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PODCAST

# How ABB is empowering women in the workplace

## ABB Decoded

On International Women In Engineering Day (INWED) ABB CEO Bjorn Rosengren and Chief Human Resources Officer Carolina Granat discuss the importance of empowering women to pursue careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math – and why diverse teams perform best.

**Anthony Rowlinson:** Hello and welcome to ABB Decoded – the podcast that tries to press pause on our fast-moving lives and make sense of the technology and trends that are shaping our world.

I'm your host, Anthony Rowlinson, and we're joined for this episode, on International Women in Engineering Day, by ABB's CEO Björn Rosengren and the company's Chief HR Officer, Carolina Granat.

They took time out from busy schedules to share their views on an ever-more important topic: how to encourage girls and young women into science, technology and engineering careers and thereby ensure greater workplace diversity. For a global technology leader, like ABB, which was founded on a spirit of innovation, attracting the brightest minds across cultures and genders is essential to its future success.

So let's hear from two of ABB's most senior executives as to how they plan to go about attracting more women into the workforce.

**Björn Rosengren:** Yeah, my name is Björn Rosengren. I've been the CEO of ABB for two years. Before then I've been heading different companies during the last 20 years.

**Carolina Granat:** Hey, I'm Carolina Granat. I'm the CHRO of ABB since one year back. I joined ABB in September 2020 and in this role since, one year back. And the majority of my career I spent within Sandvik, 16 years and before that Boston Consulting Group.

**Anthony:** So, we will start by asking why, why you've made diversity and inclusion such a key priority for ABB, and also why you've both taken personal responsibility by being executive sponsors for gender diversity?

**Björn** Yeah, I mean, maybe I can start. And, uh, I've said since I came here, I've always had big respect for ABB as a company. And now, and I've been here for a couple years, I think I can confirm it is a great company. I talk about technology, but I also talk a lot about people. And I think a company like ABB deserves to have the best people to be successful. I think that is a basis.

So, from my perspective, I think it's important that ABB will always attract the best competence in the market. And when I'm saying that, it means that we need to have a broad recruitment base. That is important. So, you know, the people working in the company should have the same opportunities, but also

people who would like to join should feel that ABB is a company you can succeed. Whatever gender you are, or if you're coming from different culture, or whatever you are. So, performance is that counts, and that gives you the opportunities.

**Anthony:** And presumably, Carolina, you'd echo those sentiments?

**Carolina:** Yeah, absolutely. And I also think, I truly believe that diverse teams outperforms homogeneous teams. And I think that's extra important when you are a company where innovation plays an important part, which is truly for ABB and all the history of ABB. So, I think that's one important aspect for why it's important for ABB, and maybe more for me personally. And I think maybe that's true for you as well, Björn.

I mean, I have two teenage daughters. So, of course, if you go more specifically into gender, I also feel, , that I want to really ensure that everyone has the same possibilities. And if they would ask me, you know, later on, when they get older, if I did what I could to change the world, or not the world, but maybe the company where you can have an influence, I would like to say to them, yes, I did what I could to change things.

**Anthony:** And Björn, you have daughters as well.

**Björn:** Yes I do! I have one son and two daughters, and two of them have started to work and one is still in school. And, of course, for all of them, we want to see the best, and that they get the same opportunities and chance. A company like we are, we are a global company, we are working in all different cultures, in all different countries where things like diversity might not, be always so worked in. And I think, from my perspective, I would like to see that ABB has this culture.

Firs, we talk about diversity. But to create that it is actually the inclusivity, which is important, that people feel that they are part of the company and have really the same opportunities. And that, that is the important for me.

**Anthony:** You both mentioned your daughters working. It's interesting to talk about this for a moment. Do you feel that gives you an extra motivation to engage in this topic, being parents of girls?

**Björn:** I don't really know, but I think this comes very natural. I think, you know, since you were in school. I remember the girls were always the best in the school, and we boys maybe were not mature enough at that time. So bright people should have good opportunities. And I've been in the industry for 35 years, where it's not always so natural, and there is an imbalance when it comes to gender. So seeing this development and experiencing, you know, things where you maybe was a little bit biased in the beginning, that this is definite for men and this is for women, that you realize that you have these women outperforming men in the men's area. And that's quite exciting. And I also realize that, you know, when you're working in a company, it's of course much more fun if it's a diverse group. You know, it's better for the company, and I think it's also, nicer to work in that environment.

**Carolina:** I think, as you say, as a parent, and that goes, I mean, without saying, no matter if you have boys or girls, I think all of us as parents just want our children to have the same opportunities. So of course, that is kind of a personal motivation that I think everyone, when you start to think like that, it's so obvious that you would like to give everyone the same opportunity.

**Björn:** I think this is quite clear. But, you know, it's really, if you go back in time a little bit, but when I started, which is quite a number of years ago, it was a little bit different. And many times, it called the Boys' Club, you know, that's where the people making decisions. It was quite, quite exciting. I was really part of a startup when this was broken down a little bit in the company where I was working. Because we had a lady who was head of HR. And by that time, it was natural that you always discussed, you know, who should go here and who should go there. And of course, men deciding putting men in place.

Breaking this was actually the open job market. And that was really the breakthrough when it gives equal opportunities. Suddenly this Boys' Club doesn't matter anymore because it's the people who recruit. Everybody can apply, and everybody has the same opportunities. Of course, we always need to choose

the right person on the right place. But now, it gives an opportunity to people. I think the open job market is really opening the door to diversity.

**Anthony :** Carolina, you've been heavily involved in that, at ABB introducing it. Could you give us your perspective on how that's helped ABB?

**Carolina:** I couldn't agree more. Because what it does is actually what Björn says. No matter what existing networks there are, if that is between men or other people that have been working long together in their career. All of a sudden, you actually open that to everyone to apply. And the surprise is, because you think, yeah, , we know all the people in the organization, but surprisingly often, there always pops up one or two names that no one really thought of beforehand. And we've already seen some examples of that within ABB with the open job market, that people who wouldn't have been considered is actually, in the end, the best candidate for the position.

Then, of course, it's up to us to now foster that culture, so everyone feels encouraged to apply and take that initiative. And I think that is a bit, maybe, still a bit the challenge because I think some people still wait for the manager actually to call them and to say, "Hey, I think you are the right person for the position." And when you don't get that call, you think maybe I shouldn't apply. So, I think that's a culture shift that we're still working on. So, people actually understand that it is an open job market, so it's not pre-decided. So, please, put your name there and show that you are the best candidate.

**Björn:** If you're waiting for that call, you will be waiting for a long time.

**Carolina:**Yes!

**Björn:** But... I agree with you, and I think it's correct. But, it's also not only this that will solve diversity. Because we need to, of course, educate people. We need to work with biases that we all have, and we need, of course, to get that out of the system.

**Carolina:** Yeah, no, I think you're right. Because in the end, it's the recruiting manager who takes the decision. So, of course, he or she also need to be aware of his or her biases, in terms of... Because it's natural. You want to recruit more of the same, that just comes natural, whoever we are. So I think we, we both need to work with the open job market, but also to really make people aware and also train our managers how to think when they select, and be aware of their biases. And go for the best person, that's in the end the most important.

And then, of course, I know, that's a topic that you are, are very engaged in, Björn, that we want to ensure that we have a good pool of candidates. And right now, it's maybe not as diverse as we would like it to be. And that's where we need to put a lot of work and effort, to ensure that we attract new people into ABB that are representing all dimensions of diversity.

**Björn:** And I think it's clear, because when we have open manager positions, which we have all the time, we can see it's not a balance. So, I think it's absolutely clear, the foundation need to be built. And I think that the first recruitment into the company, it's important that we get a good balance there. So, I think that is a good, a good step in the right direction.

**Anthony:** You both seem to be talking about a degree of cultural change, maybe a mindset shift within ABB, is that fair to say?

**Carolina:** Yes. I think it's a cultural shift that starts with more, also, inclusion. And so, I do think... and that's what we will try to also create in the organization, that people can bring their full self to work. No matter who they are, what background experience. And I think this is extra important, as Björn said earlier, depending on where you work, in what country, what site, this might not be so easy outside the workplace. So, if we can offer that safe space for our employees, I think, we can really have, you know, people performing at their best. And that will, in the end, you know, give, also good outcome for the company.

**Björn:** I also believe that it's building confidence. You know, I think when we, when we can create an inclusive environment, but we also need to build up the confidence in our employees that, you know, we are good enough and we have the opportunity. And this, is a difference between men and women today. I

can see my, daughter and son. So, just an example, my daughter was asked to become a small manager for a part, and she came to me and said, "I turned it down because I'd never been a manager before." And then I said, "Yeah, of course you'd not been a manager before, but you have to start sometimes." Then my son maybe is a little bit different in his attitude, more taking like this. So, it's a little bit helping people to strengthen their own confidence.

And that's why we're quite spending a lot of time... when I travel around, you know, different companies, I try to meet our women talents in the different parts. And I spend, maybe, lunch, or we have an hour that we discuss how is ABB to work for, do you feel yourself that you have the same opportunity. And then I at least try to... I'm not sure that I'm succeeding... but I at least try to build confidence in, "Come on, you have the opportunity." We want you guys to succeed, or you girls to succeed. I mean, that's important.

So, I think training, but encouraging. We send people to mentorship programs, and things to build confidence. So, I think that's an important job for us.

**Carolina:** And I think also, with an engineering company and our culture that is also needed then too. Because when we tell what we can offer, we, we have shown... and that goes back to your point, Björn, of maybe how a woman would kind of look at all the criteria, what's needed for the position.

And in an engineering company, we don't only make 3 bullets, we make maybe 25 bullets of 'this is what you need to have to take the position'. And the women would more likely say "No, I'm only ticking maybe 10 out of the 20 boxes," and men would say, "Yeah, yeah, but I can manage with the things."

So, I think it's also we need to, to rethink a bit how we promote the positions, and not describe them in an engineering way, if you will. So, we really attract more people, and that people have the courage to apply for them. And I think it's a great point, that we also need to have those conversations with all the, the talents in the organization, no matter women or men, to, you know, go for it and apply.

**Anthony:** And talking as we were about ABB culture, and perhaps culture changes, how does that relate to ABB's core values?

**Carolina:** You know, I think, really, the ABB values, with courage, care, collaboration, curiosity... that's kind of the whole essence of having an inclusive environment. Because if you think of the dynamic, the courage and the care, that really both that we want to challenge each other, but also with the respect for who we are and all of that. And then when it comes to curiosity and collaboration, I think that also comes back to this curiosity, allowing people to think differently, being curious on what other people thinks, no matter what perspective they bring. But also, that collaboration. You know, that also kind of is the core of an inclusive environment. So, I think our values is really supporting the whole diversity and inclusion agenda for us.

**Björn:** I say also that it takes time, of course. And I think the important for us in the executive committee we've discussed it, is that we see that we are moving the right way. I think we can say Rome wasn't built overnight. This is something that takes time. But that's why we always measure the diversity we have, and the way we are developing. So small steps in the right direction. When we should worry if we don't see progress. So I think that's important.

But it will take time. You know, as we said, you need to build foundation, we need to have good candidates. Because, in the end, we are always going to choose the one that is most suitable for each job. If it's a man, woman, or whatever culture or coming from different parts of the world, we will always make the decision for the most suitable person.

**Anthony:** And does it help having an initiative like International Women in Engineering Day to bring these topics into focus?

**Carolina:** I think it's, I mean... of course you can always debate, you know, it's a pity that it's needed. But I do think it's an opportunity to discuss, like we do now, what are the elements in our culture that might be, you know, obstacles to us to allow for everyone to have a career? And I think that is, again... you need to start to look at yourself. Okay, what could I do differently to support this? So, I think it's, it's an opportunity for everyone to highlight the need and have good discussions on the topic.

**Björn:** Yeah, I think reflecting is not bad. Sometimes you, you know... we are moving in full speed, happening things, all the time, and just forward, forward, forward. Sometimes you just need to stop up, take one step back, and reflect a little bit about the situation. You know, how can I do life easier for someone in the organization? How can I help them build a little bit of confidence? And how can I support that people takes the step that they deserve to be taking? Small things like that.

**Carolina:** I think another reason why it's important... again, coming back to that, it's, maybe not so easy in some places, some cultures, so just feeling that you have that support, also, within the company. It is an important signal. And that is the feedback that we receive also from employees, that it's an opportunity to feel supported as an employee.

**Anthony:** Björn you mentioned, the importance of taking measurable progress in these areas. I believe there are some quite specific targets we have for ABB and inclusivity.

**Björn:** Yes, yes we do. We have set up targets. And we debated them, are they ambitious enough, or so on. For me, I don't think that is the most important. I think we said that we have an ambitious target of having 25% of our senior managers being female, that we set, 2030. The important thing, as I said... we need to see that we are moving all the time into that. If we do that a little bit earlier, or just a little bit late, I think I can live with that also, as long as I see we got progress.

**Carolina:** And I think also, what it creates when you set that type of target, as you say... I mean, you can debate what is the right level, what is ambitious or not. But when you do that... and that has happened over the last years now... really good discussions. Because we also realize, to achieve that, we need to do things differently. Also, with the early talent pool, how do we attract. So, you really get into good discussions and actions.

And it's important to measure the progress step by step, and have the patience, because this takes time. But it's really important that we take those small steps every year, which we have done now over the last couple of years, which is a great, great improvement for us.

**Björn:** And I think us in the executive committee... but, I mean, this goes to all the managers we have in the group. We have an important task where we all need to support this progress. We need to do it. And I try to, you know... if I can be a mentor, supporting, I'll take that step. If I can do a little bit extra to support someone in their career, or in their development, I'd be happy to do that.

**Carolina:** I couldn't agree more. Because if it only would be, like, an HR initiative, then we would never be successful. So that is really a call for action, that everyone needs to understand that they can influence this.

**Anthony:** And I think you've both alluded to this point, but is it harder to make this kind of change in a company like ABB which has long traditions and was once upon a time quite a sort of stolid engineering company – very different company now – but is it harder to make that change in a company like this?

**Björn:** You know, I think... I was quite astonished when I came into ABB, because it's a very diverse company from a perspective from different culture and people working. You know, when you walk here in Zürich, you know, you see people from all different parts of the world. We have more nationalities in the group than anyone else. I think we are very global.

Where we are lacking is on the gender side. And I think here we have more to do. Which is not, maybe, so different from this kind of group where you are a big service organization, a lot of blue-collar factory-type of work, and so on. So, I think that's the history. Now we need to look forward, and see that we progress in the right direction.

And I think, I mean, ABB is very open for change and for development. I'm not worried at all. I see people take this seriously. When I travel around in the different parts, I think it really feels that this is an important subject, and that people in the organization supports this development. So, I'm not worried at all. I think we will see good progress.

**Carolina:** I don't necessarily think it's more tough for ABB than any other company. I think what is tough right now is that because in an engineering company, of course you can sometimes hear, maybe, the

excuse that "Yeah, but there is not that many women in that specific field or area." Of course they exist, but now the war of getting them into companies is really tough. Because it's not only us that have this ambition, everyone wants to progress. So, of course, we need to have, you know, a really good offer in terms of our purpose as a company, which I think we have a really strong offering towards all our potential employees.

But I think that's where the toughness is. It's not specifically tough for ABB, but it, it's really...everyone have this same ambition, and that's where it's a competition of talents for sure.

**Björn:** I think also there we have another task to do, and that is, of course, to be part of influence in the society. And we do. I mean, when we go to universities, you know, we have our schools where young people starts, and encourage them to maybe choose not the traditionally divide between what men and women do, or boys and girls, you know, engineering school. We encourage people to take that. We prepare to support them during their education. We are constantly meeting them, giving them opportunities in our different, operations, where they can do thesis, they can work during summers, and these kinds of opportunities, see that it's a quite exciting environment.

So, I think we have a job there together with every other company in the world, to make sure that the base, you know, the recruitment base, and that the interest, is actually coming. And it's going to take time, but I feel very confident that we are moving the right way.

**Anthony:** So, really, you're talking about looking beyond ABB's own boundaries, actually, out into society and maybe taking a leadership role?

**Björn:** Absolutely.

**Björn:** Yeah.

**Anthony:** Is that... How do you do that as a company?

**Björn:** No, I mean, as I say, we work with universities. We have a school for younger children. We go out into society. We want to be good citizens where we are. We're putting our culture into different parts of the world. We support things happening there. And we encourage girls to actually apply to be part of them, educate themselves in different areas which actually is important for ABB.

**Carolina:** I think that, um, really what you're into now, and that's where, I think, ABB can make a difference. It's, it's a whole, I mean... the product solutions that we have that can influence the whole sustainability agenda. We will be more attractive to people to join us, because people want to be part of that. So, I think the purpose of ABB and, actually, all the things you mentioned, Björn... that, really, we should probably promote it even more.

**Björn:** A quite interesting thing also which I notice when I meet young talents in school... sustainability is becoming more important for all young people. Not least women and girls. These are interested in, you know, being able to contribute in the change, and in the improvement of the world. So, I think for ABB, as we are well-positioned when it comes to sustainability and driving the agenda in the market, helping customers in this journey... I actually believe ABB is a perfect company to come to work for.

**Anthony:** Okay. I have a personal question for both of you. Have you encountered bias yourselves during your careers, and felt either that you had to do something about it, or that you did do something to correct bias?

**Björn:** I think everybody, you know, being an older male being in the industry for 35 years, of course, I've seen everything that has changed from the beginning. You know, when you coming into industry, you believe this is only for men. And you realize that that's not the case, and suddenly they're popping up, you know, female in the man's world and surprising everyone, because they are extremely successful. So, of course, this is an evolution. I think, also, from my perspective, you know, as long as I've been in the industry, as more I understand the importance of diversity overall. Not only gender, but overall, in any kind of decision making and making a company great. So, of course everybody has biases. And, and it is something you need to work with, and education is a good way to get away from that.

**Carolina:** No, and I think just because I'm HR, I'm not better than anyone else. I also have biases. And, really, when I always need to think of it is when I recruit. Because I would fall into the same trap as anyone else, that I would naturally look for more of the same, as I mentioned earlier.

So that's the situation where I always remind myself when I go into the room with a candidate, to try to, you know, think of my background experiences and, and try to be observant. And one thing that I learned, if you just allow for a bit more seconds or minutes to give the person a chance, and not decide for yourself, that will actually open up for, I would say, more diverse candidates to be successful in that process.

**Anthony:** Okay. Another interesting question is that there have been many studies that predict that full equality between the genders won't probably happen for a hundred years or more. But yet, ABB has a quite ambitious medium- and short-term goals. Do you think those two things can be reconciled?

**Björn:** You know, first I'll say that, you know, it might take time before you will be fully diverse from that perspective. At the same time, I think we can already tomorrow make sure that ABB is inclusive, which I think is the basis for diversity. Everybody should feel that they have the same opportunities, that they are part of the company, and it's really fun to come to ABB and work, and they can develop. You know, and then it's up to each individual, you know, what direction... You want to be manager, you want to be an expert, you want to work, you know, enjoy developing products, solutions, sustainability, whatever? I think we got room for that. So as long as the employees feel that they are part of developing ABB, and feel inclusive, I think it's a good start. Then it has to take the time it takes.

**Carolina:** I agree. If you say a hundred years, that sounds a bit depressing. But I do think, if we have that mindset that we really need to start now, we need to start with ourselves and show in our actions... I'm sure in hoping that there somehow will be a hockey stick, you know, it will slowly progress. But then I think by addressing as you say, also, the inclusive environment, that we can do right away. And that will attract more and make the progress, happening faster I'm sure.

**Björn:** And as an ending, I would just take this opportunity... you know, I've been traveling around a lot, and I met a lot of engaged people, you know, in every company I can see. You know, making sure that we have the right talents when it comes to the different genders, giving an opportunity to get them together, work with them, build confidence, you know, giving opportunities.

**Anthony:** Opportunities are there for those bold enough to take them, seems to be the message, so thank you, Björn Rosengren and Carolina Granat for those words of encouragement on International Women in Engineering Day.

And if you've enjoyed this episode of ABB Decoded, why not like, share and subscribe to the series wherever you get your podcasts.

Until next time.