to these tools.

Secondary Principal Paul Fradale said that Aoba has been a 1:1 school—meaning there is a device for each student—since 2014. Those in grades one through three have tablets, and those in grades four and higher have laptops. ASIJ established a 1:1 system a decade ago and Columbia International School has had such a system in place for grades 7–12 for 20 years. Nishimachi International School also has 1:1 device provision.

“The need to go online for our classes has surely ramped up the computer skills of the schoolwide community,” said Columbia Principal Barrie McCliggott. “Our students in kindergarten and primary grades are now quite comfortable communicating with teachers and fellow students through a variety of applications. Skills related to finding, verifying, and giving credit for information found on the internet have improved. And dispositions related to self-regulation, independent learning, and becoming self-responsible learners are being challenged and becoming a focus of teacher discussions.”

He noted that technological challenges exist at both the primary and secondary levels related to internet access, device use, and how to access materials before the learning even begins. “This is a bigger challenge for teachers of younger students, who require a little more handholding through the process,” he said.

10 TIPS FOR ONLINE STUDY FROM COLUMBIA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

■ WALK THE TALK

Your commitment to excellence must continue even online.

■ EVALUATE CONDITIONS

Make sure students have reliable internet access and devices.

■ STICK WITH THE FAMILIAR

Continue using existing channels and systems—especially in the first weeks.

■ LESS IS MORE

Streamline content and elevate the most essential learning for students.

■ SEIZE THE MOMENT

Embrace new opportunities and possibilities for your students.

■ PROVIDE SPACE

Allow students to personalize what, how, and when they learn.

■ DESIGN EXPERIENCES

Create a clear sense of purpose that allows students to work toward mastery.

■ CREATE OPPORTUNITIES

Relationships and collaboration matter as much online as they do in person.

■ THINK DIFFERENTLY

When assessing, reference success, be specific, and identify strengths and next steps.

■ MAKE IT FUN

Have a positive growth mindset to make distance learning fun and successful.

INTERACTION

Finding ways to keep everyone involved is one of the most challenging aspects of online teaching. Technology offers amazing capabilities but recreating the sense of class when everyone is in a different location requires new approaches, creative thinking, and flexibility.

McCliggott shared Columbia’s approach. “We have focused on creating learning activities that bring students together as a class using Google Meet or Zoom, as well as activities that provide opportunities for students to work together in small online groups and then present back to the whole class. Traditional activities such as show-and-tell, storytelling, and question-and-answers sessions can still be done online.”



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10 TIPS FOR PARENTS FROM ASIJ

■ ESTABLISH ROUTINES AND EXPECTATIONS

Set regular hours for your children's schoolwork. Make sure children move regularly, take periodic breaks, and keep normal bedtime routines.

■ DEFINE THE PHYSICAL SPACE

The regular place for doing homework may not be suitable for extended periods. Establish a space where parents are present and can monitor learning.

■ MONITOR COMMUNICATIONS

Keep tabs on emails sent by teachers. Remember that they are communicating with dozens of other families and bear that in mind when responding.

■ BEGIN AND END WITH A CHECK-IN

A brief grounding conversation allows children to process the instructions they've received, get organized, and set priorities. Start and finish each day with one.

■ TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE

Help your children process and own their learning. Engage with them, but don't complete assignments for them—even when they are struggling.

■ ENSURE TIME FOR QUIET AND REFLECTION

Families with multiple children may find it challenging to manage everyone's needs. There may be times when siblings need to work in different rooms to avoid distraction.

■ ENCOURAGE PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Make sure your children remember to move and exercise. This is vitally important to their health, well-being, and learning.

■ REMAIN MINDFUL

Do your best not to transfer your stress and worries to your children. They will be out of sorts and need as much normal routine as parents can provide.

■ MONITOR ONLINE USE

Staring at computer screens for eight hours a day is not good, even for education. Try to find the right balance between online and offline learning experiences.

■ SET RULES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

Help your children maintain contact with friends, but remind them to be polite, respectful, and appropriate in their communications.

At Nishimachi, this varies from grade to grade and class to class and depends very much on the type of learning activity taking place. "Teachers are using an array of tools, including Google Hangouts, Google Chat, and Zoom, to facilitate multiple ways of interacting. Much like a class in school, this setup means there will be some whole-class time, one-to-one time for those children who require it, and some independent learning time, too. We have digital tools to support each of these ways of learning," explained Head of School Karen O'Neill.

She cited three tools that help maintain interactive teaching when the group cannot be in the same room:

■ Whole-group sessions

To use the whiteboard, videos, and other screen sharing to deliver teaching points

■ Breakout rooms

To give kids a way to work together, help each other, discuss or answer key questions, listen to each other, and share their work

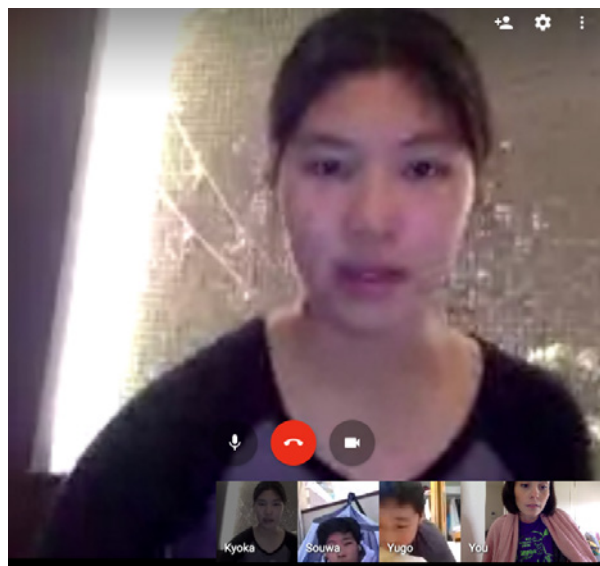
■ Padlet, Seesaw, Flipgrid

To record thinking, ideas, work, and feedback

All the schools with which *The ACCJ Journal* spoke are using some combination of dedicated learning apps such as Padlet, Seesaw, and Flipgrid along with Zoom or tools from Google to facilitate online classes. And they are finding that these enhance many aspects of the process.

"Screen-based engagements allow a higher degree of student control of the path, pace, and place of learning," said Fradale. "And transparency of learning for parents is higher than when the physical campus was open." Aoba uses Google Meet for large groups and Google Hangouts for smaller team meetings. "This facilitates live, synchronous meetings throughout the day. We have Chrome extensions that provide virtual whiteboards and such to the Google environment for all students and teachers to use," he added.

Horizon teachers have also found ways to make sharing print materials with full online classes easier. "Some use document cameras to display work on printed materials," explained Huseynov, speaking of the adjustable, stand-based devices with USB connectors that can be used to "project" material into an online meeting



An online class at Aoba



Art Recreations is an online course for Nishimachi's grade-three students.

in much the same way one would show something on a screen in a classroom. "Document cameras give students the ability to see an object or text clearly from anywhere, which is important for comprehension and understanding."

Having a range of tools is important because different students respond better to different approaches—and online learning offers opportunities to tailor education to individuals.

"We survey students regularly and use their feedback to refine our approach. Some students prefer synchronous learning experiences and find that approach motivating, while others favor asynchronous activities that permit more autonomy and independent decision-making. What we've learned is that there's no one right approach for every student all the time," explained ASIJ's Wilcox.

"Our goal is cognitive engagement; we want our students to be the ones thinking, talking, and writing—more than the teacher. Our synchronous experiences trend toward teacher-directed mini-lessons and student groups working together, not lecture-based experiences, while our asynchronous experiences permit more agency and self-direction. Feedback is at the heart of learning, whether synchronous or asynchronous, and both approaches create opportunities for targeted, individualized feedback."

PARENTAL CONCERN

The disruption to school life naturally raises many concerns for parents. The lack of social interaction is high on the list, and each school is taking steps to address it.

"We responded to that by making every morning check-in a whole-class, face-to-face experience," said Nishimachi's O'Neill.

"This allows children to see the familiar faces of their classmates and teacher, and to stay connected on a far deeper level than is possible using a chat application."

That's important because, as Chiyoda International School Tokyo's Daniel Roebuck explained, "There is some feedback—from younger children's parents especially—that they have some difficulties making their children concentrate on studies without teachers and classmates around."

The connection to both their peers and teacher is very important, he added. "Our teachers check in with their homeroom class daily to chat and discuss what their targets are for the day."

Annette Levy, deputy head and director of curriculum & professional development at Saint Maur International School, Yokohama, mentioned how much the children miss the contact with their peers, how the loss of social and athletic pursuits affects them, and how Saint Maur is trying to offset this. "To maintain our sense of community, teachers are being incredibly creative and providing physical education challenges, choral collaborations, and even whole elementary school assemblies online."

At ASIJ, the biggest concern probably is student readiness for next year, according to Wilcox. "We're confident our students will be ready for next year and that they won't be disadvantaged by distance learning at all. In fact, insofar as lessons learned about perseverance, resilience, and self-management, we suspect our students will be positioned to excel next year and beyond," he said.

"Our teachers and teams are talking and identifying the learning that is most essential and foundational for the next level of learning. In September, teachers will use this information to

guide instructional decisions while pre-assessing and adjusting instruction to meet the needs of students. We know parents worry about their children's preparation and the opportunities they'll have in the future, but we're confident our students are going to hit the ground running next year."

Screen time has been a top concern of society in general in recent years, as we spend more and more time staring at smartphones and tablets. So, it is no surprise that parents worry about how the necessity of looking at a screen to attend school will affect their children. O'Neill said this is the most common concern they hear as they conduct regular surveys to ensure that their e-learning program is meeting the needs of their community. "In response to this concern, both the elementary and middle school schedules have been revised to encourage more offline, active-learning experiences," she said.

Aoba has done the same. Fradale said some students are reporting eye strain from looking at screens for extended periods, so the school has "implemented mandatory physical activities to address this, in part, and strives to offer a balance of digital and analog engagements and tasks."

STRUCTURE

Students struggle with the same thing as workers when all activity is shifted to the home: structure. Our days are largely defined by routines, and it's the little things in the daily process that help us focus on specific activities and maintain balance in our lives. Schools are particularly structured, with a flow of classes, gatherings, and activities. It's important not to lose that.

"The secondary school has maintained a fairly synchronous approach to the school day in order to stabilize students' lives through a known routine," said Aoba's Fradale. "Teachers schedule telemeetings with student teams throughout the normal schedule of classes, while the students work in large problem- or inquiry-based units."

Otsuka added: "In the kindergarten and elementary classes, there is a combination of whole-group, small-group, and one-on-one synchronous interactions with students. The majority of the learning from kindergarten to grade three occurs asynchronously, where tasks are assigned with flexible completion times. Teachers meet with students synchronously through Google Meet for daily check-ins and targeted support sessions."

Saint Maur is taking a similar approach at the secondary level, where "all the live sessions are mirroring the regular school day periods, and so all of these virtual sessions are initially as a whole class," explained Secondary Principal Tim Matsumoto. "Should

there be a need for one-on-one or small group sessions, this is possible as well once the needs of the whole class are addressed. During live sessions, teachers utilize small groups and one-on-one support as part of their day-to-day expectations. Teachers are available throughout the school day for questions through multiple platforms and, where appropriate, they support children in one-on-one situations in addition to those offered during the scheduled live lessons."

COVID-19'S LEGACY

The coronavirus pandemic is providing an accelerated testing ground for new approaches to education in a digital age. While there is naturally concern that students may not be receiving the optimal experience, educators are maintaining open channels and close contact so that they can make continual adjustments.

"The divide between children who have access to digital platforms versus those who don't will continue to widen," said O'Neill. "I also believe that the Covid-19 situation has allowed educators to leap into the use of digital platforms much more quickly than would otherwise have happened. This will allow a subset of children to be much more adept with technology, leaving others behind."

McCliggott believes that Covid-19 will result in "a hybrid learning environment that incorporates the positives of the wealth of resources provided through the internet in a learn-anywhere-anytime environment." He said this coupled with the support, coaching, and socialization opportunities of the traditional school model are a desirable outcome.

Aoba Admissions Director Ae Kimura feels that the results so far have been good and are moving education towards stronger blended systems. "Data we have from our weekly parent and teacher survey indicate that student learning outcomes within the current online delivery are what we expected within the limitations of primarily online learning engagements. This means in the long term we are very confident that our students are not being disadvantaged," she said. "While not under ideal circumstances, the online learning we are currently undertaking is helping us learn valuable lessons and develop our existing blended learning program. This will help us ensure that our future programs are as high-quality as possible."

Huseynov hopes the efforts of teachers to maintain learning during the crisis will lead to a better appreciation of the important role they play in society. "The world is full of millions of teachers—many doing brilliant things right now. They are our metaphorical 'practitioners' that will be on the front lines of blending the best of the old and new educational practices. The entire globe now understands that growing and preparing together is essential to future success," he said.

And Wilcox sees the crisis as providing needed impetus for turning talk into action. "Over the past two decades, there's been talk ad nauseum in education about 21st-century skills and competencies, but only incremental progress in schools toward those lofty goals. The Covid-19 pandemic is disrupting life as we know it. We suspect the pandemic will create urgency and accelerate this conversation in tangible, norm-altering ways," he said.

"Our hope is that ASIJ will become even more intentional and bold in its resolve to live our mission and vision, which is fundamentally about not just preparing students for high school graduation and admission into college, but about helping



An Aoba student joins class on iPad.

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Elementary students at Nishimachi hold a virtual "book parade."

them find their ways in life and be productive global citizens who contribute to their communities in meaningful ways. We know ASIJ students will be well served by the institutional recalibration we are experiencing right now."

Indeed, that sense of impetus can be found in the views held by the Saint Maur's administrative team, as expressed by Levy. "Covid-19 has pushed all educators to be even more flexible in how learning can take place. We, as administrators, teachers, students, and families, all appreciate being in school more," she said.

"While this has been an opportunity to become more creative and adapt, as educators we tend to borrow the best bits of systems. I imagine we will do the same from online learning once we return to our physical campus. We are likely to incorporate some of the best from this online experience into that face-to-face experience."

There's a business opportunity here, too. Matsumoto feels that the Covid-19 situation will most likely inject more research and experimental development into platforms that attend to the needs of "smart" education delivered online. "Could this flatten the disparity curve between the haves and have-nots regarding access to educational resources?" he asks.

TIPS

Distance learning due to Covid-19 concerns is likely to be with us for a long while. And even after the pandemic is over, the way we teach and learn is being changed forever. Give that screens will play a bigger role in the lives of students, *The ACCJ Journal* asked these educators for some closing tips to help parents successfully guide their children.

"Parents should allow their child to experience a variety of online learning tools, including educational apps and even YouTube," said Gymboree's Yamada. "However, sitting in front of the screen should not be used as a type of babysitting. Parents should stay involved with their child's learning and be there to support them when needed. Participating in interactive classes and communicating with friends on Zoom are very important for children's cognitive and social development, so parents should encourage these actions whenever possible."

Fradale recommends balancing screen and non-screen time. "Less is more in terms of 'busy work.' Focus should, instead, be on larger, team-based projects. Maximize student-to-student interactions and make sure that teachers interact with students regularly each day," he said.

Routines are also important for maintaining a sense of structure and momentum during distance learning. "Build a new daily routine and stick to it. Revise it every few weeks based on observations and consultation with the school," Otsuka said. "Co-construct agreements with your children about each family member's role and responsibilities as a reference point. Maintain communication with the teachers so that informed decisions can be made to benefit students and families."

Huseynov also stressed this point. "Setting up a routine and completing assigned work on time is essential to limiting parent and child stress," he said. "Students do not need to lose the skills they have already acquired. In fact, they can gain and progress intellectually during distance learning. Schools may be closed, but learning does not have to stop."

O'Neill also encourages strong parental involvement. "Students need time to practice in order to encode what they learn into their long-term memory. Reading something online without having an opportunity to discuss it with an adult is challenging for any student. Parents must allow for extra time away from the screen, and more time for discussion. Children should be given opportunities to engage either with their parents, with peers, or with their teacher."

Roebuck mentioned physical and mental well-being. "Take eye breaks. Stretch your legs. Talk to your child about what they are learning. Turn off the TV at mealtimes. Don't forget play is important. Children are often suffering stress, too, yet cannot express these feelings clearly."

And Saint Maur Elementary Principal Rachel Forbes-Dias emphasized the importance of tending to mental stress. "Without social and emotional needs being met, learning will not be at its best or may not even be able to take place. Do ensure that your child feels safe and nurture the sense of belonging and love that they need," she said.

"Acknowledge your child's feelings and support them in trusting their own feelings. They are grieving what is now lost in their life. Their usual routine, aspects of their relationships, and perhaps their sporting and musical outlets that may have had an important place in their life are gone right now. Give them opportunities to talk about their feelings. Having this outlet should help in allowing them to focus more fully on learning. Find ways to laugh together to ease the stress and realize that our emotions are contagious."

What Kimura said about Aoba's experience sums up well the spirit of professionalism, dedication, and teamwork that can be seen across the international school landscape and which is leading the way on future education. "We believe we were able to come this far due to our families' continued support, the teachers' commitment to our students, our school's professional preparedness in a time of crisis like this, and the firm belief in our school's community capacity to work together during this short-term crisis."

And as McCliggott said: "Teachers should keep it simple and focus on the big ideas, and parents should encourage students to reach out to their teachers and classmates for shared learning. For students, don't worry about what you didn't get, just focus on learning a little more each day—and remember to get some fresh air and physical activity. Education is a lifelong journey and we do well at things we like. So, make it fun." ■



FALL START?

Japan considers changing
its traditional school year

By Akane Okutsu and Rurika Imahashi

NIKKEI
ASIAN REVIEW

Japan's academic calendar starts in April, the same month that the country's corporations welcome their annual batch of young recruits. But now, the coronavirus has rekindled talk of moving the start of the school year to September, which would make it easier for Japanese to study overseas and for its universities to attract foreign students.

Education Minister Koichi Hagiuda said on April 28 that his ministry is "conducting simulations" for revising the April start of the school year "as one option." He also said he needs to coordinate with other ministries, since any revision would "need to be observed by society" as a whole.

Corporations, for example, would have to adjust their recruitment calendar and practices.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe chimed in on April 29 at a meeting of the lower house budget committee. "With such a big change happening, I would like to consider a wide range of options," he said, noting that some have voiced the need for caution because a change in the school calendar would greatly affect children, parents, and society as a whole.

Hagiuda's comments come as a political groundswell is building. The day before he made them, the Democratic Party for the People held a working group meeting for the first

time on the topic. It intends to work with other opposition parties on proposals to submit to the government. The smaller Japan Innovation Party compiled its own proposals the same day.

SOCIAL SHIFT

Such a change could be a catalyst for a "paradigm shift" in Japanese society, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike said in an April 28 video posted online. She noted that it would change the schedule for everything from preschool to job-hunting for university students.

Calling a September start the "global standard," Koike argued that it would help attract foreign students—something that has been an issue for Japanese schools that are out of sync with much of the rest of the world.

"There would be some confusion, but things are already confused now," she said.

Calls for change are growing louder. A group of 17 prefectural governors have urged the government to adopt a September start to the academic year, saying that "now is the time to think boldly."

Miyagi Prefecture Governor Yoshihiro Murai told reporters on April 27 that a permanent shift would "boost globalization." He called the idea "one option" to a problem that has cropped up now that the coronavirus has caused public schools to be closed. As the country finds itself behind the e-learning curve, students are falling behind.

TIME FOR CHANGE

Former University of Tokyo president says September best fits colleges

By Shinichiro Yokoyama

STUDIES STALLED

Japan's public schools have been closed since the beginning of March and are expected to remain so until sometime after the government lifts the state of emergency that it declared on April 7.

In the meantime, only five percent of public schools are holding online classes as of April 16, according to an education ministry survey.

Hagiuda is considered an advocate for a September start to the school year. At the April 28 news conference, he said: "The issues have already been sorted out at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology. In a globalized society, it may be easier to accept international students."

He said it is imperative for the national government, local governments, educators, and the leaders of Japanese industry to speak with one voice.

"The only way to secure opportunities for children to learn," he said, "is to move [the start of the school year] to September."

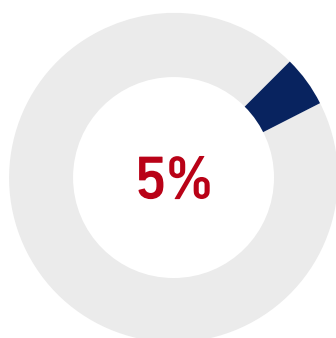
As things stand now, many public schoolteachers are simply giving assignments to their homebound students, who are on their own to complete them.

There are concerns this arrangement will lead to unequal outcomes and that students with few resources will be at a disadvantage when they take the country's competitive entrance exams.

"School days are precious for students," 12th graders wrote on the Spring Once Again website, "and events that we were looking forward to have been canceled as we stay at home."

The website is part of a campaign advocating for a move to September.

The 12th graders also suggested that a revised enrollment date would solve confusion over university entrance exam and application procedures. The campaign had attracted more than 2,300 signatures as of April 26, according to a Twitter post.



of public schools are holding online classes as of April 16

The April start of Japan's school year, which dates back a century, is said to be related to the country's agricultural background.

When Japan pushed modernization during the Meiji Period (1868-1912), farmers were told to submit their taxes in money and not in rice. But it took time for farmers to turn their fall harvests into money. This made it difficult for bureaucrats to form a state budget by January to start the new year.

And so the start of the government's fiscal year was set in April. Later, in 1921, the start of the school year was also aligned to April.

As the coronavirus pandemic forces long-term school shutdowns, calls are growing to ditch this long tradition and push back the start of the school year to September, bringing it in line with the international norm.

Junichi Hamada, a former president of the University of Tokyo, has been a longtime advocate of a September college start. He is surprised by the sudden shift in sentiment but welcomes a broader debate.

"For both politicians and the public, the question will be how to shape Japan after the coronavirus," Hamada told Nikkei. He sees the school-year debate being shaped as part of bold ideas for a post-pandemic Japan.

Hamada's own proposal for moving the matriculation for Japan's top university to fall, made in 2012, was ultimately scrapped amid internal opposition.

Excerpts from the interview follow.

There are growing calls to switch to starting the academic calendar in the fall.

To be honest, it feels rather sudden. I exchanged emails recently with members of the board at the time of our proposal to move admission to fall. We said that our debate at that time laid the groundwork for people's view, which led to talk of fall admissions coming up here and now.

I believe there are two contributing factors.

One is that high schoolers and other children are being denied learning opportunities. Even if we want to solve problems, such as widening achievement gaps and disadvantages for certain children, the current rigid system makes it difficult to do so. People think that taking the plunge and moving to a fall start would enable everything to be solved at once.

The other factor is [the sense] that, as Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike and others have said, now—during the coronavirus crisis—is the time for change. The sense that we can only do this now. The idea of fall admissions emerged from these two factors.



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The new school year and cherry blossoms are closely connected.

GLOBAL GOALS

“Changing the academic year to start in September also makes sense [when it comes to accepting] more foreign students,” said Masato Kamikubo, a Ritsumeikan University professor, who pointed out that the government has been trying to increase the number of international students studying in Japan.

In addition, Kamikubo said, the country’s unique academic year has prevented many Japanese students from studying abroad.

The debate has raged before. The University of Tokyo pushed it in 2011, hoping to align its calendar with those in the United States, the United Kingdom, and many other countries. At the time, the university said the April start to the academic year hindered its efforts to attract foreign students and professors.

But the university’s voice was drowned out by strong opposition from Japanese industry, which did not want to interrupt its traditional recruitment efforts.

In Japan, spring graduations and, weeks later, the start of a new school year, have been part of life since the Meiji Period (1868–1912). Opposition to drastically shifting the calendar remains, and laws would need to be revised.

But Kamikubo said business will be more open to the idea this time around. “Companies have come to realize that Japanese employment practices, like the simultaneous recruiting of new graduates and lifetime employment, are not sustainable. Rather, the new academic year would give companies more opportunities to gain global talent.”

Kamikubo warns that, if Japan misses this opportunity to alter its academic calendar, there will be no second chance, and the country would pay a lofty price. “While the world is becoming more united,” he said, “Japan will be left behind and will lose in the global competition for outstanding human resources, unless it can change now.” ■

What do you think is important to do now?

It comes down to this: How do we deal with the immediate disadvantages that children face?

We should move forward with a variety of steps, such as reorganizing the academic calendar, extending the school year, postponing entrance and qualifying exams, or even providing economic support. If things are still not going well even after exhausting many different measures, then a bold step such as fall admissions will be necessary.

Alternatively, while working with more flexibility and considering various measures under the current system, we could find that introducing a fall start—something we thought was impossible—could prove less difficult than expected.

But that is putting the cart before the horse. First, we need wide-ranging discussions starting from the central point of how to support students.

Fall and September admissions must not end up as mere empty slogans.

The University of Tokyo proposal involved a “gap term” between high school graduation in the spring and college admissions in the fall. But some call for a fall start at all levels, including high school and below.

I still believe fall admissions should just be for university. Changing everything from preschool up through elementary, junior high, and high school all at once would be difficult. The general perception that school starts in the spring remains and switching would be costly.

One of the aims of fall admissions is internationalization [by syncing with academic schedules abroad], but that is mainly an issue at the college level. It would be a shame to lose the gap term by switching to a fall start in high school and below.

If the discussion moves forward, there will likely be more people who disagree on the details.

Disagreement is certainly reasonable. It’s important not to just point out problems, but to discuss how to overcome them.

For both politicians and the public, the question is how to shape Japan after the coronavirus, and how determined we are to take the bold steps necessary to create a new society.

I believe that is why governors are so open to fall admissions. Without that feeling, our society will stagnate.

There seem to be few opinions coming from people in education.

For teachers on the ground, I believe that there’s a strong sense that the problem is too big for them to speak up about, and that they are instead focusing on concrete things they can do, such as online classes. They probably also feel that, because this is a nationwide issue that involves the foundation of how the system is set up, the country as a whole should act.

But universities can be more flexible about accepting students in fall at their discretion, and I hope they do so voluntarily.

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Expert advice for
expats in despair

By C Bryan Jones



Most of us have lived through a disaster or crisis, so have some understanding of how to cope and stay resilient. But no one is immune to the effects of stress and pressure, and the coronavirus pandemic is a crisis like few in our lifetimes.

The disruption and devastation caused by the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of March 11, 2011, lingers in the minds of the country. But those terrible events and their impact were limited compared with the effects of Covid-19. What is happening now is causing mental health challenges on an enormous scale.

Japan's suicide hotlines are reporting a surge in calls from people concerned about health and financial matters. According to Kyodo News on May 13, the Federation of Inochi no Denwa, comprised of some 50 suicide prevention organizations employing some 6,000 counselors across Japan, said the number of incoming calls its members have received has soared since the government declared a state of emergency in April. Saitama Inochi no Denwa says 70–80 percent of the 70 or so calls it receives each day have been related to Covid-19.

For non-Japanese residents, such hotlines may be less accessible due to language barriers. Fortunately, the international community in Japan is supported by many experts who provide counseling in English and other languages. Thanks to them, expats have a place to turn when they need help. *The ACCJ Journal* spoke with some to learn what they are hearing from those affected by the crisis and for tips on how to cope.

COVID IMPACT

Vickie Skorji, Lifeline director at TELL, explained that we have all been experiencing what is known as traumatic stress response, something that happens to everyone during a disaster. “As we adjust to all the changes and uncertainty that Covid-19 is placing on our lives, our stress response is in overdrive. And it is being stimulated by all the news reports and social media posts listing the number of cases, deaths, etc.,” she said. “It is important to recognize that everyone is stressed and pushed at the moment.

“On the Lifeline, people were initially worried about daycare, jobs, income, and why their workplace was still making them come into the office. We also heard from a lot of university students who were worried about whether they should stay in Japan or go home. Everyone was impacted,” Skorji said. “Now we are hearing from people who are stressed from working at home and trying to manage children and other matters. Relationships are strained, people are worried about finding work and paying bills, and those with mental health problems are feeling overwhelmed.”

MOUNTING PRESSURE

As the crisis stretches on, the stress of quarantine as well as the worries of job and income loss can send us on a downward course.

“If you notice that your relationships are becoming more strained—perhaps you are becoming more irritated with work colleagues or are fighting more with your spouse or children, this could mean that you are not taking enough breaks or setting boundaries on your working hours,” Skorji said. “You may also be feeling increasingly tired, not sleeping well, or having trouble switching off from news or social media. These are all signs that you are not coping well and are close to burnout.”

She explained that learning to understand how our body responds to physical and emotional stress is vital. “Putting in place healthy coping strategies is key to our ability to ride out this storm. Otherwise, we will burn out and our immune system will become more vulnerable—something we all want to avoid.”

Andrew Grimes, a clinical psychologist who is founder and director of Tokyo Counseling Services, warns of the stress that can be caused by the continuous stream of news reports. “Under any and all circumstances, do not watch or listen to constant news or podcasts about Covid-19. Spend up to 30 minutes each day checking on the situation of your folks and friends back home before you call them.

“Here in Japan, in the evenings, you can keep up with daily current developments by watching NHK news in English at 7:00 p.m. on NHK World. But, other than those times, keep your mind and heart on things that are more important to you. This will help you relax.”

COPING

Staying home all the time removes the framework that holds our days together and helps us move from task to task. That itself can cause stress, and Skorji emphasized the importance of maintaining structure.

“Keep a good routine of when you get up, start work, take breaks, and finish. Also, what time you go to bed at night. Getting at least eight hours of sleep is important, as is eating well and keeping active,” she said. “And for couples, it is important to sit down and figure out how to balance work and children’s schooling, and support each other.”

Skorji also recommends limiting the time you spend looking at news and social media. “Learning to switch off—perhaps meditating, doing deep breathing exercises, or yoga—are great way to decrease your stress levels,” she said, pointing us for more advice to telljp.com/covid-19-coping-tips

Michael Nevans, director of psychological services at Tokyo Mental Health, said that if we look at the changes we are facing as a systemic shift, the situation becomes less problem-saturated and more solution-oriented. “This is because systems organize themselves in a way that is sustainable. When people spend less time out of the house for work and more time in the home—working or otherwise—the rest of the system will shift to accommodate this.”

The issues they are seeing at Tokyo Mental Health are often related to families and individuals growing into these new systemic roles, Nevans said. “I think that, because this

change was unexpected and thrust upon people, they are not well resourced to transition. They are getting stuck between old patterns and expectations and the new expectations and requirements of this ‘new normal’ that is taking shape. When you sprinkle this with poor communication and setting of boundaries, you wind up with dysfunction.”

Finding a way to accept these changes and shifting systems is a must, he explained, and offered some tips:

- Set boundaries: learn to say no and mean it
- Communicate effectively: listen more than you speak; be understanding and empathetic
- Segment: create transition times from one activity to the next, especially when changing roles

Role changes could be when you go from doing parenting tasks to having a moment with your partner, or from being in work mode to being in home mode.

Grimes encourages everyone living with family to continue taking an interest in what their children are doing. “Not only is it important to learn from your children—especially teenagers—what is important to them and what is worrying them, it can also keep you happy during this difficult time,” he said. “As much as possible, do things with them more than your previous business schedules allowed prior to Covid-19.”

While some people are finding themselves with lots of free time due to layoffs or restrictions on work hours, others are seeing exponential increases in workload as companies try to maintain the same level of output with fewer staff. In such cases,

working on the weekend may seem unavoidable. Grimes says not to do it.

“As much as possible, do not use weekends to do work. Take this chance to share meals and build stronger family connections. Tell your children about your parents and grandparents to ensure that they have a good understanding of their family history and heritage. In time, they will pass this on to their children and grandchildren,” he said.

“If you are single and living alone, stay in touch with your friends and reach out to those you shared time with in your past. You’ll discover many happy memories and be reminded of all the fun times and love you received over the years. This can also help stave off feelings of stress and worry.”



PHOTO: INNINA YOGA

Learning to switch off—perhaps meditating, doing deep breathing exercises, or yoga—are great way to decrease your stress levels



VICKIE SKORJI
Lifeline director
TELL



ANDREW GRIMES
Founder and director
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MICHAEL NEVANS
Director of psychological services
Tokyo Mental Health

PITFALLS

Nevans said a very important topic that he has not seen discussed much is excessive dissociation. “It is the cornerstone of all our toxic—and sometimes destructive—behaviors,” he said. “This is when people zone out. They can leave their body—meaning they do not feel the physical reaction of their emotions or thoughts—and they intentionally do things to avoid their feelings. Excessive dissociation is huge right now.”

Examples in daily life include:

- Excessive drinking
- Binge-watching TV
- Emotional eating
- Excessive online shopping
- Online gambling

To avoid dissociation, Nevans says to meditate and be mindful.

“Check your thoughts by adding an awareness moment throughout the day. Take a moment to breathe before your meals and check into your body. Ask yourself if you really want to do an activity or if you are just falling into routine behavior due to boredom or stress,” he explained.

“Ask yourself, ‘Do I really want that drink?’ Maybe you decide to have it, but to have just one or two servings with dinner. Basically, align your mind and thoughts with your body and heart. You will find that you are much more present and deliberate in your actions.”

Grimes also pointed out how excessive use of technology and lack of work boundaries can be detrimental. He encourages people to set a schedule for when they will stop working each day and to rediscover their passions.

“On evenings during the week, decide what time you will stop looking at your computer and smartphone. Use the valuable time after that to enjoy your favorite authors and read books about your hobbies and interests,” he said. “Remember your passions and explore them more than before. Listen to your favorite inspiring music and watch your favorite comedy programs from the past, as well as ones you want to keep up with. If your family back home are also watching, it’s great for conversation.”

The bottom line, he said, is to avoid looking at your computer and smartphone screen at least two hours before you want and need to sleep. If you don’t, your brain will be unable to rest. And everyone agrees that getting proper sleep is important for managing stress during this crisis.

STRESSING THE STRESSED

While no one is immune to the pressures of this historic upheaval, Skorji said her biggest concern regarding mental health and the pandemic is the way it is putting additional pressure on those already struggling.

“I see the impact of Covid-19 as a long-running issue, and I worry that people will become exhausted and depressed. We may see an increase in suicides. Already, I am seeing an increase in people feeling suicidal on the Lifeline,” she explained.

“I am worried about the people who already have mental health problems, and the impact of the increased stressors and pressures in their lives. Also, about how long it will take the economy to recover and people to get their lives and jobs back.”

Nevans said that things get bad when people think they have no options or opportunities. “I think hopelessness and helplessness will become inevitable feelings and thoughts as we enter into the third month of this thing. When will we return to normal? What will the new normal look like for me? These questions will grow,” he explained.

“This is why I encourage psychological flexibility through acceptance whenever possible. It creates a resiliency to anxiety and depression. Like a palm tree bending in the storm, it stands strong and rooted, rising tall when the winds pass.”

STRONGER TOMORROW

While the coronavirus pandemic has brought great hardship to individuals and businesses, not everything about the disruption has to be bad. In some respects, it is the pause button that some people needed to assess the paths they’ve been traveling.

“This disaster has given us an opportunity to look at the way we conduct our work, schooling, how we eat out, how we get together,” said Skorji. “While it has created a lot of chaos and uncertainty, we have also seen people be very creative in finding new ways to connect, hold classes, operate businesses, and celebrate special occasions. Hopefully, we can implement many of these ideas going forward, providing people with more choices and opportunities.”

She believes it could also help us learn how to better deal with daily life. “We talk about stress and the stress response a lot, but most people don’t really pay that much attention to how they are coping with their day-to-day stressors and the impact these have on their bodies,” she said. “I hope that, going forward, we all have a better appreciation and understanding of this topic and how stressors impact our bodies, mental health, and relationships.”

Nevans agrees: “If we can see the situation from a place of strength and empowerment, we can find a way to make it a win. I tell a lot of people that this is the chance for new behavioral patterns to start, for new world views to emerge, and for people to really redefine themselves in their systems. All of this is possible when you see yourself as a powerful creator in your life, taking responsibility for your growth. For a lot of people, this growth will require new thinking and outlooks in addition to flexibility.”

He stressed that it won’t be easy, though.

“Change is always possible and always happening. But change—even good change—is hard. You need to be focused and keep control of yourself so that you can navigate the changing world to your benefit. Otherwise, you will fall victim to the change and get into that hopeless, helpless place.

“You will have moments of feeling defeated and run down. You will feel miserable, sometimes. But it is on the other side of that coin that you will find your indomitable spirit, the part of you that will live, survive, and thrive. Keep your hope alive—even if it is a flicker at times. Remember, you are the powerful creator of your world and you have the tools necessary to be successful.” ■

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Nichi Glucan is an allergen-free supplement made from black yeast, and it has been on the market since 1996. Dr. Samuel JK Abraham, head of R&D at GN Corporation, explained how the supplement was developed. "In the late 1980s, Professor Noboru Fujii identified a poly-extreme tolerant fungi called *Aureobasidium pullulans*. Such a highly stress-tolerant organism was expected to produce something that could help beat stress upon consumption as well. Further advancements in research thereafter yielded the *Aureobasidium pullulans* strain AFO-202, which could be successfully cultivated and made to produce the Beta 1,3-1,6-glucan in a pure form." This glucan—a chain of carbohydrates—has a molecular structure that binds to intestinal cells, which then absorb the glucan.

Nichi Glucan is manufactured using a process that requires no extra purification steps. "This AFO-202 strain of Beta 1,3-1,6-glucan is the active ingredient of Nichi Glucan. One of its unique advantages is that it is produced in a pure form by the black yeast, unlike other beta glucans,

which are extracted from sources such as baker's yeast or shiitake mushrooms. In terms of purity, Nichi Glucan stands above the rest," said Abraham. He added that the water used to produce the black yeast is obtained from the Niyodogawa River in Kochi Prefecture—the river is said to be one of the purest in Japan.

Manufactured in a Good Manufacturing Practice-certified factory in Japan, the product has been approved by Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. Nichi Glucan contains 42 milligrams of the beta glucan in one sachet. It comes in granules, and can be taken orally or dissolved in water, other beverages, or even in soup.



HEALTH BENEFITS

Abraham explained the many health benefits that the supplement offers: "Nichi Glucan is a three-in-one product. In our studies, we have found that it helps with the control of blood sugar and high cholesterol, and immune enhancement in both cancer patients and healthy elderly people." He added: "It enhances immunity and balances the metabolism, thereby helping to overcome lifestyle-related conditions."

Abraham explained that the supplement can be used by a wide range of customers: "Nichi Glucan can be consumed by all ages, but would be helpful to those who have weak immune systems—especially due to aging or stress . . . and those who are concerned about lifestyle-related conditions." It is also proven to be helpful for pregnant women and those who have recently given birth.

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Since 2018, EastWood Country Club has been home to the Jarman International Charity Cup, sponsored by inbound tourism consultants Jarman International KK. The monthly tournament raises funds for Mirai no Mori, a non-profit organization that creates fun, educational outdoor programs for deserving youth throughout Japan. We invite a growing list of beginner-to-advanced golfers living in Japan, as well as those here on visits, who want to grow their Japan network via this welcoming event. Please contact us if you would like to be added to the list.

During Japan's effort to quell Covid-19, the government requests that in-person interactions be reduced by 80 percent.

For this reason, we won't be holding the usual Charity Cup—with lots of players—for the time being. As of April, we've added a "virtual" aspect. This allows small groups and individual players to enjoy the thrill of friendly competition while maintaining social distance. Please visit bit.ly/ewc-jarman to join in the cup and maybe win the Jarman Trophy and monthly prize of ¥100,000! ■



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SUSTAINABLE SERVICE

RIVERET crafts bamboo into eco-friendly tableware



Many wood and other natural products made in Japan, such as small sake cups, tend to have a very Japanese look and feel. And because they are seldom dishwasher safe, they can be a hassle to clean. Takamichi Okuda had an idea to change that.

He wanted to use his company's bamboo business to create stylish, natural products for everyday use. He also wanted them to be sustainable and aligned with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, including responsible production and consumption.

"We wanted to make something more stylish that would appeal to Westerners," said Okuda, who is CEO of Nakayoshi Shoji Co., Ltd. The company's main business is making wooden tableware and disposable bamboo chopsticks for convenience stores and restaurants. "We also wanted to achieve sustainability, and to try to make it possible for people to easily use natural products."

The result is RIVERET tableware, a collection of 60 carefully crafted bamboo products ranging from drinking vessels to plates. They have a simple, understated beauty typical of Japan but come in shapes familiar to Americans and Europeans, such as Bourgogne goblets, Champagne flutes, and martini vessels.

EAST MEETS WEST

The brand, launched in 2013, takes its name from the word for a small river and is meant to echo the graceful curves of a mountain stream and the natural environment of a forest. The products are durable, eco-friendly, and dishwasher safe thanks to a special waterproof coating technology developed in-house.

RIVERET is the brainchild of Okuda, who recently inherited the family business from his mother. Originally, he had no interest in the chopsticks business. After college, he

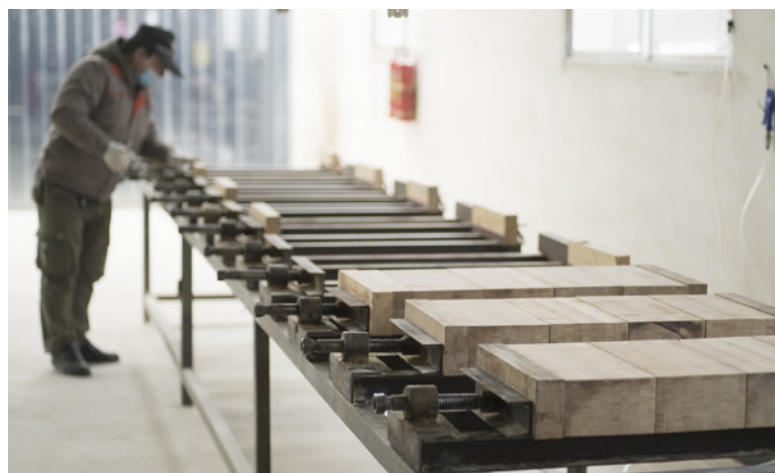
joined Omron Corporation, the factory automation and electronics company.

But as his mother's company grew and she got older, he was asked to return. He said he would do so on one condition: that he could start a new brand of more artistic bamboo products. He also thought it would be smart to diversify the company's business.

Granted his wish, Okuda asked his three in-house designers to come up with various stylish products—mostly drinking vessels.

IDEAL MATERIAL

All RIVERET products are made of moso bamboo, the fattest species, grown on a mountain in southeastern China owned by the company since 1993. No pesticides or chemical fertilizers are used.



Blocks of bamboo are carved into different shapes.



RIVERET's children's collection is called agney.

Bamboo, Okuda said, is an ideal material for tableware. It's durable, sustainable, lightweight, and has an attractive natural hue. It is technically a grass—not a tree—so it grows much faster than wood, taking only three to five years to reach maturity compared with 10 to 30 years.

It is also twice as strong as wood. Nakayoshi Shoji's high-tech lathes can carve bamboo down to a thickness

of 2 millimeters at the lip of a cup, and it won't chip as easily as wood. And if you drop a cup made of bamboo, it won't break like glass.

Replanting is not needed because moso bamboo propagates itself through its underground rhizomes, or root systems. This means it can be continuously and efficiently renewed with minimal land use. And it doesn't contribute to deforestation, a major cause of environmental problems and global warming.

As for the chopsticks business, Okuda agrees that it's best not to use disposable utensils but admits that it is sometimes unavoidable for mass-market foods. In such cases, bamboo is a much better choice of material than wood because it is more sustainable, he said.

The company is trying to be green in other ways, too. The Saitama plant is due to switch to solar power in August.

TAKING SHAPE

To make the products, the bamboo, which is hollow inside, is cut into strips and glued together into blocks using a safe adhesive and method that they developed. These blocks are then put into lathes at the company's Chinese factories and carved into various shapes according to detailed specifications.

Okuda brought technological know-how that he gained at Omron to his new project. From the start, he wanted to industrialize the production process to make it more efficient without undermining the products' artistic look and feel. "By hand, you can only make three items a day, so we needed to industrialize," he said.

Half of the carving is done by computer-guided machines and half by hand, using special molds, Okuda said. Cylindrical drinking vessels are spun on a rotating lathe while the plates are carved by machines that cut into the bamboo from above. "The Chinese expertise of those who were trained at our company is impressive," he said. "We have workers who have been doing this for us for years now. They're very good at making these shapes."

SPECIAL COATING

The carved cups and dishes are then shipped to the company's factory in Saitama Prefecture for the final steps: coating, polishing, packaging, and shipping.

Japanese workers spray each item six times with Lohas coat, a special coating technology developed at the company that uses green tea to suppress E. coli and other bacteria and makes the products waterproof. It is compatible with Japan's Food Sanitation Act. The bamboo itself also contains properties that make it bacteria resistant, Okuda said.

ENHANCE AND EXPAND

All RIVERET designs are made in-house, and some containers are shaped to enhance the drinking experience. For example, the beer vessel, with its slightly concave contour, maintains a foam cap for longer. This delays the oxidization of the beer and enhances its flavor.

So far the company has been focused on the Japanese market, where the café au lait cups are bestsellers. But it has started to expand overseas, selling its

products online in Switzerland and at a shop in Brooklyn, New York. Okuda envisions opening RIVERET stores in Paris and New York. "We want to be one of the natural brands in overseas markets," he said.

In Japan, the products can be bought at riveret.jp or other online stores, or at various shops and department stores listed on the website. The company even has a children's line called agney, with pint-sized plates, cups, and a car-shaped bento box.

Most items come in a light and slightly darker hue—often with an accented two-tone color scheme—and are delivered in attractive boxes. The products make handsome gifts and can be personalized with a laser-engraved name or initials.

Stylish, durable, and eco-friendly, RIVERET's tableware makes a handsome—and conscientious—addition to anyone's home. ■



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HAVE A BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

While we headed into 2020 with optimism for business, the year started with the rapid spread of the novel coronavirus. As Covid-19 made its way around the globe, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic on March 11.

Some sovereign states responded with measures to curb the outbreak. These have ranged from travel bans, mass quarantine, and lockdowns of entire cities. These steps have affected businesses in many ways. Some have seen a decline in demand for their goods and services. Others have struggled with an increase in demand that they can no longer meet.

Industries adversely affected include manufacturing, tourism, leisure, and aviation. Hospitals and traders of masks, sanitary products, and other personal protective equipment could not accommodate the sudden increase in the demand for their goods and services.

RETHINK

The pandemic has disrupted operations to such an extent that many companies are reconsidering their business continuity and sustainability plans.

Were companies prepared for this pandemic? Mostly, they were not. According to a survey by global research and advisory company Gartner, Inc., only 12 percent of more than 1,500 respondents believe their businesses were highly prepared for the impact of coronavirus, and just two percent think their business can continue as normal. This highlights the huge range of businesses that could be affected by the outbreak.

For the professional services industry, one of the measures that is commonly in place is telecommuting. Accounting and law firms can easily adopt a telecommuting policy, because accountants and lawyers have laptops that give them the flexibility to work anywhere.

Some companies, however, have had a hard time implementing remote work arrangements—especially business process outsourcing companies that rely on desktop computers as workstations. Some rushed to acquire laptops to continue operations, a move that entails additional costs. Had the pandemic been considered in the business continuity plan, such a need may have been avoided.

In times of adversity, a company that has a good business continuity plan will still enjoy profits, while those that don't plummet into bankruptcy.

To prepare for the next pandemic or disaster, it is important that companies revisit their plans. A good business continuity plan provides a comprehensive guide in a worst-case scenario and should at least include:

- Enumeration of resources and how they can be utilized in relation to the company's action plans
- Impact analysis which enumerates possible threats and their corresponding impact on operations
- Benchmarks that provide resilience insights, normally including yields such as the maximum tolerable period of disruption, maximum tolerable downtime, and others that would provide relevant information
- Assessment of preparedness
- How core operations can continue while the company is undertaking business continuity measures

Considering the going concern assumption of the company, it is favorable to have a business continuity plan as part of the risk management process. In times of adversity, a company that

has a good business continuity plan will still enjoy profits, while those that don't plummet into bankruptcy. ■



Harold Young is a secondee to the Tokyo office of Grant Thornton Japan. He previously worked at Punongbayan & Araullo GT in the Philippines, where he was involved in financial statements audits for the real estate, manufacturing, and business process outsourcing industries.



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Japan policy updates translated
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DIET DAILIES

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

HOW WILL CORONAVIRUS IMPACT 2020 TAX REVENUES?

Fears have surfaced in the Ministry of Finance that, due to the domestic recession brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, tax revenues for FY2020 will need to be adjusted downwards. Corporate, personal, and consumption taxes are expected to decline. A drop in spending means hopes for increased revenue from last October's consumption tax hike are fading. Projections had already been adjusted down due to the US-China trade friction and natural disasters of 2019, raising the specter of two difficult years in a row.

Tax revenues for the 2020 fiscal year had been expected to rise by about ¥1 trillion over 2019 figures to ¥63.5 trillion. But this presumed gross domestic product growth of 1.4 percent. Those figures considerably exceed the 0.5-percent growth projected by the private sector, and analysts have voiced skepticism.

Moreover, the actual GDP for the final quarter of 2019, released by the Cabinet Office in February, showed a decline from the previous quarter of 1.6 percent. This was blamed largely on the poor performance of export-dependent manufacturers affected by US-China trade friction and the consumption tax increase, which put a damper on spending. "So, the coronavirus is truly like bees stinging a crying face," said a ministry bureaucrat, using a Japanese expression meaning to go from bad to worse.

In the initial estimate for FY2020 tax revenues, an unprecedented increase of ¥21.719 trillion over the previous fiscal year had been expected. But if the economy is hit by the double whammy of Covid-19 and a drop in consumption tax revenue, no major growth can be expected.

On February 28, the Daiwa Institute of Research released an estimate that, due to the coronavirus, individual consumption during the four months from February to May would drop by ¥3.8 trillion—considerably more than the ¥2.6 trillion following the Great East Japan

Earthquake and Tsunami of March 11, 2011. A Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry bureaucrat remarked, "There are no circumstances that give cause for optimism."

FINANCIAL SERVICES AGENCY

WILL MY NUMBER AND BANK ACCOUNT LINKING BE MADE MANDATORY?

The government has continued its deliberations on a system that would require the linking of financial accounts with each citizen's 12-digit ID, called My Number. Following a cabinet meeting on January 17, it came out that Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications Sanae Takaichi had requested that the Ministry of Finance and the Financial Services Agency (FSA) consider such a move. The government had been planning to issue concrete guidelines during 2020, ahead of enacting revisions in the relevant law that would provide for a unified number system.

Takaichi explained the need for such as system based on personal experience: "When a parent passes away, in some cases, the family must endure difficulties because they don't know where the accounts were held, or they are unable to locate the bank passbooks. There were cases at the time

of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami when account passbooks were washed away, and people didn't know where the accounts were."

In response to a reporter's question as to whether linking should be mandatory, Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso said: "With the diffusion of information technology, the My Number card ought to be usable in various ways, for example as a credit card, a substitute for a health insurance card, or for storing residential registration details. I'd definitely like to elicit people's cooperation to accomplish this."

The FSA, however, flew off the handle, with one senior bureaucrat complaining: "Takaichi's remarks were made without any grassroots lobbying. Under the present system, a depositor must give their consent when allowing a personal account to be linked to My Number."

Another bureaucrat at the FSA pointed out: "Without any clear benefits, people will just interpret the government's rationale to mean it's aimed at facilitating collection of taxes."

In 2018, securities account registrations were linked to My Number, but as nearly everyone in the country has a bank account the proposed requirement is more complex. For the law to be revised during the regular session of the Diet next year, it will be necessary to indicate a clear direction and engage the public by this fall. ■



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