# Work Well-Being Patterns: A Pattern Language for Collective Well-Being at Work

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This paper presents an overview of the Work Well-Being Patterns and the full descriptions of six of them. Work Well-Being Patterns is a set of 27 patterns of practice that enable workers to continue working in a state of well-being while achieving results. This pattern language was created based on interviews with 20 employees of Rakuten Group, Inc., a continually growing company at the forefront of promoting well-being. The results revealed key factors for sustaining well-being while achieving results: taking control of your own work, maintaining your mind and body, and enriching the world around you. The pattern language is organized into three categories, each corresponding to one of these aspects of well-being, with nine patterns per category. This paper introduces six patterns, two from each category: *Purpose of Work*, *Focus Management*, *Small Wrap-Up Party*, *Signs of Fatigue*, *Support for Understanding*, and *Continuous Updating*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Well-being is an important aspect of human life. Well-being refers to a state of feeling healthy and happy: a state of physical and mental contentment. As the ancient Greek Aristotle said, "Happiness is the highest good" (as cited in Irwin, 2019), well-being has long been one of the most important concerns for people.

However, for workers, it is not easy to continue working in a state of well-being while achieving results. Overwork may cause physical and mental exhaustion. The American psychologist Oates (1968) coined the term "workaholism" to describe the state of excessive, addictive working. This condition not only harms health and human relationships (Shimazu and Schaufeli, 2009), but also increases the likelihood of "burnout," in which a previously motivated worker becomes demotivated (Schaufeli, et al., 2008). Excessive working hours and workload are also said to cause depression and sleep disorders (Bannai and Tamakoshi, 2014).

Nevertheless, there is not necessarily a trade-off between pursuing work-related results and achieving well-being. In fact, the concept of "work engagement" shows that an employee's well-being and high performance at work can be compatible (Schaufeli, 2013).

So how is it possible to continue working in a state of well-being while achieving results? To answer this question, we conducted interviews with 20 employees who are working in a state of well-being while achieving results at Rakuten Group, Inc., a leading company that continues to grow and is engaged in initiatives related to the promotion of well-being (Rakuten People & Culture Lab, 2020). We compiled the practical knowledge gained from the interviews into a pattern language. This is the "Work Well-Being Patterns."

This pattern language focuses on people's practices. It is true that the state of well-being of workers can be realized through the development of organizational systems and structures. At the same time, however, we believe that the state of well-being can also be realized through the daily practices of workers. By applying this pattern language to our daily work and life, we can achieve a state where well-being and achieving results enhance each other.

This paper presents an overall view of the Work Well-Being Patterns and six patterns within it in detail. In the following sections, we first introduce the process of creating the pattern language, followed by the overall picture of this pattern language and the full descriptions of the six patterns. In the Appendix, summaries of all 27 patterns are presented.

## 2. CREATING PROCESS

Work Well-Being Patterns was created applying the creation process developed in Iba lab (Iba and Isaku, 2016). This section explains how Work Well-Being Patterns was created in four phases: Pattern Mining, Pattern Writing, Pattern Symbolizing, and Practitioners' Review Dialogue. The following process was carried out mainly by four students from Keio University: Inoue, Hioki, Hikino and Sasaki, and received regular feedback from Professor Iba and members of Rakuten People & Culture Lab: Kobayashi, Otsuka and Hidaka. Since Sasaki was not involved in the writing of the paper, his name appears in the Acknowledgement.

### 2.1 Pattern Mining

The Pattern Mining phase is the process of creating Pattern Seeds, the basis of pattern language, based on interactive interviews called Mining Interviews. In detail, the process includes the selection of subjects for the Mining Interviews, the Mining Interviews themselves, extraction of Pattern Materials, Clustering, transcription of Pattern Ingredients, Systematization, and transcription of Pattern Seeds. Each of these activities is described in detail below.

The subjects of Mining Interviews were employees working for Rakuten Group, Inc. The company is a mega-venture company that originated in Japan and is currently expanding significantly. Rakuten Group, Inc. is focusing on promoting well-being and is undertaking various initiatives in this regard. Specifically, they advocate for "Collective Well-being," defined as a sustainable team state where diverse individuals connect under a shared goal and desired vision, and they develop guidelines and conduct external outreach activities (Rakuten People & Culture Lab, 2020).

The selection of the subjects for Mining Interviews was assigned to the employees at Rakuten People & Culture Lab, which is engaged in initiatives related to the promotion of well-being within the company. They selected 20 people who were working in a state of well-being while achieving results, and who would be considered by those around them to be the kind of people they would like to have more of. The selection was made with consideration that the gender and age of the subjects of Mining Interviews were as diverse as possible. Additionally, care was taken to reflect a wide range of workstyles, including individuals in managerial positions and those who are involved in parenting. The subjects of Mining Interviews selected in this way were 14 men and 6 women, and in terms of age, three in their 20s, four in their 30s, eleven in their 40s, and two in their 50s.

Mining Interviews were then conducted with the subjects. Mining Interviews are a form of interactive interviews in which the practitioners' experiences are explored in depth together through dialogue (Iba and Yoder, 2014). The Mining Interviews for the creation of this pattern language were conducted from April to June 2022 using the online meeting tool Zoom. The average duration of each of the 20 Mining Interviews was about 60 minutes and all interviews were later transcribed.

The first question was, "What is important for you to continue working in a state of well-being while achieving results?" From there, the ideas and practices that the participants value, why they are important, and what positive effects they have when they do them, were explored through dialogue. For example, when an interviewee stated, "I run on a regular basis," we asked, "Why do you do that?" He replied, "For my health, but also to change my mind before and after work." Additionally, when asked, "How do you keep up your running?" the answer was, "I make plans to go running with friends so that I can continue." In this way, interviews were conducted so that we could hear the objectives of the subject's well-being practices and specific examples.

After the Mining Interviews were completed, the process of Pattern Materials extraction began. First, while reviewing the recorded Mining Interviews, we extracted practices that they felt were important for achieving results and remaining in a state of well-being. As a result, 451 sticky notes were created.

Next, clustering was performed based on the extracted Pattern Materials. Clustering is the process of putting sticky notes with similar contents closer together, referring to the KJ Method developed by Jiro Kawakita (Kawakita, 1967; Iba *et al.*, 2017). The contents of each sticky note were read and discussed, and those whose meanings were close to each other were placed closer together (Figure 1). The "meaning" here can be explained as the purpose of the practice. For example, if there is a person who "takes a shower before work" and another who "goes for a run every morning," if both are doing it "to get switched on for work," they are placed close together. If they are doing it for different purposes, they are left as they are without being close together. After approximately 30 hours of work, 87 "islands" were created.



Fig. 1. The scene of clustering.

We then moved on to the creation of the Pattern Ingredients. Each island was described in a single sentence formula: "Do ~, by doing~." Once the description of the Ingredients of the Patterns was completed, we conducted Systematization (Iba and Kanai, 2021). The Pattern Ingredients were printed on a small piece of paper and laid out to obtain an overview of the entire pattern language. From there, we considered three categories that embrace the whole pattern language, and all members agreed on these three categories: *TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR OWN WORK*, *MAINTAINING YOUR MIND AND BODY*, and *ENRICHING THE WORLD AROUND YOU*.

The Pattern Ingredients were then separated into the three categories. For clarity and usability of the pattern language, we adjusted the Pattern Ingredients so that each category would contain three groups and each group would contain three Pattern Ingredients. Those that did not fit well were moved to other groups or merged with other Pattern Ingredients. This process resulted in 27 Pattern Seeds, which later became patterns.

## 2.2 Pattern Writing

After Pattern Mining was completed, we moved on to the Pattern Writing phase. First, Pattern Seeds were written in the form of Context, Problem, Solution (CPS), which describes "under what circumstances," "what kind of problem occurs," and "how it can be solved."

Once the CPS was written, we moved on to the full description phase. In this phase, in addition to the CPS, we included the following elements: Forces, which explain why the problem occurs; Actions, which provide specific examples; and Consequences, which detail the expected results. When necessary, the wording of the CPS was changed. The CPS and full descriptions were gradually refined through mutual feedback among team members.

## 2.3 Pattern Symbolizing

Concurrently with Pattern Writing, we also undertook Pattern Symbolizing. In this phase, each pattern was given a Pattern Name, an Introduction, and a Pattern Illustration.

We created a Pattern Name that appropriately describes the content of the pattern, ensuring that it is both easy to call and appealing. Once the Pattern Name was decided, an Introduction was written. The Introduction is a sentence that supplements and reinforces the Pattern Name, conveys the appeal of the pattern, and makes the reader want to read it. Simultaneously, Pattern Illustrations were created. A Pattern Illustration is a simple, symbolic, and attractive picture of the pattern's content.

## 2.4 Practitioners' Review Dialogue

During the process of describing the patterns, we conducted the practitioners' Review Dialogue. In this dialogue, we asked people who practice the patterns to look at them and give us feedback. The participants in the dialogue were members of Rakuten: Kobayashi (Chief Well-Being Officer), Otsuka and Hidaka. We held approximately

eight Zoom meetings, each lasting between one and two and a half hours. In addition, we received written feedback.

Specifically, we asked them to verify that the expressions resonate with Rakuten employees and to assess their ease of use within the company. Also, we asked for specific examples of patterns in practice in order to further improve the quality of the patterns. For example, in the pattern of recognizing the purpose of work and working on it, it was originally written that it is important to *imagine* the purpose of work. However, we were told that it is important not only to *imagine*, but also to *check with the client*. Based on this feedback, we brushed up our patterns.

3.   WORK WELL-BEING PATTERNS

Work Well-Being Patterns consists of 27 patterns of practice that are important for workers to continue to work in a state of well-being while achieving results (Figure 2). These patterns are grouped into three categories, each containing nine patterns: *TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR OWN WORK*, *MAINTAINING YOUR MIND AND BODY* and *ENRICHING THE WORLD AROUND YOU*.

The category, *TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR OWN WORK* includes important practices to help workers find satisfaction and enjoyment in their work and be highly motivated. This category consists of three groups: FROM MUST TO WANT, IMMERSION IN WORK and OVERCOMING TOUGH TIMES.

The category, *MAINTAINING YOUR MIND AND BODY* includes important practices to keep the mind and body healthy while coping with the stress and fatigue that comes with working hard. This category consists of three groups: TIME DESIGN, RECOVERING FROM FATIGUE and COPING WITH DAILY STRESS.

The category, *ENRICHING THE WORLD AROUND YOU* includes important practices for building good relationships with the people around you and creating a comfortable and growing environment. This category consists of three groups: CREATING A PLACE FOR EVERYONE, CO-CREATION OF A COMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENT and EXPANDING THE WORLD.

In the following section, we present two patterns selected from each category.

*TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR OWN WORK*
− Purpose of Work
− Focus Management
*MAINTAINING YOUR MIND AND BODY*
− Small Wrap-Up Party
− Signs of Fatigue
*ENRICHING THE WORLD AROUND YOU*
− Support for Understanding
− Continuous Updating
    The other patterns are outlined in the Appendix.
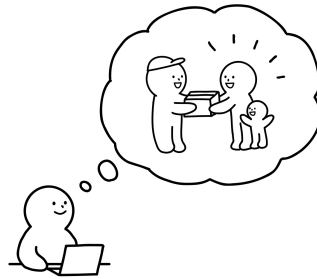


Fig. 2. Overview of Work Well-Being Patterns.

4. PATTERNS

In this section, the full descriptions of the six patterns are shown.

4.1 Purpose of Work

# Purpose of Work

What does this work contribute to?

You are working day in and day out.

▼ In this context

**If you are just doing the tasks in front of you, you may lose sight of the meaning of your work.** In a multi-person job, the scope of one's responsibility within the whole is limited. If you focus only on the goals and deadlines you need to achieve, you may lose sight of what the work is leading to. This may make it difficult to feel fulfilled and lead to a loss of motivation.

▼ Therefore

**Identify and reflect on the purpose of your work to understand the role your current task plays in the project, organization, and society.** Every single task you work on plays a part in achieving a larger objective. When you are assigned a task, try to imagine what role the task is playing and who it is bringing happiness to. You may also check with the client about the purpose of the work, or research its importance by yourself.

▼ Consequently

By understanding what your work is connected to and how you can help others, you will find your work more rewarding. It will also increase your motivation to work, which will lead to better performance. Furthermore, working will become a daily joy, and you will be able to lead a more fulfilling life.

4.2 Focus Management

# Focus Management

There is only one thing you can do right now.

There are several tasks that need to be done.

<p style="text-align:center">▼ In this context</p>

**When you have a lot of work to do, it becomes difficult to focus on the task at hand because you are concerned about other tasks and deadlines.** The situation of having to concurrently handle multiple tasks can arise at any given time. While it is crucial to have an overview and grasp the progress and content of each task in order to manage them effectively, constantly being preoccupied with such concerns may lead to a lack of focus within each individual endeavor, resulting in all of them being compromised to some extent.

<p style="text-align:center">▼ Therefore</p>

**Approach your work without distractions by setting aside everything except the task you've chosen to tackle at the moment.** First, prioritize the several tasks in your mind, as well as which ones you will work on and when you will work on them. And explicitly schedule dedicated time for each task, blocking off any other appointments. Furthermore, to enhance focus and work more effectively on tasks, it is a good idea to divide the time spent on each task into shorter segments, so you can focus on accomplishing small steps of your task.

<p style="text-align:center">▼ Consequently</p>

By organizing the timing of working on the tasks you have, you will be able to focus on each task. In this way, you will be able to finish each job one by one, and each time you do so, you will feel a small sense of accomplishment. In this way, you will be able to achieve high performance even during busy times when you have several tasks on your plate.

4.3   Small Wrap-Up Party

# Small Wrap-Up Party

A celebration for the day's hard work.
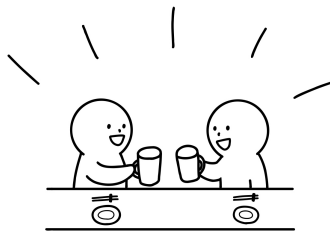


The day's work is finished.

<p style="text-align:center">▼ In this context</p>

**If you work long hours and end the day as it is, you may end up with fatigue.** Often, since many tasks cannot be completed in a single day, the end of the day marks only a pause in work. Such days can leave you feeling unrefreshed, awaiting a sense of accomplishment that seems far off. In this situation, fatigue and a persistent feeling of unease accumulate, weighing heavily on the depths of your mind and causing a depletion of your energy and motivation.

<p style="text-align:center">▼ Therefore</p>

**Have a small get-together at the end of the day so that you can close the day with pleasant memories.** For example, go out to dinner with the people you work with after work. Even during busy times, it is a good idea to

go out for a drink together before heading home and praise each other for the great work. Alternatively, you may want to enjoy time with your family at home, eating a meal of your choice. It's a way to bring the day's work to a close, just as you would have a wrap-up party when a project or a big job comes to a close.

▼ Consequently

You will have a good time at the end of the day, and you will be able to vent your exhaustion. You may also find that you have more energy when you work thinking that there will be a small party at the end of the workday. Furthermore, you will be able to start work the next day with a clearer mind and a more positive outlook with your fellow workers during a busy time.

4.4    Signs of Fatigue

# Signs of Fatigue

The sign is an SOS from yourself.
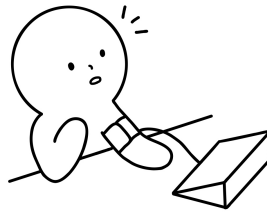


You are busy working every day.

▼ In this context

**As fatigue accumulates, you may find it difficult to perform at your best and may become irritable towards others.** Fatigue accumulates little by little and is difficult to notice by yourself. However, accumulated fatigue can impact the quality of your work and your communication with others. As a result, you may become even more tired and irritable, potentially falling into a vicious cycle.

▼ Therefore

**Take your unusual condition as a sign that you are tired, so that you can recognize and deal with your fatigue earlier.** For example, physical changes, such as skin breakouts or significant fluctuations in blood pressure or body temperature, may also be signs of your tiredness that you notice. Additionally, consider it a sign that you are tired when you notice being bothered by trivial things that normally do not bother you or when you unconsciously become a little harsh in your tone of voice toward those around you.

▼ Consequently

By becoming immediately aware of your own fatigue, you can take action before it has a major impact. In addition, you will be able to choose work that is easier to tackle according to your fatigue at the time, and you will no longer feel self-loathing for not being able to do things the way you normally do. In this way, you will be able to maintain your physical and mental health and achieve stable and high performance on a daily basis.

4.5    Support for Understanding

# Support for Understanding

Create a place where no one is left behind.
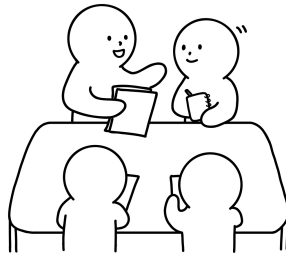
There is a member of your team who is unfamiliar with the language and content related to a particular job.

▼ In this context

**If you communicate with that member in the same way as you would with a member who is familiar with the job, you may unintentionally leave them behind.** After working at a job for a long time, the words and content used at work become so commonplace that you use them casually in your daily conversations. However, for those who are unfamiliar with the job or those who have just started working there, there are times when they do not understand. At such times, members who do not understand may find it difficult to ask questions, or they may not be able to keep up with the conversation since it moves on while they are trying to figure it out.

▼ Therefore

**Provide the necessary support to help the member understand by paying attention to any unfamiliar words or content.** For example, if jargon known only within the company or to certain positions is used, explain its meaning immediately to the member who is unfamiliar with the term without waiting for them to ask for clarification. Also, be sure to politely communicate things that are not in the manual, such as how the work is done and where to find things. In addition, when you are meeting online, you may want to use the chat feature to explain the meaning and context of the term.

▼ Consequently

By reaching out to those who are unfamiliar with the work being done, everyone in the room can work together on the task. This will help members who are new to the organization or team to feel like they are part of it. In this way, by having members who know a lot about a particular job take care of new members, you can create a comfortable place to work for everyone.

4.6    Continuous Updating

# Continuous Updating

Continue to grow throughout your life.
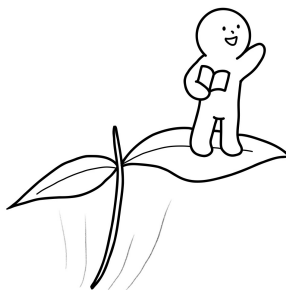
You live in a time of rapid change.

<div align="center">▼ In this context</div>

**Times are shifting, and if you don't feel yourself changing, you may feel insecure about your current situation and future.** In a fast-changing business environment, certain jobs may not persist into the future. Also, your interests and what you want to do may shift from what you are doing now. This can cause anxiety if you are not able to keep up with the fast-paced changes, leading to a great deal of stress.

<div align="center">▼ Therefore</div>

**Continue to grow and update throughout your life by learning not only what you need to learn for your current job, but also what you are interested in.** For example, if you find another field of work appealing alongside your current one, take the time to learn about it. You may also want to try to further deepen what you were learning as a student or update your knowledge. In this way, continue to learn on a daily basis, using time outside of work, such as commuting time and holidays.

<div align="center">▼ Consequently</div>

By learning more about what interests you, you will increase what you know and what you can do. In this way, you will enjoy yourself, build on your strengths, and continue to work in a way that is uniquely you. Furthermore, if each member of the organization becomes able to demonstrate their own strengths, the organization as a whole will be able to continue working in a lively state while achieving results.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This paper presented an overview of the Work Well-Being Patterns, a pattern language for well-being at work, and the full descriptions of six of the patterns. We created this Pattern Language to share the practical knowledge of people who are successfully accomplishing both well-being and achieving results. We sincerely hope that this pattern language will support the well-being of many workers. Furthermore, we anticipate that managers and directors will utilize this pattern language to implement initiatives that promote the well-being of workers.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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APPENDIX
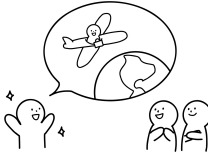
The following is a table with summaries for each of the patterns in the Work Well-Being Patterns.

A.1 PATTERNS FOR TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR OWN WORK

A.1.1 From *Must* to *Want*

Patterns in the group From *Must* to *Want* are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The summaries of the patterns in From *Must* to *Want*

| Pattern Name | Illustration | Summary |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Purpose of Work |  | Identify and reflect on the purpose of your work to understand the role your current task plays in the project, organization, and society. |
| Enjoyable Twist |  | Make the daily work more enjoyable by adding a little twist to the process of working (e.g., compete on the level and speed of results). |
| True Interests |  | Talk to people around you on a regular basis about what you are interested in and what you want to do, so that it can lead to your job in the future. |

A.1.2 Immersion in Work

Patterns in the group Immersion in Work are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The summaries of the patterns in Immersion in Work

| Pattern Name | Illustration | Summary |
| --- | --- | --- |

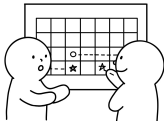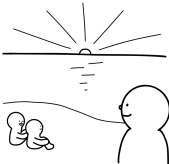| Concentration Time | | Create an environment that is less stimulating from the outside and work in that environment by informing fellow workers in advance that you will concentrate on your work during that time. |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Focus Management | | Approach your work without distractions by setting aside everything except the task you've chosen to tackle at the moment. |
| Little Stretch | | Adjust your goals to where you can perform at your highest level by adding extra things to do to a given goal, or by breaking down a high goal into smaller pieces. |

A.1.3 Overcoming Tough Times

Patterns in the group Overcoming Tough Times are shown in Table 3.

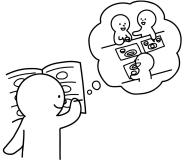Table 3: The summaries of the patterns in Overcoming Tough Times

| Pattern Name | Illustration | Summary |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Readjustment for Achievement | | Inform the manager that the work you are undertaking is in a difficult situation, and adjust staffing, deadlines, etc. together to complete that work. |
| Harvest from Failure | | Reflect carefully on what went wrong and identify the causes so that the next good outcome can be achieved. |
| Original Self | | Remember what you value and what makes you who you are by coming into contact with places, people, and things that remind you of your lively and authentic self. |

A.2 PATTERNS FOR MAINTAINING YOUR MIND AND BODY

A.2.1 Time Design
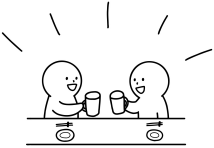
Patterns in the group Time Design are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: The summaries of the patterns in Time Design

| Pattern Name | Illustration | Summary |
|---|---|---|
| Exercise Timeslot | | Schedule time for physical activity in advance, and make it a part of your daily routine. |
| Sleep for Tomorrow | | Sleep in a way that enhances your performance tomorrow by thinking of the time you go to sleep as the run-up to tomorrow. |
| Mealtime Appointment | | Block off meal times in your schedule in advance so that you have time to eat. |

A.2.2 Recovering from Fatigue

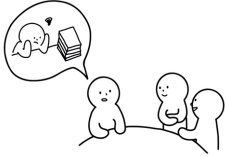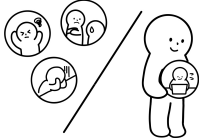Patterns in the group Recovering from Fatigue are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: The summaries of the patterns in Recovering from Fatigue

| Pattern Name | Illustration | Summary |
|---|---|---|
| Small Wrap-Up Party | | Have a small get-together at the end of the day so that you can close the day with pleasant memories. |
| Switch Off Time | | Get away from thinking about work all the time by consciously creating time for relaxing or doing manual tasks that can be done without using your mind. |
| Feeling Beauty | | Expose yourself to something that makes your heart flutter, such as something you find beautiful or moving. |

A.2.3 Coping with Daily Stress

Patterns in the group Coping with Daily Stress are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: The summaries of the patterns in Coping with Daily Stress

| Pattern Name | Illustration | Summary |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Signs of Fatigue | | Take your unusual condition as a sign that you are tired, so that you can recognize and deal with your fatigue earlier. |
| Uncork the Bottle | | Talk to others about your problems and concerns so that you do not keep them to yourself. |
| Focus on the Controllable | | Focus on what you can control and do your best by separating what you can control from what you cannot control, and by taking a detached view of what you cannot control. |

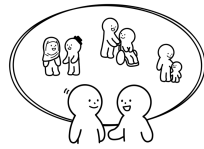A.3 PATTERNS FOR ENRICHING THE WORLD AROUND YOU

A.3.1 Creating a Place for Everyone

Patterns in the group Creating a Place for Everyone are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: The summaries of the patterns in Creating a Place for Everyone

| Pattern Name | Illustration | Summary |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Casual Communication | | Create a relationship in which you can easily talk about what you are thinking by making time for small talk. |
| Support for Understanding | | Provide the necessary support to help the member understand by paying attention to any unfamiliar words or content. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Inclusive Expressions | | Avoid creating people who are excluded by the language you use by using language that is not offensive to anyone who hears it. |

A.3.2 Co-creation of a Comfortable Environment

Patterns in the group Co-creation of a Comfortable Environment are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: The summaries of the patterns in Co-creation of a Comfortable Environment

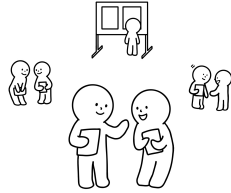| Pattern Name | Illustration | Summary |
|---|---|---|
| Duties at Home | | Live each day with the awareness that you are part of the family by discussing with your families and thinking about what you can do to make a happy family. |
| Flexible Cooperation | | If there are important personal matters outside of work, discuss and coordinate with team members to accommodate and help each other. |
| As a Pioneer | | See the difficulty you feel in working as the first example among others who will have the same problems in the future, and work to improve and make the system better. |

A.3.3 Expanding World

Patterns in the group Expanding World are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: The summaries of the patterns in Expanding World

| Pattern Name | Illustration | Summary |
|---|---|---|
| Chit-Chat Chance | | Create opportunities to interact through casual conversation by viewing breaks as a chance to expand your friendships with others, and try to talk to those around you. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Stepping Out | | Gain a relative perspective of the environment you are in and what you are working on by creating opportunities to engage with people you would not normally encounter in your organization and people who think differently. |
| Continuous Updating | | Continue to grow and update throughout your life by learning not only what you need to learn for your current job, but also what you are interested in. |