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Volkswagen plant in Wolfsburg opens competence center for technology and innovation

- **Center will foster culture of innovation**
- **Innovations to be tested in near-production environment and developed to series maturity**
- **Employee training already in trial phase**

Wolfsburg, April 20, 2016 – Plant Manager Jens Herrmann, Head of Plant Planning André Kleb and Works Council member Jürgen Hildebrandt today opened a competence center for technology and innovation at the Volkswagen plant in Wolfsburg. Volkswagen employees will develop and test new production technologies on-site in the center's near-production environment. The center will foster the culture of innovation at the plant still further.

"This center will contribute to taking innovations to the factory faster and more successfully", Jens Herrmann commented. "This is where our experts come together to test new technologies in a protected environment, but nevertheless under near-production conditions. That is how we make sure new technologies transition smoothly to series processes", Herrmann added.

The innovation center has six sections: digital way, human-machine interaction (HMI), material flow and material handling, body construction, assembly, and ergonomics. Going forward, experts will be able to test their developments in continuous operation for a three- to six-month period and at the same time train employees on site in how to use the new technologies.

Digitalization is making further inroads at all stages in the production chain, including maintenance. An app is currently being developed which sends real-time messages about line failures to the maintenance specialists' tablets. The data directly indicates the source of the failure. The digital system also enables advance notification of upcoming maintenance procedures which helps further improve productivity.

Works Council member Jürgen Hildebrandt commented: "We have to realize that innovative technologies are changing work processes in our factories. It is important that our colleagues are not only prepared for these changes, but that they can also proactively engage in shaping work in the car manufacturing plant of the future. Work can by all means become more efficient, but at the same time it must also become less stressful, more ergonomic and easier for the workforce."

“The level of automation in the value stream will continue to increase” André Kleb, Head of Plant Planning and innovation sponsor at the Wolfsburg location, said. “Our goal is stable and efficient processes that bring further improvements in our productivity. So it is important to get our employees on board, introduce them to the new technologies and train them in how to use them. At the same time we also want to make a significant contribution to managing demographic change and will be testing age-friendly workplaces. We will be able to achieve all of this at our new competence center for innovation”, Kleb continued.

“The new technology and innovation center is currently testing human-machine interaction (HMI). The goal is the automation of stressful routine tasks through the use of robots. In one particular project, robots support employees in drivetrain preassembly tasks where access is difficult” explained Thaddäus Kustra, Project Manager for the new technology and innovations center. The employee and the robot work directly alongside one another on the same drivetrain, thus optimizing what was previously an ergonomically challenging workplace. A further advantage is that drivetrain preassembly time is significantly reduced. The trial phase runs until summer 2016, and it is planned to then integrate this HMI application in series production.

Another ongoing project in material flow and material handling relates to an ultra-flat driverless transport vehicle. One of the objectives of this automated guided system is to reduce the use of forklifts in assembly. Thanks to the new flat geometry and the vehicle’s 360° mobility in limited turning space, it will in future be possible to transport containers direct to the installation point. That improves material supply efficiency because employees no longer need to uncouple the containers from the transport system and position them at the assembly line. It is planned to start using this system in material logistics before the end of this year.

Note: Text and photos are available from www.volkswagen-media-services.com

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