

The Shinkansen's Theater for Seven Minutes

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Abstract (100 words)

JR East TESSEI CO.,Ltd., (TESSEI) is a famous cleaning company in Japan, focused on Japan's transportation network. The staff, who do cleaning at Tokyo Station, call their jobs "The Shinkansen Theater for Seven Minutes". In seven minutes, TESSEI staff have to clean the interior of the Shinkansen. Each train has seventeen cars, and two teams of 44 staff members have charge of cleaning them.

TESSEI has a clear mission: passengers' satisfaction is the most important outcome to the company so staff on location exert their utmost efforts. TESSEI thinks if they make the staff happy, they will make customers happy. TESSEI's work is more than a cleaning company, it offers "a comfortable travel space to customers", who use the Shinkansen. Customers would like good memories of their trips. So, to accomplish this mission, staff need teamwork and effective communication between team members. To accomplish this, firstly, staff freely share their working techniques during daily meetings, so that each member can understand and solve challenges. Secondly, TESSEI introduced "the Angel report" in 2007. In the Angel report, TESSEI focuses on the good things that employees accomplish. As well, TESSEI encourages employees and gives equal opportunities for promotion.

Keywords (five words)

Co-producer, Mission, Teamwork, TESSEI, Case Study

The Shinkansen is Japan's famous "bullet train". Shinkansen means "new trunk line" and the train system connects all of Japan. The trains are most famous for their speed. Average speeds for the trains are 320km per hour. The Shinkansen serves commuters who live in smaller cities travelling to work in larger cities such as Osaka and Tokyo.

JR East TESSEI CO.,Ltd., (TESSEI) is a famous cleaning company in Japan, focused on Japan's transportation network(see youtube video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Ak6uWp4ATk>). The staff, who clean at the Tokyo Station, call their jobs "The Shinkansen Theater for Seven Minutes". In this company, the number of employees is about 820 people, including part-time workers who are called "partners". The average age of employees is 52 years old, and the proportion of employees who are women is about 50 percent. The number of Shinkansen trains, which "the cleaning angels of TESSEI" process, is about one hundred twenty, and the number of railroad coaches is about 1,300 a day. Basically, each team has twenty two people, and cleans twenty railroad coaches a day. TESSEI activates four hundred staff on a typical working day, and can offer a consistent quality of service, even if the timetable is extremely crowded (Nikkei BP net 2014 a). The trains run seven days per week from 6:00 am until 11:00 pm.

Service operation

The Shinkansen arrives at Tokyo station; it stops at the station for twelve minutes before it starts up again. It takes three minutes for passengers get off the train. In the next seven minutes, TESSEI staff have to clean the interior of the Shinkansen. Each train has seventeen cars, and two teams of 44 staff members have charge of cleaning them. In the case of first class carriages, three staff members clean them. TESSEI staff clean the Shinkansen cars using the following steps (IHCSA café 2013).

- ① Staff wait for arrival of the Shinkansen three minutes in advance. They wait in a line on the platform, and bow when the train enters Tokyo Station.
- ② Staff greet customers getting off the train and collect the trash customers bring to the door.
- ③ They gather larger trash within the Shinkansen car. Then, staff clean in more detail.
- ④ They turn seats to the direction of departure.
- ⑤ In all one hundred seats on twenty lines per car, staff wipe all tables and windows and window frames, and open window curtains.
- ⑥ Staff sweep the floor within the car.
- ⑦ Staff change the seat covers and put a "do not use" card on very dirty seats.
- ⑧ Staff take care of lost property in the car.
- ⑨ Staff welcome customers who are waiting to board.

When the staff complete cleaning the cars, passengers have two minutes to board the train. In only a brief seven minutes, the staff has to clean the cars, and strive to improve efficiency in their job. TESSEI also cleans platforms and washrooms in the station. Their staff actively help elderly people who have large luggage, and help others who don't know how to get to their destination. In other words, staff care for Tokyo Station passengers, so they can enjoy their trip.

Obviously, TESSEI's direct customer is JR EAST line, who hires them as contractors to work on the Shinkansen System. But TESSEI staff think passengers at the Tokyo Station are their customers. They have a clear mission: passenger satisfaction is the most important part of their jobs, so staff on location exert their utmost efforts. TESSEI thinks if they make the staff happy, the staff will, in turn make customers happy.

The support systems in this company also play a role in staff and customer satisfaction. TESSEI was simply a cleaning company to start with, but in 2005, when Teruo Yabe became the managing director in this company, dramatic organizational changes started (Omotenashi Inc. 2013) .

Organizational Changes

1. Redefinition of Business

TESSEI's work is more than a cleaning company, it offers "a comfortable travel space to customers", who use the Shinkansen. For the customers, the whole process starts when they leave home, then get on the Shinkansen, and finally, get off at their destinations. They would like good memories of their trips. So, TESSEI redefined the business as providing customers with positive memories, and it focuses on "Omotenashi" (good service) to customers. In 2005, Yabe came from JR East line, was assigned managing director of TESSEI, and thought about changing the definition of the business.

In those days, this company simply contracted cleaning jobs from JR East line, and it didn't seek to improve quality. TESSEI management controlled the job based on manuals. They devised manuals, and made employees do their jobs based on manuals. TESSEI did not accept proposals from employees. If employees didn't follow instructions, this company warned them. Employees felt frustrated, and complained about these situations. As a result, employees made some mistakes, and there were complaints from customers, giving the company a bad image (IHCSA café 2013).

Although TESSEI wanted to offer customers a higher level of service quality, they were focused on correcting employees' attitudes and behaviors. Yabe tried a different approach to change the organization. Yabe's previous experience was safety practices. According to safety practices, even if a company implements rules and sets safety procedures, they cannot

completely eliminate accidents, because humans operate machines, and being human they make mistakes. Therefore, motivating employees to appreciate safety and improving their abilities of concentration, companies can prevent accidents. So, Yabe visited TESSEI's employees to gather their suggestions. Through this approach to employees, he gradually gained their trust. TESSEI implemented employees' proposals to motivate their employees and get them to take pride in their jobs (Nikkei BP net 2014 a).

The TESSEI team is made up of staff from variety of backgrounds and experience. TESSEI made an effort to lead employees in the same direction on their jobs. TESSEI puts stress on improving the individual ability of an employee and on teamwork.

2. TESSEI's meeting

TESSEI has to keep to Shinkansen's fixed stop times for their cleaning jobs, even though a Shinkansen car may be excessively dirty. So, they need teamwork and effective communication between team members. Staff freely share their working techniques, so that each member can understand and solve challenges. Their schedule includes enough time to discuss their work and arrangements before cleaning the Shinkansen. Each team holds one meeting per day, to discuss daily problems, and to find solutions by themselves. Through these meetings, TESSEI gives teams more discretionary power, supports them to make and implement policies, and welcomes proposals from employees. For example, to exceed customer expectations, staff clean the Shinkansen wearing Hawaiian shirts in summer, and Santa suits at Christmas (see youtube video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ck6ISYMeI6Y>). As well, based on an employees' proposal, TESSEI suggested to JR East line to set up nursing rooms for baby passengers, and JR East line accepted and implemented it (IHCSA café 2013).

3. Angel report

TESSEI introduced "the Angel report" in 2007(Nikkei BP net 2014a). Group managers report on their staff. There is one rule in this report: Managers should write as many positive comments as possible. A company easily receives information about employees' mistakes, but TESSEI focuses on the good things that employees accomplish. About thirty group managers provide input, and report about 3,000 positive comments a year. Head office gathers and summarizes them, and issues an Angel report twice a month. The basic concept is TESSEI should focus on the efforts on ninety nine percent of employees who perform well, not on the one percent of employees who make mistakes. Obviously TESSEI corrects mistakes of the one percent, but the Angel report's objective is to motivate the other ninety nine percent. TESSEI acknowledges not only are employees praised in the Angel report, but also acknowledges those

who praise fellow employees in the Angel report.

4. The change of personnel management system

TESSEI changed their personnel management system in 2007(Nikkei BP net 2014b). Before the change, employees over 44 years old could take an examination to be full-time workers. From 2007, to attract and retain younger staff, the company encourages employees over 20 years old to take an examination to be full-time workers; the main requirement is for them to have worked at least one year as a part-time worker in this company. In the first year, about 80 people took the examination; as a result, 30 employees passed it (Nikkei BP net 2014b).

Before the 2004 changes, employees could not take a promotion examination for supervisor, without group manager's recommendation. But now, if an employee has been a full time worker for over two years, they can take this promotion examination. Also, supervisors can take an examination for higher management, if a group manager recommends them and they have worked for over two years. As a result, TESSEI transformed career opportunities in this company. On a performance review, a "tutor" evaluates a team, and an "instructor" evaluates all teams using a five point scale (Nikkei BP net 2014b). Based on that result, a meeting is held at each branch station. At that time, financial bonuses are assessed.

Other benefits that TESSEI offers their employees include: uniforms, medical insurance, costs covered for transportation to and from work, and extra pay for midnight shifts.

In conclusion, TESSEI encourages employees and gives equal opportunities for promotion. It respects the autonomy of each employee and encourages their creativity in making proposals for job improvement. TESSEI realizes employees' smiles are not enough to give passengers a comfortable and safe travel space. Their mission is clearly focused on friendly quick, and correct cleaning in Shinkansen car. Both "bottom up" and "top down" approaches are integrated in TESSEI.

Questions

- Discuss how timing is important to the TESSEI cleaning system.
- How does TESSEI incorporate the idea of customer as co-producer ?

- What are the pros and cons of using examinations to test employees for promotion?
- What other steps could TESSEI use to motivate their employees ?
- Who is TESSEI's direct customer ? Indirect customer? Discuss the importance of pleasing both.

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