

Lean Production and Leadership – Operational Excellence in Japan

Nothing Is More Inspirational than Successful Role Models.



Illustration: © Roman Ditzer, 2025

**Impact of the Learning Journeys:
Results of the Online Surveys**
Lean Production and Leadership –
Operational Excellence in Japanese Companies

June 2025

Dr Roman Ditzer

Online Surveys

Objective and Questions

We wanted to know more out about the long-term impact of our **LEAN Learning Journeys** to Japan so we conducted a simple survey. The aim was also to find out the extent to which the inspiration from Japan has led to behavioural changes and improvements in daily business back in Europe. After all, our Japan seminars are based on one fundamental principle: **Ultimately, the only thing that counts is what is later implemented in your own company.**

The survey consisted of nine questions, formulated in an open manner to ensure that the answers were neither suggestive nor prescriptive. We were eager to receive honest feedback and clear statements. At some points in the survey we follow-up on affirmative answers and ask for more details or examples.

The results of the online surveys **2015, 2019, 2020, 2023, 2024, and 2025** are presented together below.

Online Surveys

Participants and Response Rate

Participants 2012 to 2024

We contacted **344 participants** of our 20 Learning Journeys of the years 2012 until 2024. **174 participants*** answered the questions and completed the survey in November 2015, October 2019, December 2020, June 2023, June 2024, and April 2025 . **This equates to a response rate of 51 %.**

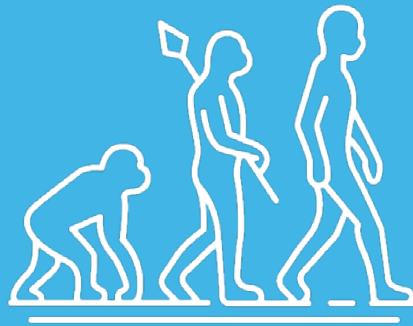
Thus the **results are representative and robust.**

** Some questions could be skipped without being answered, hence the total number of answers not adding up to 174.*

Question 1

Question about the Impact of the Learning Journey

Looking back, would you say that the Learning Journey was worthwhile for your own personal development?

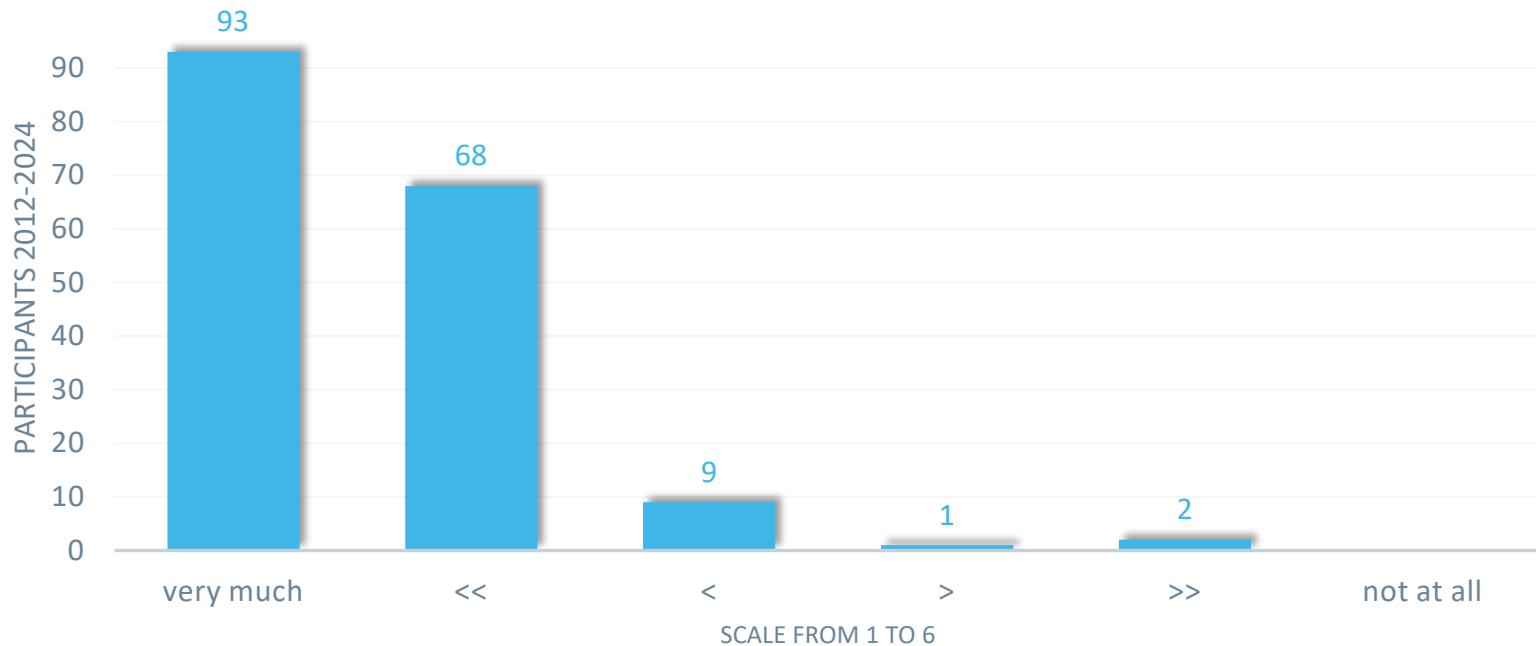


Source: Icon made by istar_design_bureau: www.flaticon.com/authors/istar-design-bureau

Was the Learning Journey Worthwhile?

Results of 20 Learning Journeys from 2012 to 2024

On a scale from 1 (very worthwhile) to 6 (not worthwhile at all) ...



Participants 2012-2024 (173 answers)

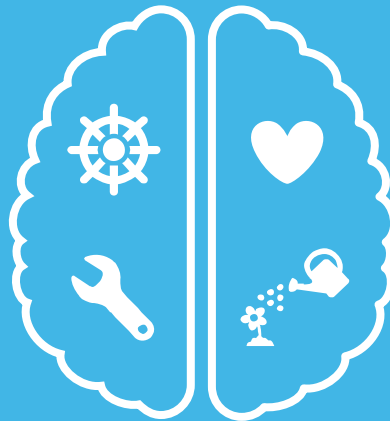
Average score: **1.6**

Question 2

Question about the Impact of the Learning Journey

Did the experience in Japan change your leadership style?

Leading with the left
side of the brain

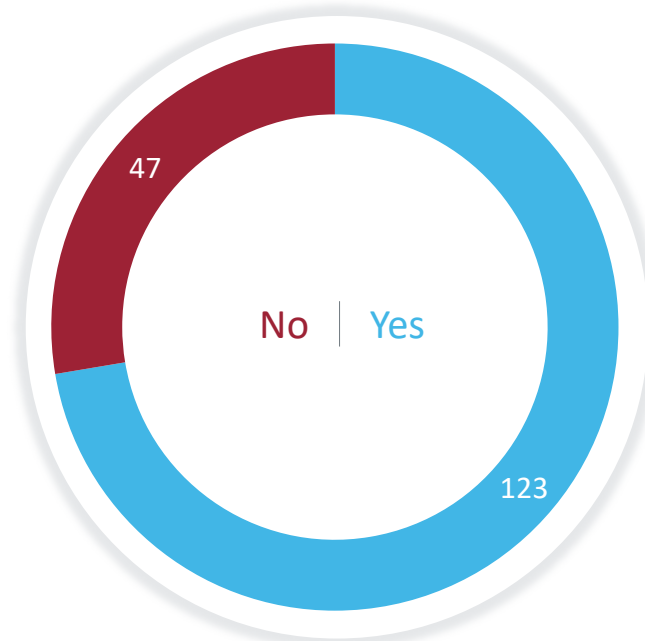


Leading with the right
side of the brain

Has your Leadership Style Changed?

Results of 20 Learning Journeys from 2012 to 2024

Did the experience in Japan change your leadership style?



Participants 2012-2024 (170 answers)

72 % of the participants reported a change in behaviour.

Has your Leadership Style Changed?

Follow-up Question

If yes, in what way?

Has your Leadership Style Changed?

Selected Answers

"After the trip, my appreciation of the employees has changed. What you invest here, you end up getting back twofold.

It also showed me what advantages a consistent implementation on the basis of a uniform philosophy entails."

Has your Leadership Style Changed?

Selected Answers

"For me, lean has always been more of a craftsmanship that you have to do well ('brain work'). I learned from my trip to Japan that it is more of a way of life ('working from the heart'). That's why I now try to introduce more people to waste in my everyday life and help them to recognize it themselves instead of solving the waste directly with methods."

Has your Leadership Style Changed?

Selected Answers

"I pay more attention to small steps – not taking on too much, focusing on pragmatic implementation".

"Less deciding on my own → more trusting of employees and motivating them!"

"To greet every employee personally every morning."

Has your Leadership Style Changed?

Selected Answers

"Since Japan, I have placed much more emphasis on visualisation and transparency of results. *Go and See* is more important to me than before."

"More discipline, more 'leading by example', more 'go to *genba', fewer automation requests"**

"I have tried to grow my EQ (emotional intelligence) and use the right side of the brain."

**Genba*: 'place of action' meaning shopfloor

Has your Leadership Style Changed?

Selected Answers

**"Significantly more on-site presence!
I now try to make the world a little bit better every day. 'One step, one yen, one second'* . I try to change the things I can influence and spend less time trying to convince boards."**

*'One step, one yen, one second' is one of the *kaizen* mottos of the company KSK, with the message that even seemingly small improvements have value and that no improvement is too small to be considered as such.

Has your Leadership Style Changed?

Selected Answers

"The manager's task is to take care of the employees and to use and promote the potential of the employees: Employees take care of their worries and are given the freedom and, if necessary, the means to remedy them".

"Balance between 'left and right brain hemisphere'"

Question 3

Question about the Cost-Benefit Ratio

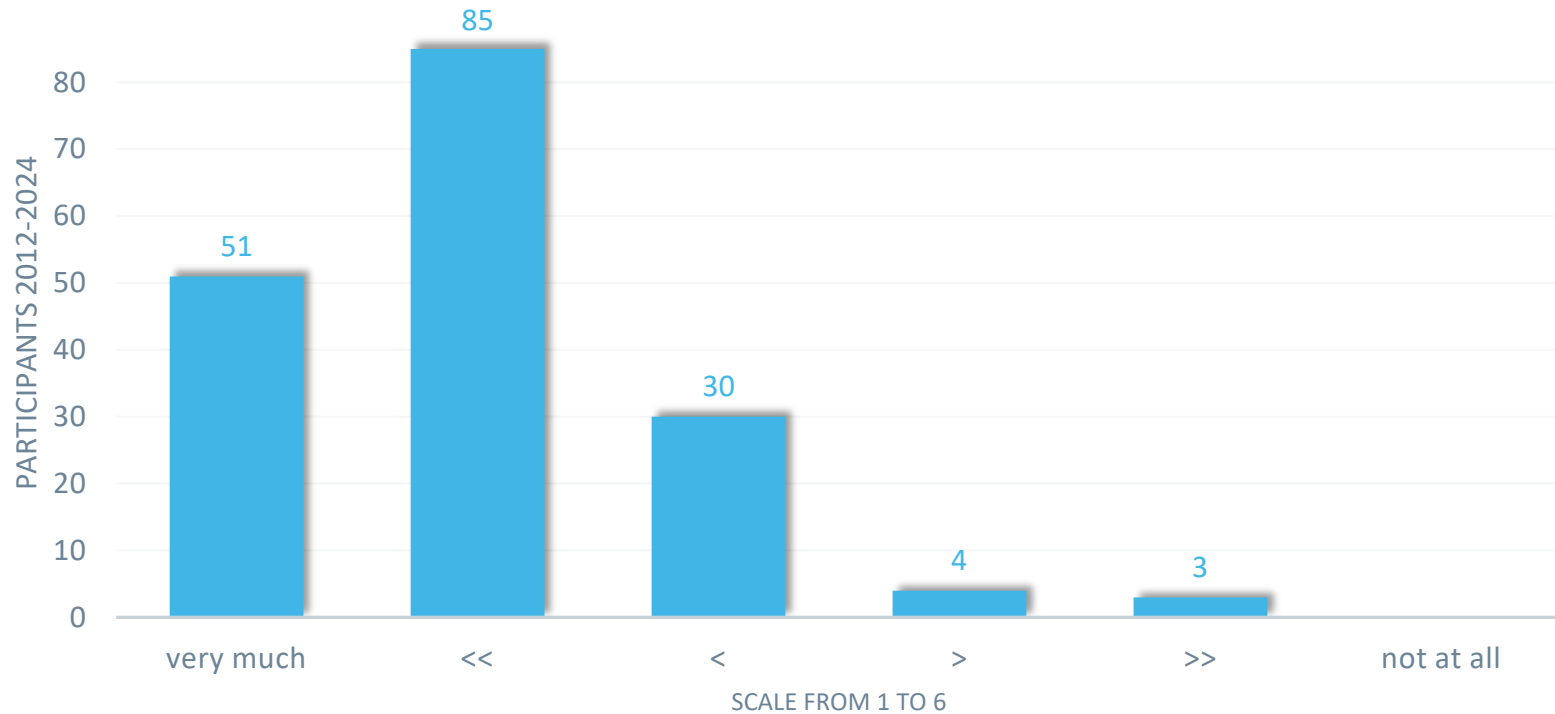
In retrospect, would you say that the Learning Journey was **worthwhile** for the company that sent you?



... Worthwhile for your Company?

Results of 20 Learning Journeys from 2012 to 2024

On a scale from 1 (very worthwhile) to 6 (not worthwhile at all) ...



Participants 2012-2024 (173 answers)

Average score: **2.0**

Question 4

Question about the Impact of the Learning Journey

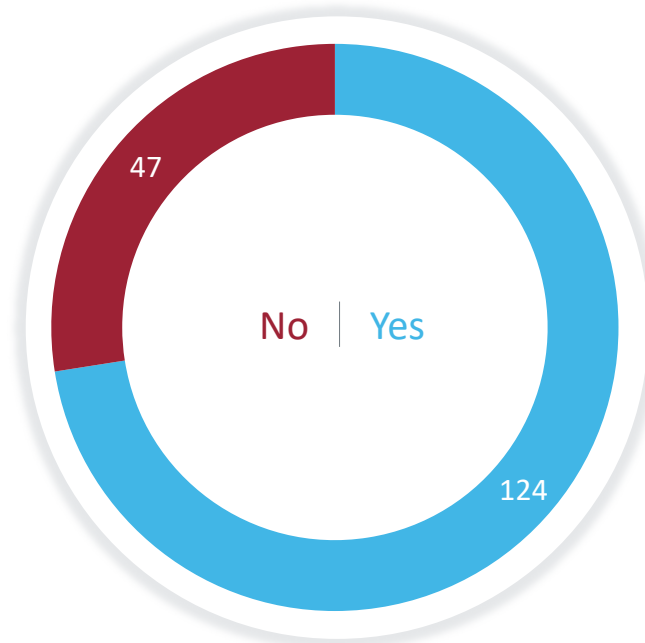
Are there any **specific improvement measures** which can be traced back to the ideas from the Learning Journey?



... Specific Improvement Measures?

Results of 20 Learning Journeys from 2012 to 2024

Did the Journey lead to any specific improvement measures?



Participants 2012-2024 (171 answers)
The Learning Journey led to improvement measures for **73 %** of the participants.

... Specific Improvement Measures?

Follow-up Question

If yes, do you have any examples?

... Specific Improvement Measures?

Selected Answers

"Every participant of the Learning Journey has started (partly already implemented) his own projects in the plant with the knowledge from Japan. The effects in Euros as well as in culture are excellent."

"The minimum target of the tour (savings from the elimination of waste) was achieved. However, a much more important key figure is that the exchange with other subsidiaries has increased massively and that the lean community in Berlin has risen from 3 to over 20."

... Specific Improvement Measures?

Selected Answers

"Savings programme worth 140 000 EUR started."

"1. stronger focus on analysing the causes of malfunctions and deviations as a basis for implementing sustainable corrective/preventive measures.

2. raising awareness of the cumulative effect of small issues".

... Specific Improvement Measures?

Selected Answers

"Training series on lean for DB Systel employees; development of a team in this direction; impulses for the daily thinking behaviour of employees, e. g. through Brownbag sessions."

"Setting up learning islands at DB LEAN Lernfabrik ['learning factory'] Leipzig"

"Annual event introduced to appreciate the suggestions of direct employees"

... Specific Improvement Measures?

Selected Answers

"In logistics we hosted a number of workshops based around the 'TPS Training Day'*-style examples. We also worked with our *kaizen* and training teams to develop a three part training program as an introduction to lean for all colleagues that is now 50% through the roll out."

"More comparable numbers, e. g. hours that employees get for *kaizen* activities ... This structured information will help."

*The 'TPS Training Day' is a practical *kaizen* training workshop based on the Toyota Production System (TPS) lead by 'Toyota Old Boys', former Toyota employees.

... Specific Improvement Measures?

Selected Answers

"OEE* improvement (+10%) targeted in an area through workplace analysis and *kaizen* changes → project is underway and should be completed by the end of this year.

Exactly arrange the work on a line of two employees (through time analysis), optimise and drastically improve the plant OEE for small batch sizes → project is ongoing

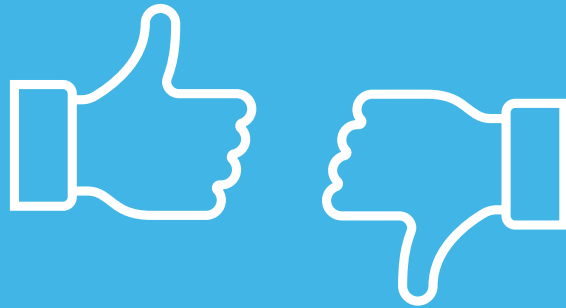
→ all topics are discussed every second week through our 'Coaching Meetings' (2 h fixed meetings)."

*OEE: Overall Equipment Effectiveness

Question 5

Question about the Cost-Benefit Ratio

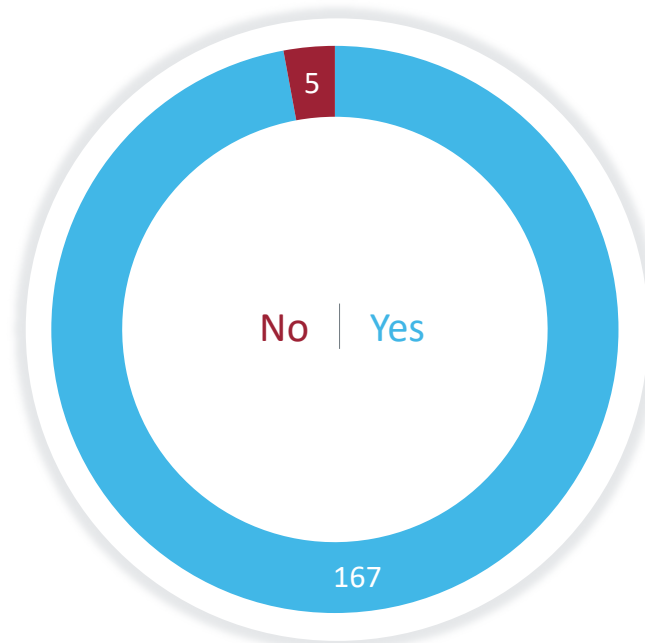
From your company's point of view, would you recommend that colleagues also participate in a Learning Journey to Japan?



... Recommend the Journey to Colleagues?

Results of 20 Learning Journeys from 2012 to 2024

From your company's point of view, would you recommend the trip to colleagues?



Participants 2012-2024 (172 answers)

97 % of the participants would recommend the Learning Journey.

Question 6

Question about the Programme Event with Long-lasting Effect

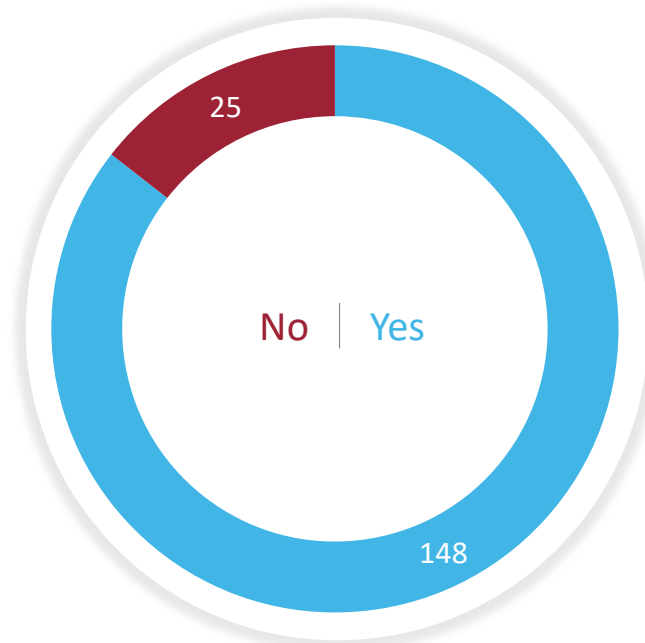
Is there a company visit or programme event that you remember as **particularly positive**?



Highlight of the Journey?

Results of 20 Learning Journeys from 2012 to 2024

Is there a company visit or programme event that you remember as particularly positive?

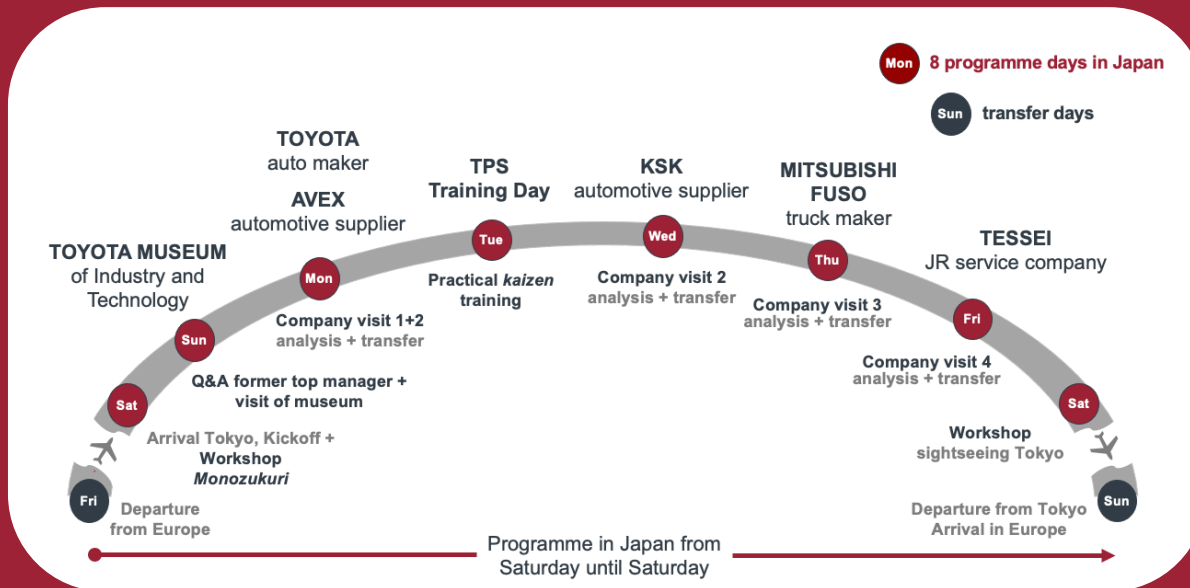


Participants 2012-2024 (173 answers)
86 % of the participants recall
a personal highlight.

Highlight of the Journey?

Follow-up Question

If yes, what was it and what was the reason?

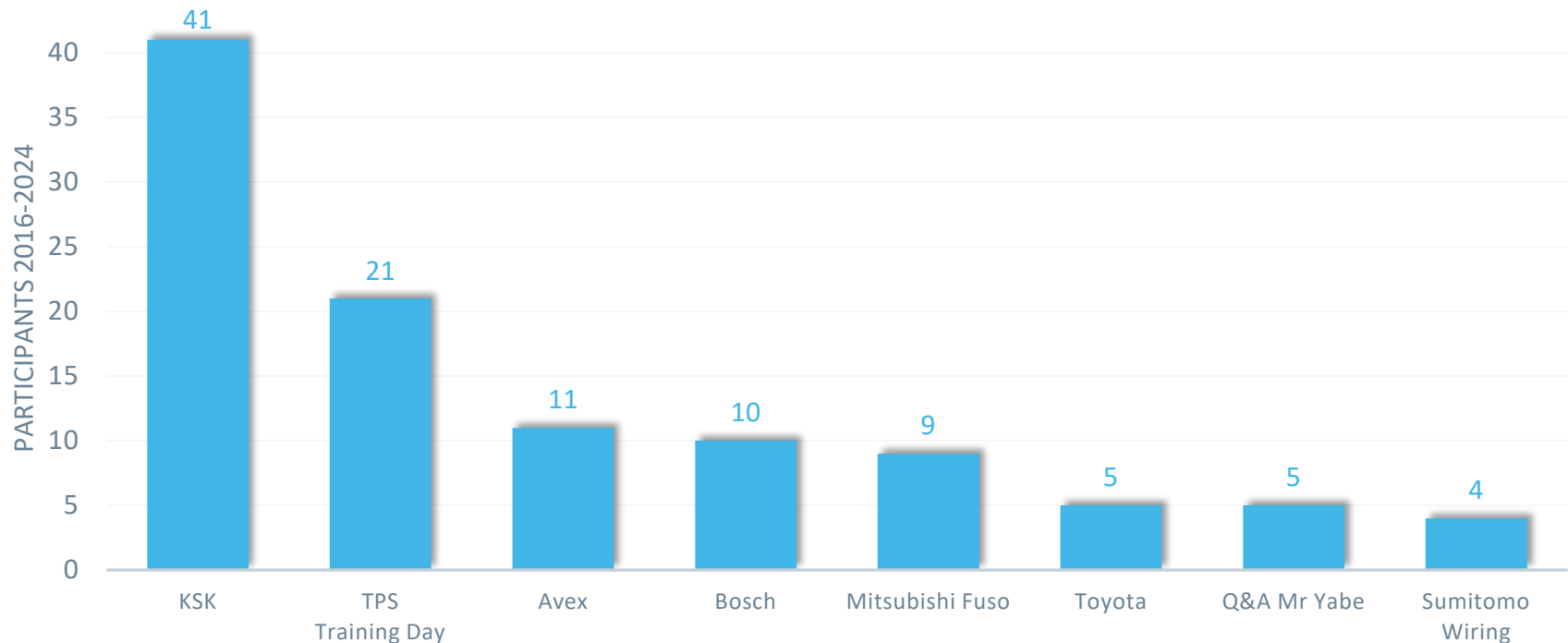


*The programme overview is an example.

Highlight of the Journey?

Highlights of the Learning Journeys from 2016 to 2024

Is there a programme event that you remember particularly positively?



Answers of Participants 2016-2024 (multiple answers possible)

Further mentions: TESSEI (3), JR-EAST (2), DENSO (2), Lecture by Masaaki Matsuo (2), Toyota Museum (2) as well as MURATA, *Monozukuri*-Workshop (knife sharpening), *Kaizen* Matrix, hot springs, group dinner and Nagoya Castle

Highlight of the Journey?

Selected Answers

"KSK: all 'evolutionary stages' from manual to fully automated production. *Kaizen/LEAN* was highly visible there."

"KSK and the classic CIP* approach and implementation shown there were an eye-opener for me with regards to what is really possible by utilising CIP."

"SUMITOMO WIRING ... people management"

*CIP: Continuous Improvement Process

Highlight of the Journey?

Selected Answers

"I have a vivid memory of all the places we visited. However, the management of the company AVEX in general (change management, hiring policy, maintenance, etc.) made the greatest impression on me."

"In general, the combination between theory in the seminar room and practice in the companies. The truck production at MITSUBISHI FUSO was particularly impressive."

Highlight of the Journey?

Selected Answers

"TPS TRAINING DAY*: Because it helped sharpening the focus on careful root cause analyses (e.g. Five Whys)."

"Toyota Old Boys* [TPS TRAINING DAY]: Very vivid demonstration of how relatively easy it is to bring about improvements when you take your time and look at things from different angles."

*The 'TPS Training Day' is a practical *kaizen* training workshop based on the Toyota Production System (TPS) lead by 'Toyota Old Boys', former Toyota employees.

Highlight of the Journey?

Selected Answers

"BOSCH: Very structured company, insane love of order, super logistics. TOYOTA, KSK, MITSUBISHI FUSO, *shinkansen*, the Nagoya castle, Nagoya, Tokyo, traditional hotel, guided city tour on the 52nd floor, Metro, the team of Dr Ditzer (perfection) ⇒ everything awesome and a crazy experience!"

"All of [the companies] as they applied *kaizen* in different ways and with different budgets. Visiting them all gave us a more 'whole' understanding."

Question 7

Question about the Survey Participants

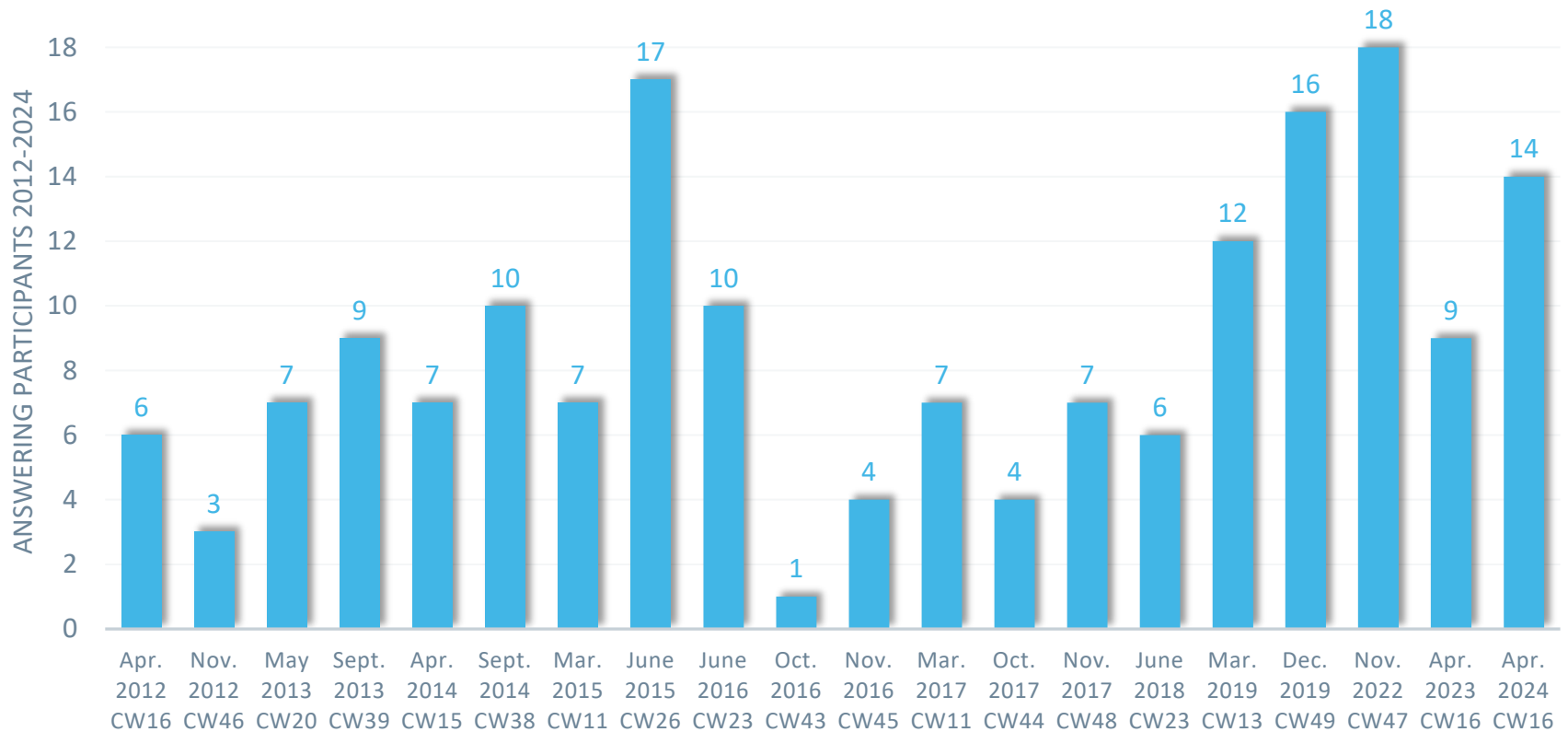
Which Learning Journey did you participate in?



About the Participants of the Survey

Results of 20 Learning Journeys from 2012 to 2024

Which Learning Journey did you participate in?

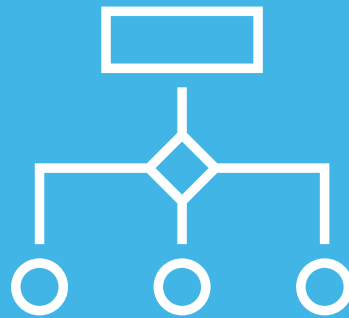


CW = calendar week

Question 8

Question about the Survey Participants

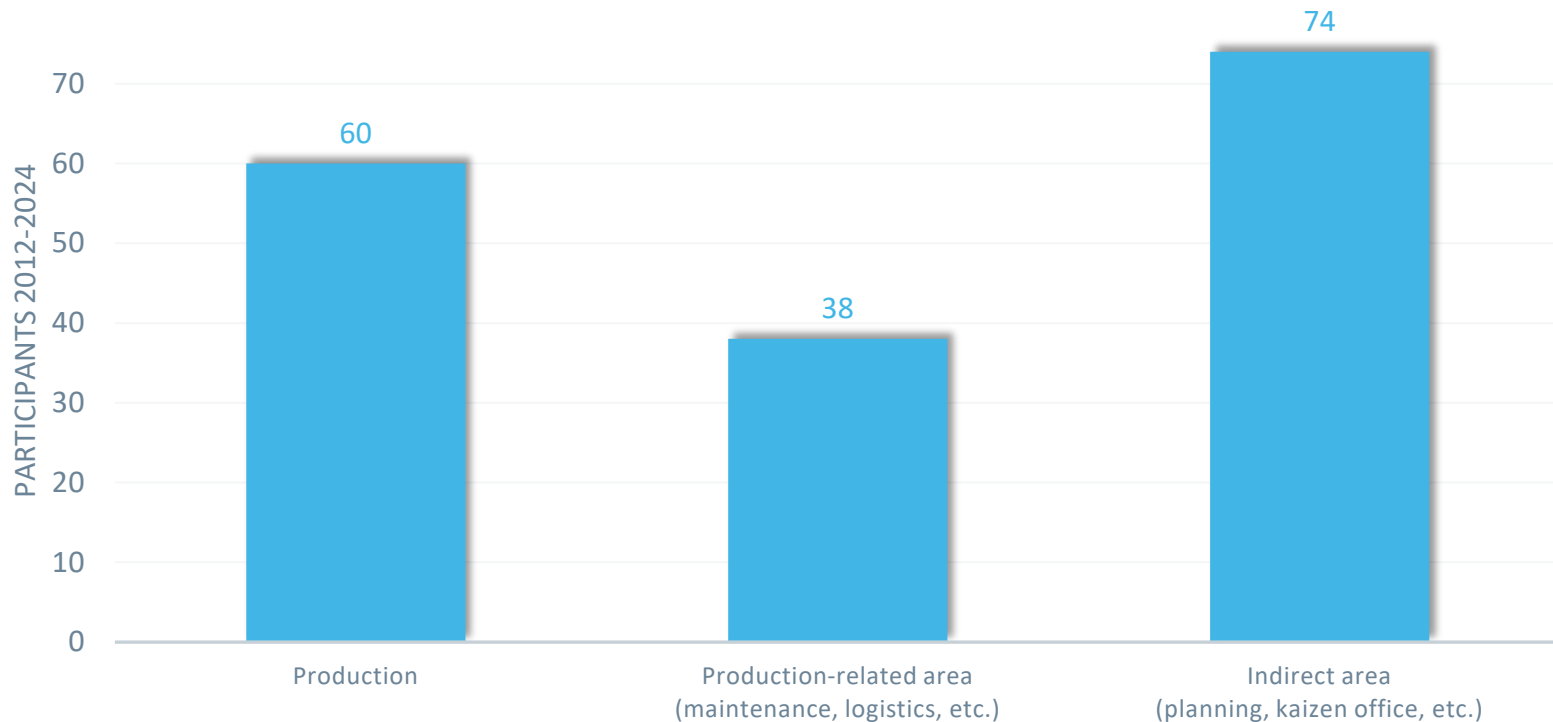
In which division of your company are you currently working?



About the Participants of the Survey

Results of 20 Learning Journeys from 2012 to 2024

In which division of your company are you currently working?



Participants 2012-2024 (172 answers)

43 % of the feedback came from participants working in **indirect areas**.

Question 9

Question about the Survey Participants

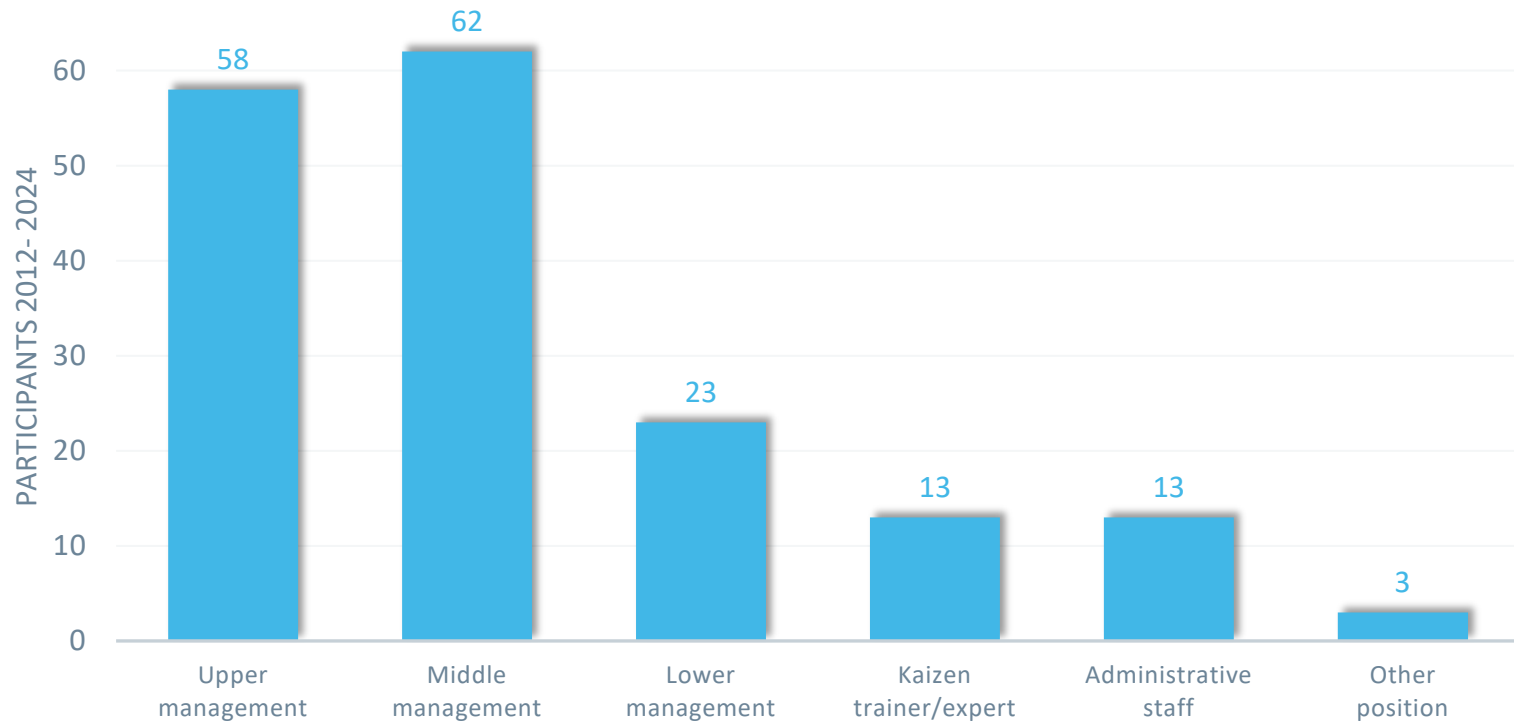
What is your **current position** in the company?



About the Participants of the Survey

Results of 20 Learning Journeys from 2012 to 2024

What is your current position in the company?



Participants 2016-2024 (172 answers)

The **great majority (83 %)** of our participants are **managers**.

Conclusion of the Online Surveys

Transfer and Implementation of Insights Takes Place.

The Learning Journeys have benefited participants and companies:

- The inspiration from Japan has led to changes in the way the participants think and act. Specific mention was given to:
 - **Stronger integration** and **more communication** with employees
 - More appreciation for **small measures** and **pragmatism**
 - Increased awareness and use of **soft factors ('right brain hemisphere')** in leadership work
- Experiences gathered during the journey were transferred to one's own area. Specific improvement measures were implemented:
 - The consistent transfer and implementations after the return has **changed practices, brought savings** and led to **changes in culture**.
- The participants confirmed: The **cost-benefit ratio for the company is good** (2 on a scale of 1 to 6) and it makes sense to provide this opportunity to other colleagues.
- The participants continue to look back on their personal highlights. Especially the company KSK has been remembered positively by many.

Learning Journeys to the Sources of Excellence

Concept LEAN Learning Journey

Benchmark Learning Journeys to Japan:

'Lean Production and Leadership – Operational Excellence in Japanese Companies'

- The seminar focuses on two areas: The **application of LEAN Production** and the associated **leadership style**
- Before departure: **in-depth introduction** in a one-day preparatory seminar
- Before departure: **webinar** with a Japanese top manager on corporate culture, mindset and how to change these for successful corporate reform
- Eight days in Japan: exclusive **insight into the practice** of selected flagship companies – directly on-site in Japan
- Qualified **evaluation** of what has been seen and **identifying the LEAN success factors**
- **Implementation of own projects** after return

Ultimately, the only thing that counts is what is later implemented in your own company.

Learning Journeys to the Sources of Excellence

Nothing Is More Inspirational than Successful Role Models.

RD interlogue organises Learning Journeys on the topics of Lean Management, Lean Production, and *kaizen*.

For more information, please visit www.rdinterlogue.com/en/japan_seminar

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Journeys to the Sources of Excellence