

Short Distances

Dear Reader,

I spent today touring the Mercedes engine factory in Bad Cannstatt. Many of the solutions that I saw there, in particular the visualisation of set values and actual values, seemed to me to be exemplary. I was especially impressed by a comment made by one of the assembly line managers. When I asked her how she ensured that any design changes that were necessary because of repeated defects in production actually got through to the engine development department, she answered: „I just call a colleague and ask him to come over and have a look at the problem on the assembly line.“

In a world of global production networks, this seemed an almost old-fashioned answer. And yet: isn't the competitive lead enjoyed by the German automotive industry due precisely to the fact that highly trained and highly skilled engineers from various disciplines work together on a premium product with premium properties? If it's simply a matter of putting cars together, then Tata and Chery can do that too – and even better than we think.

I am firmly convinced that we are making a great mistake if – as the USA has done – we drive manufacturing industry out of the country and believe that we can de-

fend the future of our nation only with innovative development departments. Value creation takes place in the factory!

If you are a decision-maker or are involved in preparing decisions, then I would ask you to consider not only wage costs or business tax but also the advantages of short distances. Wherever possible, development and production belong together at a single location. In the emerging economies, I believe that the approach is the other way round. China is a country that is investing heavily in training engineers and in establishing development expertise.

Also against this background, next month will see the launch of our new trade magazine ATZproduktion. And this year's Stuttgart Symposium, organised by the FKFS and ourselves on 11 and 12 March, will also include a number of highly interesting lectures on production technologies. I look forward to seeing you there.

Kind regards,



Johannes Winterhagen
Stuttgart, 30 January 2008



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