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# RESET BUTTON



Christopher Bryan Jones  
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Sometimes in life and business, we allow momentum to carry us forward without really assessing why we are doing something, or if we're on the right path. There are so many demands on our time that finding opportunities to reflect can be difficult. Sometimes we just need to hit pause.

That's what the coronavirus pandemic has allowed many people to do. One of the silver linings of this terrible outbreak is that Covid-19 has served as a sort of reset button. The forced pause in activity and disruption to routines has pulled the blinds open on how we live our lives and conduct our businesses. And it is likely to lead to positive change.

## WORK

In terms of business, we've seen entrenched workflows upended and long-discussed-but-uncomfortable changes rapidly set into motion. Surprisingly to many, ripping the Band-Aid off wasn't so painful after all.

While there is much to be said for establishing a routine and sticking to it, finding new ways of doing things can spur innovation. This is true not only on a company level, but on an individual one as well. I have my favorite tools that make my work easier, but I also enjoy trying out new ones to see if they might be even better.

This is not the case for everyone, and often people get so stuck in their old ways that they actually make things harder as they dismiss other approaches that could provide great benefit. In companies, this can trickle down from the top and impact everyone. Finding a way through the pandemic has made considering new ideas a must.

## LIFE

Relationships have also been strained by Covid-19. Some will not survive the crisis. Others will be stronger. For families and partners who live under the same roof, the chance to spend more time together has allowed them to reconnect and rediscover the joys of the past. Often, amid the rat race of modern life, these connections get lost.

For those who live apart, the quarantines and stay-at-home requests have been challenging. In some cases, we have not been able to see loved ones since March. And as each week passes, that distance can cause rifts and weaken the relationship. But that is, in itself,

a form of reflection that may only be possible when you are forced to pause.

## BALANCE

Ultimately, the chance to stop and look around at how and why we do things will lead to a better work-life balance—that elusive goal we so often talk about but rarely achieve. Through this period of reflection, we can find the best path. For some, the pandemic may represent a chance for a slight course correction. Others may find it to be a barrier separating their pre- and post-Covid-19 lives. But the end result can be positive.

And from the business perspective, it's as if an operating system update has been installed and we can now enjoy new features and improved tools.

What the future holds remains to be seen, but I have no doubt that we are better prepared for the years to come as a result of this crisis than we were before. Two decades into the 21st century, we're finally letting go of entrenched 20th-century ideas about how companies must operate. It just took a tragic, global disruption to reveal the reset button. ■

A flagship publication of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ), *The ACCJ Journal* is a business magazine with a 57-year history.



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# My New Normal



PRESIDENT

By Peter Fitzgerald  
ACCJ President

In addition to representing the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) as president, I also run Google Japan G.K. Words—and their ability to link and unlock content and ideas—are at the core of our business.

So, alongside the personal and business challenges we are all facing, the words and language that have defined Covid-19 have played an outsized role in my crisis experience. For a technology executive who spent his formative years studying English literature instead of engineering, this has been a not-unwelcome diversion.

Terms such as teleworking, lockdown, and self-isolation have taken on new meaning and relevance. And social distancing seems to have emerged from nowhere to become central to our personal and professional lives.

But what has most captured my imagination is the idea of a “new normal.” Almost since the crisis began, we’ve been hearing about this new normal—an umbrella term covering social distancing, teleworking, and any other aspect of navigating daily life in a time of pandemic. The term itself is meant to represent the idea that we may never completely return to our pre-crisis lifestyles, and that we may need to reset our idea of what constitutes the ordinary.

## WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Normal comes from the Latin word *norma* (carpenter’s square). It came to mean something standard, and later something expected. So, when we talk about a new normal, we’re really talking about new expectations. And when you shift your thinking from new normal to new expectations, that’s where it gets really interesting for me.

Here is my new normal:

After proving that teams—and, in fact, entire businesses—can function at a distance, I expect workstyle reform and workforce productivity programs to take on a new sense of urgency.

After realizing, in very pointed ways, that traditional business processes aren’t simply inefficient but can actually put staff in harm’s way, I expect we’ll see digital placed at the center of business design in a way never seen in Japan.

After experiencing—courtesy of teleworking—the challenges of juggling a household and a career, I expect a generation of salarymen may approach issues of gender equality with greater sensitivity and understanding.

After seeing the world’s healthcare systems overwhelmed by coronavirus patients, I expect governments and the private sector will seek a new way forward in medicine and public policy. Imagine what a pandemic could look like if the entire population had access to telemedicine instead of being forced to overcrowd hospitals. Imagine if our policies and actions could be shaped not by selective testing but by taking the nation’s temperature in real time?

After being confined behind borders, masks, and ultimately the doors of our own homes, I expect we’ll break with old patterns and seek to establish new ones.

For businesses, the fragility of supply chains has been laid bare, and the reliability and utility of partners has been tested. The Covid-19 crisis has exposed both risk and opportunity in the interconnectedness of our business communities and I expect we’ll see new collaborations and shared innovations that break the silos of industry sectors. And, I expect, despite the tactical moves to isolate nations, we’ll continue to make progress on the regulatory and trade front toward level playing fields that support global collaboration.

Finally, having been kept from in-person meetings for too long, I expect to temper a technology executive’s faith in all things digital with a renewed appreciation for the value of real human interaction. For a while, at least, the lament “this meeting could have been a memo” will feel more like appreciation for not missing an opportunity to connect.

That’s my new normal. What’s yours? ■

When you shift your thinking from new normal to new expectations, that’s where it gets really interesting.



# New Digital Agenda

## ACCJ task force focuses on innovation and growth in Japan

By Jim Foster



Japan arguably has the world's best internet infrastructure, and deployment of 5G networks is moving along steadily. Thanks to a flexible and innovation-friendly regulatory environment, many well-known US companies—from Amazon to Cisco to Google—have entered the Japanese market and achieved significant success. In parallel, Japan has produced its own digital technology leaders, such as SoftBank Group Corp. and Rakuten, Inc.

But the overall pace of progress in the market during this period has been uneven, and there is growing concern that Japan—once a dominant player in the development and application of new technologies—is falling behind others in Asia and elsewhere.

### WORKING TOGETHER

US companies have an enormous stake in the continued growth and vitality of the Japanese economy, and there is a long history of technology sharing and collaboration with their Japanese counterparts to develop new markets in Japan and other Asian countries.

A little more than a decade ago, in November 2009, the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) issued a white paper entitled *Achieving the Full Potential of the Internet Economy in Japan*. It contained more than 70 specific recommendations for how the US and Japanese governments and private sectors could work together at that time to develop and grow the internet as a platform for economic growth and social innovation.

Today, the internet is a critical part of the business world's basic infrastructure, so the key issue is how to promote further innovation and growth. How can we help Japanese society through the emerging digital economy using technologies such as cloud-based services and artificial intelligence (AI)?

Considering the rapidly shifting environment, the ACCJ Board of Governors recently approved the formation of a new task force to research and draft a white paper to be entitled *New Digital Agenda for Innovation and Growth in Japan*.

We will examine new business and policy challenges around which US and Japanese companies might center their bilateral cooperation on Japan's digital economy, and offer recommendations for areas in which international policy coordination can be strengthened. The goal is to facilitate more rapid deployment and utilization of transformative digital technologies, such as cloud computing, Big Data, and AI, in key sectors of the economy, including healthcare, financial services, logistics, and transportation.

### DIALOGUE MATTERS

An important focus will be the development of an action-oriented agenda for the US–Japan Digital (formerly Internet) Economy Dialogue, an annual forum that brings together the governments and business communities of the two nations, represented by the ACCJ and Keidanren, the Japan Business Federation. Over the past decade, the dialogue has been alternately convened in Tokyo and Washington, DC, with the most recent meeting taking place in the Japanese capital last October.

The dialogue has been successful in driving enhanced cooperation between the ACCJ and Keidanren, in large part because it has set an agenda that reflects the broad range of common interests among US and Japanese companies rather than just the areas of friction. Exemplary of this was the *US–Japan Internet Economy Private Working Group Joint Statement* in 2018, which listed as shared concerns:

- Cooperation on cybersecurity
- Joint action against data localization regulation
- Harmonization of data protection rules
- US–Japan leadership in shaping the global digital environment

In May, Keidanren released a white paper calling for the digital transformation of Japan's economy and society. This was followed in June by a report from the Cabinet Office outlining how digitalization is at the core of its Society 5.0 vision.



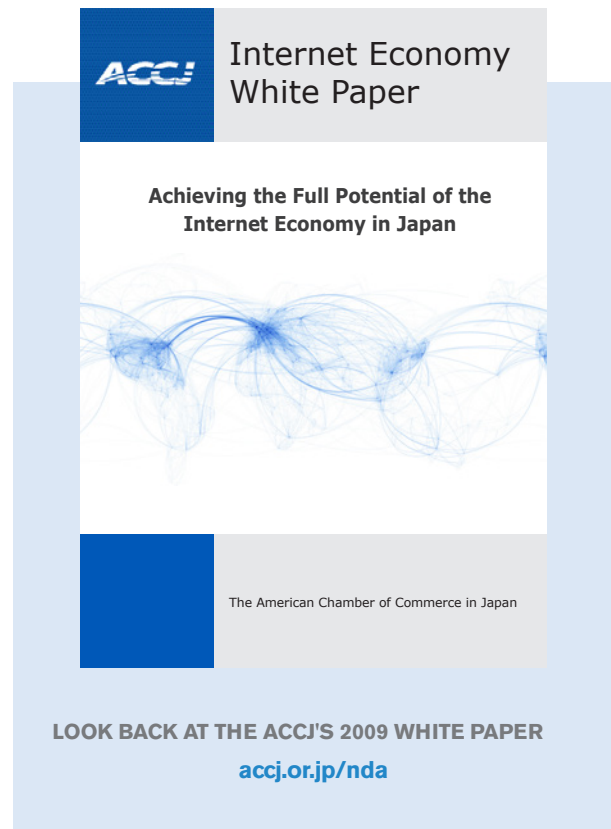
**We will examine new business and policy challenges around which US and Japanese companies might center their bilateral cooperation on Japan's digital economy.**

Much of this activity can be linked to Japan's planned hosting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Innovation Governance Summit in April 2021, which is seen as an opportunity to reinforce the country's role in setting international rules for the global digital economy.

#### **NEW DIGITAL AGENDA**

The ACCJ's new white paper will be released in the first quarter of 2021 with an eye to staking out a role for the chamber in this ongoing discussion in Japan. It will underscore the commitment of the US business community to supporting the Japanese government's goals of rapidly advancing the digitalization of the nation's economy and society by:

- Reviewing 10 years of US–Japan cooperation on the internet economy
- Proposing new steps to accelerate the utilization of transformative digital tools
- Advocating new initiatives in key sectors where progress in digitization is lagging
- Strengthening US–Japan cooperation on a shared global digital agenda
- Profiling top US companies taking part in the growth of Japan's digital economy



The task force is chaired by James Miller, director for public policy at Amazon Web Services, and Jim Foster, who led the research and drafting of the 2009 white paper during his time with Microsoft Japan, will serve as a senior advisor.

The group will coordinate closely with the Digital Economy Committee, led by Netflix K.K. Director and Head of Public Policy Yoshitaka Sugihara and Caterpillar Japan LLC Executive Director Megumi Tsukamoto, as well as the many other ACCJ committees involved with digital-economy and societal issues.

We are looking for subject matter experts from inside the chamber to serve in leadership positions in a number of key functional, technology, and policy areas, such as financial services, healthcare, transportation, telecommunications, AI, robotics, cloud computing, data privacy, cybersecurity, and competition law. ■

ACCJ members interested in being part of the task force should visit the task force web page: [accj.or.jp/nda](https://accj.or.jp/nda)

# Beyond Two-meter Spacing

Covid-19 Opportunities and Impact on the Japanese Workplace

By Megan Casson

**T**he effect of Covid-19 on the global economy has forced organizations across industries to evolve—rapidly in the moment, but with a more measured eye on the long term. Japan is known for its long office hours and unwavering dedication of workers. Yet when the pandemic took hold, that tradition was shaken and most companies were forced to allow work from home.

Now that the state of emergency has been lifted and the country has begun its journey back to normality—or at least a new normal—social distancing measures must remain in place to ensure the safety of workers and help prevent a second wave of infections. But how will that be done in offices designed for the free interaction of large groups of people?

On June 4, the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) Real Estate Committee hosted a webinar entitled Covid-19: Opportunities and Impact on the Japanese Workplace: Beyond Two-Meter Spacing. Sarah Bader, principal and representative in Japan at Gensler International, Ltd., Ryann Thomas, partner at PwC Tax Japan, and Daichi Amano, creative director for Asia-Pacific at global design and architecture firm Gensler, discussed the strategies companies can use to balance working from home and returning to the office.

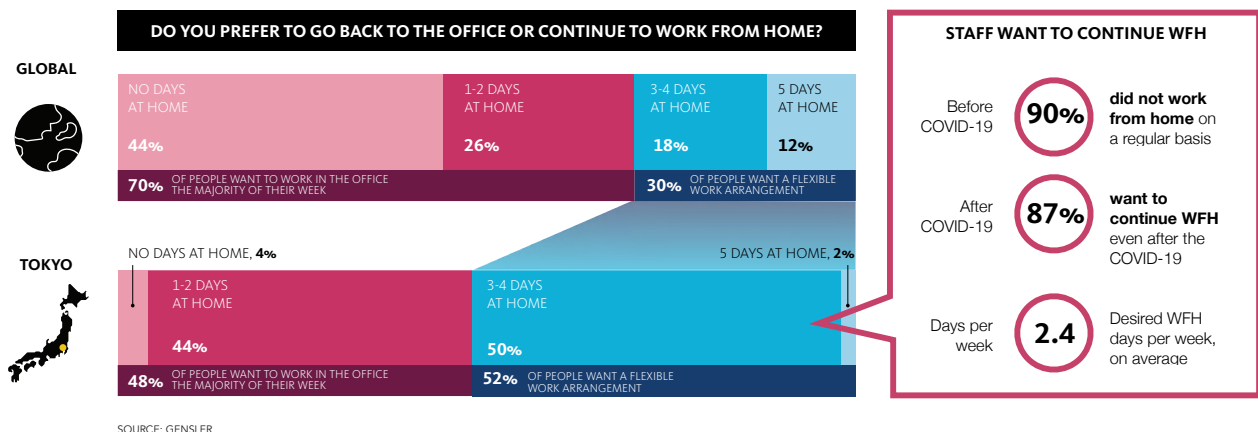
## WORK FROM HOME

Discussion began with statistics showing how work from home has been received during the crisis. Throughout the presentation, results of Gensler surveys were shared. Seventy percent of US workers polled said they want to work in the office most of the week, while 30 percent want a flexible arrangement. Just 12 percent indicated they would like to work from home full time.

Although a majority wish to return to the office, critical changes must be made for that to happen. Social distancing and cleaning protocols, in particular, were cited as crucial.

The top reasons people prefer the office are:

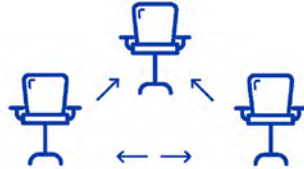
- Scheduled meetings
- Socializing
- Impromptu face-to-face interaction
- Sense of community
- Access to technology
- Focus on work
- Meetings with clients
- Professional development and coaching
- Access to amenities



Office space must be adaptable, because the future of office working is changing faster than we imagine.



**Remove excess chairs** in conference rooms with more than 10 seats.



**Spread out collaboration seating**, so people are spaced further apart.



Encourage people to **collaborate virtually** whenever possible.

In Tokyo, 100 Gensler employees surveyed between May 18 and 22 were asked if they would prefer to go back to the office or continue working from home. Before the coronavirus, 90 percent did not work from home on a regular basis. Now, 87 percent want to continue to work from home at least a few days each week.

And at PwC, the most common point made was that the office space must be adaptable, because the future of office working is changing faster than we imagine.

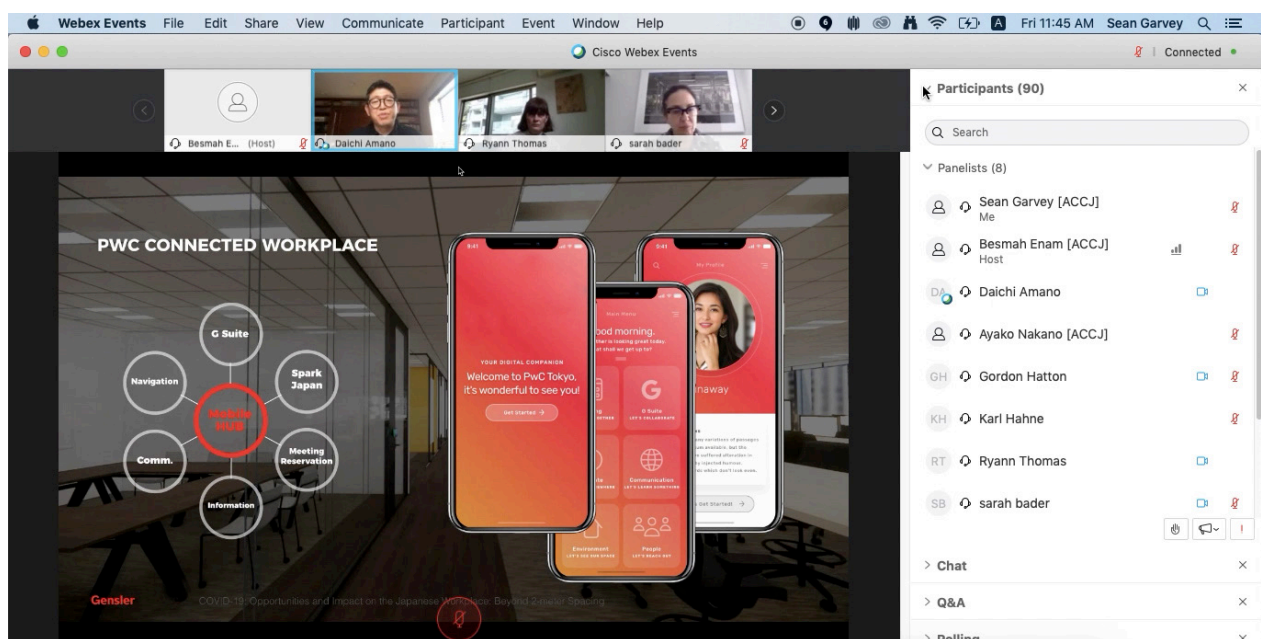
## OFFICE CHANGE

When people do return to the workplace, technology will play a key part in allowing business to go on safely. Purification systems can be used to improve indoor air quality, leading to higher productivity, fewer lost workdays, and lower healthcare costs. Infrared screening systems can be used to check for fever and confirm that those entering the premises do not show signs

of infection. And hands-free tools can be part of solution-based design strategies that minimize the need to touch door handles, elevator buttons, and building directories.

The recommendation that people stay two meters apart must also be incorporated into office design to promote safety while Covid-19 remains a risk, so de-densifying workstations will be important. Where existing desk spacing is less than two meters—a common situation in Tokyo—every other desk or seat can be used to create a buffer. It will also be important to position employees so that they aren't directly across from one another.

While face-to-face interaction is cited as a top reason for wanting to return to the office, gatherings remain a concern. Steps such as reducing the number of chairs in a conference room can encourage smaller meetings and allow for proper distancing. Of course, encouraging people to collaborate



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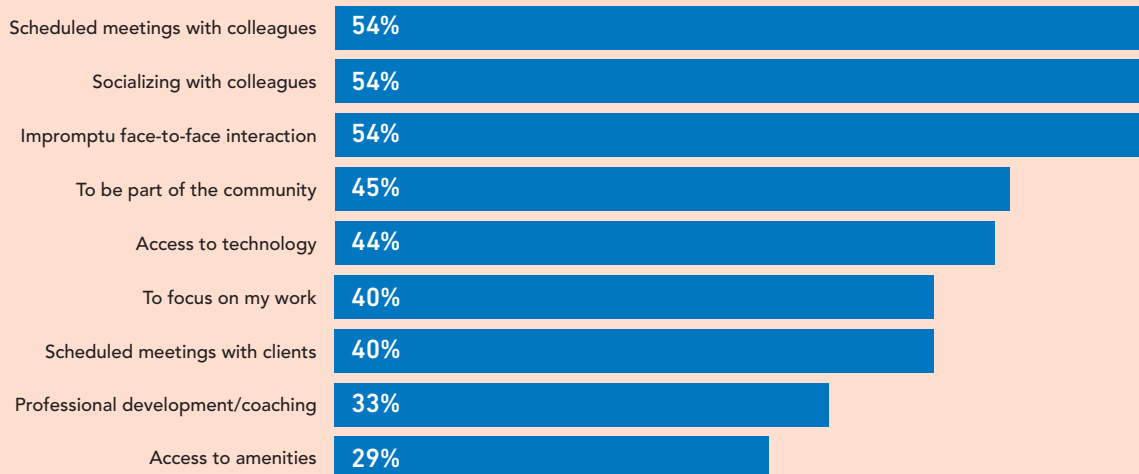
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### Reasons for preferring the office



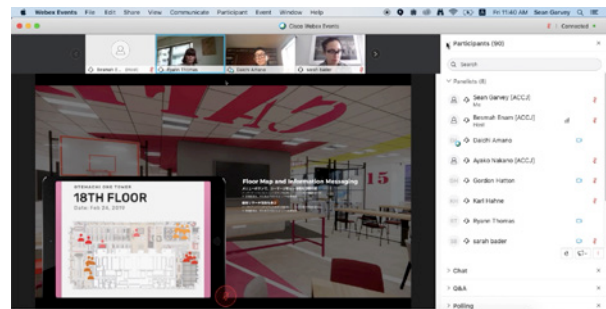
virtually as much as possible is the best way to reduce the risk of spreading the disease while still maintaining relationships among businesses, clients, and colleagues.

### DIGITAL FLOW

As part of the discussion, Thomas shared PwC's experience planning for their new office, and how they are looking beyond physical distancing to provide both a virtual and physical community.

She explained their new digital program, which was originally designed—pre-Covid-19—to assist the flow of office work by giving employees more flexibility when reserving meeting rooms, and to allow clients to check in electronically with whomever they are meeting. The program will include a floor map and navigation system.

"If you want to find someone, or if you want to speak face-to-face or have a meeting, you want to be able to identify whether the person is sitting in the office. If they aren't, then you know they are at home and can plan for how that remote meeting might take place," she explained.



PwC's new digital program

For the "new normal" workplace, the technology can also collect data on how and where staff are working, and which spaces are being used.

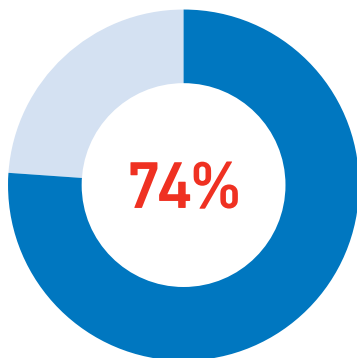
"With this technology, we will be able to guide and manage the staff through a platform, providing information about where there are free seats, what kind of seating is available, or where there are too many people," Thomas said. "This technology will be implemented across all our offices, including the existing Otemachi Park Building."

### ADAPT TO CHANGE

"It's about building a culture where people are not in the same place. It's about being able to share ideas and infinite information collaboratively, when you're not [physically] working together. It's about being able to understand where people are and what the space looks like," Thomas said.

Presenting already designed plans, PwC aims to create flexibility when it comes to the redesign so that the company can easily adapt to significant change in operations, much as it has during the coronavirus pandemic.

"One of the aims of the new design is that—should we find the future of office working changing in ways we can't imagine—we are able to redesign the office far more flexibly than we can in a traditional office, where a lot of design structures are fixed and mutable, and are costly—or impossible—to change." ■



say that people are what they miss most about the office

# The Role of Non-Executive Directors: The Right Skillsets and Mindset

By Megan Casson

**N**on-executive directors are essential on the boards of large companies and can be vital to maintaining smooth operations. They bring a fresh perspective and can contribute more objectively in supporting—as well as constructively challenging and monitoring—a management team. For ambitious professionals looking to advance their career, serving in this role can be an important next step.

To help members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) understand what it takes to be a non-executive director, the chamber held a virtual event on June 4, organized by the Women in Business Committee and jointly hosted by the Financial Services Forum and Alternative Investment, Human Resource Management, and Legal Services & IP Committees. Entitled *The Role of Non-Executive Directors: The Right Skillsets and Mindset*, and moderated by OECD Tokyo Centre Head Yumiko Murakami, the webinar explored the board role through a panel of three experienced non-executive directors: Jenifer Rogers, Melanie Brock, and Nicholas Benes. They shared their experiences, explained the skills they have developed, and discussed the dos and don'ts of being a non-executive director.

## THE ROLE

A non-executive director is a person who is not an employee of the company, and usually serves part time. They have the same legal duties, responsibilities, and potential liabilities as executive directors, but they are expected to bring a different perspective to the board.

Benes, who is representative director at the Board Director Training Institute of Japan and a non-executive director at Imagica Group and Advantest Corporation, began the webinar by exploring the key requirements of the position.

Starting with his own experience, he said, “Having sat on various boards for about seven years, I realized that many of the directors around me did not have the common skill sets that they really needed to be directors.” He went on to explain the essential skills needed to be a successful and competent non-executive director. These include being able to understand:

- Financial statements
- Cashflow statements
- Basics of corporate law
- Requirements of duties and procedures
- Corporate governance practices
- Leading-edge practices outside Japan
- Securities law

“The role of the non-executive director is really the same as the board’s role, since all directors legally have the same duties of due care and loyalty,” he explained. “In fact, everyone’s expected to be independent-neutral, in terms of their perspective and advice to the board. It’s just that we expect even more of that from non-executive directors because that’s their more specific purpose.”

## ACCESSING OPPORTUNITY

Next, Brock, who is chief executive officer of Melanie Brock Advisory Ltd. and a non-executive director at Sega Sammy Holdings Inc., offered insight into how aspiring non-executive directors can make themselves seen, thereby increasing their chance of being considered for the role.

“You need to find mentors and sponsors in the various fields that you’re working in and liaise with them. Find out more about the people who are already on boards. How did they get there? I think also you can generally be more curious about what is happening in your area of expertise,” she said.

Brock also stressed attending events and networking as key to raising your professional profile, along with leveraging search firms and reading more about your professional field.

Rogers, an ACCJ governor who is general counsel for Asia at Asurion Japan Holdings G.K. and a non-executive director at Mitsui & Co., Ltd., Kawasaki Heavy Industries, Ltd., and Nissan Motor Co., Ltd., spoke about applicant expectations and the importance of trust between a potential non-executive director and the existing board.

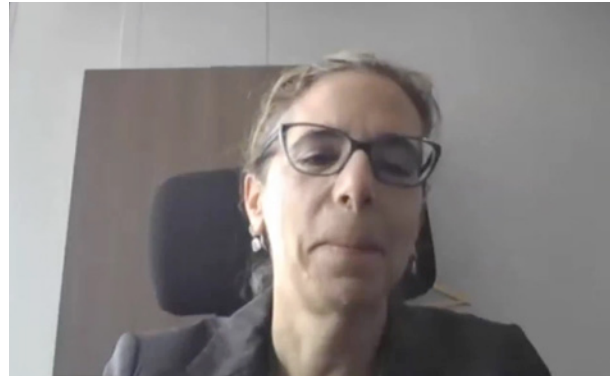
“I think that, when you become a non-executive director, it’s a little bit like a marriage—you have to make sure that you trust



Nicholas Benes



Melanie Brock



Jenifer Rogers

the company and that you think you can have an impact,” she explained. “For me, it’s been really interesting.

Having three companies that I sit on the board of allows me to learn about new businesses and make an impact across the whole company.”

Benes also offered advice for the interview process:

- Study the company in advance
- Ask about the atmosphere of the board
- Try to understand how it functions

“If they’re very open to the concept of having new ideas, and they are willing to say, ‘Even if you don’t agree with us, we still want to hear you,’ that’s a good sign,” he said. “So, look at the mutual body language in the meeting.”

This, Benes suggests, will tell you whether the company and CEO are really hiring you to give opinions, advice, and perspectives, or if they just want to get a foreigner on the board. Asking why the company is interested in appointing you—and judging the atmosphere—is very important, he stressed.

## DOS AND DON'TS

Benes also shared the dos and don’ts of the position.

“I thank others for encouraging me to do this, because it required me to do something I don’t do enough: be introspective. You may say these are obvious and relate to any large organization. This like being diplomatic, cultivating trust, asking for facts, analysis, and that sort of thing. Prepare yourself adequately, before and during your board membership.”

Studying competitors, admitting when you are confused or mistaken, sticking to your guns when you feel it is important, and providing dedication and humility in your contributions are other aspects Benes cited as important.

As for what you shouldn’t do in the role, Benes repeated Warren Buffett’s rule: Don’t vote for what you don’t understand.

“It is what you vote for that you have legal liability for. What you abstain from, and what you vote against, are things for which you have absolutely no legal liability.”

## TOKEN DIVERSITY?

Often the reason for a board hire is questioned. Are they choosing someone based on their suitability for the role or are they simply interested in meeting a diversity quota? This is something both Rogers and Brock spoke about as foreign, female board members.

“I like to think that the boards that asked you to be part of their group and their organization aren’t asking you for token reasons, they’re asking because they see that you will use your voice and that you will attempt to make an impact and a change where it needs to be made,” Brock said.

Rogers gave her positive experience on a Japanese board as an example. “What is my experience like as a foreign female choice? I think I am quite diverse, just by how I look and in my background. So when I am chosen, I do feel that companies are at least ready to change. I take that as a license to speak up.”

Brock added, “I’m very proud to be the first foreign female on the Sega Sammy board, and I’m looking forward to the day that I can welcome a Japanese female colleague to join.” ■

### MODERATOR

**Yumiko Murakami**

Head, OECD Tokyo Centre

### PANELISTS

**Jenifer Rogers**

ACCJ governor

General counsel for Asia, Asurion Japan Holdings G.K.; non-executive director, Mitsui & Co., Ltd., Kawasaki Heavy Industries, Ltd., and Nissan Motor Co., Ltd.

**Melanie Brock**

CEO, Melanie Brock Advisory, Ltd.

Non-executive director, Sega Sammy Holdings Inc.

**Nicholas Benes**

Representative director, Board Director Training Institute of Japan

Non-executive director, Imagica Group and Advantest Corporation

**For ambitious professionals looking to advance their career,  
serving in this role can be an important next step.**





## INTERVIEW

# Mind over Matter

## How artificial intelligence might confront and change business and society

By C Bryan Jones

**T**he role of technology in our work and personal lives is growing at a rapid pace. It is largely thanks to the rich tools now at the core of business that life has been able to continue during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Powering many of these tools is artificial intelligence (AI), and this was the focus of the first in a new series of online events covering technology, hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan Kansai Business Programs Committee.

The guest speaker for the June 5 event, presented in Japanese, was Dr. Shotaro Funai, a scientist in the Physics and Biology Unit at the Okinawa Institute of Science and Technology Graduate University. *The ACCJ Journal* talked to Funai to find out more about his research and how AI can be applied to business, as well as to finding a coronavirus vaccine.

### How did you become interested in AI?

Since I was a child, I have been interested in the mechanism of the world. According to the French philosopher Descartes, this world consists of matter and mind, and I wanted to know about both. But when I was a high school student, I realized that research on matter is much more developed than that on mind, and the most fundamental mechanism of matter is studied by physicists. This is why I decided to study physics at university.

When I was a university student, I read the book *The Elegant Universe* by American theoretical physicist Brian Greene. It is about string theory and suggests that all mysteries of matter

might be solved by the existence of higher-dimensional worlds beyond our three-dimensional one.

I was so impressed, and then started my research on string theory in graduate school. After I earned my Ph.D., I continued to research string theory as a postdoc researcher. But I also became interested in AI—especially the neural network—in that it is an attempt to make a simple model of the human brain, which might be related to a mechanism of the mind. I then began reading many articles and papers about the development of machine learning and found that recent discussions of AI use many ways of thinking that are similar to how we approach physics. So, I started researching machine learning from the viewpoint of a physicist.

### What is the focus of your AI research?

I focus on how machine learning works. Machine learning is a simple model of the human brain in that its structure—the neural network—is an imitation of the human brain.

These days, there are many types of machine learning, but all extract features of input data and describe them as the long sequences of numbers; that is, high-dimensional vectors.

These sequences are, in general, hard to understand in terms of human languages, but we can interpret some of them in terms of physics. Therefore, using various systems in physics, I train machines and correlate the number sequence of extracted features with various physical quantities.



AI can forecast how many products will be sold tomorrow, next week, or next month. This is helpful not only for companies but for society as a whole, as we look for solutions to sustainability problems.

#### What is the biggest current challenge in AI?

I think that image recognition has already been sufficiently developed—we have many useful and suitable techniques and can use them for our daily life without any problems. So the current challenge should be linguistic recognition, including translation, summarization, or classification into genres. Recent developments such as BERT, short for bidirectional encoder representations from transformers, seem to enable machines to understand the context of a sentence. BERT is an AI language model used by Google to generate search results.

The next stage may be to guess nuances, common sense, and cultural background from input sentences. I am also curious about this development. Collaborating with linguists, brain scientists, and statisticians, I started to study whether a machine can grasp some emotional aspects of *tanka* (a Japanese poem of 31 syllables) by comparing the machine results with the reactions of human brains.

#### What are three ways in which AI can transform business?

Almost all procedures with fixed rules can be done using AI. Companies don't need to employ people for such procedures. AI can forecast how many products will be sold tomorrow, next week, or next month. This is helpful not only for companies but for society as a whole, as we look for solutions to sustainability problems.

AI can also propose the most efficient matching of humans and jobs. Companies could use this proposal as a reference

when determining the roles employees might play in a project to make it more successful.

#### Can data science and machine learning play a role in business?

At least for me, recent AI is almost equal to machine learning. Of course, other types of AI could be developed in the future, but still, I believe, machine learning should remain the main part of AI.

Data science has its own history and now contributes to the development of machine learning—in particular, it provides many methods of data processing applied to machine learning and analyzing how machine learning works. But, from now on, perhaps the two should be developed together. Therefore, as far as I understand, both data science and machine learning play the same roles as AI in business operations.

#### What role can AI play in developing a Covid-19 vaccine?

In my understanding, the strongest point of AI is to find unexpected relations and, in terms of medicine, combinations that are effective on humans. AI has already succeeded in proposing ingredients for new, useful materials in several fields of science and medicine. Therefore, to develop a Covid-19 vaccine, we can also expect that AI will propose ways to induce the antibody. I know that several universities and institutes have already begun such research.

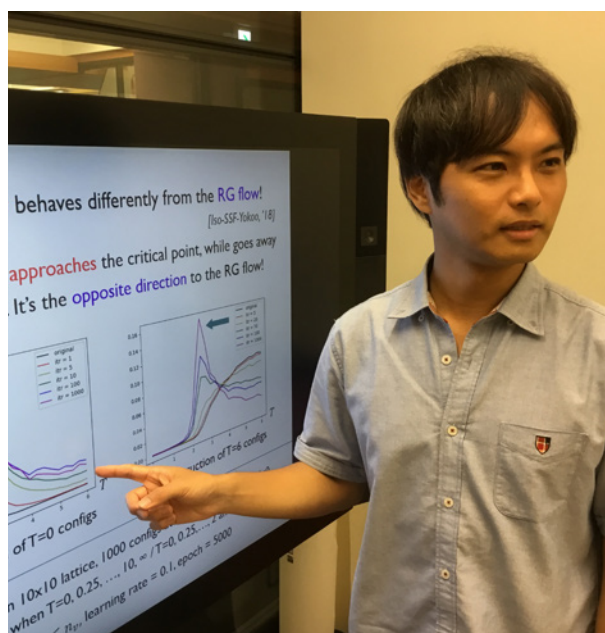
#### What role do you see AI playing in our lives in 20 years?

AI can make our daily lives more convenient and efficient. It always gives us useful information that affects our various decisions. But, I would also like to say that it is my hope that AI will also be a tool for broadening our mental horizon. On the internet, many people share their thoughts and opinions—through writing, images, movies, and so on. Often, this creates conflict with others who hold different views.

AI can learn from the things that are shared, extract features from them, and then describe them as number sequences. This can allow us to easily visualize the relationships between different opinions—which are quite similar or quite different, which things many people agree on and which they don't, and so on. AI can also forecast how these opinions could change in the near future through our communications and exchange of ideas.

If such a system is widely used, each of us can look over many kinds of opinions objectively and then we may pay more attention to how we can overcome differences of opinion to reach consensus.

That's just my hope, but I think AI can play such a role soon, and I believe this could be the only way to make our world peaceful. ■



# ACCJ Chubu & Nagoya International School Walkathon: The show must go on!

29th annual event goes virtual with great success

By Erin Sakakibara

In early December, the Chubu Walkathon Committee eagerly gathered at Coat of Arms Pub in Nagoya for our first face-to-face meeting to plan this year's event. After the great success we've had in recent years, we set a lofty goal of increasing the funds raised by nearly double compared with 2018. Our committed band of veteran *tantos* (leaders) decided on the main elements that we would include in the 29th Annual Walkathon, and all seemed set.

## BEST-LAID PLANS

Many members of the committee have been volunteering in their particular roles for years, so I felt comfortable that, as chairperson, my part would be the easiest. All I'd have to do is keep the ship righted by chairing meetings, rallying the troops, and ticking off boxes along the timeline of duties—the same ones that get done year after year. Outside of a few tweaks to the previous year's programming, we had a pretty well-worn path to follow.



NIS students choreographed a dance for TikTok.



But as winter turned to early spring, the ominous signs of what was to come started to show.

Nagoya International School (NIS), our partner organization in hosting the event, decided to move to online learning at the end of February due to the coronavirus. Despite this—and not having a crystal ball—we continued planning the event, with hopeful anticipation that it would go on like any other year. When the inevitable finally happened, we were faced with the reality that we wouldn't be able to gather in the park. The committee faced a tough decision: cancel, postpone, or come up with a new plan. Inspired by what we were already seeing online, we decided to quickly pivot and commit to seeing it through—virtually.

This decision was especially important given the long history and tradition of the event. After all, how could we have a blowout 30th anniversary Walkathon celebration next year if there was no 29th? More importantly, the very reason for hosting the Walkathon—to support the many small-but-mighty organizations working hard to make the Chubu region a great place to live—was still our mandate. This year, more than ever, they would need the Walkathon to go on!

## CHANGING COURSE

After that, the committee decided to meet weekly via Zoom as we tried to imagine an online event that reflected the original spirit of the Walkathon.

Sponsorship, as always, was key to the fundraising element. Under the circumstances, loyal sponsors stepped up to do what they could, and we were grateful. Going after new sponsorships, however, was a challenge. But with the confidence that we had a good support base to help us reach our goal, we started focusing on the other big part of the Walkathon: gathering as a community. How exactly would that work?



Erin Sakakibara emceed the livestream.



Canine members of the Japan Service Dog Association emceed the opening.

In the end, we kept the two key parts of the event—entertainment and walking—at the center of our new plan. Thanks to the talent and quick study of several committee members, the event became a livestream version using Facebook and Zoom. We had a lineup of veteran Walkathon entertainers along with some debut performances. Most were pre-recorded and streamed during the event. The performances were interspersed with live “visits” by some of the charities supported by the Walkathon. Distinctive people from the community also contributed by explaining the meaning and history of this much-loved annual event.

And, of course, what is a Walkathon without a walk? We encouraged people to get out and walk on the day, in a responsible manner that respected social-distancing efforts.

After their day of activity, walkers needed to post their steps using the designated hashtag. We awarded first, second, and third places to those who took the most steps. We also added a fun element for the younger crowd. NIS students choreographed a dance for willing participants to emulate, and we asked people to “show us your walk on TikTok,” the popular short-form video app. Prizes for this challenge were awarded for the most unique and funniest dance videos.

### FUNDRAISING

In addition to sponsorships, we raised funds by selling the official Walkathon T-shirt (traditionally a gift when purchasing a ticket to the event) and soliciting donations. Both were done through our website.

With almost no overhead costs, we were pleased to get close to the amount raised last year. While it fell short of our original ambitious goal for the regular in-person gathering and festivities at the Global Center of Moricoro Park in Nagoya, under the circumstances we were thrilled with what we accomplished!

One of the most rewarding takeaways from the day was the support we received from the community, both near and far. It was heartwarming to see messages come in from overseas and across Japan!

### CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

Every step of the way, this Walkathon was a challenge. It was difficult to make the right decision at the right time and to conduct planning through seemingly endless Zoom meetings, where often misunderstandings caused by the remote communication format contributed to frustration and wasted time. And it was difficult—to say the least—to navigate the technical challenges of pulling off something like this when absolutely no one on the committee had such prior experience. But all the hurdles made the rewards that much sweeter, and we look forward to the day when we can distribute the funds to the various charities which we support!

As chairperson, I can say that I stand in awe of a committee that wouldn't let adversity get in the way.

It is our sincere wish that we will be enjoying a walk, a beer, a splash in the dunk tank, and all the community spirit that Walkathon brings each May next year for the 30th Annual event in Nagoya. But, if it isn't possible, we now know that we have the capability and, more importantly, the determination to see that the Walkathon never misses a step! ■



Erik Olsen-Kikuchi tracks his steps.

**As chairperson, I can say that I stand in awe of a committee that wouldn't let adversity get in the way.**





# WORK IN THE BALANCE

How has productivity fared during Covid-19 and what lies ahead?

By Malcolm Foster

Isolated at home, many of us have spent the past few months working on laptops in the bedroom and joining countless video calls. The big, sudden change thrust upon us as a result of the coronavirus pandemic has forced a rethink of how companies operate. One question being asked is: How productive are workers in the Covid-19 era? Among members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) involved in human resources, as well as other experts, the answers vary widely.

## PERSONAL FACTORS

Industry, task, working conditions at home, equipment, speed of internet access, and even people's personalities play a role in the effectiveness of remote work.

Researchers and software developers, for example, can do their work fairly easily from home. Some say they are even more productive compared with being at the office, because there are fewer interruptions—unless you have young children who don't understand why mom or dad are glued to their screens for hours.

Other jobs and tasks, such as working on collaborative projects or dealing with personnel issues, can suffer from the lack of face-to-face interaction, undermining productivity and effectiveness.

On the plus side, not having to spend two or three hours each day commuting on crowded trains allows employees to devote more time and energy to their job during work hours and personal pursuits during off time. Many welcome the extra flexibility to take care of private tasks between work tasks, such as calling the doctor or cooking dinner between conference calls, creating a better work-life balance—something that is regularly talked about as a goal of the modern workplace. This has made some feel more productive about their life in general, and thus more motivated.

But others thrive on human interaction. Being isolated for weeks on end can cause them to begin feeling lethargic and uninspired, leading to lower productivity.

"Some people feel more energized and creative when around people," said Nancy Ngou, an associate partner at EY Advisory and Consulting and ACCJ governor. "You can just recharge your energy by walking up to somebody and having a conversation. But when you're working remotely, that's much more difficult."

A recent internal survey at EY shows that a majority of employees feel more productive working from home, but there are also those who feel less productive, Ngou said.

Still, despite the hurdles and adjustments, many employees have told her that the greater flexibility of working from





**NANCY NGOU**  
Associate partner  
EY Advisory and Consulting  
ACCJ governor



**MASAYUKI MORIKAWA**  
President  
Research Institute of Economy,  
Trade and Industry

home has made them feel “more productive throughout the day, instead of rushing the second you get home, starting to cook dinner or helping kids with homework.” For some, their life as a whole has felt more manageable. In addition to equipment, physical space and type of work, an important factor was whether this was the first time for the respondent to work remotely, she added. “If you are not accustomed to working from home, it may take time to find your most effective rhythm.”

### MEETING ONLINE

Video conferencing platforms such as Google Meet, Cisco’s WebEx, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom have made it possible for business to continue during this unprecedented period of disruption. But while these tools have proved enormously helpful in connecting people, some workers feel they have made communication more difficult and work less efficient overall.

“Online meetings cannot exceed the productivity of face-to-face communication,” said Masayuki Morikawa, president of the government-linked Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry (RIETI).

Initial surveys touching on productivity show conflicting results. Morikawa polled the 80 or so employees at his Tokyo think tank. It is a small sample, but the results provide some clues. While workers felt more efficient as time progressed, on average they still felt less productive working from home than from the office, he found.

**Handling all the additional communication can also eat up time and energy, allowing workers to devote less time to their main responsibilities.**

If they rated their office productivity at 100, their work-from-home productivity averaged 72 in May, up from 63 in April. Some respondents, mostly researchers, said they were more efficient at home, giving ratings as high as 150, Morikawa said. But clerical workers generally felt less productive at home, because they could not communicate as easily with colleagues, he said.

Morikawa predicts that, even in the best-case scenario, productivity at home for white collar workers will peak out at about 80 percent of office efficiency.

### SERVICE INDUSTRY

But the story is completely different for blue collar or service industry workers, he pointed out. For those with jobs in hotels, restaurants, factories, delivery services, and health-related fields, working from home is not an option. This means their work-from-home productivity would be near zero. It would also make them much more vulnerable to job loss, he added.

“You’re lucky you can work from home,” he said. Also, while Western expats may live in spacious apartments, most Japanese live in smaller homes where they may not have an extra room that can serve as a study. Families must share space, which is not conducive to concentration or conference calls.

Recent studies in the United States and Europe show that just 24–34 percent of jobs can be done at home, Morikawa said.



Many blue-collar jobs are hands-on, so working from home is not an option.





# ROBERT WALTERS JAPAN

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ROBERT WALTERS

20<sup>TH</sup> 周年  
20 YEARS IN JAPAN



Covid-19 has forced changes to the requirement of personal seals.

Covid-19 has, therefore, had an unequal impact on the global job market. “Higher paying jobs are relatively unaffected,” while lower-wage jobs have been hit harder.

These factors make Morikawa pessimistic about the future. Even as economies around the world re-open, it will likely be some time until we return to “normal” pre-pandemic life. Perhaps we never will. “Not only Japan’s, but every economy’s productivity will be reduced,” he warns.

Another broader study of more than 700 workers around the world conducted in May by US-based Global Workplace Analytics (GWA) suggests a more optimistic outlook. The results indicate that worker productivity held steady or may have risen when considering factors such as fewer interruptions, elimination of commuting time, and less need for office space. The survey found that 77 percent of respondents felt “fully productive” at home, and that people wasted less time on interruptions and distractions there (43 minutes) compared with the office (78 minutes).

GWA estimates that increased teleworking could save companies thousands of dollars per year by reducing the amount of office space needed, lowering commutation costs, offering additional productive work hours, and providing the ability to continue operations easily in times of disaster or epidemics.

### CHANGING CULTURE

The coronavirus pandemic has certainly forced Japanese companies to quickly implement teleworking systems. According to a 2018 government survey, just 18 percent had such systems in place, lagging Western firms. But a recent poll by Keidanren,

## Global Workplace Analytics suggests . . . worker productivity held steady or may have risen.

Japan’s biggest business lobby, shows that 98 percent of its members had introduced teleworking capabilities, and that nearly three-quarters of workers had access to them.

It has also forced companies to change the way they do business—internally and externally. Managers, for example, have had to learn a new set of skills to conduct video meetings successfully, said Joshua Bryan, director of human resources recruitment at Robert Walters Japan K.K., a recruiting company that specializes in connecting clients with bilingual candidates.

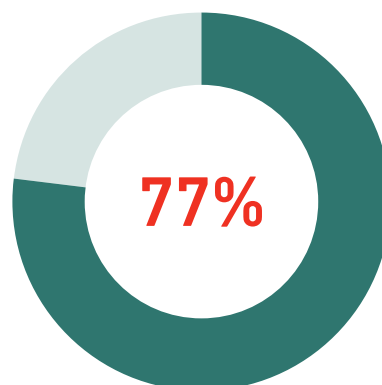
The company brought in an expert on virtual meetings to give tips, such as the need to call on individuals by name as opposed to open-ended questions, which often elicit silence. They also counseled managers “to be willing to show vulnerability and a bit of a mess during video calls, with family members or children in the background, and to be comfortable with that,” Bryan said.

Team leaders have also made a special effort to have short video check-in calls that aren’t about work but, instead, are just to ask employees how they’re doing, Bryan said. For example, to talk about what they’re watching on TV or cooking for dinner. The goal is to replicate the lighter interactions people would normally have in the office.

The transition has gone smoothly for Robert Walters, which has more than 300 employees in Japan. Bryan attributes this to getting employees to work from home on a trial basis in late February, well before the state of emergency was declared. And worker productivity has remained steady—or even improved—over the past couple of months, he said.

### READ THE AIR

Scattering people has also created obstacles in the Japanese business context, where teamwork and being physically together is important so that people can “read the air,” Morikawa said. Managers can more easily keep an eye on who’s doing what, and adjust work assignments accordingly, and employees can also pick up on what their colleagues are doing and offer help. All that has been largely removed by this emergency, and he suggests that this has undermined team cohesion and overall productivity.



of workers have felt  
“fully productive” at home

SOURCE: GLOBAL WORKPLACE ANALYTICS



**JIANA LEUNG**

Chief administrative officer  
Head of human resources  
Deutsche Securities, Inc.  
Co-chair, Women in Business Committee





**JOSHUA BRYAN**  
Director, financial services,  
legal & HR recruiting  
Robert Walters Japan K.K.

Another uniquely Japanese business practice that has come under pressure to change is the use of *hanko* or *inkan* (personal seals) to validate documents. Without these stamps, proposals often cannot move ahead, slowing productivity. Deutsche Bank Japan has begun requiring *hanko* on fewer documents and is consolidating stamping into a single day, at regular intervals, to make it more efficient, said Jiana Leung, who is head of human resources for Japan and APAC non-hub locations, as well as co-chair of the ACCJ Women in Business Committee.

### INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

Depending on their personalities and work habits, people have responded in very different ways to the need to telework. While some love working quietly at home, others miss the human contact, and can feel unmotivated or unfocused as a result.

Annie Chang, president of AC Global Solutions, a two-person business in Tokyo recruiting women for technology jobs, said she has always liked a clear distinction between her work and personal life. Even though her business is small, she got an office to share with her colleague and enjoys getting dressed for work and riding her bicycle to the office, because it puts her in a more disciplined and productive mindset.

“When I go home, I want to focus all my time on my family. I’m no longer president of the company, now I’m the mother,” she said. “That’s how I change my mindset. Now that’s hard to



Workers surveyed say they have  
wasted less time on interruptions  
and distractions at home (43 minutes)  
compared with the office (78 minutes)

SOURCE: GLOBAL WORKPLACE ANALYTICS

do because you’re in the same environment all the time. It’s also easy to work too many hours at home.”

So, working from home the past eight weeks has been hard for Chang, who is also vice-chair of the ACCJ Independent Business Leadership Committee. She has felt less focused and misses being in her cozy office, where she can chat with her colleague easily. “I love the human contact. I’m not a virtual person. I like to see the sparkle in people’s eyes,” Chang said. “I can’t be isolated. I can do Zoom and all that, but it’s just not the same.”

Bryan said managers at his company had to learn to adjust their style depending on the person. “Some people, we found, just became more productive. They were able to concentrate more. Personalities that were more introverted were able to gain more energy from the experience,” he said. “But those with less professional experience needed more structure to their days, and it had to be customized.”



Video conferencing will remain essential to business in the “new normal.”





While telemedicine has been important during the pandemic, and will continue, healthcare remain largely an in-person job.

### EXTRA EFFORT

Given the hurdles of teleworking, employees generally have put extra effort into communicating with each other through video calls, messaging chats or emails, and that has helped to maintain productivity, said Leung at Deutsche Bank. The company has been investing in remote work technology for several years so, when the time came to work from home, the transition was relatively seamless, she added.

But handling all the additional communication can also eat up time and energy, allowing workers to devote less time to their main responsibilities.

To compensate for lost human interaction, Deutsche Bank has organized a virtual walkathon for employees in which people can sign up to run or walk a certain distance to raise funds for charity. They can exercise alone or in small groups. This is also a way to “give back to society” in recognition of many who are suffering job losses, she said.

Overall, this crisis has tested the ability of companies and individuals to adapt, and may have a winnowing effect, said Fusion Systems Group chief executive officer Mike Alfant, who is ACCJ president emeritus and also chairs the chamber’s Emergency Disaster Response Advisory Council. “This will expose their weaker areas and amplify their stronger areas,” he said. “The companies that survive will have adapted more readily to the newer environmental pressures.”

EY’s Ngou said: “Companies have been forced to push the envelope. The crisis has really challenged them on what can be done virtually or with staggered hours. You’ve really had to get creative for the sake of employee health.”

### ROAD AHEAD

In the long term, the coronavirus outbreak may have initiated permanent changes in business practice—particularly allowing staff greater flexibility in working from home in the future, Leung and others said. In an internal survey, employees responded overwhelmingly that they would like to work from home at least one or two days a week, and would like to continue to have that option in the future, Leung said.

“I really think that, post-Covid-19, working from home is going to be the norm going forward,” she said. “Companies need to think about how to be more flexible and cater to this new norm.”

RIETT’s Morikawa agrees. He predicts that Japanese companies will probably allow more teleworking as a result of this experience. He estimates that the optimum percentage of time to devote to work at home is about 30–40 percent, so about two days a week.

“Five days working from home is inefficient. Every worker’s job is composed of lots of tasks, and some of them can be done at home efficiently. But others need to be done at the office,” he said. “So, some combination is best.” ■



**MIKE ALFANT**  
CEO  
Fusion Systems Group  
Chair, Emergency Disaster  
Response Advisory Council



**ANNIE CHANG**  
President  
AC Global Solutions  
Vice-chair, Independent  
Business Leadership Committee

# TOURISM REBOOT

Japan's hotels and travel agencies prepare for a new world

By Julian Ryall



Arguably the hardest hit of all Japan's business sectors, the tourism industry is using the lull in trade forced upon it by the coronavirus pandemic to take stock. Nevertheless, for some hotels, *ryokan*, airlines, travel agencies, and others that make up the interconnected travel industry in this country, a virus that emerged with little warning and has killed at least 400,000 people globally in a span of six months may also have sounded the death knell for their business.

The Japanese government has effectively banned tourist arrivals from virtually every country in the world, meaning just 2,900 foreign nationals arrived in the month of April, down 99.9 percent from the same month a year ago. It is the first time since 1964 that the monthly arrivals figure had slumped below 10,000.

## HARD FALL

To add insult to injury, 2020 was meant to be the year that Japan broke through the 40-million-foreign-visitors barrier, with the growing number of leisure tourists boosted by people flocking to attend the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Instead, the Games have been postponed until July 2021, and there have been ominous warnings that

they may be scaled down or canceled if a coronavirus vaccine has not been developed by then.

The growth in the number of leisure arrivals to Japan in recent years has indeed been impressive. As recently as 2012, just eight million tourists came into the country, but that figure had soared to more than 32.5 million in 2019. This growth encouraged the administration of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to boldly target 40 million for 2020. Even 60 million arrivals in 2030—a number unthinkable to many not long ago—did not appear impossible.

But the Covid-19 pandemic has brought about the biggest collapse in air travel demand in the history of commercial aviation, said Shane Hodges, vice president of Asia-Pacific sales at American Airlines.

Despite the news to date for the travel industry being deeply worrying, companies are developing strategies to survive the downturn. Some hotels are reporting that they have started to take reservations for weddings and corporate events for the latter part of this year, and many bookings by travel agencies have been postponed rather than canceled outright.



**TIM SOPER**

Vice president of operations  
Japan, South Korea, and Micronesia  
Hilton Hotels & Resorts



But everyone in the travel industry interviewed for this story agreed that the biggest plus in Japan's favor is the destination.

People want to come to Japan. There are individuals in Portland, Paris, and Perth who have dreamed of a visit to the Land of the Rising Sun, of climbing Mount Fuji, seeing *geisha*, sitting under the cherry blossoms, and reveling in robot cafés. They want to take part in all the travel clichés that residents may take for granted, but that are the exotic embodiment of this country for millions abroad.

### WAITING GAME

The trick is going to be surviving until the travelers return.

"Having been in Asia for 30-odd years, I have lived through different crises in the past," said Tim Soper, vice president of operations for Japan, South Korea, and Micronesia at Hilton Hotels & Resorts. "We had the triple disaster here in Japan back in 2011, we had 9/11, we had SARS in the early years of this century, more recently we had MERS, and I can recall the Asian financial crisis of 1997. But we have never before experienced something so truly global and so devastating in its impact on our business.

"Because it is global, because there is talk of second waves—and who knows how long this is going to last—companies have to simply prepare for the worst and hope for the best."

In the present crisis, with the number of guests plummeting to near zero over a matter of weeks, if not days, Soper said companies need to recognize that "cash is king" and that conserving liquidity needs to be the top priority.

Hilton operates 22 properties across Japan and has 5,500 employees. In a normal year, the company would anticipate revenues of \$1 billion. They had expected even more in 2020, Soper said.

"From a tourism perspective, if you look at what has happened in Japan over the past six or seven years, there has been an absolute transformation in the inbound leisure business into Japan that every hotel has benefited from. It has been a golden age of travel," he added.

Right now, it is sensible to refocus on domestic demand.

### NEW WORLD, NEW PLAN

In the post-pandemic world, however, companies need to pivot to a new model and a new way of doing business if they want to remain viable.

For Hilton, the priority must be assuring future guests that they will be safe when visiting a property.

Under the Hilton CleanStay plan, which is being rolled out with support from the Mayo Clinic Infection Prevention and Control team, existing methods of keeping rooms and shared facilities virus-free are being dramatically enhanced. Components include a seal on rooms after they have been thoroughly cleaned with medical-grade products, extra disinfection of the most frequently touched parts of rooms, such as light switches, door handles, and television remote controls, and improved guidelines for disinfecting hotels' fitness facilities. In addition, CleanStay covers

food and beverage outlets and other parts of the company's properties.

Soper said the company is bringing forward the deployment of the digital key program that has already been

introduced in about 2,000 properties—mainly in the United States—and permits guests to skip the front desk entirely and enter their room using their mobile phone.

### HELPFUL RESOURCES

In early June, the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ) Tourism Industry Committee unveiled a new website ([accj.or.jp/tourism](http://accj.or.jp/tourism)) that gives hotel operators an opportunity to share best-practice advice and tips on how they are going about ensuring the security of their guests.

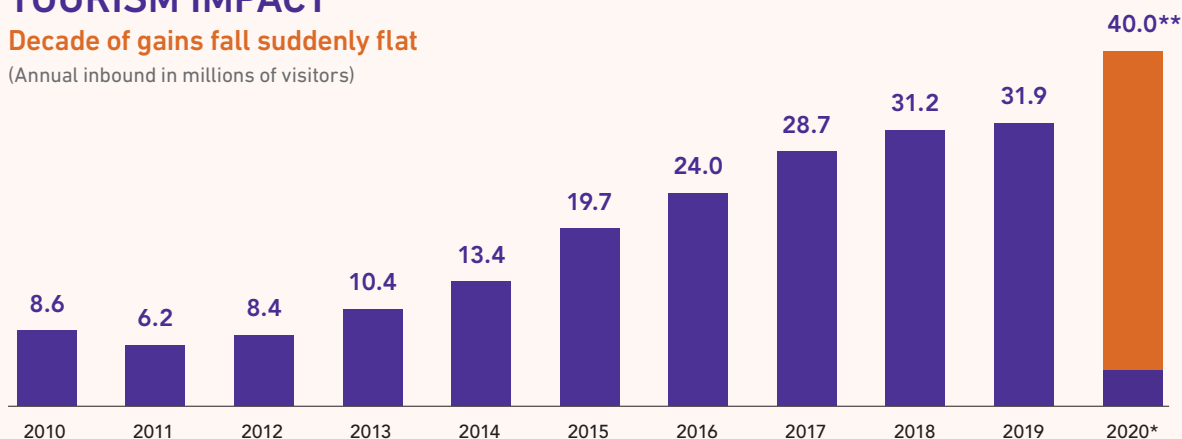
"No-one knows how long it is going to take for the travel industry to bounce back in Japan, as we are, to a large degree, dependent on the government lifting its restrictions on foreign travelers and then airlines ramping up their flights to meet demand," said Cynthia Usui, co-chair of the committee.

"There have been suggestions from the International Air Transport Association that it might take until 2024 for us to get back to 2019 levels in terms of travelers," she added. "So, the priority for the industry now has to be switching focus

## TOURISM IMPACT

### Decade of gains fall suddenly flat

(Annual inbound in millions of visitors)



\* first quarter

\*\* target

SOURCE: JTB TOURISM RESEARCH & CONSULTING CO., GOVERNMENT OF JAPAN



**LAUREN SCHARF**  
Co-owner  
Okuni travel agency

to cater for the needs of domestic travelers, who still account for 75 percent of all spending and are, therefore, a valuable resource that can be tapped.”

That is precisely the tactic that Lauren Scharf, co-owner of the Okuni: Japan Unbound boutique travel agency, is employing. The company had a full roster between March and May, and more business coming in later in the year. But clients have been forced to either postpone or cancel their trips.

“We are trying hard to attract domestic travelers, primarily the Tokyo-based expat market who would normally go to their home countries for the summer,” she said. “As they are unable to do that this year, we think they will be interested in visiting some of the off-the-beaten-track destinations in which we specialize.

“We have e-mailed newsletters to international travel agents with whom we work, updating them on Japan’s Covid-19 policies and telling them about post-Covid-friendly options for their clients,” she explained. “We’ve also sent notes to the clients who came to us directly, and we sent out small gifts to cheer everyone up during the peak of the lockdowns.”

Existing clients check in from time to time, she said, although no new business has been forthcoming.

“We don’t expect our clients to travel here or anywhere until there’s either a vaccine or cases have diminished to negligible



Tsumago Nakasendo, Nagano Prefecture

levels,” she said. “It just seems very unlikely that most people will take the risk of traveling until they’re confident there’s little to no risk involved.

“However, should people want to come before that point, we’ll encourage them to steer clear of the major cities and spend their time in rural regions, staying in private villas and small *ryokan*, and meeting local people we’re sure are ‘safe.’”

## OPTIMISM

Sean Brecht, managing director of bespoke travel company Discover Shikoku!, says the impact has been “significant” and the company has suspended promotional campaigns. The best they can do, he said, is to “simply work to keep everyone informed and updated as best we can.”

Yet he remains optimistic that the company can adapt to the new situation and that Japan, as a destination, will bounce back.

“Our business is one of exclusivity and personally tailored experiences. As such, a certain degree of privacy and separation is our normal method of operation. While there are no guarantees in a global pandemic, adjusting to the realities of travel in a post-corona world is not a significant leap for us, and we remain confident in our ability to provide the safest, healthiest, and most enjoyable of travel experiences possible,” he said.

“But I think the notion that there will be a ‘return to normal’ is naïve at best,” he added. “It seems pretty safe to assume that there will be a ‘new normal.’ Even if we find a magic bullet for Covid-19, all the evidence seems to indicate that the potential



Hilton Tokyo Odaiba



**CYNTHIA USUI**  
Co-chair  
ACCJ Tourism Industry Committee





**SEAN BRECHT**  
Managing director  
Discover Shikoku!



**CARL KAY**  
President  
Tokyo Way

for pandemic outbreaks is increasing in an ever more connected world with an ever more degraded environment.

“So, whatever the new normal is, I think Japan will remain an attractive destination if it adjusts to the new normal in an effective and efficient manner.”

Carl Kay, president of bespoke travel agent Tokyo Way, concurs that the crisis has been “very challenging” for the industry, both in Japan and globally.

“We periodically speak with the luxury travel agents we work with, mostly in North America and Europe,” he said. “In our segment, custom-designed luxury travel, where we work closely with guests and their agents to plan trips, there is not much value in doing heavy promotions now, not until guests are ready to invest their time and emotional energy in planning a trip with us.”

He added that they are starting to discuss best practices with each of their suppliers. “Already, when we design elaborate custom trips, we do various mental rehearsals running through each moment to visualize what will happen with luggage or how the balance of scheduled activities and free time feel.

“Now we are adding another layer to that process: a virus safety check. When will guests be able to wash their hands, where might masks be advisable or required, where can we route around crowds, and so on.”

## YEAR OF WAITING

Kay believes it will not be until spring 2021 that significant numbers of foreign tourists return to Japan. But he knows they will come back.

“Japan remains an appealing destination for travel, which will revive here in line with global developments—or maybe even a little stronger than some other places because, so far, Japan has shown relatively good resilience to the coronavirus.”

Hodges said American Airlines is providing customers additional flexibility as they navigate air travel amid concerns around the coronavirus. “From July, we plan to increase service between Tokyo’s Haneda and Narita airports and our key hubs of Dallas–Fort Worth and Los Angeles, and we have extended our offer to waive change fees for customers who purchase tickets by June 30 for summer travel through September 30.”

Hilton’s Soper agrees that things will recover.

“Right now, it is sensible to refocus on domestic demand, and we are lucky in that there is strong domestic demand in Japan as people are getting fed up with being in lockdown,” he said. “With the end of the state of emergency and an easing of government restrictions, we are seeing the first green shoots of a long, slow recovery. And when the restrictions on foreign tourists are lifted—and we are able to reassure travelers that they will be safe—I’m sure people will come back to Japan.” ■



PHOTO: SEAN BRECHT

Discover Shikoku! is optimistic about bringing visitors back.

# REDISCOVER JAPAN, REVISIT KYOTO

With international tourism on hold,  
there's never been a better time to explore

In recent years, demand for tourism in Japan has been driven by Asia's emerging middle classes—most notably from China—while, on the supply side, Japan's unique attractions cater to a broad market ranging from snowboarders to anime fans, hikers to culture vultures, shopaholics, foodies, and those seeking spiritual enlightenment.

And demand has boomed: the number of foreign visitors to Japan rose from about five million in 2003 to 31.9 million last year. Yet, Japan's tourism boom has not been uniformly welcomed, with some pointing to the pressures of overtourism or—more pejoratively—“tourism pollution” in recent years.

Kyoto has exemplified the problem, its streets choked with tour groups, overcrowded local buses, and long queues to enter any of the city's 17 UNESCO World Heritage sights, such as the Golden Pavilion. Tensions with local communities concerned about the impact of factors such as unfettered home rentals have also been on the rise.

It's a reality far removed from the tranquil images conjured up by Zen gardens, bamboo groves, or the glimpse of a geisha disappearing through the *noren* (entrance curtain) of an unnamed—but very exclusive—restaurant.

## CHANGE OF PLANS

Expecting a boost from the Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Japanese government set a target of 40 million inbound tourists for this year—a number that seemed within reach. And then, well, we all know what happened. The latest data from the Japan National Tourist Organization show a 99.9-percent drop in April 2020 (2,900 visitors) compared with April 2019 (2,927,000). The global tourism sector has screeched to a virtual halt and will take years to recover.



As a result of the coronavirus pandemic and accompanying lockdowns, many expats in Japan have had to shelve their foreign travel plans indefinitely. But as one door closes, another opens. Quite simply, there has never been a better time to travel domestically in Japan.

Consider, for example, that Japan is now a far easier place for the foreign visitor or resident to navigate compared with even five years ago. English is more widely spoken, is more easily found on menus and maps, and credit cards are more widely accepted. Supporting tools, such as guides and apps, have emerged, and tourists have a broader range of accommodation choices than just high-end *ryokan* and decidedly midrange business hotels.

Put another way, the tourism-supporting infrastructure has been built, but the crowds have evaporated. With the rollback of emergency measures, a window of opportunity is emerging to rediscover Japan—and perhaps nowhere is this more applicable than the nation's cultural capital. So, grab an *ekiben* (station lunchbox), jump on the Shinkansen, and head down to Kyoto!





## PRIME PROPERTY

If you're looking to make the experience more memorable, consider a stay in a traditional wooden townhouse or Kyo-machiya. Andrew and Naoko Staples are the owners of just such a property in the popular Higashiyama part of Kyoto. The famous Gion entertainment district and numerous attractions, including the charming streets of Nineizaka and the UNESCO World Heritage site of Kiyomizu-dera, are all close by, as is the Kamo River, which offers a wonderful route along which to stroll on your way to the traditional downtown shopping heart of the city, Kawaramachi.

The couple acquired the property back in 2012, when Andrew was a professor at nearby Doshisha University. They worked with a local architect and team of craftsmen specializing in the renovation of traditional buildings to breathe new life into the property.

"We'd been looking for a *machiya* to renovate and live in for some time. I'd been interested in taking on such a project after learning more about these lovely buildings and the efforts to preserve Kyoto's architectural heritage," Andrew explained. "The house was in a pretty sorry state when we took it on, and it needed a full scheme of work. There was no bathroom, for example, although the neighborhood *senjo* (public bath) is just along the street. We also discovered a well in the kitchen area. This called for the services of a Shinto priest who came and performed a purification rite—all part of the amazing experience of buying and building in Japan!"

## MAINTAINING TRADITION

"From the outset, we wanted to retain some of the key features of the house, such as the intricate woodwork that had been hidden by a suspended ceiling, and the light fittings from the Taisho or early Showa Periods," Andrew said.

"But we also wanted to make this a comfortable and contemporary living space that blended Japanese aesthetics with modern comforts. I think we were able to achieve this throughout, but the newly installed bathroom, sunken seating in the *tatami* room, and the en-suite Western bedroom, in particular, exemplify the ambience that we were aiming for. Accents such as framed wood-block prints by a local artist provide a modern twist on this traditional artform, while broadband internet and AppleTV bring the house into the 21st century."

Machiya Momiji, as the property is called, is recognized by the Kyoto local government as an authentic Kyo-machiya. Fully licensed under Japanese law, the property can sleep five guests in two second-floor bedrooms: one Western with beds, the other a *tatami* room with futons.

Momiji sits on a quiet residential street just 10 minutes by taxi from the Shinkansen Line at Kyoto Station. "I know the journey to Tokyo very well," said Andrew. "I had a career change which meant a year of commuting to the capital, leaving Kyoto early on a Monday morning and returning on Friday evening. It was something of a pleasure to take my seat on the 5:30 p.m. train from Tokyo Station each Friday knowing that, two-and-a-half hours (plus a bento and a beer or two) later, I'd be back to relax at home and enjoy everything Kyoto has to offer."

## WELCOMING GUESTS

The following year, Andrew's family joined him in Tokyo, and with the shift in home base they began to run Momiji as a holiday let for discerning guests.

"It's been a pleasure to welcome guests to our house and to help them enjoy their stay in Kyoto. Many have come from overseas, and we've always made a point of providing something of a concierge service when it comes to things such as booking restaurants, offering suggestions on where to go and what to do in the city and beyond, as well as finding independent shops or specialized tour guides, for instance. We are grateful to our guests for the glowing reviews they have provided."

The property is entered from the street through a fabulous *genkan* that features a thick wooden bench, flagstone floor, and subtle lighting. A circular feature in the internal wall offers a glimpse of the downstairs rooms, which include a fully equipped kitchen, dining area with table and chairs, and sofa. There are also a combo washer-dryer and a flat screen TV, both recessed behind sliding doors so they can be hidden when not in use.

This area leads into the featured *tatami* room, which offers sunken seating, table and floor cushions, and a wonderful view of the *tsuboniwa* (courtyard garden), which is home to a Japanese maple tree—the *momiji* after which the house is named. Another door leads to the downstairs toilet, bright sink area, and wonderful tiled bathroom featuring a deep soaker bath and secluded view of the garden.

All in all, Machiya Momiji is a charming house in a wonderful location, offering comfortable and contemporary accommodation and a chance to experience life in a traditional Kyoto *machiya*. What further reason do you need to revisit Kyoto? ■



Full details: [homeaway.com/vacation-rental/p3678359](https://www.homeaway.com/vacation-rental/p3678359)



# ADAPT AND ENHANCE

**Business schools embrace sudden change to boost future success**

By Julian Ryall

**In a world still in the grip of a pandemic, businesses have quickly learned that they must be nimble in the face of challenges, ready to embrace new technologies and mindsets to come out the other side of this crisis in one piece.**

Those very same attributes apply equally to the tertiary education sector, with some suggesting that universities in Japan may now be more willing to offer web-based options as a direct result of Covid-19.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) has, until recently, been slow to embrace the concept of online learning, even though such classes have been successfully introduced in other countries. Instead, MEXT has preferred to stick with the tried-and-tested model of students physically attending lectures in brick-and-mortar classrooms.

## **FORCED HAND**

Just as it has with other business sectors, the coronavirus has forced a rapid rethink by authorities and a swift pivot by educational institutions.

“We were not offering any courses online before Covid-19, due to university policies, but, because of the coronavirus, we have switched many of our courses—including lectures, seminars, and workshops—to online delivery,” said Philip Sugai, a professor of marketing in the graduate school of business at Kyoto’s Doshisha University.

Part of the reason behind the decision concerned the university’s international students, many of whom have been unable to return to Japan due to travel restrictions imposed

either by the Japanese government or that of their home country. The university now permits students to earn credits even if they are not physically present on campus.

“The biggest challenge has been making the change so quickly, especially for courses that were designed to be case-based or project-based,” admitted Sugai. “Shifting to an all-online delivery has created challenges in ensuring that students can still learn the key lessons from the cases and projects, and that they do not face any limitations even though they are participating remotely.”

## **RESOURCE SHIFT**

Educators at NUCB Business School, the postgraduate school at Nagoya University of Commerce and Business (NUCB), had to be similarly quick on their feet to meet the changing needs of staff and students at the height of a health crisis, but were maybe more fortunate than some as the school already operated an online facility for a limited number of courses.

“The Online Studio was used for courses as part of certificate programs, such as the Women’s Career Empowerment program,” said Usman Muzaffar, coordinator for international development at the university. But English-track programs had not previously made use of the facilities.

“As it has for many other institutions, Covid-19 necessitated a swift response for the sake of the health of our students and faculty members,” Muzaffar said. “Building off the Online Studio model, we have now set up 10 smaller studio facilities so that multiple courses can run concurrently.

“Prior to the outbreak, online courses were an idea to be explored in the future, but have now become the necessary standard. We are learning every day how to maximize the potential of the hardware and online platforms to circumvent their limitations,” he added.





**PHILIP SUGAI**  
Professor of marketing  
Doshisha University



**USMAN MUZAFFAR**  
Coordinator for international development  
NUCB Business School

## QUALITY FIRST

Maintaining the integrity and high standards of the NUCB Business School programs was the “chief concern,” Muzaffar said, as business school courses are taught in the case method style, meaning that class participation and group discussions are vitally important, and are reflected in how students are evaluated.

“Based on feedback from our course instructors and participants, we can confidently say that we have been able to emulate the pace and efficacy of class discussion to an extent that we feel no need to adjust the structure of our courses or student evaluation methods,” he said.

Ensuring that the required standards of education were maintained was also the primary focus at the Tokyo campus of McGill University, which offers an MBA program through its Desautels Faculty of Management.

“More than the method of delivery, the focus is on maintaining the quality of education,” said David Hackett, director for the McGill MBA. “Online is a different medium than being in the classroom, so the content needs to be optimized for that. The length of a class, the method of delivery, how interaction is done—it all has to be reviewed.”

Arguably the best prepared education institution was Tokyo Online University, which started its internet-based courses in April 2018 and has been largely unaffected by the health crisis, beginning its 2020 academic year on schedule in April.

“Most courses are completely online with no on-campus requirements, but some electives require campus visits,” said

Yasuhisa Kato, a professor on the Faculty of Information and Management. “Currently we are redesigning those electives through synchronous video conferencing and an asynchronous discussion forum.”

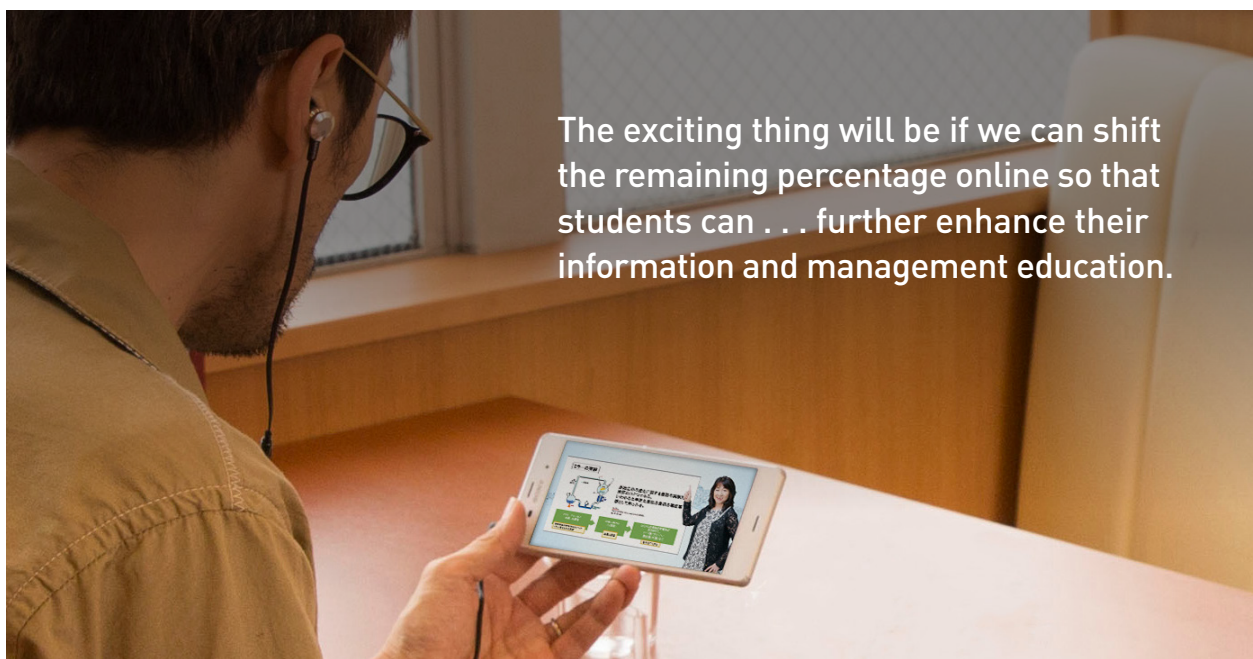
Professors create online content as Microsoft PowerPoint slides and then record lectures in the university’s studios. Through the proprietary Learning Management System, called @ROOM, and the portal system, @CAMPUS, students can register for courses, study, and participate in student activities. Typically, courses include video lectures, quizzes, discussion forums, and final exams that are delivered via @ROOM on the cloud system.

## EQUAL CHANCE

The advantage of online learning, Kato said, is that students can learn anytime, anywhere.

“At our university, most students have full-time jobs. They cannot earn a degree at other, traditional universities,” he said. “Also, there are geographical factors involved; while there are many universities in urban areas, there are only a few in rural parts of the country. We are offering more opportunities to people who want to study in higher education.”

One disadvantage that has become apparent, Kato added, is that anyone studying remotely has fewer opportunities to speak with fellow students before or after classes, and to get to know each other. The Tokyo Online University has gone some way to getting around that problem with a campus social network service, limited to students, faculty, and staff.



The exciting thing will be if we can shift the remaining percentage online so that students can . . . further enhance their information and management education.

A student participates in a course offered by Tokyo Online University.





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Professors are using a range of tools and platforms to deliver online courses.

### TECH ADVANTAGE

Elsewhere, instructors are using a panoply of technology to get their messages across, including Camtasia for video recording and editing, Photoshop for pre-recorded content, Zoom and Microsoft Teams for live classes, as well as Slack, Dropbox, and regular e-mails for student discussions outside of live lectures.

“I am teaching an e-marketing class this term, and having to do this 100 percent online is actually an advantage, because all the students can access the exact same tools all at the same time, and I can have them share their screens and confirm that they have understood a specific tool or software in real time,” said Sugai.

NUCB Business School’s Muzaffar agrees that the screen “enables the course instructor to conveniently see all the course participants in a compact interface without being limited by the range of vision when calling upon participants to speak.” He also believes that, while educators and students worldwide tend to prefer teaching and learning in a “live environment,” digital platforms are going to play an increasingly important part in future education.

“The shift in higher learning engendered by Covid-19 can only offer possibilities for institutions that want to provide more opportunities to students facing physical, spatial or temporal limitations to their educational advancement,” he said. “Although there is no substitute for the traditional university model.”

**The biggest challenge has been making the change so quickly, especially for courses that were designed to be case-based or project-based.**

### BALANCE IS BEST

McGill’s Hackett anticipates that the “long-term result will be more hybrid classes, courses that are handled both online and in the classroom.

“The online portion will be optimized to do what online does best, things like on-demand viewing and being able to replay sections you didn’t catch the first time. The in-class portion will do what it does best: offer rich information from being in the same room as professors and interacting with classmates,” he said.

Sugai agrees that while Japan “will move to embrace online or distance learning more widely over the long term,” he does not anticipate this shift will threaten the traditional university model.

“You’re seeing students in the United States protesting their tuition payments because education online is not viewed as being similar to in-person education,” he said. “Because we are all human beings and thrive on face-to-face interactions, I think that courses delivered in person will continue to account for 50 percent or more of how universities offer their content.

“The exciting thing will be if we can shift the remaining percentage online so that students can be doing internships, project-related work, or other types of initiatives that will further enhance their business education in addition to what they learn in person in our classrooms at Doshisha University.” ■



**DAVID HACKETT**  
Director  
McGill MBA



**YASUHISA KATO**  
Professor, faculty of  
information and management  
Tokyo Online University



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# The MBA Tour Tokyo

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There's a business school for everyone. Meet yours.

By C Bryan Jones

Since 1993, The MBA Tour has been working to narrow the connectivity gap between candidates and business schools by providing dedicated forums that bring institutions and prospective students together for personal engagement.

Partner schools in North America, Europe, Asia, Australia, South America, and Africa have a chance to connect with talent on a powerful, personal level and foster bonds with highly qualified candidates through the more than 60 business education events hosted each year across six continents.

In 2019, The MBA Tour joined the Graduate Management Admission Council (GMAC) and is now part of the GMAC Connect suite of discovery and engagement solutions.

## GOING VIRTUAL

The coronavirus pandemic may have curtailed travel, but it has done little to dampen the ambitions of businesspeople or the dedication of GMAC to create opportunities for schools and candidates—and that holds true for Japan.

Like many events, The MBA Tour will go on in a virtual format on July 30, and Managing Director Petia Whitmore believes there are advantages to the online setting. "The major opportunity in hosting virtual events is the wider reach we now have to serve the greater Japanese market outside Tokyo, and more frequently than just once a year," she said. "Even when travel starts up again, we now have a great tool that can be utilized as a supplement to in-person recruitment to provide more access and opportunity for Japanese candidates to connect with schools virtually throughout the year."

As Whitmore pointed out, MBA candidates and universities find themselves needing to learn how to function remotely. This includes not just courses, but also the research and application phases that come first. "Our virtual format offers a great solution for candidates to navigate the admissions process, network with other candidates, and meet schools—all in one platform," she said.

## MATCH AND MEET

Based on conversations with business schools, The MBA Tour has made the top priorities for the virtual format to host MeetUps online and to offer even better matching for informal small group meetings.

"The MBA Tour virtual events will utilize an advanced matching algorithm and GMAC-proprietary data compiled through decades of candidate engagement and research," Whitmore explained. "The data is leveraged to enhance the matching between candidates and business schools, and to stimulate effective discussion. This technology is powered by machine learning and will expand a candidate's view into schools they are exploring while increasing the variety of schools they speak with at our events."

A big part of The MBA Tour events is the exhibition portion—something that would seem difficult to stage in a virtual setting.

Whitmore assured *The ACCJ Journal* that this important research and networking opportunity will go on.

"Each school will still host a booth in the online exhibit hall. During the event, candidates can chat live with university representatives at the respective booths, as well as download brochures and other helpful resources," she explained. "Additionally, booths will be equipped with on-demand content that is accessible throughout the duration of the tour."

Candidates will be able to connect directly with admissions officers, network, access exclusive tips on the GMAT from exam creators, and receive complimentary consultations and resume reviews from test preps and admissions consultants. "This is a great learning opportunity for those still in the consideration stage, and also serves candidates who are ready to apply and looking for the best-fit program."

## FUTURE MBA

With coronavirus forcing change in so many aspects of education and business, what might MBA programs look like in the new normal?

"In light of Covid-19, where so many businesses, unfortunately, have suffered and many professionals are needing to pivot, I think we will see more candidates applying to business school over the next few cycles," Whitmore said. "We are experiencing a shift in the world and, more than ever, need leadership who can adapt. This is where we believe graduate management education can really make a difference." ■

## PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

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Georgia Tech  
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IESE Business School  
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# TOKIKO SHIMIZU

Bank of Japan's first woman executive director

By Simon Farrell

In what is widely seen as a boost for gender equality, Tokiko Shimizu was appointed in May as the first woman executive director of the Bank of Japan (BOJ) since it was founded in 1882.

She will serve a four-year term as one of six executive directors who oversee the daily operations of the bank, which include financial markets, monetary policy and economic analysis.

Shimizu, 55, joined the BOJ in 1987 after she had graduated from the University of Tokyo with a degree in engineering.

She also holds a master's degree in international policy studies from Stanford University and has worked in foreign exchange and financial markets, as general manager for Europe and chief representative in London. In 2010, she became the first woman branch manager, at the BOJ's Takamatsu branch.

**Congratulations on becoming the BOJ's female executive director. What will your roles and responsibilities be exactly?**

In official terms, the executive directors shall, in accordance with the decisions made by the governor, administer the business of the BOJ assisting the governor and the deputy governors. My responsibilities are, basically, to administer the business of the Nagoya Branch as the general manager, but I am also responsible for other businesses of the BOJ as one of the executive directors.

**What do you think will be your biggest challenges?**

As I have already been the general manager of the Nagoya Branch for two years, the challenges will not immediately change. For the economy of the area I cover, consisting of Aichi, Gifu, and Mie Prefectures, the most immediate challenge is how to return the economy of the area to its usual strength and vitality, while at the same time maintaining control over the Covid-19 situation. This area is the very heart of Japan's manufacturing industries. We need to monitor closely developments in the industries' production and investment, as well as demand and supply conditions in the labor market. Those movements will determine the robustness of the recovery of Japan's economy.

**What are you most looking forward to?**

As one of the executive directors, I would like to pay more attention to our relationship with the people outside our immediate circle and with global stakeholders, and I am looking forward to enhancing these networks of communication and exchange. Monetary policy is setting out into uncharted waters, and the world economy has changed its structure and the mechanism by which growth may be ensured. Central banks must review our responsibilities ceaselessly, and we need to be well prepared, determined, and confident to meet whatever challenges the future may bring.



Shimizu earned her master's degree from Stanford University in California.

**What are the most useful lessons you learned at Stanford University in the United States?**

As that was my first experience of living abroad, everything I saw there was essential in helping me gain a broader understanding of how people's lives go in the world. My classmates who were also studying for the Master of Arts in International Policy Studies came from a broad range of backgrounds and nationalities, but I was the only Japanese.

The most useful lesson I learned at Stanford was that an international and institutional perspective is a prerequisite

**Education:**

1983—University of Tokyo: BA in Urban Engineering

1994—Stanford University: MA in international policy studies

**Bank of Japan:**

1987—financial markets, foreign exchange

2010—first women branch chief, at Takamatsu

2014—deputy director-general, Asian Affairs, International Department

2016—general manager, chief representative officer for Europe

2018—chief of Nagoya branch

2020—starts four-year term as bank's executive director



for a central banker to achieve the goal of keeping the world economy safe and healthy. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to take a class with Professor Masahiko Aoki, and he taught us that policymaking should be based on a fundamental understanding of institutional setting and history.

In the summer of 2014—two decades after I had taken his class—I visited his office at Stanford during my summer

holiday. I was then in charge of Asian affairs in my role as deputy director general in the BOJ's International Department and I wanted to ask him for some advice. I needed to make a plan to enhance coordination among the ASEAN countries, China, Korea, and Japan for further development of the regional economy.

He kindly told me that it would be perhaps most fruitful to study endogenous growth theory and to apply such a perspective to coordination among the Asian countries. Four years later, I learned that the theory had earned Paul Romer the Nobel Prize. Unfortunately, Professor Aoki passed away in the summer of 2015. It was my great honor to be his student at Stanford University and to be the beneficiary of his invaluable advice just a year before we sadly lost him.

I also enjoyed playing golf on the university's course and at Pebble Beach!

**Tell us about your experience as the general manager for Europe in London.**

From 2016 to 2018 was the second time for me to work in London. The first time was 2008–2010. You may have noticed that both were somewhat unprecedented periods for the UK and the world. Many of my friends in London begged me, "Please do not come to London again because, whenever Tokiko comes, something bad happens!"

**The most useful lesson I learned at Stanford was that an international and institutional perspective is a prerequisite for a central banker.**

To maintain control during such uncertain times, I worked closely not only with the Bank of England but also with colleagues in Whitehall, Westminster, and Brussels. I was so impressed by the efforts many colleagues made to ensure closer communication internationally as the situation became more

uncertain. Based on the information we got through such communications, my colleagues in the Japanese financial community in Europe were successful in becoming well prepared for Brexit.

**How do you feel becoming the BOJ's first female ED?**

No one can build a career in a traditional organization without an accumulation of basic achievements during the course of promotions. I myself regard my career as the consequences of a number of choices made over the period of a 33-year working life. I do not have any feelings specific to becoming the first female ED, but it does give me confidence in the steps I have taken over my years spent at the BOJ.

**What advice do you have for aspiring women leaders in Japan?**

I believe the most important thing for a person to achieve their goals in their career is for them to make steady progress based on secure foundations, and to make sure that the path they choose is one that brings meaning to the world.

If there is a gap between men and women to make a robust step through their career, it might be harder for a woman to be a trustable person. Trust cannot be earned in a day, but by proving one's ability to maintain quality of results over many years—and by being always prepared for challenges that are more difficult—trust will certainly be deserved. ■



# TRAVEL BUBBLES

Coronavirus-torn Asia looks to reconnect

By Katerina Ang

NIKKEI  
ASIAN REVIEW

Zulkarnain Muhamed resides in Johor Bahru but works across the border in Singapore. The ship husbandry supervisor's daily commute is a familiar one for thousands of Malaysians, who take advantage of Singapore's higher wages and the southern Malaysian city's lower cost of living.

But the coronavirus pandemic has upended his life. Since Malaysia closed its borders amid a nationwide lockdown in mid-March, Zulkarnain has been living out of a Singapore hotel. He cannot see his young family, and his monthly living expenses have increased by about 6,000 ringgit (\$1,380). A petition calling on Malaysia's government to work with Singapore on a solution that would allow daily crossings now has more than 25,000 signatories.

Zulkarnain's plight is a microcosm of the havoc border closures have wreaked across Asia and the world. But for countries, companies, commuters, and anyone with a chronic case of wanderlust, there are glimmers of hope.

Even as Asian governments warn that the pandemic is far from over, many are beginning to explore the idea of "travel bubbles" that would allow citizens to cross borders with minimal or no quarantine periods. This cannot happen soon enough for the travel and tourism sectors, which employ 57.5 million people in the 21 economies that make up the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

Meanwhile, international tourist arrivals could fall as much as 78 percent globally this year, according to a United Nations forecast.

## TRAVEL CORRIDORS

The potential permutations of travel bubbles are dizzying. An early example is the corridor set up on May 1 between China and South Korea, which requires executives to undergo a short quarantine and at least one negative coronavirus test in each country. Samsung Vice-Chairman Lee Jae-yong recently used the procedure to visit a Chinese factory, and the two governments are negotiating an expansion of the program.

In early June, an advisory group will present Australia and New Zealand with a plan for quarantine-free travel between the two countries. Singapore is in discussions with both, as well as



countries as disparate as Canada and South Korea. Last week, the city-state announced an agreement with China comparable to the travel procedure that Beijing set up with Seoul, paving the way for a “fast lane” to open in early June.

“We have to keep ourselves connected to this world—our survival depends on this,” Gabriel Lim, Singapore’s permanent secretary for trade and industry, told the *Nikkei Asian Review*.

A Pearl River Delta travel bubble that would include Hong Kong, Macao, and some mainland Chinese cities has also been floated in recent weeks. Tourism officials in Vietnam have said they hope for some international travel to resume later in summer; it is one of a handful of countries launching talks with Japan.

“Our members see the value of getting their economies back on track,” said Rebecca Fatima Sta Maria, executive director of APEC’s secretariat, which recently organized a meeting that featured a presentation on travel bubbles. “It won’t be business as usual, but no one is saying they don’t want to open up.”

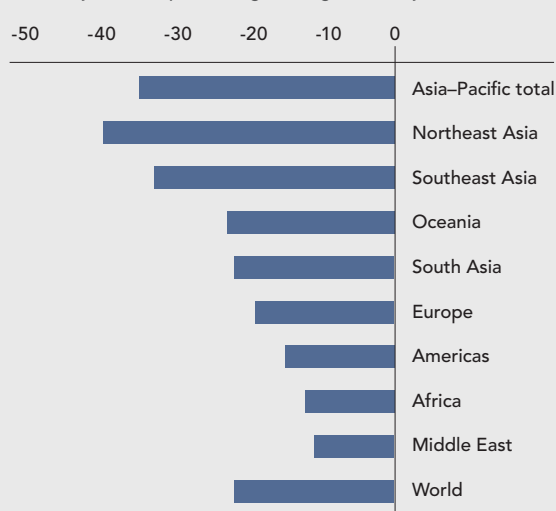
The medical prerequisites for the bubbles are still being debated, but partner destinations will likely have similar testing and disease surveillance infrastructure. Agreements that could ensure travelers who contract Covid-19 get reciprocal access to medical care while abroad are also being discussed, officials said.

Another key player in the coming new era of travel could be Taiwan. Though the island has been lauded for its coronavirus response, travel industry conditions there are as grim as anywhere. Six publicly listed travel agencies recently reported that their April revenue had plunged by 95 percent year on year. The Mandarin Oriental Taipei hotel announced that it would temporarily stop taking room reservations, effective Monday, and lay off about 200 workers.

## TRIALS

Taiwan is developing a trial program with Stanford University that will see 500 passengers tested in San Francisco, California, before being allowed to fly to Taipei in June. These volunteers also will be repeatedly tested during a 14-day quarantine after arrival.

### Asia-Pacific suffers steepest decline in Q1 arrivals (January–March, percentage change from a year earlier)



SOURCE: WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION (UNWTO)



Universal Studios in Osaka looks to rebound.

The aim is to discover the minimum number of days a person who has already tested negative needs to be isolated, since an initial test might not detect an infection in its early stages, explained Jason Wang, the Stanford medical professor leading the trial.

“There’s no added value making people stay in quarantine longer than needed,” said Wang, whose hypothesis is that an early-stage infection can be picked up within five days of an initial test. After accounting for processing and travel time, this means passengers flying between the US West Coast and Taiwan would need to be quarantined for just 72 hours.

Hawaiian authorities have also expressed interest in the trial, Wang said.

## BUSINESS FIRST

Some Asian countries are prioritizing business travelers in their negotiations. China and Singapore have stressed the importance of making travel available for high-level executives and essential technicians. APEC is also exploring how its Business Travel Card, which facilitates easier entry to participating economies, might incorporate health protocols, Sta Maria said.

Japan, too, is weighing its options for reopening, likely starting with business travelers and researchers. Taiwan has come up as a potential partner. And this week brought word that Tokyo is entering into discussions with Vietnam, Thailand, Australia, and New Zealand.

When many of the bubbles might come to fruition is still an open question. But the success of Australia and New Zealand in managing community transmission even as their lockdown measures have been eased has raised hopes that an Oceania bubble could be implemented by August.

“I would have said the worst-case scenario would be August or September, and I’m hoping it’ll be earlier than that,” said Margy Osmond, co-chair of the Trans-Tasman Border Group that is advising Canberra and Wellington. New Zealand Deputy Prime Minister Winston Peters, whose party is a junior member of the current coalition government, has said that a trans-Tasman bubble should be put in place immediately.

## CAUSE FOR CONCERN?

The push for rapid relaxation of border closures is not universally shared, however. Canberra’s three-stage reopening plan calls for cross-Tasman travel to only be considered in late July.



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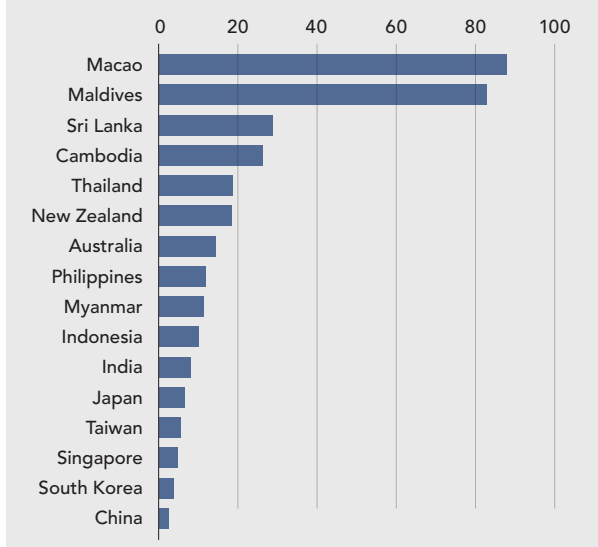




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### Tourism's role in Asia-Pacific economies

(As percentage of exports in 2018)



SOURCE: WORLD BANK, WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION (UNWTO)

The state government of Queensland, which is home to the popular Gold Coast resort strip, has so far refused to open its borders even for domestic tourism.

"We're in [the southern hemisphere] winter, and getting through it will be an important point," said Meru Sheel, an infectious diseases epidemiologist at the Australian National University. "Respiratory diseases tend to spread a bit more easily in cooler weather, and we need to be sure winter won't have an impact on cases."

One Japanese airline executive, who preferred to remain anonymous, said bubbles would help to revive demand but also expressed concern about putting the country at risk of new waves of infections. "Japan cannot control the partner country's decision to make a similar agreement with another country," they noted. "What if that [third] country has a high infection rate?"

For now, they said that resuming more domestic flights is the priority, as they account for the biggest segment of the carrier's sales.

Masato Takamatsu, an independent consultant specializing in crisis management in tourism, called travel bubbles a "very realistic" option for reopening borders, "especially for those who cannot survive without inbound visitors, like New Zealand." But he stressed that both sides of any arrangement would need proactive testing and information sharing to give each other confidence. "This is still quite challenging for Japan," he said.

### Vietnam . . . is one of a handful of countries launching talks with Japan.

While groups of Asian countries have been comparing notes on what travel setups might look like, initial agreements are likely to be bilateral rather than regional. "Immigration is generally a sovereign issue and while, over time, some arrangements may anchor a broader opening within a certain region, that's further down the line," Singapore's Lim said.

### LINGERING CONFLICTS

Disputes triggered by the pandemic also mean that some preexisting travel links are unlikely to be quickly reestablished. Relations between Canberra and Beijing are particularly frosty after the Australian government pushed for an independent international probe into the origins of the pandemic. China was Australia's largest inbound market for arrivals in 2019, government data show, but Beijing has previously used group travel bans to discourage its citizens from visiting certain countries at moments of political tension.

Australia was not on a list of countries that Chinese state media recently said would be allowed to apply for "green channel" chartered flights.

Similarly, cross-strait travel between China and Taiwan looks unlikely to resume anytime soon.

"All travel bubbles are political. If it's based purely on the science, Taiwan should be the first to have been approached by the mainland," said Steve Tsang, director of the China Institute at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London.

"Taiwan's success with Covid-19 is often used to contrast with how badly China managed the earlier stages, which means the Communist Party is hesitant to give it more credence."

Taiwanese health officials have been particularly critical of the veracity of Chinese health data, and Taipei is keen to keep its enviable record of more than a month with no locally transmitted cases going. "People are going outside, and the baseball season is on-going," said Stanford's Wang. "That's because there are no local cases at the moment."

Still, he said, "You can't limit travel forever and have to slowly open up."

### TRADE AND TOURISM

Any resumption of passenger flights within a bubble is likely to prove a boon not only for tourism but also trade, as it would lead to an increase in cheaper cargo capacity as well.

While Asian countries restricted cross-border movement of people, many export-reliant economies tried to maintain the free flow of goods even at the peak of the pandemic. But "the basis upon which goods are flown from place to place is very much anchored by passenger travel," Lim said. "We've seen the cost of airfreight increase . . . as air networks drop. It's had an impact." ■

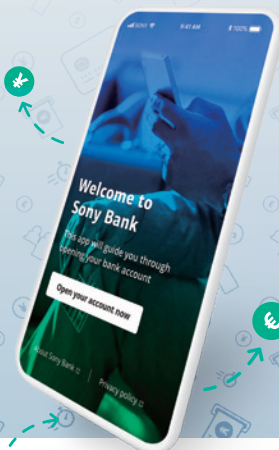
Additional reporting by Eri Sugiura, Kentaro Iwamoto, Lauly Li, Cheng-ting Fang, and Kim Jaewon.

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# New English Online Banking for Japan's International Community

Sony Bank's new service offers a rich set of features



When you're getting yourself established in Japan, one of the first things you do is open a bank account. But as long-term residents of Japan well know, this seemingly simple task is full of formalities and extra steps.

But it doesn't have to be this difficult, and that's where Sony Bank's new service comes into the picture. Sony Bank is not a new player in the banking field: they were founded in 2001 with an aim of offering their customers better and simpler banking using advanced technology—ahead of many traditional banks in Japan.

## FOREIGNER-FRIENDLY ENGLISH ONLINE BANKING

In 2018, acknowledging the growing number of English-speaking international residents in Japan, Sony Bank decided to take steps to meet these customers' needs. They teamed up with Jarman International KK, a consulting company that specializes in helping Japanese businesses effectively reach international customers. The team studied a sample group of approximately 50 international residents from predominantly English-speaking countries, who had lived and worked in Japan on average longer than 11 years. The purpose of the study group was to point out the main banking issues international residents in Japan have and find their solutions. Sony Bank also conducted a survey of dozens of international residents in Japan to find out the most prominent issues that they faced in banking.

What they discovered is that residents found the paperwork involved with opening a bank account too complicated. They

felt that the need for *hanko* was an inconvenient formality, and they commented on many banks' lack of English materials and customer support in English. The majority of those surveyed said that what they were looking for from their bank was the ability to take care of their everyday transactions without needing to visit a bank branch in person.

Taking this feedback into account, Sony Bank began work on their English online banking service, which was finally unveiled in March of this year. As Noriko Rzonca, executive officer at Sony Bank's Digital Transformation Department, pointed out, there are three keywords that their service is based on: "easy" to use and obtain; "fair," in that it offers all of the same services to all of its customers; and "smart," letting customers go almost entirely cashless.

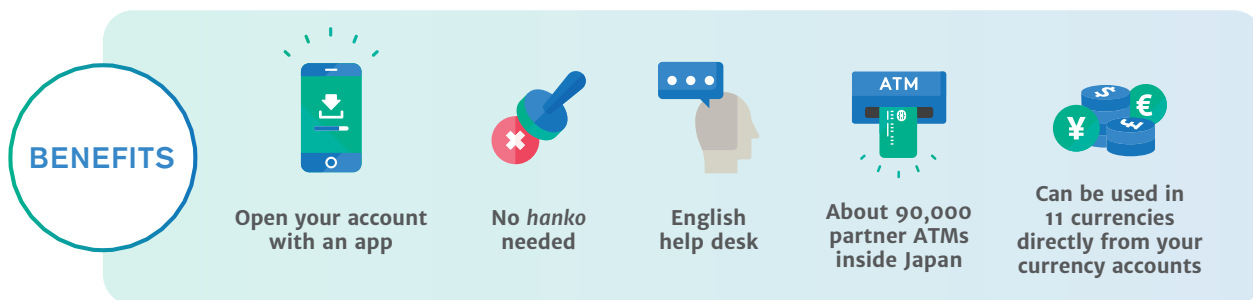
## DIGITAL SIMPLICITY

To make the account-opening process as smooth as possible, Sony Bank created "Open Account," an English-language smartphone app, that allows customers to open their account simply, with no need for Japanese language ability, *hanko*, or complicated paperwork. After the user installs the Open Account app, they can use it to scan two documents: their residence card with a valid address in Japan and their health insurance card (Social (Employees') health insurance card or National health insurance card). Open Account uses optical character recognition to extract the information needed from these documents to set up the account.

Sony Bank is providing a valuable service to Japan's international community.



Noriko Rzonca, executive officer, Sony Bank's Digital Transformation Department



One of the first things that strikes you when you visit Sony Bank's English website and use the Open Account app is the quality of the English involved. It is easy to understand, particularly when it is compared with what you might find in other Japanese banks' material. As Rzonca explained, this was a conscious decision. "We partnered with external consulting agencies and design firms with a group of internationals. All the English content on our website and the Open Account app is not directly translated from Japanese—this can easily lead to confusion or misunderstanding. Instead, it has been created and checked by native English speakers."

Sony Bank's English website has an easy-to-understand guide that explains how to use the bank's products and services as well as a regularly updated blog that covers financial topics that international residents in Japan will find useful. The website also includes online live chat and email support in English.

### THE WORLD IN YOUR WALLET

Once the bank account has been created, within approximately 10 days, the customer receives their Sony Bank WALLET, a cash card with Visa debit functionality that supports up to 11 different currencies as well as cashless payments. The card can also be used to withdraw Japanese yen from about 90,000 partner ATMs inside Japan, including Seven Bank, Aeon Bank, E-net, Lawson Bank, Japan Post Bank, Mitsubishi UFJ Bank and Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation.

Inside Japan, every Sony Bank customer can enjoy a minimum of four fee-waived cash withdrawals in Japanese yen per month at partner ATMs, and yen deposits at partner ATMs are always free. Sony Bank also offers a rewards program, Club S, which provides extra benefits that include additional fee-waived cash withdrawals. There are three levels within Club S—Silver, Gold, and Platinum—and unlimited fee-waived cash withdrawals from partner ATMs inside Japan are available for Platinum-level customers. Using Sony Bank's English online banking, it's easy to check your balance and make fund transfers.

Rzonca said that one valuable benefit of Sony Bank WALLET is the ability to make cashless payments and withdraw cash in multiple currencies. It can be used in 11 currencies directly from your currency accounts. This is particularly useful for customers who are traveling from Japan back to their home or to other countries. Customers can easily shift their funds

around to different currencies and save up various currencies as needed. She presented one example of how this would come in particularly handy: "Let's say you know that you're going to the US in the next three months. You can save up US dollars in your foreign currency account in advance of your trip. And when you withdraw cash or make payments using Sony Bank WALLET, it comes out directly in dollars from your foreign currency account. If you have a sufficient dollar balance in your account, only the ATM usage fee will occur. You can check in to a hotel with this card, rent a car, or do your shopping with it where Visa is accepted. You can truly rely on it wherever you go." Of course, Sony Bank WALLET can also be used for cashless payments wherever Visa is accepted.

### MANAGE YOUR FINANCES IN ENGLISH

The Japanese-language website of Sony Bank offers several other financial services and, in the future, Sony Bank will roll out these services for their English-speaking customers. But just as they did when they prepared to launch their English service, Sony Bank is committed to base what they offer on careful research and listening to the feedback of international residents. "We'll continue to conduct customer research this year and hear what our customers' needs are. After that we will develop our plan for additional products and services accordingly," Rzonca said. They also invite customers to provide feedback via their English help desk.

Even though the service is in its early stage as a start, Rzonca is proud that Sony Bank is providing a valuable service to international residents in Japan: giving them the autonomy to bank the way they want, when they want. "I understand that our customers are busy people. The most important thing I want them to know is that they don't need to go to the bank for every transaction they want to make," she said. "Their business and their finances are completely under their control, and almost anything they want to do from a basic banking perspective, they can do it online."

"What we most want potential customers to know is that Sony Bank is always here for you, and that opening a bank account and using our English online banking are all things that you can do on your own. You don't need to get support from your Japanese friends to handle complicated banking transactions. You can do it by yourself in English. ■

**For more details about Sony Bank's English online banking, scan the QR code.**

#### Important Matters Concerning Foreign Currency Deposits

Foreign currency deposits entail some risks such as loss of principal. When conducting foreign currency transactions, please be sure to make the investment decision on your own after confirming the "Important Matters Concerning Foreign Currency Deposits" on our English website.



# JMEC: PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

## 26th annual event reveals nascent talent

By Custom Media

Each year, participants in the Japan Market Expansion Competition (JMEC) put hundreds of hours into crafting business plans as they compete for the coveted top spot in the “mini MBA program” that has propelled many aspiring and existing leaders and entrepreneurs to business success.

The coronavirus pandemic presented challenges during the final months of this year’s process, but that didn’t stop the dedicated participants, mentors, and judges from seeing the plans through. Nor did it stop the celebration and recognition of winners as the gala event—normally held at Tokyo American Club—took place virtually on June 3.

### JOURNEY

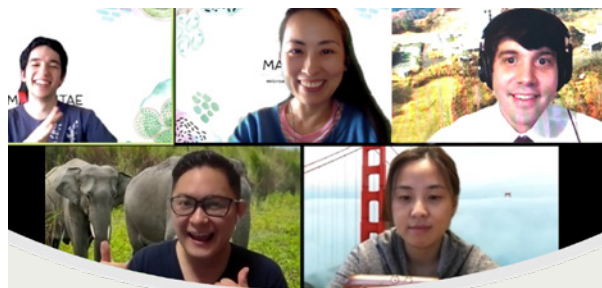
Thirteen teams comprising up to five members each researched, analyzed, and presented customized Japanese market expansion plans for their project client companies as part of JMEC 26.

The journey for the 61 program contestants, representing 19 nationalities, began last August with information sessions. From November to January, the participants—all mid-career business professionals working in Japan—attended a series of weekend lectures on business, accounting, market research, marketing, and presentation skills conducted by leading personalities from Japan’s international business community. In mid-January, contestants were placed into 13 teams and given their research projects.

Many teams were lucky to be able to travel and accomplish many steps, such as interviewing potential collaborators and market experts, as well as researching distribution channels, before the Covid-19 state of emergency was declared.

With that information in hand, each produced a lengthy written business plan and a summary presentation targeted at both the project clients and the judging panel. After months of research, data analysis, and endless video conferences, the teams presented their business plans virtually to the panel of four judges on May 23 and 24.

JMEC Executive Committee Chairman Tom Whitson said: “JMEC 26 was conducted under the challenging conditions of a national state of emergency, due to Covid-19, which severely curtailed much of the research and interaction that preparing a business plan entails. I want to congratulate all the participants for their dedication to this project that resulted in a series of excellent business plans. You have all well and truly earned your certificates as graduates of our JMEC business training program.



### First Prize

**Team 12:** Jonathan Ho, Yasuko Yoshino, Hiroshi Koyama, Hailan Huang, Takenori Nishimura  
**Project Client:** AlgaEnergy—MareVitae® Cosmetics

### Second Prize

**Team 13:** James Greer, Miyuki Sasaki, Toshifumi Suzuki, Bogna Baliszewska, Ngo Van Nguyen  
**Project Client:** Sun Tamaniwa Farm

### Third Prize

**Team 3:** Geoffrey Kayiira, Nonoka Tajiri, Shunsuke Akiyama, Noriko Kubodera, Javier Lopez Gimenez  
**Project Client:** AlgaEnergy—Macami Food Condiments

### Best Presentation

**Team 6:** Amanda Marshall, Yuta Nagasaki, Tatsuro Oshimoto, Derrick Sugiyama  
**Project Client:** Global Dreamers Lab

### Best Market Research

**Team 2:** Xing Zhang, Shisa Hoshino, Hajime Watanabe, Jinghui ‘Sunny’ Huang  
**Project Client:** Herniamesh

### Best Executive Summary

**Team 8:** Charles Feuchter, Yuka Miyazaki, Diah Wasis Wulandari, Yusa Kawauchi, Yuichi Fujimori  
**Project Client:** Ardex

“On behalf of the JMEC team, I want to thank the 12 companies that submitted projects to the program as well as the lecturers, judges, team mentors, and consultants who gave up days of their time to make this program a success.”



## WINNERS

The JMEC judging panel, being senior executives and successful entrepreneurs in Tokyo, evaluated and scored the written plans, as well as the team oral presentations. JMEC Judge Rike Wootton said: “The quality of this year’s plans was exceptional—very little separated the winning teams. When we read the final plans and saw the presentations, we were impressed with the detail and insights the teams came up with under such difficult circumstances.”

**First prize went to Team 12**, who developed a business plan for cutting-edge Spanish biotechnology company AlgaEnergy, which creates product solutions derived from microalgae for a range of industries such as agriculture, nutrition, cosmetics, and aquaculture. The team focused on the roll-out of cosmetic brand MareVita®. AlgaEnergy Expansion Director Miguel Rodríguez-Villa said: “The quality of the team’s work was exceptional and exceeded our expectations, with profound and valuable insights on the Japanese market, which are very useful for an appropriate approach regarding our expansion plans in Japan. On behalf of AlgaEnergy, congratulations to the team for their first-place prize!”

**Team 13 took second prize** with a business plan for Sun Tamaniwa Farm, an indoor vertical farming project by Hamish Ross, a Tokyo-based entrepreneur and investor. Ross said: “I was very impressed by the depth and conclusions of the plan, which was way beyond my original expectations. It has given me the confidence to progress with the project, because the team were able to access potential customers and ideas that I hadn’t thought of. Flexibility and the ability to think outside the box are a hallmark of JMEC teams, and this team showed such characteristics in spades.”

**Third prize went to Team 3**, in another presentation for AlgaEnergy, which focused on microalgae-based solutions for the food and beverage industry—specifically condiments enriched with microalgae. AlgaEnergy Development Projects Manager José María de Gregorio Muñoz said: “Our JMEC team presented their findings and business plan to us last week, and we were much impressed by the quality of their research, analysis, and outcomes. The team was very well organized and highly dedicated to the project, and their plan will enable us to draw very valuable conclusions!”

## SPECIAL MENTION AWARDS

Three others received special honors from the judging panel to recognizing outstanding efforts.

**Team 6 received the Best Presentation Award** for an impressive oral presentation to the JMEC judges for Global Dreamers Lab, a visionary museum facility project in Tokyo by Carl Williams, a US Air Force veteran with deep ties to Japan. At the museum, people from all backgrounds can find and nourish their dreams through interactive and extraordinary educational experiences.

“The JMEC team produced a business plan that was way above and beyond my expectations, and amplified my initial ideas,” Williams said. “The plan provides a solid foundation and roadmap for taking the project forward, and I congratulate my highly dedicated team on their well-deserved award!”

**The Best Market Research Award went to Team 2** for their extensive and outstanding market research efforts for Herniamesh, an Italian maker of medical devices, including surgical mesh solutions, sold through their worldwide distribution network. Marketing and Sales Area Manager Marco Bertolino said, “We were very happy with the team’s final business plan, which provided highly useful research and analysis to help us re-enter the Japanese market—and I congratulate the team on their award!”

**Team 8 won the Best Executive Summary Award** for a potential market re-entry project for Ardex, a global company headquartered in Germany that is a leading solution and service provider of innovative tile and flooring systems. Andreas Oberecker, the company’s Asia regional managing director, said: “Choosing JMEC as partner for our project proved to be absolutely the right decision. Our JMEC team was highly motivated and moved quickly, and we were impressed by the level of technical and commercial detail that was uncovered.” ■

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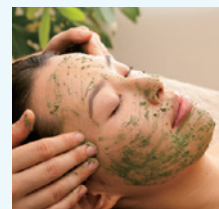
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# DIET DAILIES

## CABINET OFFICE

### IS THE TIME RIGHT TO SHIFT MANUFACTURING?

The widening impact of the coronavirus pandemic has led some in the Japanese government to seek a reevaluation of the nation's industrial structure, which has come to depend heavily on China as a generation source. China accounts for 21.1 percent of Japan's imports of intermediate goods and 24.7 percent of its exports.

The Council on Investments for the Future, through which Prime Minister Shinzo Abe leads Japan's growth strategies, is devising new guidelines to help move production bases back to Japan or third countries other than China.

Implementation of the guidelines, which may well be expedited by the government's coronavirus measures, is designed to accommodate the segmentation of economic activities expected as the seemingly inevitable struggle for hegemony heats up between the United States and China.

That said, in the face of concerns raised by many Japanese manufacturers that are heavily invested in China, the government may not proceed as planned. A council official was heard to say: "Sufficient measures haven't been adopted. Unless structural changes take place, it is likely to be a case of forgetting the risk as soon as the crisis passes.

As Covid-19 spread, production in China came to a stop, depriving Japanese manufacturers of necessary components. Panasonic Corporation and Lixil Group Corporation saw orders for toilets and system kitchens temporarily halted, and Nissan Motor Co. Ltd. was forced to stop production at its Tochigi Plant and a subsidiary's plant in Fukuoka Prefecture, on the island of Kyushu. Meanwhile, production of some car models manufactured by Honda Motor Co. Ltd., Suzuki Motor Corporation, and Mazda Motor Corporation was delayed.

To prevent further disruption to the supply chain, the government plans to promote the return to domestic manufacture of certain high-value-added products. Production of other goods can be shifted to Southeast Asia. These moves are to be financed by government-related institutions that will also support the automation of domestic plants using artificial intelligence and robotics to reduce production costs. The goal is for companies not to lose their international competitiveness.

## MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNICATIONS

### WILL HUAWEI PLAY A ROLE IN JAPAN'S 5G DEPLOYMENT?

Moves have begun toward adoption of 5G mobile communications technology. At the end of March, three major carriers—NTT DoCoMo Inc., KDDI Corporation, and Softbank Group Corp.—successively initiated the limited startup of 5G services. This is expected to be followed by deployment of local services utilizing 5G by companies, regional governments, and others. However, the Ministry of International Affairs and Communications, whose task is to promote the changeover, is not unruffled, due to an excess of problematic factors.

Thanks to minimal drops in transmission speed for large volumes of data and multiple connectivity support, the 5G standard is far superior to the current 4G. However, it faces a huge number of issues, including higher costs, complex deployment of base stations, and support for peripheral technologies. The ministry has stated high hopes that the technology can raise the competitiveness of Japan's domestic industries, but with a slowing down of demand for

smartphones, it believes the transition to 5G will not be as smooth as previous upgrades to 2G, 3G, and 4G.

China's Huawei Technologies Co., Ltd., which has been banned by the US government from selling its technology there, has been lying in wait for the Japanese 5G market. Some observers sense moves below the surface by bureaucrats in the Japanese government. Even though the battle for the 5G market has only just begun, some questionable matters have already surfaced.

Despite the US ban, Huawei has been making inroads in some European markets and is likely to be recognized by the British government to set up 5G communications networks for Vodafone or BT.

The main reason for Huawei's strength is the considerably lower price of its base stations compared with other manufacturers.

The Japanese government has been largely in accord with the United States, and current guidelines exclude procurements from Huawei. But these restrictions have not been applied to procurements by private companies. NTT DoCoMo, nevertheless, has imposed its own self restraints on dealing with Huawei. While the ministry asserts, "We have no restrictions on private firms," companies would be reluctant to run afoul of the government, since procurement of Huawei equipment would run the risk of being excluded from government business. ■





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