

ONE-PAGE INFORMATION - KAIZEN No.36

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■ Kaizen is Transplanted to U.K. by Japanese Supervisors

According to Asahi-Shinbun newspaper (Jan. 29,2004), Japanese “Big Three” auto-makers (Toyota, Nissan & Honda) have sent their supervisors to U.K. to help British parts producers over the past eight years as requested by the British government and British Automotive Manufacturing Association (SMMT).

It should be remembered that supervisors, not professional engineers, were sent because they have more experiences and knack to solve problems in nitty-gritty situations than professional engineers.

I had a chance to talk with Mr. Sachio Itoh who returned home recently from his two years stay in U.K.

According to him, this scheme had two objectives : to help British parts suppliers to improve productivity and product quality and to train British industrial engineers in Kaizen.

Every two years, 2 experienced supervisors are selected each from Toyota, Nissan and Honda.

Each Japanese supervisor is to spend a total of 15 days (3 weeks) for a period of 3 months at one parts maker. In this way, a total of 18 Japanese supervisors have implemented Kaizen programs at 600 SMMT companies over the 8 years.

As it was found that Kaizen implementation procedures differed slightly from company to company, a “Common Approach Manual” was worked out by the three Japanese auto companies to avoid any confusion.

When Mr. Itoh visited a factory in Sunderland U.K. in spring 2003, he was shocked to find a lot of rubbish scattered around the work place and rejected parts lying on the shop-floor without any identification.

He pointed out the following two important differences between the companies in his country and U.K. which makes teamwork difficult.

- 1) A persistent class separation between managers and workers
- 2) No systematic training system

According to the newspaper, this project was terminated last year in complete success due to cost and other reasons. But British government is planning to expand this Kaizen project to other 8 different industries including the aviation industry by utilizing the experiences that SMMT have gained from Japanese supervisors over the eight years.