

Interview with Erik Askensjö, Managing Director, Schaeffler Sweden and manager of the Industrial Nordic and Baltic Area

28 Sept 2021

SCHAEFFLER

Introduction

Erik Askensjö holds a B.Sc. in Business Administration from Linköping University. He has been the Managing Director of Schaeffler Sverige AB and Manager of the industrial Nordic and Baltic area for the past five years.

The Schaeffler Group is one of the world's largest suppliers of systems and specialist components to the automotive and industrial sectors. They are proud to have been selected as one of the UN's 50 Climate and Sustainability Leaders.

Erik is passionate about the value of a good working environment for his team, and has placed happiness and wellbeing at the heart of the refurbishment of their office facility in Arlandastad, north of Stockholm in Sweden.

When it comes to lighting, Erik sees no reason why the lighting in the office should be any less considered than the lighting in one's own home.

He also believes that using the latest technology is key to meeting sustainability targets. In his view, the 10% additional investment over and above a 'basic' lighting provision represents great value - and cannot see why others would not do the same.

Background

EA: The building itself is a little more than 20 years old - and had not been renovated or modified since then. About four and a half years ago, we decided to change the whole sales concept for Europe. Instead of having a small legal entity in each country, we decided to go for an area solution. So we created one headquarter for each sales area, and then have smaller entities in each country or even home-office for the sales people.

So we decided to base the Nordic and Baltic area office in the city called Arlandastad, 45 kilometers north of Stockholm. And to be able to host all the new employees with the new area concept, we also needed to completely rethink how and where people were sitting in the three floors that we have.

We had a very good interior decorator on the team. I've worked with her before and she has always been a very good support to me. We worked together to choose the colour of the curtains and furnishings to give a Nordic touch with the light wood style. We also picked up the company brand green.

Lighting is a priority

And then perhaps to the most important thing for me: the lighting. I'm personally very interested in lighting - we have taken great care with lighting in the house where I live. So it was very natural for me to ask why shouldn't we care about lighting in the office too?

After all, we spend one third of our time in the office. Maybe not a third of our lifetime, but we do spend a big part of our life in the office.

So why shouldn't the employees - and myself too - feel well when we are working for the company?

So when planning this, we said:

First we need general lighting in the office, we must feel comfortable, regardless of whether it is a single office, or an open plan office where we have our customer service for example. So we have chosen a very sunlight-like overhead pendant for general lighting.



Schaeffler office refurbishment, Arlandastad, 2021
General and task lighting using pendant luminaire 'Plain' from Anell Ljus + Form



Schaeffler office refurbishment, Arlandastad, 2021.
A line of light around the outer edge mimics the daylight colour shift

We programmed the lights to create different scenarios. For example, we have one LED strip that follows the outer wall, 20cm from the edge. It shifts from a very yellow light in the morning and ramps up after two hours to a whiter, brighter light. And then at three or four o'clock in the afternoon it starts to ramp down to become more yellow again. That is one example of how we use light to create atmosphere for the employees.

Secondly, there must be very good lighting for each and every individual so that they feel relaxed: I don't want them to build tension or fatigue or stress or whatever it could be. So for each and every workstation, we have task lights so that every employee can choose how much illumination they want: maybe over the day from morning to midday to afternoon.

They can also adjust the angle so they don't get shadows on the desk or in the wrong places: that's very important.



The lighting you want also depends on your mood: some days as we all know, you feel like you own the world. And some days you feel a little bit more problematic, perhaps you have issues at home or whatever. Then you want another kind of lighting. All these can be adjusted individually.

Schaeffler office refurbishment, Arlandastad, 2021.
Each workplace combines Plain pendants fitted with SunLike full spectrum chips, and task lighting.

How did you justify the financial investment?

EA: Well I would like to divide that into two parts. When we talk about light, one thing is the installation as such. The other is the luminaires.

Very often we look at the luminaires and we say: 'Okay, how much do they cost?' They cost £100, or they cost £200 or whatever it is. And yes, if you look at the luminaire itself, we have gone for slightly more sophisticated luminaires. *They are perhaps 20-30% more expensive than the cheaper ones. On the other hand, the luminaire itself is probably only 50% of the total installed cost of them.*

The total installed cost of the lighting in the context of the renovation is, best guess, between 20 and 30%. But we also need to keep in mind that we took away all the first generation light tubes and low energy lighting that was not performing 100%.

So we are only talking about an extra 10% on the total project cost (compared to a 'standard' solution) So adding a 10% more higher investment, you get a lot better quality - and you get much more than you expect from a lighting and luminaire perspective.

Integrated controls are also part of the upfront investment

Another big part of the investment was the decision to go for a completely computerised lighting control system.

It's connected to the burglar alarm system, so when the first employees arrive in the office in the morning, we disable the burglar alarm. The basic lighting in the office automatically switches on to a low level.

And then when we go home tonight, the last employee will start the burglar alarm system and the lighting in the building will shut down automatically.

So with these sophisticated functions, of course the investment is a little bit higher. But the lighting, the luminaires and the installation of the good lighting from my perspective, that is not the major investment.

If you are going to change the lighting in the office, it's better to spend the money on good luminaires to get a good work environment rather than saving a few pennies on something which is only a fraction of the total installed cost.

And I'm convinced that the cost of having employees who are not performing their best, is far greater than the money we would save with cheaper lighting.

Are you expecting that this system will save you some energy costs as well?

EA: Well, of course, it will definitely save energy cost as we also change to modern LED light luminaires everywhere. And we have sensors in the corridors and in common areas. So if no one is there, then the luminaires go down to 20-30% of maximum capacity.

So it is a sophisticated system, but the system itself is too young to be able to draw any conclusions on the total saving.

Benefits - employee pride

The comments from my colleagues and coworkers show that they are so proud of their work place that I definitely think it's worth the investment.

We see that when we have visitors to the building, whether it's customers or rarely, but it happens, that family members come and say 'hello' to see what it looks like, we see that the employees are so proud of their working office.

Schaeffler is one of the 50 organizations that have been chosen by the UN to champion sustainability. How do your choices about lighting support that position?

Sustainability is of course a very important topic for Schaeffler, for our company and for the general environment too. For example, we are working towards our goal to make all our production carbon neutral by 2030.

And for me personally: I would like to hand over a planet to my children that I feel proud of, not a disaster. *And if I can do something to save energy by creating a little more modern lighting in the office, it might be seen as a small contribution, but it is a contribution from my side.*

Lessons for others?

EA: *I would say that from my perspective, I really don't understand the argument why they cannot afford it.*

The extra investment to get a good atmosphere and a good luminaire, good lighting in the office is so small in comparison to what you get in terms of employee wellbeing and the motivation for them to come to the office and work.