



At Betech in Hoogeveen one person is responsible for 4 machines. (Photo Betech)

Since 1994

Betech was founded in 1994 by Wim van de Beld. The company consist of five specialized production facilities i.e.

- Hoogeveen (mass turning)
- Groningen (machining and turning of plastics)
- Leek (turning of aluminum)
- Steenwijk (injection moulding)
- Someren (high complexity turning)

The Betech Group employs 80 full time employees.

The company is expanding rapidly. The expansion plan will be executed in multiple stages which will result in a doubling of the square meters to 12.500 of square meter in Hoogeveen.

DICK OFFRINGA

Machines do the work; continuously and almost unmanned. Digitalization, data and co-operation. These three words are leading for the Betech Group. This is how the production company competes with Asian competitors and has a head start on European colleagues.

Shrill sounds of chisels, drills and machines fill the production hall of Betech in Hoogeveen, one of the five production locations of the Betech Group. It's clear that this location operates with metal. The green lights at the machines tell which of them is running, the red light indicate that the machine is set-up for a new product, the blue that a tool is ready for replacement. The machines has to do the work, preferably 24/7 and unmanned.

As a total company Betech produces about 50 to 75 million small components a year made out of metal and plastic, mostly for the automotive industry. CEO/owner of Betech puts it into perspective: "In the cost price of a car a maximum € 4,- in parts has been contributed by our company." But also other industries, like manufacturers of medical equipment, energy industry and mechanical engineering use Betech as a supplier. "At home and abroad, we even sell products to Eastern Europe and low-income countries", says Arjan Schuinder (Sales & Marketing). Betech proves that manufacturing

'Collecting all production data, that's what Betech does.'

in Holland can be profitable. "Provided that the production is smart" he adds "In terms of hourly rate we can't compete with Asia, but they can't compete in production speed, durability and innovation." In this case smart means as few people as possible at the work floor to keep the labour costs low and to automate what can be automated. Schuinder says for example that at Betech one person is responsible for four machines which have to run 24 hours a day. As a consequence the added value by labour is limited to a minimum.

"In Asia one man operates one much slower machine, which also increases the rate of failure." Van de Beld:



Arjan Schuinder (left) of Sales & Marketing and CEO/owner of the Betech Group Wim van de Beld. Photo DvhN.

"After half past four in the afternoon everybody goes home and the production keeps on running." Due to the manner of production Betech has been declared exemplary company in the innovation program 'Industry 4.0' of the Chamber of Commerce. The company shares knowledge with other companies, while it tries to remain in a leading role for European competitors. To this end Betech joined the industry development centre Brainport Industries in Eindhoven, visits many exhibits and congresses in Europe and makes education a high priority.

Digitalization, data and co-operation. These three words are leading for the Betech Group. The choice to continue on this path was made by Van de Beld in 2007, a year before the financial crisis had started and the dip in the automotive industry had an effect on Betech. Van de Beld: "We shortly used an excellent government arrangement which made it possible to partly support Betech's employees financially. This government help and process-renewal made it possible that we even made a profit during the crisis." But only installing robots does not cover it, Wim says: "We can't be copied because we are process innovators. To produce products smarter than the competitors, with less effort and a better level of quality."

"Everybody can be buy a machine", thus Schuinder. "We collect all machining-, material-, tooling-, and production data and we optimize all processes. Therefore the production improves. If you know a drill

will fail in eight hours, you have to replace it before that. The quality stays guaranteed and this prevents delay in delivery times."

Both Wim and Arjan argue that, although the humanly share in production has to go down to 20% within three years and to 15% in 2025, the factor human is more important than ever. The improvement of automation is accompanied by more freedom of choice for the operators.

Every Monday all the teams make sure all machines are fully planned, taking set-up- and cleaning times into account. They decide which machine is the best fit for the order, exchange orders among each other to make sure the delivery deadline is met and think about the subject of process improvement. By changing which machines they operate every year, they widen their knowledge and are able to operate in multiple places when necessary. Van de Beld is pleased with this methodology. "Employees have more decision-making power and are therefore more involved with their job. They can move with everything part of the planning, except for the delivery times. Those are sacred. If we meddle, we will only disturb production. As a result of the method the work pressure has decreased enormously. Everyone is more relaxed."

Equally important as the collaboration on the work floor, is the combined knowledge/strength of suppliers and

customers. "Many purchasers are still looking for that last penny of discount, for us that time is over. More often we work together with partners. These partners inform us about new materials and production techniques and our customers tell us what market developments they expect."

To achieve this there has to be secure foundation of trust and you have to share knowledge, thus Van de Beld. "When it's possible to collaborate in the design of the product/component, significant savings in material use and/or production time can be assured. If we are more open, the contracts don't have to be as hard as they used to be."

This tight collaboration gives the concern knowledge about which course of investing is desired. "But you can only make the required investments when your company is financially healthy" says Van de Beld to people who want to know more about Industry 4.0. "I'm from a working-class family where you first had to have money before you could spend it. We've got money in the bank for all our investments." Due to the harsh environment banks are not willing to approve investments in valuable robots quickly, he knows. "They want prove that the investment will pay off. We don't have this barrier and also invest when the return on investment can't be verified directly."