

Barbara Bergmeier, Executive Director of Industrial Operations, and Dr. Heiko Gierhardt, Director Material Fulfilment at Jaguar Land Rover, a subsidiary of the India-based Tata Group. © Porsche Consulting/Max Arens

“Flexibility is the key to success”

24/01/2025 On the job for Jaguar Land Rover: Barbara Bergmeier, Executive Director of Industrial Operations, and Dr. Heiko Gierhardt, Director Material Fulfilment.

Top manager Barbara Bergmeier, Jaguar Land Rover's Executive Director of Industrial Operations, oversees the entire ecosystem for vehicle production. Her responsibilities include production, procurement, and the supply chain. She is supported by Dr. Heiko Gierhardt, Director Material Fulfilment, who is in charge of the supply chain and component delivery to the plants. In an exclusive interview with Porsche Consulting Magazine, they talk about challenges facing the automotive industry, vulnerable supply chains, and the importance of flexibility in the transformation to electromobility. They view diversity, inclusion, and openness at the British-Indian global corporation as essential to a healthy team culture, greater competitiveness, and innovation.

Ms. Bergmeier, what is an aviation expert doing at Jaguar Land Rover (JLR)? Do your cars secretly sprout wings?

Bergmeier: (laughs) In addition to more than 30 years with the car industry, I spent three and a half years with Airbus, so "aviation expert" might be something of an exaggeration. I wanted to get to know another industry. Working in an industrial ecosystem was something I found especially interesting. At the time the automotive industry was still thinking primarily along conventional supply chain lines: one company is the supplier, and the other one is the carmaker.

Can you explain the difference?

Bergmeier: The defense and aerospace sector takes a different approach: there are partners who are sometimes the clients and sometimes the suppliers. This network form of business relations was eye-opening. I learned a lot.

So you brought that network approach to the automotive industry and replaced its strict hierarchy?

Bergmeier: Yes, if you like. It's also part of my personal philosophy: to lay a solid competitive foundation, you need good relations with suppliers. The aviation ecosystem was more innovative in that respect than the automotive sector.

Mr. Gierhardt, are you a pure car person?

Gierhardt: Yes, my training is in cars, although I also gained a year of maritime experience with the German Navy. I worked as an engineer for BMW and then Porsche and VW. I've now come to Britain, where I'm working on supply chains for JLR and on component delivery to the plants.

JLR is a very international company and a member of India's Tata Group. What is it like for you as a German to work in England?

Gierhardt: There's so much variety here. People from over 40 nations with a wide range of perspectives and experiences work in my area. It's an incredibly strong and multifaceted group. You might lose some precision in your German language skills, but you gain enormous cultural experience. Like the characteristic "Britishness," a certain calmness that's really helpful in professional contexts and life in general here. That's something I really enjoy.

Where do the British get their calm?

Gierhardt: In crisis situations here everyone pulls together. There's a "we can handle this" mentality. It's one of Britain's great strengths. "Keep calm and carry on." Combining that with the German propensity for performance in every detail gives you a lot of quality. This diversity is exactly what makes working here so fascinating.

And what are your impressions of England, Ms. Bergmeier?

Bergmeier: It rains a lot (laughs), and the food is really much better than people in Germany think. We

have to throw out our stereotypes. I find the openness and diversity especially appealing. In London, for example, there's nothing you can't find. And we at JLR really make an effort in terms of inclusion and diversity. Much more so than I was used to in the past …

…you can see this in the latest Jaguar ads: they're very colorful, loud, different — and you don't see any cars. What do you think of them?

Bergmeier: They're great! They don't have any cars because the cars don't exist yet. We first unveiled the brand, and then the Jaguar Type 00 two weeks later in Miami as a design vision and precursor of future production models. The response to the new Jaguar has been incredible. Now we have to align our company with the new strategy and electromobility so we can bring out the new Jaguar in late 2026. Over the next few years we'll be investing around 18 billion pounds in electrifying our brands. But back to Jaguar. It's a daring step because we need to attract new customers — companies and individuals who think differently, appreciate beautiful design, and are excited by special cars.

If production lines stand still until 2026 and cars aren't being built, what will you be doing as head of operations?

Bergmeier: (laughs) Well, production will continue for the Range Rover, Defender, and Discovery. The change to battery-driven cars means a major restructuring, of course. Countless assembly lines have to be reworked. We've already trained 20,000 employees for electromobility. After all, by 2030 there'll be electric versions of all our Group's vehicles.

Is diversity also helpful in this restructuring process?

Bergmeier: I simply believe that inclusion and equality are indispensable for a healthy team culture. A culture that makes us considerably more competitive, that fosters innovation, and that ultimately enhances team performance. I'm at home with this diversity — it feels very good here.

It sounds like that's one of England's advantages as a location for industry.

Gierhardt: I'd even call diversity the key competitive advantage. People don't think within narrow limits here, they range further afield. Barbara and I find that a real pleasure — and not only in a business context.

What do Germans contribute to this multicultural system?

Bergmeier: For me personally, it's discipline and leadership. They're extremely important for production and the supply chain. I also embody them in my actions. Value-based leadership is my contribution to the group. Discipline and punctuality. If someone arrives a minute too late, I always say, half joking, "one minute = one car." Because if someone arrives at the production line a minute late, everything comes to a halt. I promote this mindset on our teams.

Does it work?

Bergmeier: It works very well in my area. But that might be because we have two or three Germans here.

Gierhardt: (laughs) We all help with that.

Bergmeier: But our English colleagues also know that discipline is very important for making cars. Creative fields, like design, certainly have other focuses than structure and punctuality. In operations, however, those qualities are crucial.

Gierhardt: To say what you'll do, and then to do it, is something very German.

So what are the biggest challenges here in England?

Bergmeier: We're a British brand, even though we have a very international presence. We're concerned with classic questions like how to meet our production quotas, how to ensure stable supply chains, and how to advance our shift from premium to modern luxury. We've covered a lot of ground over the past two years, acquired some presence with good results, and can now take the transformation on to the next level.

Gierhardt: From a procurement perspective, the transformation to an electric drivetrain with a completely new supply chain is an enormous challenge, of course. It requires a lot of flexibility — also in view of geopolitical considerations. And then there are environmental issues: floods, severe weather, you name it. We have to identify and address these issues early on. We want our processes to set the benchmark — for the industry at large.

That's an ambitious aim. What changes have you made over recent years to achieve it?

Bergmeier: I'm a strong advocate of the end-to-end approach. From the supply chain itself to our individual suppliers to the final delivery. Silo mentalities are a thing of the past. Our strength lies in working together. Sometimes we actively support our suppliers; at other times we learn from them and benefit from their innovations. The sum of our experiences amounts to more than what each of us could achieve on our own. That's how we solve a lot of problems before they become a matter for the board.

You'll have to explain that …

Bergmeier: In the past, when I was still working for companies with conventional purchasing departments, all the solutions were discussed and decided by the board. What I want is for our team to take action beforehand. We hold weekly calls with our main suppliers, with everyone briefly describing their situation so we can ensure transparency throughout the ecosystem.

Gierhardt: Taking an end-to-end approach encourages a greater sense of responsibility. Complexity

levels have risen; you can't compare them anymore with the past. If one component is missing, it'll affect the entire production process. When that happens, I have to find the best possible compromise for the overall system — from purchasing to delivery. For me, the supply chain extends on to the end customers, to the replacement parts they'll need at some point in the future. The factory and aftersales, simply everyone, all have to coordinate with each other.

How do you motivate employees who had previously focused on minimizing costs to adopt an end-to-end model that stretches far on into the future?

Gierhardt: It's a matter of leadership. You have to embrace the approach and make it your priority. Everyone has to realize that you're doing it yourself. You have to get everyone on board, and give feedback on a constant basis: this was good, that didn't work out. It's a never-ending process.

Does that also work for the suppliers?

Bergmeier: Our suppliers have also come to understand our approach. Everyone can have a problem on occasion, and everyone else can support them in finding a solution. But my condition here is: actively and transparently communicate the problem. Our partners do that too. They don't try to keep their difficulties under wraps. If you're watching for risks early on, you can deal with them before they turn into problems. We've seen that over the past two or three years. A few years ago I couldn't have imagined the current reality, even in my wildest dreams: the collapse of the bridge in Baltimore, which had our cars backed up on ships at the end of the quarter, the floods in eastern Europe and Switzerland that affected key supply chains, earthquakes, or cybersecurity issues. That makes it all the more important to ensure transparency, analyze, and bring the combined expertise of the entire value chain to bear.

Transparency, expertise, responsibility — are these the core factors?

Bergmeier: Tackling problems together generates trust. I believe we have extremely good relations with our suppliers.

What are the biggest problems you're facing at the moment?

Bergmeier: One challenge is surely how to remain flexible and versatile. We don't know how the markets will develop in terms of electromobility. As such, the more flexible you are, the greater your chances of success. That applies not only to our own production, but also to everyone in our supply chain. The second biggest challenge is competitiveness. I've been dealing with this topic for 34 years now, whether in material or production costs. And as mentioned, natural disasters are affecting our supply chains much more often than before. But Heiko's the one in charge of that ...

...in charge of the weather?

Gierhardt: (laughs) The one in charge of what we do when the weather acts up. We're already using AI

to help track global developments. For the recent floods in eastern Europe, for example, Sunday's weather reports gave us a quick preview of the situation, which helped us gain targeted information on Monday morning and an idea that afternoon of how our business would be affected. We're making targeted use of relevant AI tools. In supply chains, the most crucial piece of information is often what we don't yet know. What will the next chip crisis be? What's the next big problem on the horizon? We're mapping patterns in the supply network that can lead to problems. And then taking steps to safeguard the situation.

Like in racing, when a car's data show that something's going to happen before it actually does?

Gierhardt: Exactly. Our data points are endless. The challenge consists of recognizing the right ones. You've got to know the background noise in order to be flexible enough in specific cases. We've made enormous progress here over the past two years — also with the support of Porsche Consulting.

Bergmeier: We have to ensure transparency about potential risks. That doesn't start in the supply chain, but back in development already. We have to know our suppliers' problems at all times, and what parts of the cars are affected. Before the semiconductor crisis, we weren't able to do that. It was an expensive lesson. But we've learned now. We're aiming to have a digital model of the entire ecosystem in real time by 2026. To achieve this, we're also drawing on a lot of expertise from sister companies in the Tata family. That gives us options other manufacturers don't have.

Your parent company, the Tata Group, manufactures not only cars but also pharmaceuticals, metals, and other products …

Bergmeier: That's right! We're networked with many Tata companies, and work hand in hand with them. We're very proud of that. Tata has more than 365 billion dollars of market capitalization. The scope offered by this group of companies was one of the reasons I came to JLR.

You mean you'll never run out of steel?

Bergmeier: And even if we did, Tata Steel's experts and logistics teams mean we can help our suppliers as well. Tata also has around 700,000 IT experts worldwide, as well as its own logistics service providers and engineering and electronics specialists. Tata is even in a good position regarding batteries.

The times have become more turbulent. Is it possible to be prepared for every crisis?

Gierhardt: As a general rule, "Inventory keeps you calm"!

But that too has its price!

Gierhardt: You're right. And I'm no friend of stockpiling. You can't load up on every single component, because there are now so many variants. You'd need nearly boundless warehousing capacities. But

transparency helps here too. If you understand a situation, you can often solve problems before they arise. For example, if I know how the chip industry produces, I can take the necessary precautions. If I know exactly how a machine works, I can guard against its weak points. Transparency combined with speed in solving problems — that's our approach.

Bergmeier: When I started my career 34 years ago, supply chains were stretched thin. Everyone wanted to cut costs, and just-in-sequence strategies played a big role. Today the priorities are on minimizing risk and geopolitical threats. Costs are still important, of course. But if heightened risks shut down your production for a week, you'll see costs in a different light.

Can you assign numerical values to the risks for each individual part?

Gierhardt: That's our objective, but we're not there yet. Right now we're watching the overall situation and evaluating the risks. At some point we'll be able to translate that into pounds and pence.

Bergmeier: Sometimes we track specific risks and talk with our finance department about whether and how we can or want to take countermeasures. Discussions with other departments often help you understand what the risks could mean and what the solutions might be.

Gierhardt: And every week we report on our supply risks and how they could affect our production plans. That shows us what we can count on, and where we need ideas for what's up in the air. We then calculate costs and compare them with potential revenue and profits. These discussions take place on an entirely different level than just a few years ago.

Bergmeier: Here's one example. During the semiconductor crisis, we made 30,000 fewer cars in one quarter than planned. Now we know what that costs us. Using AI and sound judgment, you can run those calculations for other scenarios too. Ultimately, though, you sometimes have to make pragmatic decisions. You can have all kinds of super intelligent people and systems saying everything there is to say but still not making the actual decisions.

How then do you make the decisions?

Bergmeier: After all these years I've developed a certain instinct and make the occasional gut decision despite all the tools. Often there's no shortage of data but their significance and impact aren't entirely clear. And not making any decision is frequently the worst course of action.

Gierhardt: That becomes a "just do it!" moment.

Bergmeier: And your comment is always, "So what?"

Gierhardt: Exactly!

Success used to depend on understanding the automotive world. Now do you need to understand the

whole world?

Bergmeier: Yes, you could say that. I often text Heiko to ask "Have you heard this?"

Gierhardt: And I usually say "Yes!" We've become very good at keeping an eye on the world.

Do you have a Jaguar control center where, like James Bond, you can monitor world events?

Gierhardt: That would be our Supply Chain Tower. It's a place where all the relevant partners can work together, from AI and engineering teams to suppliers from around the world. Everyone's input and interconnection are what counts.

Can you say how much faster you've become at solving problems?

Gierhardt: We don't measure that. But if you hear something on Sunday and can make the right decisions by Monday morning, then you're very fast.

Bergmeier: The most successful companies will be the ones with the greatest flexibility and versatility. That's my mantra. I learned it early on in my career.

And what does England's supplier structure look like following the death of the British car industry?

Bergmeier: We have stable relationships. But there are still some suppliers here that only work with us, so they're very dependent. I hadn't seen that in Germany. But we also work intensively with German suppliers. There's a little bit of Germany in every Jaguar and Range Rover.

Gierhardt: I spend a lot of time with German suppliers. And then I'm a culture ambassador for Great Britain.

Does JLR have a long-term future in the UK, despite Brexit?

Gierhardt: Brexit doesn't have much of an effect on our everyday production, except for business trips to Europe when our British colleagues have to stand in long lines.

Bergmeier: In particular, "Britishness" is very important to us for the design and the brand. And most of our industrial potential is here in Britain. The Tata family is committed to Great Britain. We're probably the country's largest industrial employer now.

Ms. Bergmeier, speaking as a Bavarian, what do you miss the most in England?

Bergmeier: A good Brezel (soft pretzel). They're a little squishier in London than back home in Munich.

And you, Mr. Gierhardt?

Gierhardt: I'm from Hesse. So Handkäs (a regional cheese) and an Äppler (apple wine). I miss that. But actually we've settled in very well.

And given your two very different brands: do you prefer driving off-road or on a winding country road?

Bergmeier: Three years ago I'd have said there's nothing better than a road winding up over a mountain pass. But I've since become an off-road aficionado. When I'm off-road, I think I'm the world's best driver because the Defender does nearly everything on its own.

Gierhardt: For me there's no debate: a mountain pass and an old E-type.

An old E-type?

Gierhardt: That's the brand's identity. It's iconic. And that's what we're building the Jaguar brand up to be again.

Ms. Bergmeier, do you ever miss aviation?

Bergmeier: Whenever I board a plane, I hope it's an Airbus. And aerospace has a fascinating culture of quality, for instance. But I'd never say I miss something. The automotive world is where I belong.

Info

Text first published in Porsche Consulting Magazine.

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Image Sublines

Path: “Flexibility is the key to success”/Images/img_1.jpg
Title: Barbara Bergmeier, Executive Director of Industrial Operations at Jaguar Land Rover, Gaydon, United Kingdom, 2025, Porsche Consulting GmbH
Subline: “Value-based leadership is my contribution. Discipline and punctuality. I always say, ‘one minute = one car’,” explains Barbara Bergmeier, Jaguar Land Rover's Executive Director of Industrial Operations. For her, these qualities are key to creating the space for transformation and further innovations. © Porsche Consulting/Max Arens

Path: “Flexibility is the key to success”/Images/img_2.jpg
Title: "New Jaguar" marketing campaign, United Kingdom, 2025, Porsche Consulting GmbH
Subline: Colorful, loud, different: The recent “New Jaguar” marketing campaign stands for audacious design, novel ideas, and diversity. It aims to attract new customers who think differently, appreciate design, and are excited by special cars. © Jaguar Land Rover

Path: “Flexibility is the key to success”/Images/img_3.jpg
Title: Dr. Heiko Gierhardt, Director Material Fulfilment at Jaguar Land Rover, Gaydon, United Kingdom, 2025, Porsche Consulting GmbH
Subline: “The transformation to an electric drive with its new supply chain requires a lot of flexibility,” says Heiko Gierhardt, Director Material Fulfilment at Jaguar Land Rover. Better processes are also needed to find rapid solutions to the higher incidence of floods, storms, and similar environmental events. © Porsche Consulting/Max Arens

Path: “Flexibility is the key to success”/Images/img_4.jpg
Title: Dr. Heiko Gierhardt, Barbara Bergmeier, Markus Uellendahl, Oliver Stahl (r-l), Gaydon, United Kingdom, 2025, Porsche Consulting GmbH
Subline: A visit to Jaguar Land Rover's new headquarters in Gaydon, near Birmingham: (from right) Heiko Gierhardt and Barbara Bergmeier with Porsche Consulting's Senior Partner Markus Uellendahl and Partner Oliver Stahl. © Porsche Consulting/Max Arens

Path: “Flexibility is the key to success”/Images/img_5.jpg
Title: Barbara Bergmeier, Executive Director of Industrial Operations at Jaguar Land Rover, Gaydon, United Kingdom, 2025, Porsche Consulting GmbH
Subline: Barbara Bergmeier uses a structural model of the iconic Land Rover Defender to illustrate crucial points of the supply chain in the company's highly modern and communication-enhanced headquarters. © Porsche Consulting/Max Arens

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