

"A man is  
great by  
deeds, not by  
birth"

-Chanakya

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**Labour management relationship among non-regular workers  
in Japanese automobile sector**

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## Abstract

Across the globe, the percentage of non-regular workers is on the rise and their working conditions and labor rights are often a source of controversy particularly in automobile industry which is the one of the world's most representative industry for use of non-regular workers. Japanese labor market exhibits some distinct features such as long employment tenure and strong employer employee relationship. However, the proportion of regular employment in Japan has fallen to 64.8% in 2012 from 80% in 1980s. The proportion employees working in non-regular employment as of 2012 include part-timers – 17.2%, those doing side jobs – 6.8%, Contract employees and temporary employees – 6.8%, and dispatched workers 1.7%. This change in employment pattern and most of these non-regular workers being out of the preview of trade union have posed a serious challenge to the labour management relationship in Japan. This qualitative study is based on two case studies facilitated through semi structured, open ended questions and supported by observation report on field visit to three large automobile factories in Japan. The sample covers union and management representative from two factories as well as union leaders from Japan Automobile Workers Union (JAW). The data was analyzed by using Atlas-ti through line by line coding and presenting a network view in order to find the grounded theory. The union leaders were found to face the new challenge of dealing with disparity between fulltime and non-regular workers, maintain healthy working condition for them and engaging and retaining *haken* and entrusted workers. However, the union has continued to follow cooperative labour management relationship while bringing the new issues under the umbrella of spring negotiation. Though, management struggle to meet the competitive cost, but found to be committed to a cooperative labour management relationship by avoiding lay off even during the worst years of recession. Union is losing its power and have adopted the path of compelled cooperation whereas management has also taken the help of progressive human resource practices while maintaining a healthy industrial relations climate. This study has policy implications for management as well as trade union federations in automobile sector. This learning can also help the actors of industrial relations not only in Japan but also the business in subsidiary locations for creating a cooperative labour management relationship.

**Key words:** Trade union, Management, non-regular workers, labour-management relations

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