Jacques Marbehant – Senior Vice President, Head of Global Manufacturing, Engineering and Health, Safety & Environment, UCB



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Belgian champion UCB's global manufacturing head, Jacques Marbehant, talks candidly about managing a broad global manufacturing and supply chain through the COVID-19 pandemic, the talent challenges inherent in scaling up manufacturing capacity and scope, and why greater levels of both internal and external collaboration are crucial for the pharma industry moving forward.



With 18 years' experience at UCB behind you, what are the main changes you have witnessed?

It has been a fantastic journey! UCB has changed dramatically in that time, continually transforming itself for a better future. The company has moved from small molecules to biologics, peptides, and recently we announced our first steps on research into gene therapies. UCB today stands as a truly innovative biopharmaceutical leader with several assets and a solid pipeline going forward.

How has your job evolved and what are the main items at the top of your agenda sheet today?

Firstly, leadership and purposeful communication is more important than ever as we navigate through this unprecedented time of pandemic. This means supporting our people, creating the right conditions for supply continuity, and accelerating our pipeline. At the same time, we aim to create safe conditions for people working at our sites so that their work and supply to patients can continue uninterrupted. We are leveraging all our expertise to help communities fight against the virus and are collaborating with governments where possible so that we can fulfil our mission of providing a better world.

UCB has an impressive pipeline. In large molecules we have added Cimzia® about ten years ago and we now have a few exciting launches ahead of us which are keeping us extremely busy and focused. With manufacturing, this is where our ambition starts to visibly and significantly materialize with the first deliveries to patients, worldwide, and we want to be ready as soon as possible with thousands of colleagues collaborating throughout the entire value chain. Our upcoming pipeline represents a fantastic opportunity to bring some relief and comfort to people living with severe disease.

Supply chain resiliency is really high on our agenda, more than ever; asking ourselves how we can ensure that our risks are well-identified, investigating complex risk patterns and mitigating those so that our supply to patients can be maintained.

Finally, we all realize how COVID-19 is a catalyst and an accelerator for pre-existing trends, also in the field of digitalization and sustainability. It led to a greater focus on emotional, physical, and psychological health and increased our efforts towards our sustainable ambitions, becoming carbon neutral, an employer of choice with Health, Safety and well-being deeply anchored. To care for

people living with severe diseases, we also need to focus on our people so that they do their best for the patients.

Can you introduce UCB's manufacturing network?

Our four sites in Braine-l'Alleud (Belgium), Bulle (Switzerland), Zhuhai (China), and Saitama (Japan) are the results of ten years of network adaptation and reflect the journey of UCB from a small-molecule and large volume driven company to a diverse network with a balance between small and large molecule products. In the past ten years UCB has moved from eleven manufacturing sites to just four sites, with two hubs in Belgium and Switzerland representing strategic concentrations of resources and expertise to cover the manufacturing of both large and small molecules.

The Belgian and Swiss sites serve global markets. At Braine-l'Alleud 2000 colleagues are working across R&D, manufacturing, and corporate functions, while in Bulle 550 colleagues are mainly working in manufacturing, and in several additional global functions such as centres of expertise for biologics and devices, Global Supply Chain or supporting the local commercial affiliate. Our external biologics manufacturing network is also managed from Switzerland.

The sites in Zhuhai, Southern China and Saitama, a suburb of Tokyo in Japan, can be better characterized as market entry sites dedicated to their countries.

This internal network is supplemented by an external network operating around the globe.

UCB recently announced a EUR 300 million investment into its Belgian site to expand biologics capacity. Could you talk us through the rationale behind this investment and its potential impact?

This investment will allow us to continue producing mammalian drug substances for our biologic treatments. Having started work onsite enhancement about one year ago, it represents a solid investment and something of an inflection point at UCB as we move from small molecules to the rich pipeline of biologics we plan to launch between now and 2025.

We have filed a new biologic license application for a new biological drug which will be manufactured in Braine-l'Alleud.

The plant itself will be extremely modern, green by design, and with significant digital integration. It aims at supporting our biologic pipeline and product lifecycle through seamless transfer from development and Phase III clinical trials into the launch and growth of production. The site was formerly small-molecule driven, but after having started investing into CMC capabilities for biologics through a first BioPilot plant ten years ago, this new investment represents a significant step in its transformation from a high-volume, low-value site into a low-volume, high-tech and high-value site.

Such a transformation must have created a need to bring new people on board with new capabilities, as well as a potentially steep learning curve for existing staff. What were some of the challenges in moving from small molecules to biologics from a manufacturing perspective?

The size of investment is very different, as is the time needed to activate a supply chain. Biologics need to be integrated much earlier, even in the development stage, so that we can anticipate as much as possible. Building skills and expertise were and are still extremely relevant, as this field requires specific competencies, complex data analysis, strong quality management and we are dealing with high value materials.

At the same time, a number of our staffs applied for in-depth internal and external training, theoretical and also very practical in specific workshop dedicating to practising. While we established specific and extensive training programs ourselves, we could rely on some public or governmental platform aiming at supporting biotechs. Today, 10 years after launching this program, we are extremely proud of our dedicated staffs who invested their time and made this journey towards biologics manufacturing; they developed new competencies and enriched diversity of thoughts and approach while increasing polyvalence and agility at UCB.

Biologics is still an area with a lot of opportunities where innovation scale plays a huge role, as does digitalization. Maximizing data and developing the process at the next stage is a huge opportunity.

We understand that you have the capability for manufacturing both small molecules and biologics at the same site in Switzerland. Can you talk us through the logic of this, given the difference in investment scale and complexity, and what sort of synergies can

be leveraged?

Beyond the site itself, it is more a question of where the capabilities are. There are several benefits to greater integration between development and manufacturing, which we have been working on for five or six years now. At the late stage of development, we are also utilising manufacturing operations to ensure a seamless and fast transfer and accelerate our so-called speed to market.

There are a number of functions beyond the technological specifics that are common to both small and large molecules, meaning that there are a number of synergies to be leveraged. Finally, we want to be an employer of choice, so this mixed footprint allows our scientists and engineers more opportunities to develop new skills and expertise, enriching UCB in return.

UCB is a Belgian champion with a big manufacturing footprint in Belgium. Why, therefore, the decision to expand in Switzerland, given the costs associated with the country?

Switzerland is well known as a country with high levels of expertise and education, which makes a critical difference. Moreover, the ‘made in Switzerland’ brand carries an association with quality, which is pivotal in our world. Productivity, which is very high in Switzerland, is another factor, especially for a company like UCB in the high-tech and high-value business. Additionally, Switzerland is known for its integration of strong business practices in terms of societal responsibility, sustainability, and becoming an employer of choice.

Our Swiss site is quite advanced in that regard; for example, it reached the equal salary certification at the end of 2019, which indicates its commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion. Moreover, the site was an early adopter in reducing its environmental impact, reducing waste and CO2 emissions, consuming fewer resources, so leading the way in contributing to UCB journey towards carbon neutrality and a better planet, hence becoming somehow a gold standard from a manufacturing standpoint.

Beyond individual countries, UCB’s objective is to ensure supply chain resilience through collaboration between our sites and our external network. The Belgian site is quite integrated, starting from CMC development, clinical trials and commercial manufacturing end-to-end and is, therefore, more of an accelerator to launch, while Switzerland is focusing on product growths adding capacities in the product life cycle. Those sites are major players in a network of global partners to ensure a geographical footprint across the US, Asia, and Europe, and maintain a

balanced supply continuity.

How would you characterise UCB’s relationship with its network of CMOs and CDMOs globally?

In 2008-9, we were extremely small molecule driven. Therefore, considering its biopharma transformation, UCB had to adjust its own networks – including making a few divestments – to ensure a successful journey towards a more balanced future portfolio. While we develop new and strong partnerships, we still maintain a close business relationship with some of our previous sites and colleagues and have developed a robust management system covering strategic, tactical, and operational aspects of our manufacturing network.

Although we have been far away from our partners during the COVID-19 pandemic considering the travel bans in place, I actually feel that we have never been so close to them. We are engaged in constant discussions, working together to find solutions and deliver on our shared objectives. In collaboration with our partners and thanks to our systems in place, supply has continued to be maintained throughout 2020 and we have faith that this will continue to be the case thanks to the reliable, trustworthy and efficient profiles of our partners.

There are plenty of newcomers in the CMO and CDMO space with different service offerings; under what circumstances would a company like UCB consider working with them?

Our industry is characterised by innovation and UCB has built itself on its research and ability to reinvent itself. We are keen to innovate and collaborate providing it serves our company mission and delivers value to patients. In an open innovation model, we are partnering up with companies that have deep expertise in sciences, patient solutions, just to name some fields. For example, there has been a big evolution in the way that medical devices can help patients live with and forget about their disease. Bringing on board new partners is perfectly natural, especially if they can perform better and provide a superior value. Without forgetting about the inherent risks, we are following a number of pre-established steps to ensure that their reliability and long-term sustainability is well-established.

Manufacturing is perhaps not the most glamorous or talked-about part of the pharma value chain, but COVID-19 has shone a light on its vital importance. Do you have any hopes for a re-evaluation of manufacturing?

Everybody – or at least every pharma executive committees and Board – has been remembered about the critical importance of manufacturing to ensure continuity of supply in the current circumstances and not only for their own assets but also how it is an important agent in helping fast fighting against the virus. I personally value and have the greatest respect for my peers who are on the frontlines of the vaccine supply chain. Personally, I find manufacturing extremely glamorous. We have hundreds of people working together day after day, collaborating and addressing both opportunities and challenges as a team. I always say that when you work in manufacturing, you cry twice: when you join and when you leave!

Manufacturing is a world of experts that make things happen. People working in manufacturing produce and deliver the tangible final product used by patients, physicians, or pharmacists. We are working more and more to bridge the gap between patients and what we do internally at UCB to give a higher sense of purpose to our work.

Given the level of sophistication in biopharma manufacturing today, do you think there needs to be more integration of manufacturing experts into cross-functional positions?

I think so. More than ever, pharma companies need to remain open, keep innovating, reinvent themselves, and adapt to the major trends in our world. Anticipation is key. This is a school for life and a fantastic example of the importance of collaboration.

With staff turnover and new generations entering the workforce, new opportunities are arising at the same time all cycles are accelerating. This is especially true from a digitalisation and cross functional expertise standpoint. No process is frozen forever – there are regulatory frameworks, and different pathways of course – but constant adaptation is needed. Sciences, magnified by digital, is a fantastic field and therefore a huge opportunity for UCB and our colleagues. People are curious and entrepreneur, adding cross-functional expertise which will facilitate our internal processes and make us more agile, adaptive and responsive when required.

To what extent to do your employees see digitalisation as an opportunity rather than a threat? What kind of messaging are you sort of putting out to assuage potential

concerns?

That is a fair and important question. Digital represents an opportunity to learn but also to give time to people. This time can allow them to use the brain, be innovative, and think outside of the box rather than having to merely conduct transactions on autopilot.

I would characterise people in manufacturing as having a will to deliver. Therefore, there is a common DNA in pushing performance boundaries. Digitalization is another tool that allows them to be more curious and deliver more.

Naturally, solid change management is needed for this transition towards greater digital uptake, but it has to be a win-win solution at the end of the day. Recently, exchanging on the topic with one of our plant supervisors he highlighted that, thanks to digitalisation, he was able to save time in his day-to-day low value tasks and make improvements that he had not been able to focus on historically.

Your role also encompasses health, safety, and the environment. What is the rationale behind combining these functionalities with manufacturing and how would you characterise UCB's commitment in this area?

I am convinced that manufacturing has a lot to contribute to wellbeing and safety. We want to ensure that everyone who comes to work at UCB can return safe and healthy at home at the end of the day, every day. Because of the nature of manufacturing, involving chemicals, industrial operations, etc, being also rigorous and disciplined, we have an important role model to play in the improvement and sustainability journey within the company. Moreover, as we represent a significant population within UCB, we can also engage and bring expertise beyond our manufacturing teams. Health, safety, and environment is therefore a company-wide responsibility.

Given the circumstances, this was especially important in 2020 and will continue to be important in 2021, 2022… well, always. Helping and supporting our staff working from home has been another aspect of our program as many of our colleagues have not come on site since March 2020. Working 100 percent remotely has been a new experience and a journey for our staff, requiring specific support. The safety of our colleagues who could not work from home and had to continue working on site was just as important. We had to reinvent ourselves, adapting the facilities, I mean facilities, restaurant, meeting rooms, flows of people, cleaning, and sanitisation of offices. The facility teams did an amazing job in a very short timeframe and they adapted constantly, learning

themselves.

Finally, again, COVID has been a catalyst and accelerator on our sustainability journey. We have learned that we could avoid travel. I am so impressed by the work our IT department has done in moving everyone at UCB, including contractors, directly onto the new communication platforms. This has led to the development of new collaborative tools and has allowed us to ensure our business in a different way but still being extremely focused on the purpose.

From an environmental standpoint, we did not lose any time in 2020 and, in fact, made tremendous progresses. We have switched a number of our deliveries from air to sea, helping reinforce our commitment to sustainability.

From a leadership perspective, how have you managed to maintain both internal and external relationships remotely through 2020?

It is true that physically we have been far away from each other, but through the use of digital tools we now feel that we can be closer to each other than ever before. We are missing some of the social interactions, such as informal discussions by the coffee machine, but although we will not stay in this phase forever, we will never return to how things were before. We have learned a lot about ourselves and are confident that new, better, ways of working will emerge. One big change will be far less travelling than before, which plays into the sustainability question but also adds to personal well-being.

People in manufacturing are not necessarily always the most outspoken, but they have begun to embrace these new tools; only this morning we held a webcast for hundreds of people where they could raise and answer questions, it is simply different. Communication is here to stay and is more important than ever, especially in a remote working environment.

Given the war for talent in places like Switzerland, what would you say is UCB’s value offering to young professionals?

UCB represents a great opportunity because of its purpose and mission, but not only, it has a portfolio of small molecules, large molecules, peptides, and is now making its move into gene therapy. In addition to a strong pipeline, we are investing in transforming our sites, organisation, and infrastructure for the future. UCB has an ambition in progressing digital, green, providing an

environment which allows diversity and inclusion, giving us an attractive value proposition across generations.

We are in a positive trend and, despite the pandemic, the company is on an upward swing. Talented people with the right skills and expertise – something especially important to us – will help UCB to deliver on its mission to be an innovative pharmaceutical company helping people living with severe disease where there are critical unmet needs. UCB has a fantastic opportunity to create a better world from an environmental, market access, and innovation perspective.

What would you like your pharma industry peers to keep in mind from the past year moving forward?

In the past 12 months, I learned that nobody was truly prepared for the pandemic. It has been an amazing journey internally, but also with our peers in the industry. We have never connected so much at such high frequency with a common purpose. It is obvious, therefore, that this is where the learning opportunities are for the future. The pandemic has made us humble, realising that collaboration – both internal and external – is, and will remain, extremely important.

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