

## Adding an emotional culture to technical DNA

Bosch Rexroth is a global name in manufacturing. Is there a place for emotional intelligence in such a technical business?

“We want people to overcome all kinds of changes and develop themselves,” says Steven Huylebroeck, Managing Commercial Director at Bosch Rexroth in Belgium.

He’s been with the company for 30 years and worked his way up from the warehouse through different departments. He knows the business inside out, though he’d be the first to say there’s always more to learn.

He’s also on a mission: to embed personal development into the company’s culture.

We spoke to him to find out why and how, and to see where ‘soft skills’ fit in a technological manufacturing business which supports heavy industry.

“When I became a manager, I found out that there wasn’t a satisfying or sustainable program for personal development training in our company,” says Steven. “Some people wanted it delivered by

### Business Challenges

- Getting emotional intelligence accepted by a technical culture
- Building a consistent, continuous development program

### Company Profile

In 2001, a merger between Mannesmann Rexroth and Bosch Automationstechnik led to the company creating a single brand for software driven and interconnectible Drive & Control solutions. Known as ‘The Drive and Control Company’, Bosch Rexroth solves drive and control challenges around the world. With locations in over 80 countries, it employs approximately 30,000 people globally and its headquarters are in Germany.

# Bosch Rexroth

an external consultant, some people wanted something else, and so the training just ended up being one-time actions. I guess it's the same with a lot of large companies, but this is what I wanted to change."

As a long-time believer in the potential of emotional intelligence (EI), Steven was keen to use it as the basis for development programs at Bosch Rexroth.

"I've always been passionate about emotional intelligence ... it's something you can learn and develop, it's very different to IQ. I've worked for the company for 30 years and don't have technical or financial qualifications. I started in the warehouse and worked up. But I started wondering how I got all these different positions ... it was surely not just because of my IQ so I knew there was something else.

"I saw a lot of very capable people in different departments like sales and technical support, but I also thought that if they could scale up a bit on EI, it would be better for them and for the company."

## Solution

A competence management project for the Europe North cluster of Bosch Rexroth (Belgium, Netherlands, UK, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark) was being discussed.

It had two core aims. One was to map hard skills across the business. This would help with competence sharing and succession planning, among other things.

The other, more important aim was to increase emotional intelligence throughout the company. For Steven, this meant company-wide adoption of the MBTI® assessment to increase self-awareness, which is the cornerstone of emotional intelligence.

## Solution

- Use MBTI assessment as basis for emotional intelligence training
- Use in-house practitioners to deliver the training
- Create information sessions to explain the program before it starts

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## Convincing the business

“Well, it wasn’t easy to get this introduced to Bosch Rexroth,” admits Steven.

“We’re a big company, we’re a technical company—and I’m not a HR guy. So, you get into the area of this being an HR area. And they’ve already got modules lined up for development programs, and so on. But at the very top of the company, they’re talking a lot about competence management, so the idea is definitely there.”

It helps to have people on your side—and one of those people was Mette Boeegh-Nielsen.

Mette is Commercial Director for Bosch Rexroth Denmark. “I’ve been involved in the competence project from the very start,” she says. “Steven has been passionate about it for many years and so am I. And our regional manager is also a big believer in human skills.”

“In the competence project, we’re developing hard skills and human skills,” Mette continues. Her previous role as HR manager means she brings a people-focused perspective to both the sales department and the wider business. “For example, the better we become at developing our human skills, the better we can help ourselves and our colleagues manage stress levels. In today’s world, I see stress as one of the biggest challenges we have in our organizations, and as managers, it’s our responsibility to moderate stress factors in the organization for everybody. But it’s important for all of us, not just managers, to be aware of our stress triggers and responses, as well as how we cope with them. This comes through self-reflection and emotional awareness. And this is just one of the reasons why developing EI in the organization is one of the most important things we can do to help people and develop our business all together.”

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## The better we become at developing our human skills, the better we can manage stress levels

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### Getting serious about soft skills

Bosch Rexroth is a learning company. This means it trains and develops its technical employees, helps them get qualifications, and creates career progression opportunities. It invests in the technical future of the business.

“Profiling ourselves as a learning company did help our case, actually,” notes Steven. “We’re training and developing our technical employees and it’s a very good program. And my thought is, why are we not doing the same for the soft skills? Why are we not training our own people to deliver our development programs? People who know the company inside out value the training much higher when it’s delivered by people who also know the company inside out.”

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## We’re training and developing our technical employees ... why are we not doing the same for soft skills?

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### Welcome to Competence World

To help promote the competence management program to employees, the team used a theme park metaphor.

“We called the whole program Competence World. The training is like an adventure park—you have thrills, perhaps you are excited, sometimes afraid. You come through the entrance, which is MBTI foundation training. After that you can go where you want and choose your direction.”

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“ We need this to change. We need to implement an emotional culture in our company and to do this, we need to get everybody on board. We need to give this personal development opportunity to everybody.

**Steven Huylebroeck,**  
Managing Commercial  
Director, Bosch  
Rexroth Belgium



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“We came up with a motto for the project,” says Mette. “It’s this: ‘We want to add an emotional culture to our technical DNA.’ This describes very well what we’re all about.”

The project team developed modules for the following areas:

- Emotional intelligence
- Personality type
- Type dynamics
- Teams and organizations
- Stress
- Change management
- Leadership
- Improving sales

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## We want to add an emotional culture to our technical DNA

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### Aiming BIG

Bosch Rexroth is looking at something bigger than the usual approach to development.

“In companies like ours, we tend to focus on training managers. And I said, we need this to change. We need to implement an emotional culture in our company and to do this, we need to get everybody on board. We need to give this personal development opportunity to everybody.”

The training isn’t mandatory. But to promote the program before it launched, the project team created information sessions that were open to everyone.

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## To implement an emotional culture in our company, we need to get everybody on board

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### Results

At the time of writing, training for the Belgium office is well underway. The project in Denmark is further ahead. The response has been exceptionally good.

“For the MBTI foundation stage, we had a 95% participation rate and it was all voluntary,” says Mette, talking about the Denmark program. “There’s been huge interest from people right across the business—managers, associates, student workers, trainees—and it’s been open to everyone. We’re doing teams and problem-solving now. These are full-day workshops where we bring departments together so we can see the interplay between them. It reflects daily working life.”

### Reducing friction

The external sales department and the technical department is one example of team interplay and the challenges it brings. Mette explains:

“Bosch is a production company. If there’s anything we can control, it’s directives, structures, and processes. We deliver top-notch production for our customers and we’re known for that. Bosch celebrate extremely high quality levels in everything.

“For technical customer support people, this is their focus. They want the best quality for customers and so they use lots of checklists to make sure it happens.

### Results

- High participation rates increase the chances of creating the right company-wide culture
- In-house delivery is trusted by employees, which increases the success of the sessions
- Improved understanding between departments improves the customer experience

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“Our external sales people want to secure new business for the company. Sometimes they need more speed and ‘higher level’ concepts when talking with businesses, especially if they’re negotiating. So, they can get a bit impatient. But technical support sometimes think sales aren’t giving customers the best quality when they do this.”

Both are focused on quality for the customer, but sometimes in different ways. Steven has seen exactly the same thing.

“Sales and support people are all technically minded. They just have different needs. But with self-awareness and better listening skills, we can help people find common ground and be even better for our customers. This is what I want us to get from emotional intelligence training.”

## Finding value in reflection

So far, the anecdotal evidence is encouraging. “In the training sessions I have seen a huge number of ‘a-ha’ moments,” says Mette. “Lots of interesting and different conversations—like, ‘Now I see why you do this and I do that.’ The self-reflection part of this is big, it’s good for everyone. Sometimes, as a leader, you get opportunities for these kinds of development sessions more frequently and you can forget that it’s good for everyone.

“So, that’s what we’re doing. Bringing it to everyone. People get valuable reflections on things that will stay with them for a long time.”

Both Mette and Steven agree that a pre-program information campaign has been crucial in getting such a high participation rate.

## Talking early and often about the training

“The smart thing we did was to inform people about it first,” says Mette. “We didn’t just go out and offer the trainings. We repeated the message about the benefits of higher EI and self-awareness. We were very thorough. And I used my voice in the management team to put the message out. When we received critical questions, we talked about them. In a way, we ran an internal marketing campaign to keep the awareness high.”

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“We created the sessions to explain everything,” says Steven. “We said, ‘Bosch Rexroth is a technical company, but what do we want to do? What do we want to achieve?’ Then we explained the program—emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and how it all starts with the MBTI assessment.”

“I think the information sessions helped a lot,” he continues. “I was really surprised by feedback from people who were saying ‘Yes, we’re really interested in this.’ I got feedback from people I never expected—people who are often critical toward these things and might think them fluffy. But we explained it well and the interest was huge. In Denmark and Belgium for example, people really want this. They’re very keen.”

“The critical thing is to keep it sustainable,” says Mette. “We’ve spent vast amounts of time training people, so we don’t want it to be forgotten. We’ve got to keep it alive, keep it in focus.”





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