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SoftBank Group's Resilience Further Strengthened during the COVID-19 Pandemic

As the spread of COVID-19 continues, SoftBank Group Corp. is strengthening its resilience as a company and achieving business continuity while ensuring the safety of its employees. Here, the head of the Human Resources Group of the Human Resources Department, which supports major changes in work styles from a system perspective, and the head of the System Planning & Security Management Group of the Information System Department, which supports actual business operations from a work environmental perspective, will talk about the efforts in response to the pandemic and the resilience of the SoftBank Group.

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What we were most aware of during the emergency

——— The spread of COVID-19, which fully began in 2020, has brought about major changes in both our institutional and business environments. What were the things that you were most aware of in this situation?

Sumitomo: From a human resources perspective, while we were forced to fight against an unknown virus, we placed the utmost importance on realizing employee health management and maintaining a safe work environment, and strived to respond and implement measures as quickly as possible.

Takahashi: The Information System Department focused on creating an environment where employees can work without feeling overwhelmed and maximize their work efficiency, including tasks from setting up and arranging PCs to handling security issues. We were always conscious of the need to improve the work environment and efficiency, with as little inconvenience and disadvantage as possible, even in emergency operations, including the spread of COVID-19.

Implementation of anti-infection measures and a "Zero Trust Network"

——— How were changes made in the system and work environment in response to the spread of COVID-19?

Sumitomo: In order to ensure both the safety of our employees and the continuation of our business, we switched to remote work company-wide in March 2020, when COVID-19 began to show signs of spreading in Japan. Since we had already implemented remote work on a trial basis prior to the spread of COVID-19, we were able to make the company-wide switch to remote work relatively smoothly.

Takahashi: The Information System Department continued to evaluate and verify remote work as a response to IT-BCP and work-style reform. In this phase of the spread of COVID-19, we decided to distribute a total of two PCs to each employee, one for office use and the other one for home use, because it was too much of a burden for employees to carry their PCs around when working from home, and we made preparations accordingly.

Sumitomo: Thanks to such preparations, two PCs were distributed to employees by April 2020, when the first emergency declaration was issued and the transition to remote work was made. It was well received by our employees that they can work from home or at the office without any additional burdens, including when they have to come to the office for unavoidable reasons.

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Takahashi: At the same time, the Information System Department was migrating to a "Zero Trust Network" that would allow fast and secure access to the company environment from anywhere in the world 24/7, and enable more efficient operations. This implementation project, which began with concept development in late 2019, was completed in October 2020, and remote work using the new method was initiated. The transition would normally take several years, but it was completed in only about a year to coincide with the move to the new Takeshiba Headquarters at the end of December 2020. We believe that we were able to quickly realize a work environment with high security even when working from home by preparing for implementation before the spread of COVID-19.

Sumitomo: With the company-wide implementation of remote work, internal meetings, one-on-one meetings, recruitment interviews, and communication with business partners and investees are all conducted through the web conference system as a general rule. Although we had been using a web conference system for communication with people from overseas, during the emergency declaration, online meetings were recommended company-wide. Despite some confusion at first, each department is now able to use it relatively smoothly.

Takahashi: As for our web conference system, we currently use Zoom as our standard tool and issue accounts to everyone. We also implement security checks and measures to ensure secure communication.

——— What measures are you taking to ensure the safety and security of employees?

Sumitomo: In May 2020, we conducted antibody tests at each major Group company in Japan and confirmed the presence of antibodies and the status of infection. In addition, taking advantage of the establishment of a PCR testing center within the

Group, we have been conducting periodic saliva PCR tests for all employees since August 2020. Because the saliva PCR test gives the results on the same day, if there are suspicions of a positive result, we immediately contact the person and their supervisor to check the person's physical condition and also to confirm the possibility of close contacts. Based on the result of the test, we can instruct the employee to go to a medical institution or work from home, and if the person who has tested positive was working onsite, we can promptly have the office disinfected by a specialized company. By identifying asymptomatic employees early on and building a system that prevents cluster outbreaks, we are able to provide employees with a safe work environment.

In June 2021, we also started workplace vaccination for employees of domestic Group companies and their families and business partners. In cooperation with each company, we were able to promptly arrange venues, doctors and nurses, and thus were able to start the vaccination program at an early stage.

Awareness and improvement of work style born in response to COVID-19

——— Please tell us about the positive side effects from the pandemic, if any.

Sumitomo: One positive aspect that I would like to mention is that employees who used to think that they had to come to the office to work now understand that it is possible to carry out certain tasks even when working from home. By changing the operational rules that we used to take for granted, we were able to minimize the number of employees coming to the office, and this has also led to improved operational efficiency. In addition, we are starting to work on

things that we have not been able to address in the past such as consideration of the use of electronic signatures.

Although the work environment triggered by the pandemic has brought many challenges, it has brought the possibilities for improving our operations, which have been positive in the end. This can be attributed to the fact that the Information System Department has developed an environment that enables employees to work from anywhere.

Takahashi: The implementation of the Zero Trust Network was a major achievement, and I think another positive aspect is that we were able to quickly introduce in our operation system cloud services that are highly regarded as global leaders in improving business efficiency.

——— What are some of the issues and challenges that remain?

Takahashi: In anticipation of future emergencies, we are aiming to create a system environment and structure that will allow all operations to continue as in normal times, even if offices are completely closed for several months or longer. In particular, we believe that it is necessary to create an environment that can handle further online processing, especially for contract-related operations and the operations of the

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accounting department involved in processing consolidated financial settlements that include overseas subsidiaries.

Sumitomo: As remote work continued, one of the concerns I felt was that it was difficult for employees to have a sense of balance between on and off work as the supervisors cannot pay enough attention. Looking at how employees used their time over the last year, I feel that both employees themselves and their supervisors are struggling. Since switching on and off work is very important for improving productivity, we are taking measures in response such as educating employees on points to keep in mind when working from home. In the second year of remote work, I would like to raise the awareness of each employee in order to overcome these issues, while aiming to achieve more appropriate work styles.

A corporate culture that promotes speedy and smooth change

——— What do you think about the reasons and background behind the smooth implementation of personnel measures and BCP response amid the pandemic?

Sumitomo: The Group has always had a corporate culture of "Get the thing done anyway" and "Never say we can't do it, but think of a way to do it," and I feel that this culture has permeated every corner of our organization. In the case of the pandemic, as we had no choice but to work from home, we made the rules to make it happen, created a system, and took action. As a result of this approach, we were able to implement company-wide remote work, PCR testing, and vaccination within a short period of time, and I believe that this has helped ensure employee safety and business continuity.

Additionally, by responding flexibly and promptly to subsequent changes each time, we have been able to achieve an optimal mix of office work and remote work and continue to be an organization that can achieve results even during the pandemic.

Takahashi: The SoftBank Group is a group of companies with a strong commitment to speed, tenacity, and being No. 1, which puts a high level of pressure on those working on projects. However, for elements that are expected to be valuable and effective as resources for realizing objectives, internal approval and implementation is speedy and a high degree of freedom is provided. Even if there is no precedent in Japan, we are able to proceed using the knowledge of our overseas investees and the power of Group companies, and we also have the attitude of aiming to be the best by combining the optimal solutions, unconstrained by the precedents. I believe that this characteristic of our corporate culture is also reflected in our effective response to the pandemic.

———What are your goals for the post-COVID-19 pandemic, and what do you hope to work on in the future?

Sumitomo: When COVID-19 is under control and office work is fully resumed, we need to rethink about work styles in the post-COVID-19 pandemic, including how

to take advantage of the benefits of both office work and remote work, and how to solve the issues that have arisen with the move to online work (such as working hour management, employee care, personnel evaluation, and the effective communication). Furthermore, we believe that there will surely be applicants seeking to join our company who desire to work from home, and we need to consider the feasibility of organizational and business operations that include such personnel.

Takahashi: As vaccination progresses and overseas business trips resume, I believe that the Zero Trust Network operations system we have established in response to COVID-19 will demonstrate its strength and enable us to work safely and efficiently 24/7, from anywhere in the world. The Information System Department will offer appropriate support to continue this environment and make it even more successful for the organization and our employees. We intend to support the global development of our businesses by promoting and strengthening information security governance and its processes for Group companies in Japan and overseas.

SoftBank Group Corp.

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