

## Northeast Asia Regional Program



**Shunsuke Niwa** | Tokyo, JAPAN  
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Shunsuke Niwa is General Manager and supervises all operations of JR-Central's Shinkansen Operations Division, which runs the pioneer high-speed passenger rail system Tokaido Shinkansen, the principal transportation artery linking Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka. Originally built and operated by the government-owned Japanese National Railways, Shinkansen has been part of the private Japan Railways Group since 1987. While on fellowship, he studied executive leadership development, youth leadership, organizational cultural management, and emergency preparedness.

Eisenhower Fellowships trustees past and present opened doors for Mr. Niwa, providing unparalleled opportunities to meet with top executives at several corporations, including PACCAR and Procter & Gamble. In summarizing his learnings from these meetings, he noted: "Key competencies required for leaders in organizations vary depending on the mission, goal, culture, and so on. However, through my fellowship, I came to believe that there are common competencies shared by many large organizations. I would categorize them into three groups: Skills and Techniques (including communication skills, vision creation, delegation, skills to inspire others, and mentoring); Personal Strength (including physical toughness, mental toughness, resilience, self-confidence, and self-awareness); and the Mindset of Responsibility (such as identity as a leader, motivation to make things better, and enthusiasm to let other people improve)."

Mr. Niwa noted being "most impressed that leaders of American big businesses think that they can 'teach' not only skills or techniques, but also personal strength and the mindset of responsibility." Additionally, he "found it quite impressive that in most firms I visited, C-suite executives are strongly engaged in development of high-potentials. Those high-ranking people spare their time and energy to share the stories of their careers with capable managers, as well as get committed to assess the abilities of those high-potentials. I learned that the commitment of top level executives is essential to train future leaders." His insights were particularly useful, because as a recently promoted general manager, the "fellowship opportunity enabled me to understand what I should do, that is, to establish a sound system for day-to-day operations, to delegate work, to oversee and examine if the system is working well, and to make system changes by detecting environmental changes in a timely manner and responding to them promptly."

He met with directors of the executive education programs at Harvard University and the University of Chicago (his alma mater), and had a valuable discussion with USA Fellow Bob Halperin ('02), Executive Director of MIT's Center for Collective Intelligence, who provided helpful insights regarding establishing a system to develop the talents of executives and evaluate their potential and performance. Another highlight was Mr. Niwa's visit to St. Vincent College's Kennametal Center for Operational Excellence in Latrobe, PA. His host, USA Fellow Richard Kunkle ('94), also arranged visits to the Special Medical Response Team and with KCOE clients. As a trumpet player and chairman of the JR-Central Band Club, Mr. Niwa especially enjoyed his visits to "The President's Own," the U.S. Marine Corps Band (where he saw the archival holdings of John Philip Sousa's scores and his baton), and to West Point, where he was hosted by Lieutenant Colonel Jim Keene, Leader of the U.S. Military Academy Band.

The fellowship provided several key surprises and take-aways. These included "the unexpected dedication, kindness and eagerness that the people I met with showed during the meetings; people who spared their precious time for me voluntarily, finding the significance of discussion with me, with a good preparation." His greatest personal observation was the need to have a 'flexible' and 'resilient' mindset, rather than a 'hard' mindset. And finally, he stated "The friendship and comradeship with my fellow Fellows will be the greatest asset that I gained through my fellowship. I am quite sure that the relationship with them will enable me to further improve my leadership in the future."

**Leaders bettering the world around them.**