

Introduction

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The competitiveness of Japanese and German automobile manufacturers and suppliers in recent years has been the subject of intense discussion. As the key sector in Japanese and German industry, it occupies a significant position in the debate about the capabilities of Japan and Germany as industrial countries and, indeed, about the competitiveness and ability to survive in the future of the Japanese and German industry as a whole. Competition on world markets has become more dynamic over the last ten years. Management in Japanese automobile companies is permanently charged with putting in place strategies that will ensure that their company will lead the market. Automobile companies such as Toyota, Nissan and Honda have delivered clear evidence of their capabilities in recent years.

The demands made of Japanese automobile manufacturers are constantly increasing; particularly their customers' desire for personalized vehicles and the trend towards ever shorter product lifecycles are making their job increasingly difficult. In recent years, manufacturers have responded by offering many more models and variants of their vehicles. Greater product complexity together with rapid adjustment to market requirements demand flexibility implemented with an eye on costs, quality and delivery reliability. The Japanese manufacturers are taking all this into account as they pursue strategies to secure and increase competitiveness. They need to use technology and cost leadership to achieve market leadership on both the national and the global marketplace. Today we are here to discuss aspects of the Automobile industry in Japan and Germany – especially the strategic challenges and new perspectives in the age of Globalization. We will discuss questions like “How is the Japanese automobile industry structured following the significant alliances and take-overs of recent years?” Which strategies are the Japanese and German automobile manufacturers pursuing on new and interesting markets like China? How are the component suppliers positioning themselves? Where are their strategic strengths and weaknesses? What are the main problems in the field of Technology and Production Management?

In order to find answers to some of these questions we structure the conference program as follows: