



Work-life balance at Bosch Good ideas and creativity thrive on satisfaction

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Since its establishment by Robert Bosch in 1886, the supplier of technology and services has been shaped by a values-based corporate culture. Each individual Bosch associate has a special status within that culture. An early expression of this was the company's introduction of the eight-hour working day back in 1906 as well as its efforts to offer associates attractive working conditions – both pioneering steps for the era. For most associates in Germany today, the 35-hour week is the norm. In 2012, Chancellor Merkel awarded Bosch the title “Germany's most family-friendly large enterprise.” Another milestone on the path to improving the work-life balance was the introduction in 2013 of guidelines for a flexible and family-friendly working culture. This was followed in 2014 by simplified telecommuting rules. Since then, all associates are free to choose where and when they work. To ensure that associates anywhere in the world can collaborate efficiently, Bosch has invested roughly 800 million euros in equipping [240,000 workstations with advanced software solutions](#). Striking a good balance between career and personal life is what present and future associates want. It also gives rise to more productive working conditions: satisfaction fosters motivation, and allows freedom for creativity and the birth of new ideas.

Bosch is contributing to social discussions by sharing its experience advancing and shaping its corporate and working culture. Aside from its in-house activities, Bosch is active in initiatives outside the company. As part of the *Chefsache* (“executive agenda”) initiative, 20 member organizations representing the media, business, and scientific communities as well as the public sector have committed to driving cultural change for gender equality in leadership positions. At Bosch, too, the topic of equal opportunities is on the executive agenda. Christoph Kübel, the director of industrial relations at Robert Bosch GmbH, has personally committed himself to shaping change and contributing what Bosch has learned. Bosch has implemented a modern HR policy that stands out in Germany and centers on the following cornerstones.

Guidelines for a flexible and family-friendly working culture

In its corporate guidelines, Bosch sets itself the aim of enabling a balance between professional and family demands. This entails the support of mobile working models and creating a leadership culture that focuses on results rather than the time spent in the workplace. The aim of these efforts is to promote a working culture that strikes the best possible work-life balance. After all, Bosch appreciates family obligations as much as it values professional dedication. Since the introduction of the guidelines in Germany in 2012, many regional companies have adopted them or introduced versions modified in line with local circumstances.

A variety of working models for greater versatility

At its core, the versatile working culture at Bosch comprises many different working models that support the company. These range from remote working models, to a variety of part-time arrangements, to job-sharing. Bosch has been offering associates a tool since 2016 called the JobConnector, whose slogan is “job-sharing made easy.” This platform makes it easier for associates and executives to find a suitable part-time position or a job-sharing partner online. Job-sharing candidates can then apply together for vacant posts.

The aim of the various working models is to find solutions for all associates, while taking into consideration the phase of life that they are currently in. Bosch also endeavors to enable flexible working models in areas where the nature of the work requires physical presence. For instance, there are limits to the models that can be offered in manufacturing or research for technical reasons, for example whenever specific tasks can only be carried out with the tools and equipment at the workstation. Yet, even in shift work, it is still possible to organize the working hours in a more family friendly way to some extent, or to flexibly spread work between part-time associates.

Less on-site presence, more focus on results

Many associates and executives belong to a generation who used presence as a yardstick of performance, valuing the hours spent at the workplace above all. The company's current aim is to develop a working culture that shifts the spotlight onto results, and one that is less dependent on rigid working-time rules. Wherever possible, and taking into consideration business needs, Bosch believes that associates should be able to freely choose when and where they work. The new working culture is also reflected in working spaces: associates can choose between a variety of areas and creative rooms, silent zones, lounges for casually chatting with colleagues, as well as conventional individual workstations. Such change cannot be imposed from the top; it has to resonate

with the “hearts and minds” of everyone involved – so that people begin to think differently. Consequently, associates are asked to help design the working space and are free to express their preferences candidly to their supervisors.

Executives, on the other hand, are expected to keep an open mind as regards to the needs of their associates – even if this means letting go of the control mechanisms that many of them might feel are necessary. Dismantling such reservations and encouraging executives to try out flexible working models were the aims behind the [“MORE” project](#) (Mindset ORganization Executives), which ran from 2011 through 2013. In total, more than 1,000 managers worldwide took part and worked part-time or from home at least one day a week over a period of several weeks. After the project, over 80 percent of participants kept their chosen working model. Meanwhile, ever more executives at Bosch have to come to view flexible working models as perfectly normal.

Caring for family members

Since 1993, Bosch associates have been able to take up to ten days off work to look after family members in acute need of care. Against the backdrop of demographic developments and the aging workforce, the need to take care of family members is set to increase. In 2008, Bosch extended the nursing care period granted by German law to three years for its associates. This was supplemented in 2012, with the introduction of statutory family care time, which allows carers partial leave of up to two years. During the care period, associates work part-time while a government loan eases the resulting financial burden. Later, associates return to full-time employment and repay the loan. Time accrued in a long-term working time account can also be used to cover the care period. In close collaboration with a specialist agency, Bosch offers associates across Europe assistance in finding individual nursing care solutions. Online portals offer associates information relating to the care of family members and the opportunity to speak to experts.

Cross-generational tandem

Collaboration in mixed-age teams is one of the focal points of diversity management in Europe, partly as a result of demographic change. With this in mind, Bosch launched a new project in 2015 in which younger associates can learn from their more experienced colleagues. Two associates with an age gap of at least ten years can voluntarily form a [cross-generational tandem](#). They then meet at regular intervals to exchange their knowledge and experience in day-to-day work, help each other out, and consciously take into consideration the other's perspective on life. Such cross-generational networking shows Bosch associates that they can all learn from each other, while developing an understanding of different phases of life.

Childcare offers

Childcare at Bosch is one of the many offers that help associates strike a better work-life balance. The focus is on a family-friendly working culture that makes it easier to work flexibly and that prioritizes results rather than workplace presence. At its more than 80 locations across Germany, Bosch has a wide range of childcare offers aimed at the individual needs of associates. Some large sites in conurbations even have their own daycare facilities for children up to six years old. At smaller sites, Bosch reserves places at local daycare centers or with in-home daycare providers. Alongside its own daycare facilities, childcare offerings include arrangements made with public and private providers, as well as support for parent-led initiatives. In close collaboration with an agency, Bosch supports and bears the cost for the search for individual care solutions including in-home daycare, au pairs, and babysitters Germany-wide. Bosch also partners with youth and educational institutions to offer roughly 500 children the chance to participate in activities such as cave exploration or archery. In addition, each year, about 200 associates, their family members, and children take advantage of the range of offers available to families, among them seminars that teach working methods or concentration and motivational aids. Daycare programs during school vacations are a firm component of HR offerings at individual Bosch locations: each year, some 1,000 spots are made available for associates' children or are financed by the company. Especially during the summer vacation, working parents thus have reliable childcare options.

Family time as career element

Bosch gives family commitment the same respect as professional dedication. For this reason, it does not want associates to have to choose one over the other. In order to reach the next step up the ladder, a varying number of career elements (of which there are five in total) have to be completed as part of personal development. Career elements encompass a change of division and function, responsibility for personnel, leading a project, and professional experience abroad. Associates who cannot complete a particular career element, for instance because a family member in need of care means that it is not possible to relocate abroad, should not have to see their careers suffer as a result. In such cases, family time can be recognized as an element.

Parental leave for mothers and fathers

Bosch supports working parents by easing their return after parental leave. To this end, the associate's return is planned ahead of time. Associates and supervisors meet before the leave begins in order to reach an agreement regarding when the associate intends to return to work and in what capacity. In addition, the associate's professional development is not put on hold during parental leave, and they can still take part in training measures if they wish. To

enable them to remain in contact with their department, associates on parental leave have access to company email and the Bosch intranet from home.

Long-term working time accounts

Many associates, irrespective of whether their employment contracts fall under collective wage agreements, can accrue flexitime or a part of their salary in long-term working time accounts. Participating associates who fulfill certain criteria can then take paid leave at some later point. Many use this for the classical sabbatical or to travel for a few months, to pursue scientific work or to prolong the parental leave period, or some to go into early retirement. The credit saved can also be used as a salary supplement for those working part-time during the parental leave period or while caring for a family member.

Involvement in HR policy

At Bosch, a variety of associate networks foster exchange between associates. These are self-organized and deal with topics related to work-life balance. For instance, “papas@bosch” is a network of working fathers, or “family@bosch” brings together parents who are interested in sharing their thoughts on how to reconcile work and family commitments. Bosch associate networks have over 1,000 active members. In addition, the networks involve many more associates via lectures, discussion panels, and regular meetings. Not infrequently, changes to personnel policy result from people sharing their experiences, and offering their views on what works well in practice or needs improvement. Associates’ experiences provide valuable information for continuous improvement, which is why the company organizes regular exchanges between HR and the respective networks. This is supplemented by a “business lunch” initiative with board of management members as well as discussion forums with specialists and executives. In this way, associates can contribute to the development of working culture and HR policy at Bosch.

Associate counseling – for professional and personal matters

[Associate counseling](#) at Bosch supports the workforce in personal and professional matters, especially where help is needed in resolving problems or dealing with difficult situations. Independent professionals with many years of experience are on hand to offer associates discreet and confidential assistance. They help associates balance personal and professional demands in a variety of circumstances, including pregnancy, acute crises, workplace conflicts, addiction, and debt. A range of services is provided which is tailored to the specific needs of associates, executives, and whole teams. In-house social services provide support in a variety of ways: face-to-face, by email, on the phone, or anonymously through an internet portal.

Health at home and at work

Health is pivotal to the quality of life of associates, both at home and in the workplace. As part of its "befit" program, Bosch offers a variety of health-related initiatives. Examples include medical screening, physical and mental fitness, nutrition, and workplace ergonomics. In addition, Bosch offers opportunities to associates that have medically-certified incurable conditions or serious disabilities. Two new initiatives are particularly innovative. For one, Bosch is committed to protecting and improving the mental health of its workforce. One way of achieving this is through an open and frank dialogue on the subject of mental health among the workforce. After all, the origin of stress can be traced back to causes in both the personal and professional spheres, but are often manifested in the workplace. In addition, since 2016, Bosch has been supporting associates suffering from cancer by offering them state-of-the-art cancer diagnostics at the Robert Bosch Hospital free of charge. The hospital is considered one of the country's leading cancer treatment centers, and employs targeted genetic screening to improve the treatment of tumors.

Internet:

Flexible working culture guidelines at Bosch <http://bit.ly/1bSJ7QM>

Work-life balance at Bosch: <http://bit.ly/1ex6rDa>

Work and family at Bosch: <http://bit.ly/1hJVCML>

Diversity management at Bosch: <http://bit.ly/1d2Y6WE>

Health management at Bosch: <http://bit.ly/1SXJk7X>

Associate guidance at Bosch: <http://bit.ly/2u0ffQ>

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