

## **Teaching Case**

### **Developing an Effective Corporate Innovation System: The Case of the Bosch Group**

Ann-Kathrin Leiting, Jana Thiel\*, Bart Clarysse  
ETH Zurich  
Department of Management, Technology, and Economics

*\*Corresponding author*

**Case Synopsis.** This teaching case introduces the Robert Bosch Group—a widely acknowledged global player in the high technology industry—and its recent approach to launching corporate entrepreneurship initiatives to stimulate corporate renewal. While, in the past the company has mainly acted as major supplier of components for high technology products, notably for the automotive industry, the recent changes in the mobility sector, coupled with intensified technological dynamism, call for strategic reorientation and the exploration of new business fields. Notably, opportunities shift towards supporting traditional products with digital and connected solutions. The case describes the goals, setup, and challenges of organizing an effective set of initiatives that enable employees to generate new ideas and experiment in lean start-up fashion to identify and validate impactful new business opportunities for the company.

**Teaching Approach & Audience.** We have successfully used this case in MBA and executive settings in different European business schools to discuss corporate innovation, corporate renewal, and successful organizational approaches. The case allows for an analysis of contemporary corporate innovation and entrepreneurship methods, followed by more a generative and critical discussion of outcomes and future avenues for the company to take. Typically, students receive the case very well as it allows looking at innovation and strategy outside of popular and widely used media darlings. The case setting of a traditional large industrial company resonates with the daily experiences of many MBAs and executives.

**Teaching Opportunities.** The case offers interesting avenues for class discussion about innovation and corporate renewal. In particular, it taps into two contemporary phenomena we observe in large corporations: (1) including employees in “bottom-up” innovation and entrepreneurship initiatives, and (2) borrowing tools and methods like lean start-up and accelerators from a professionalizing entrepreneurial community, in hopes to run innovation differently and more effectively. The case stimulates engaged discussions of these approaches and their ability to contribute to the ambitious expectations often associated with such initiatives.

While the primary analysis of the case is certainly focused on the material challenges that emerge from introducing more entrepreneurial methods and practices into a large organization, the case setting has also allowed us to zoom into related research areas: (1) opportunities and limitations of lean start-up-inspired business experimentation, and (2) to what extent the presented initiatives truly enable corporate renewal, taking into account that corporate culture is often a major constituent in corporate transformation and not well represented in the presented entrepreneurial tools. We use our own recent research to more critically discuss expectations on business ideas created through such programs, and more importantly to highlight the emerging difficulties to re-integrate very novel ideas into the existing corporate logic of the firm and what might be a process for successfully doing so.