

# Preface

The people who work in the production workplaces of the Japanese car component firm, which I researched for this book, are my teachers. To complete my Ph.D. dissertation, in June 1993 I stayed in the firm's dormitory and conducted research at production workplaces of the firm's plant. The people at the plant, who were very capable and helpful, facilitated and expedited my research to a considerable degree. Although previously, from 1978 to 1990, I had worked at a Japanese manufacturing firm, I had no experience in observing operations at production workplaces throughout the workday. Therefore my research at the car component plant was the first opportunity for me to conduct participant observation at any plant. Since completing my research at the car component plant in 1993, I have conducted research at many firms and plants around the world. As a result, I noticed that the car component firm that I had researched was one of the finest manufacturing firms in the world.

With the overseas business expansion of the car component firm in which I had done my research, some of the managers and supervisors whom I had met in 1993 had moved to the firm's transplants in the United States, Thailand, and China. The managers and supervisors kindly provided me with an opportunity for research at the transplants. Thus, greatly owing to the help of these people, and especially the production workers, assistant first-line supervisors, and manufacturing engineers there, this book was brought to completion.

My original research interests concerned production workers and assistant first-line supervisors. Subsequently my interests shifted to manufacturing engineers at production workplaces and their headquarters, the personnel who play important linking roles in manufacturing processes. As this book is a case study of a Japanese car component firm, I will analyze from a theoretical point of view the roles of manufacturing engineers in a future book of mine.

I sincerely wish to thank Harry C. Katz, Ronald W. Thornton, Andrew Doyle, Takenori Inoki, Susumu Ogawa, Takeshi A. Thornton, Daniel A. Heller, Yoshio Yanadori, Itaru Nakashima, Masako Kageyama, and the many people at the plants where I conducted my field research.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-981-10-1958-6>

Explaining Productivity Differences  
Comparative Analysis of Automotive Plants in Japan, the  
United States, Thailand and China

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2016, XI, 59 p. 1 illus., Softcover

ISBN: 978-981-10-1958-6