

# Roundtable Discussion with External Directors

## Developing as an Organization Where Diverse Personnel Can Shine in Their Positions

Since June 2024, when Chugoku Electric appointed an executive officer to take direct responsibility for activities to promote female advancement, we have redoubled our efforts to develop our organization so diverse personnel can play active roles. Members of this dialogue shared their views on the current state of initiatives and our future direction. (July 10, 2025)



**Ashitani Shigeru**

Representative Director,  
Chairperson of the Board

Joined Chugoku Electric in April 1979, and was appointed Representative Director, Chairperson of the Board in June 2023.

**Otani Noriko**

Director  
Audit and Supervisory  
Committee Member (External)

Served as Professor at Faculty of Humanities, Yamaguchi University from 1992, becoming Director of The Graduate School of East Asian Studies in 2005 and Emeritus Professor in 2010. Joined Chugoku Electric as External Director and Audit and Supervisory Committee Member in June 2020.

**Fujimoto Keiko**

Director  
Audit and Supervisory  
Committee Member (External)

Registered as an attorney in 2000, joining Iwamoto Law Office in 2020. Joined Chugoku Electric as an External Director and Audit and Supervisory Committee Member in June 2024.

**Sotobayashi Hiroko**

Director, Managing Executive Officer  
Supervisor of Female Empowerment,  
Head of Internal Audit Division

Joined Chugoku Electric in April 2004, and was appointed Director, Managing Executive Officer, Supervisor of Female Empowerment, Head of Internal Audit Division in June 2024.

— Diverse personnel in active roles —

**With the appointment of an executive officer as a supervisor of female empowerment, we are entering the next phase of our efforts to champion women**

— Goals and expectations behind the appointment

**Ashitani:** For some time now, we have been pushing forward with reforms aimed at advancing diverse personnel. We have now set ourselves targets to raise the proportion of external directors and female directors on the Board of Directors to at least 50% and 30% respectively by FY 3/2031. Furthermore, to expand the base from which we appoint executive officers, we also need to raise the proportion of female general managers and section chiefs or higher, and we have set new targets to tackle from FY 3/2026 onwards. Societal demands for companies to support women playing more active roles are growing, and as such we believe we need a management system that takes responsibility and enacts this kind of initiative. In response, we have created a new role for a director to be a supervisor of female empowerment. In 2024, we asked Sotobayashi Hiroko, our first female internal director, to take on that role. Since taking up the additional responsibility in June of last year, she has been highly active in introducing new perspectives.

**Sotobayashi:** To move away from the current state of affairs, I believe we first have to properly understand the current situation in society. To this end, over the last year I have visited companies from a range of industries, and gathered information on what they are doing to promote active roles for women. Rather than simply tell me of the specific measures they are taking at their sites, these companies allowed me to speak to female executives and managers who are actually active there. Hearing about their actual experiences, I was also able to learn about the difficulties they faced working and the support they required. I learned a great deal. Discovering the approaches and initiatives in place at other companies, instilled in me anew a sense of crisis about the current situation here. That concern is what fuels my

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present efforts. The information I gathered has also enabled me to confirm what we should be tackling going forwards. I have compiled my ideas and am now in the process of making suggestions to the executives. As a concrete example, I have told them of the necessity of ensuring a situation where efforts to advance women are made more tangible to more

people. Next, I raised the importance of listening, by working to gain feedback from the women who work here. The last area I identified was support. A trend evident among female employees is the scarcity of role models, and I feel that other issues are that women either do not want to be managers or feel it is out of their reach. That is not just a problem with the individual, it highlights an issue with the environment. To address the widely recognized problem of unconscious bias, awareness throughout the organization needs to be reformed. In order to make these improvements, I think we need to enhance age-based training and manager development programs into ways of working, and put in place processes before and after maternity and childcare leave.

**Ashitani:** This year, in your second year in the role, I hope you will step it up a level. In June this year, we established the Female Empowerment Committee, with Ms. Sotobayashi as its chair. This system enables us to evaluate the situation alongside division heads and general managers, while offering guidance to different organizations to address any issues.

**Sotobayashi:** I think it is significant that with the Female Empowerment Committee we have taken the first step to better empowering female employees. In terms of how we will address issues, we will take on board feedback about organization-specific issues and from relevant parties as we move forwards flexibly.

### – Necessary considerations for future initiatives –

## Female advancement as the engine to drive a change in culture

### – What do the two female external directors think about future promotion of female advancement?

**Otani:** When we talk about empowering women, there is a tendency to focus entirely on just raising the number of women working as managers or executives. I would like to see you always taking more of an overarching view. Of the office-related employees we take on from among new graduates, the numbers of men and women are now very similar. At first, they have their own goals or thoughts about what they want to achieve at our company as they go about their work, but in an environment where they feel a difference between the genders—even if largely unseen or unspoken—some will feel something is amiss or lose their motivation. Of these, at present I feel the majority are women. I would like to see this overall trend improved. I think we need a fair corporate culture where good ideas can be picked up flexibly, whoever has them, and they receive the praise they deserve. If we can ensure a culture like this spreads throughout the company and takes root, the number of motivated employees will increase, and naturally so will the number of employees who can work as managers. I am a big fan of the ideal that all employees shine in their positions in Our Desired Outcomes of the Group Corporate Vision, so I would like to see this company become one in which both male and female employees can shine.



**Sotobayashi:** I entirely agree. Female advancement initiatives are aimed at more than just the handful of employees that make up our management indicators. We will return to the original reasons that we promote female advancement, we see that it is to secure diverse

personnel and to tie this in to corporate value and growth. So it is not just for women, these activities are relevant for all employees. We have to firmly understand this essential fact and as we work to promote female advancement keep in mind a desire to create a new culture where anybody can work with a positive mindset and aim for self-actualization.

**Fujimoto:** I believe that the engine for change in the organizational culture is female empowerment. In the past, it was role models that were considered necessary to form the culture and values, but as the times continue to change, so too does the situation for workers. Companies have to evolve in suitable ways to adapt to that situation. It can be very difficult to change yourself, but I would like to see the Chugoku Electric Power Group seize female advancement as a chance to change, and to update its organizational values.

Also, if we consider that it is the culture that shapes unconscious biases, evaluation mechanisms then become vital to make changes. I believe it is important to enhance personnel evaluations that are not easily influenced by bias but can act objectively and rationally in the eyes of all, and extend our definition of abilities needed by managers and others.



**Ashitani:** On those points, the Human Resources Development Division is also working on introducing what we call “360° evaluations.” These are not the conventional evaluations where a boss assesses his or her subordinates; these are an attempt to gain a more objective understanding of the individual by taking on board feedback from various people around them, including colleagues and their own subordinates. While this is something we will be starting, I think that this kind of initiative will lead to greater diversity among our personnel going forwards. Personally, on the training front too—i.e., how we develop an employee who has worked hard as a member of a team into a manager—this is somewhere we

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will need to focus more of our energies in the coming years. As another example, while when we compare the state of female advancement to previous years it has improved greatly, I think that the major life event that is having children still, inevitably, has an impact on women's career development. We need to give further thought to how we support women so that their career development is not interrupted in such cases.

**Otani:** Maternity and other childcare leave systems have become fairly well established at Japanese companies, but there is still a paucity of mechanisms to support active roles following a return to work. In the more competitive society of the US, employees continue to think about their jobs and careers even during such leave, but in Japan many women feel estranged from their jobs after such a long time away. I think that the Chugoku Electric Power Group should, as an example, make changes that allow women on leave to return to work more smoothly. To do so, we need to further expand initiatives to share company information with employees while they are on leave, and carry out new training for those receiving it. It may be beneficial to study other types of support like these from new perspectives. Of course, wishes vary by person, so we still need to meet their preferences, but anyway.

**Sotobayashi:** The evaluation criteria that we have spoken about, as with education, and post-leave support, are all very important in promoting female empowerment. With these individual systems and measures have been introduced to some extent, our fundamental problem is making them function better. To make needed improvements, I think that it is important that we analyze from a range of perspectives questions such as whether personnel evaluation items are truly appropriate, if there are no issues with fixed notions among either the evaluator or evaluated, what kind of influence gender differences have on the way life events affect career development, and how a desire to work as a manager is born or fostered. Based on this analysis, we must always check what kind of approach is needed.

### — Future outlook in the longer term —

## Promoting female advancement by firmly anchoring it in the story of our growth

### — To keep evolving, how will you fulfill your role as the executive officer who is the supervisor of female empowerment?

**Sotobayashi:** To promote women taking on more active roles, I think it is important that we firmly incorporate the ideas of female advancement and diversity into the story we have for how the Group will grow. If we focus on numerical targets such as the proportion of female managers alone, we lose track of these efforts' necessity and meaning. Looking at it over the longer term, this kind of limited focus will not lead to positive results. What is important is to ask ourselves why we are doing this, and ensure that we are convinced and work together with a positive mindset. For this reason, going forward, I hope we will continue to continually discuss that essential question of what kind of organization or society we hope to achieve by these efforts.

**Ashitani:** In this integrated report, we have announced the new Chugoku Electric Power Group Corporate Vision. In it, we have tried to re-establish the values that form the basis for group employees' efforts. The process of reform will include hiccups, but our aim is to first properly align our thinking, set all employees—including those at group companies—moving in the

same direction, and make sure we can give our work our all. The ultimate goal is for everyone to feel pleased that this is a company where anyone can play an active role, and to be proud that they are contributing to the people of the region. That is the kind of organization I would like us to be. Our efforts to empower our female colleagues is an extremely significant part of making that ideal a reality.

