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## New at Ford: Car czar

Automaker to name its first global product chief

Bryce G. Hoffman / The Detroit News

Advertisement

Ford Motor Co. CEO Alan Mulally is expected to name a new global product development czar as part of a push to integrate Ford's worldwide vehicle development operations and empower designers and engineers to find ways to create new models faster and more cost-efficiently.

Derrick Kuzak, 55, now group vice president in charge of product development for Ford's Americas group, will be tapped for the global job, according to people familiar with the plan. An announcement could come as early as this week. A Ford spokesman declined to comment Wednesday.

Reporting to Mulally, Kuzak will have responsibility for all Ford product programs worldwide. He will lead the push to integrate Ford's global operations and commonize vehicle platforms, the basic underpinnings of cars and trucks, and the processes that create them.

"There's only one way to do that: You have to have one person in charge of it on a global level," said David Cole, chairman of the Center for Automotive Research in Ann Arbor.

Cole said Kuzak is a solid choice for the job because of his strong leadership and engineering skills. "He is highly respected by the people at Ford. I've heard that from many people."

Cole said he expects Mulally to create a similar position to oversee global manufacturing operations -- a move the new CEO has already hinted is possible.

Ford's board of directors is meeting this week in Dearborn to discuss globalizing the automaker's operations and other issues.

With the new product job, Mulally may be taking a lesson from General Motors Corp. CEO Rick Wagoner. Wagoner surprised the automotive world in 2001 when he drafted

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legendary car guy Bob Lutz to be GM's product czar. Last year, Lutz took on global product development at GM.

He has since reorganized the automaker's vehicle development operations to take advantage of global capabilities and efficiencies. GM's announcement last week that it will import its popular German-bred Opel Astra to the United States and sell the small car as a Saturn is one recent example of that shift in strategy.

At Ford, the appointment of a global product czar comes on the heels of an announcement last week that Mark Schulz, head of Ford's international operations, will retire early next year.

Mulally, who joined Ford from aircraft maker Boeing Co. in October, is not expected to replace Schulz.

He is moving quickly to create a flatter corporate structure that eliminates the historic divisions between Ford's domestic and overseas business units. At the same time, he wants to harness the combined strength of those divisions to create better cars and trucks for less money by building off of common platforms and shared components.

In a recent interview with The Detroit News, Mulally said Kuzak is the "part of the plan" to consolidate Ford's global operations and the kind of executive he wants on his core team.

"(He is a) great leader, great engineer," Mulally said, citing an example of the global perspective he hopes Kuzak will instill in Ford designers and engineers.

While engineers in Dearborn were working on a new electrical signaling system for the steering wheel of an upcoming model, Kuzak recalled that similar efforts were under way in Europe. He sent his team there to work with their counterparts on a common solution that could be used on both sides of the Atlantic.

Mulally also praised Kuzak for eschewing Ford's long-standing practice of shuffling engineers from project to project, focusing instead on building teams centered on core disciplines.

"He's pulled them together," Mulally said. "He's got the chassis guys together. He's got the engine guys together. He's got them all across Europe and the United States, working together."

Born in Detroit and raised in what is now Eastpointe, the soft-spoken Kuzak headed product development for Ford of Europe before he returned to the United States in August 2005.



Kuzak [See full image](#)

## Derrick M. Kuzak

**Age:** 55

**Education:** Bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering from University of Detroit, where he also earned a doctorate in systems engineering.

**Career:** Joined Ford in 1978 as a research engineer. Held a variety of high-level product development jobs in Europe and North America. He was instrumental in the development of Ford's SUV family and the Focus small car.

**Personal:** Lives in Milford; married with one daughter. Born in Detroit, raised in what is now Eastpointe.

*Source: Ford*

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He played a key role in the development of Ford Focus small car and on various Ford pickups and SUVs.

He joined Ford in 1978, hiring on as a research engineer.

Tapping a respected engineer like Kuzak to lead product development reflects a new emphasis on engineering that Mulally, an engineer by training, has said he hopes to bring to the automaker.

"Engineers create something out of nothing," he told The News. "That's what we do."

At Ford, he wants to smooth and streamline product development, using Toyota Motor Corp.'s vaunted system as his model.

"Before, it was design every car separately at a different place around the world," Mulally said. "(Now), we're not going to have different designs. We're going to reduce the complexity."

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