

Co-sourcing offers highly trained project staff attractive career prospects



Karel De Cock,
HR director ALCON

Looking to attract academically qualified profiles? Then the best thing you can do is to offer them career prospects too. That is not so matter of course if yours is project-based work, certainly now that the war for talent is raging so intensely. Switching over to a co-sourcing concept allowed drug producer Alcon to create a win-win situation for all parties involved. "We are now coping perfectly with peak periods", relates HR director Karel De Cock. "In three years our young validation engineers can build up a strong market value. And our co-sourcing partner offers them an attractive career path."

Alcon makes eye medicines. Quality assurance is very important, for without approval from the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) or other bodies, the company is not allowed to supply any medicines. "Validation engineers fulfil a key role", explains Karel De Cock. "They test the processes and systems, which we use for production and which affect the quality. Think for instance of reactors, analysis devices, laboratory applications, supervision systems and ERP software. Certainly for young engineers that is a fascinating training experience."

PEAK PERIODS

The operation in Puurs is growing fast and will continue along that line in future years. With new machines and advanced automation, production capacity is being boosted systematically. These days Alcon in Puurs is producing 110 million items. The plant is clearing the way for 150 million items and it will not be stopping there. In order to stay ahead of the competition, in addition Alcon is constantly looking for process improvements. That creates a great

ALCON BELGIUM IS PART OF THE WORLDWIDE ALCON LABORATORIES GROUP. IN BELGIUM ALCON EMPLOYS ABOUT A THOUSAND EMPLOYEES, WORLD-WIDE FOURTEEN THOUSAND. ALCON PRODUCES SPECIALISED STERILE EYE MEDICINES. IT ALSO MAKES SURGICAL MATERIALS AND INSTRUMENTS FOR DIAGNOSING AND TREATING EYES. ALCON IS STOCK EXCHANGE LISTED WITH NESTLÉ AS ITS PRINCIPAL SHARE-HOLDER.

deal of validation work. "In order to cope with the peak periods, in the past Alcon used to work with project contractors", says Karel De Cock. "Generally there could be no question of permanent recruitment. Frustrating for the validation specialists, but for us too as employer.

Every time we would be investing in people who would take to their heels elsewhere after the project. Co-sourcing was a turning point."

FULLY QUALIFIED IN THREE YEARS

Alcon entered into partnership with Ordina. As IT partner, Ordina is involved in numerous projects in the pharmaceutical sector. How does the co-sourcing model work? "Ordina recruits prospective validation consultants in close collaboration with our personnel department", explains Karel De Cock. "Alcon gives them on-the-job technical training. We pass on all of the necessary knowledge. As the project progresses, the young engineers carry out increasingly complex tasks. Ordina regularly provides them with training days about for example project

management or methodologies. After three years, they return to Ordina as fully qualified validation professionals. There they are given the opportunity to broaden their experience in quality assurance with other companies, or to evolve into business or process consultants. Such prospects are very important."

ALCON OR ORDINA PEOPLE?

One advantage of this co-sourcing model is that an employee's cost is allocated to a project, so he or she does not feature on the payroll list. "Today we have twelve Ordina validation consultants working at Alcon", concludes Karel De Cock. "We are not able to promise them a career with us, but we can ensure that they will keep the best of memories of their working experience with Alcon. As far as possible, therefore we involve them in what is happening in the company. All parties are well aware of the arms-length relationship: after three years it stops. It is a question of attitude: it is inherent to the concept and part of the deal with Ordina. On the other hand the gain in flexibility is huge!"

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