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■ The 21 Century Industry – Factory Becomes Office and Office Becomes Factory

Sony decides not to call their manufacturing site as plant, but a factory is now called Customer Center instead. According to the latest issue of Nikkei Business, the production department is equipped with a special information devise called “Call center” located on the shop floor (Gemba) which receives complaints and inquires direct from customers and responds quickly to individual end-users by-passing head-office red tape. This new system is designed to tie closely production people to customers. More over, Sony production people are entitled to stop production of any product whenever the unsold volume exceeds 8 weeks under the new system. They insist that 8 weeks are so-called “Open Date of food products” which should be applied to electronics products.

At Yokokawa Instrument Corp, one of the best Kaizen company, Production Planning Department and Purchasing Department are now located on the shop-floor as the integral part of production activities. The gap between office and factory vanishes into thin air in the 21 century as people are working more closely as a team.

■ Monozukuri “Spirit is the Only Driving Force of Competitiveness

Denso is now the world biggest automotive parts maker with U.S. Delphi at the 2nd place. H. Okabe, president of Denso since 1999, says in his TV interview last week that his company has 16 items of the “world top” automotive parts which no one else is able to compete. He puts great emphasis on the sprit of “Monozukuri” (Craftsmanship) which makes difference in the end. Technology must go side by side with craftsmanship skills to make the world top products possible. Denso maintains an apprentice school of craftsmanship skills established 47 years ago to train young middle school graduates with 16 Gold Medals given at the International Olympic Geme of Craftsmanship in the past. Take the common rails for Diesel engine injection pumps for example, Denso achieved the highest 1,800 atmospheric pressure which was made possible through extra high precision scraping skills by the hands of skilled workers.

In order to produce 13 different common rails for 7 different customers, they use one in-house fabricated production line called Standard “Cell Automation” which is made up of several cell manufacturing units. In order to make a change over, only some units are withdrawn and new units are replaced. The S.M.E.D. is done within the production cycle !!

