

3 Actual State of Awards Programs for Promoting Innovation^(*)

In order to promote innovation in Japan, it is necessary to increase the motivation of engineers and researchers, and to this end, as one of incentives, programs and schemes for giving them awards play an important role. While, in Japan, various awards programs are operated under the sponsorship of the national or local governments, incorporated foundations or associations, mass media, and other entities (hereinafter referred to as “hosts”) and companies, there is a call for a review of various awards programs from the viewpoints of securing incentives for engineers or the like, and, at the same time, enhancing companies’ innovations. Under such background, this research was conducted, aiming to compile basic materials for consideration of desirable awards programs for the future, by surveying the actual state of awards programs operated by hosts and enterprises, and carrying out interviews with experts based on survey results.

I Introduction

1 Background of this research

In order to promote innovation in Japan, it is necessary to increase the motivation of engineers and researchers (hereinafter referred to as “engineers, etc.”) who create excellent technologies and designs to undertake new research and development activities, and to this end, programs and schemes for giving them incentive awards in addition to financial compensation play an important role.

At present, various awards programs are operated under the sponsorship of the national or local governments, incorporated foundations or associations, the media, and other entities (hereinafter referred to as “hosts”). There is a call for a review of these awards programs mainly from the following perspectives: [i] whether these awards programs are designed to ensure that engineers, etc. in all fields are properly evaluated and awarded; and [ii] whether in-house awards programs that excellent engineers, etc., find satisfactory have been established, although this depends on the policies and rules of individual companies. The aim of this review is to secure incentives for engineers or the like in carrying out research and development activities, while, at the same time, enhancing companies’ international competitiveness and innovation potential. The Intellectual Property Subcommittee under the Industrial Property Council made recommendations to that effect in its recent report.¹

Against such background, this research aims to compile basic materials for discussing

desirable forms of awards programs for the future, by: [a] investigating the actual state of programs operated in and outside Japan for awarding engineers or the like, and comparing and analyzing these programs in terms of the method for selecting a wide range of award candidates and the selection criteria; and [b] investigating the actual state of in-house programs operated by Japanese and foreign companies for awarding engineers or the like, and collecting case examples.

2 Method of this research

We investigated the actual state of programs for awarding engineers or the like (hereinafter referred to as “awards programs”), mainly using information available on the Internet. Since available information regarding awards programs operated by individual companies is limited, we mainly targeted awards programs operated by hosts. Among the subject awards programs, 90% were related to technology and 10% were related to designs. The percentage composition by host attributes of technology-related awards programs is as follows: national or local governments at 20%; incorporated foundations or associations at 40%; academic societies at 20%; and the media at 20%.

In order to make up for the deficiency in such publicly available information regarding awards programs operated by hosts, we conducted a questionnaire survey targeting 105 sponsors in Japan, and received responses from 67 of them (response rate: 64%). Among the respondents’ awards programs, 90% were related to technology and 10% were related to designs.

(*) This is an English summary by Institute of Intellectual Property based on the FY2014 JPO-commissioned research study report on the issues related to the industrial property rights system.

The percentage composition by host attributes of technology-related awards programs is as follows: national or local governments at 20%; incorporated foundations or associations at 30%; academic societies at 30%; and the media at 20%.

We also conducted a questionnaire survey targeting 1,005 Japanese companies in order to ascertain the status of development and operation of in-house programs operated by Japanese companies for awarding engineers, etc. Among the subject companies, 90% were large companies and 10% were small and medium-sized companies. We received responses from 519 companies (response rate: 52%).

In order to understand details of the status of development and operation of awards programs by Japanese hosts (e.g. awarding policy, selection criteria), we interviewed 10 hosts chosen from the questionnaire respondents, of which eight hosts operate technology-related awards programs (two national or local governments, three incorporated foundations or associations, one academic society, and two media organizations), and two operate design-related awards programs.

In addition, in order to understand the details of the status of development and operation of in-house awards programs operated by Japanese companies (e.g. points of note, issues), we also interviewed 10 companies chosen from the questionnaire respondents with the following industry breakdown: two companies from the electrical/electronics, one from information, one from automobiles, two from pharmaceuticals, one from materials, one from textile, one from chemicals, and one from construction.

Furthermore, in order to make up for the deficiency in publicly available information regarding awards programs operated by foreign hosts, we interviewed five hosts in the United States and Europe (including three IP offices), of which four hosts operate technology-related awards programs and one operates a design-related awards program. In addition, in order to understand details of the status of development and operation of in-house awards programs operated by foreign companies, we also interviewed five companies in the United States and Europe with the following industry breakdown: two companies from electrical/electronics, one from information, one from automobiles, and one from pharmaceuticals.

Based on the results of these surveys and interviews, we further interviewed five experts on awards programs such as those who have been

engaged in selecting award candidates, for the purpose of obtaining analytical views and advice on the concept and an ideal design of awards programs.

II Investigation of publicly available information

We accessed the websites of the selected hosts and gathered basic information on their awards programs (e.g. award name, host, supporter, objective, year when the award began, number of times of the award, type of award, number of applicants, number of award winners, prize gift or prize money, screening method and criteria, judges, date and venue of the award ceremony, attendees of the award ceremony, events held jointly with the award ceremony).

The information made available on websites by the media was the most substantial, followed by that of incorporated foundations or associations, national governments, and local governments, whereas, by contrast, most websites on awards programs by academic societies were relatively simple. Elaborately made websites were found more frequently among those of design-related awards programs than among those of technology-related awards programs.

III Investigation of awards programs operated by hosts

According to the results of the questionnaire surveys and interviews, the following features were identified in awards programs by hosts.

- Focusing on awards programs by foreign hosts, those dedicated to specific technologies (e.g. medical care) represented a relatively large proportion.
- Regarding the measures necessary for increasing the motivation of engineers, Japanese hosts frequently responded that they need to increase the profile of their awards. Making the award recognized as a career advantage was also cited as a necessary measure.
- Regarding the distinguishing feature of the award, having a long history was a frequent answer heard among both Japanese and foreign hosts. The need for more strategic features that can attract media attention was also mentioned.

IV Investigation of awards programs operated by companies

The major features of awards programs operated by companies are as follows.

- Regarding the status of in-house awards, companies having both awards dedicated to a limited range of employees and those without such limitation were found both among Japanese and foreign companies.
- Regarding the current condition of the motivation of engineers, etc., most Japanese and foreign companies responded that their employees were highly motivated. As the reason for this, Japanese companies explained that the employees are doing what they want to do as a job, whereas foreign companies explained that the employees were satisfied with their salaries or the workplace environment.
- Regarding what should be done to make engineers, etc. more motivated, Japanese companies cited giving better treatment or appropriate evaluation. Meanwhile, one foreign company mentioned that since its employees were already highly motivated, nothing particular should be done additionally.

V Awards programs for the future

Through the interviews with experts, we obtained hints related to the following aspects regarding ideal awards programs for the future.

1. Promotion of innovation
2. Points to note when considering awards programs
3. Points to note when considering design-related awards
4. Review of awards
5. Things to learn from foreign awards programs
6. Future expectations

VI Conclusion

The hints we obtained through this research with regard to future awards programs are not only concerned with awards programs themselves but may be the natural conclusions to be reached when we consider how to make engineers or the like more motivated toward research and creative activities by awarding excellent technologies and designs.

We hope that the results of this research will

be used as basic materials for discussing desirable forms of awards programs in the future and will ultimately be of some help for promoting innovation in Japan.

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¹ Intellectual Property Committee Industrial Structure Council, Report by the Intellectual Property Committee, p.19, February 24, 2014
http://www.jpo.go.jp/shiryu_e/toushin_e/shingikai_e/pdf/report_ipc2014.pdf