



Revisiting the 'Japanization of British Industry': The contemporary state of shop-steward organisation in the UK car industry

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15:30 – 17:00 (coffee and tea at 15:15)

B4, Alliance Manchester Business School East



Abstract

The automotive industry is currently heralded as an exemplar of UK manufacturing policy. Characteristic of the sector's renaissance is the calibre of employment relations. Once widely known for industrial conflict and unrest, contemporaneous accounts of the industry tend to emphasise the turn to co-operative workplace relations. A well-known, if somewhat opaque, component of this narrative has relied on notions that employment relations in the industry were subject to a 'Japanization' effect with employers learning to deploy allegedly more consensual approaches to workforce management. Yet sceptical accounts argued that such initiatives would simply disembowel shop floor union structures and weaken independent shop stewards. Revisiting these debates, this seminar will discuss contemporary evidence derived from fieldwork in nine automotive assembly plants across the UK, focusing on how shop-steward organisation in the industry has evolved since these early debates and its contemporary characteristics.

About the Speaker

Niall Cullinane is Senior Lecturer in Employment Relations and Human Resource Management at Queen's University Management School, Queen's University Belfast. His research interests lie broadly in the area of work and employment relations. He has published previously in *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, *Work Employment and Society*, *Industrial Law Journal* and *Human Relations*.