

Foreword

Versatility in Mode of Management of Technical Research Activities



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It goes without saying that a private business has various functions as a going concern such as research, development, production, marketing, etc. Above all, the function of research has a unique aspect in that its effect is slow-acting in terms of realizing a tangible benefit or giving an impact on the management as compared with the others. This fact may be paraphrased as that an immediate quota assigned is not necessarily very clearly set and therefore that the research management enjoys latitude that much.

In cooperation with my fellow researchers, I once selected some ten companies which had a similarity with Komatsu in any one of the type of business, size, ratio of the core business to the whole proceeds. The selection was made in an effort to find out characteristics of each company in the mode of management of technical research activities. At that time, we made an approach to this issue from the following viewpoints.

- ① Is the nature of ongoing research inclined to creation of a new business or to strengthening the current business line?
- ② Is the nature of ongoing research inclined to the basic research and pursuit of a big hit or to underpinning development activities and therefore a steadfast approach?
- ③ Are the incurred expenses borne by the head office (corporate expense) or by an individual beneficiary business unit?

The findings from this survey revealed that policies in this regard widely varied from one company to another. Indeed the situation was “So many men, so many minds”, as a proverb goes. For instance, there was a company which strictly restricted the mission of research to helping the company return to its core business. On the other hand, there were not a few companies whose research mission was exclusively dedicated to creating a new business. We also have come across many an instance that Company A was pursuing a course that Company B had went along ten years before. It was a case of “History repeats itself”. All these facts led us to a conviction that there is neither an established formula nor a royal road for the research management.

What about the standing of the current Komatsu’s Research Center on this score? It is now steering away from the 20-year-long new business creation type and turning to the type of strengthening the present business. As for another agenda of seeking for a big hit or underpinning development activities, polarization is taking place depending on a theme on hand.

In retrospect, a number of big companies in this country were in pursuit of a second, a third business, upholding business diversification as a corporate top policy, about 15 years ago. Nowadays most of them are returning to their original core business. As understood from this instance, even a company-wide management policy can readily change due to a slight change in the surrounding business environment. It may be quite natural that there is no established formula for the research management.

Now given such conditions, what should we keep in mind as a guideline as a manager responsible for corporate research activities? In my opinion, one of the answers to the question is that we make efforts to collect pertinent information. Generally Japanese are believed to be a poor combatant in an “Intelligence War”. After all, intelligence or information is a basis for all sorts of decisions to be made. That’s why I regard information as the most important element for research management.