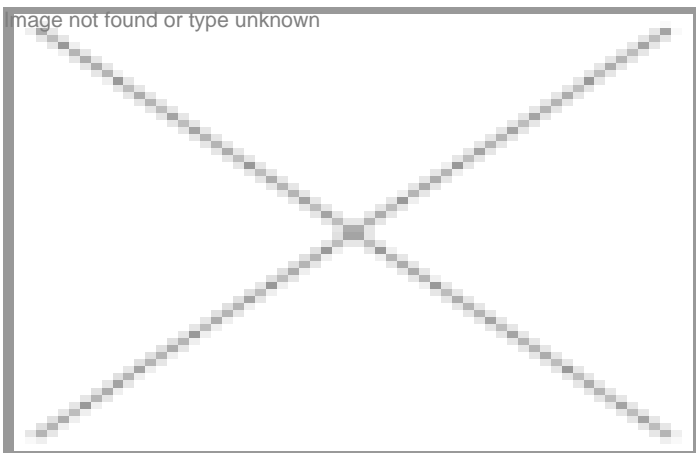


What does it take to retain R&D talent?

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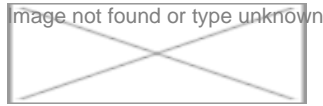
For a researcher, it is very important that besides the developmental, financial and psychological needs, his need for scientific and research pursuits are also addressed in a company. Therefore, there can be varied reasons for scientists working in companies to look for a change. Industry experts say while people at junior levels move out for better compensation and higher studies abroad, the decisions at the mid- and senior-level are based on role clarity and adjustability. Performance, future outlook of the company and whether the individual's learning and growth is in sync with that of the company are also decided.

Dealing with attrition

The demand for skilled and talented research professionals in the industry outstrips supply. Given the fact that the number of skilled scientists coming out of good institutes are few, there is an enormous pressure on the companies to acquire candidates from other companies. "Generally, researchers who have one-to-three years of experience are more prone to such shifts in order to sustain the demand on the bench. With the huge need for skilled manpower in the biopharma sector, this leads to a push-pull effect, which is circuitous and continuous," says Mr Ravi Shekhar, general manager, HR, Jubilant Life Sciences.

Biocon has an annual attrition rate of 11 percent in its R&D section and, according to the company, only 15 percent of the

attrition is linked to career. Attributing the same to the company's strong brand image and the exciting work environment, Mr Ravi C Dasgupta, vice president - Group HR, Biocon, says, "Unless an organization can provide quality assignments and challenges to the researchers' scientific talent, they will find it hard to prevent their talented employees from looking elsewhere. They also look for career progression and will consider moving on if they feel that they are stagnating in the present organization."



A junior scientist working for a leading biotech company in Delhi, who does not want to be named, says the routine lab work in the companies with no freedom to explore is sometimes quite boring and depressing. Ms Trupti Talati, senior director, HR, Quintiles India, says, "Besides the usual reasons for employees changing organizations, we find many employees joining us for the opportunity to work in an organization that has rich domain expertise and will, therefore, provide them with field exposure and an environment that is intellectually stimulating."

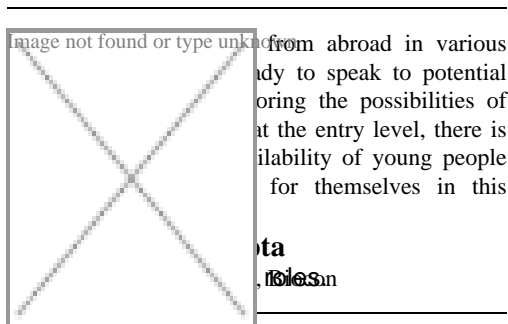
A senior lab manager in a mid-sized biotech company says, "Generally, the trainees or the junior level scientists are not given crucial responsibilities to avoid any shortcoming in results. Though they are provided many opportunities to grow, there are strict restrictions on the usage of chemicals."

A fitting rewards program

The companies follow different methodologies to reward top performers. The frequency of these rewards range from being instantaneous to monthly, quarterly or annually. The identification is based on parameters such as complexity of the task, quality of work done and its impact.

The HR department at Biocon, which has over 400 scientists, believes that providing such opportunities are very important. The company provides opportunities for people to make presentations and interact with senior management which ensures that there is sufficient visibility of star performers.

Most of the companies have dedicated rewards and recognition programs for identifying and awarding individual or team at various levels. For example, Biocon has annual award programs such as Bio-Contribute Award for teams and Bioconite of the Year award for individuals under 11 different categories. For the scientific community, the company has a special Scientific Excellence Award aimed to provide recognition to outstanding scientists.



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Similarly, Quintiles, which featured on the top 25 list of World's Best Multinational Workplaces from the Great Places to Work Institute, has a host of rewards and recognition programs, such as Work Worth Doing Award and CEO's Annual Awards. Jubilant Life Sciences has a full-fledged talent and succession planning platform to identify employees who are the best performers and have high potential to grow in order to create an able talent pool

"Accomplishment of goals and continued success are determined by our people. It is essential for us to inculcate a culture that measures performance in a fair and transparent manner. We adopt a consistent approach globally to evaluate and identify the star performers," says Ms Trupti Talati of Quintiles.

Mr Ravi Shekhar of Jubilant says they "map potential employees in a nine-box matrix and create a pipeline of talent with the potential to grow and take higher challenges". "This is a three-tier process. The company has a mid-year and full-year review to quantify the performance of each scientist against the task assigned. The tool used is Balance Score Card wherein task cascades downwards to each scientist," he adds.

A reverse trend

Post recession, a large number of scientists working abroad are keen to return to India to work in senior positions. A senior scientist who joined a top biotech company in India recently says, "There have been many changes in India. Given the economic downturn in the West and increasing opportunities here, I thought it would be wise to head back home."

Even companies are doing their best to attract scientists who want to come back. Few companies, such as Quintiles, have a globally consistent online applicant tracking system. The company has spread the net wider to source suitable candidates from across the globe by partnering with agencies who have a strong global network of profiles. To break the location barrier, the company even flies down candidates to the office where they would be based for a face-to-face interaction with their

future managers. Jubilant Life Sciences also offers higher salaries to scientists who have worked in niche areas and have very specialized skill or competence.

Every year, Biocon hires about 10 or more candidates from abroad. They are hired on local packages (Indian salaries). The company already has 12 such joiners in the current financial year.

Mr Ravi Dasgupta of Biocon is of the opinion that the rise in opportunities in India will see more and more candidates returning to India from abroad. "We reach out to talent from abroad in various ways and are always ready to speak to potential candidates who are exploring the possibilities of returning to India. Even at the entry level, there is adequate quality and availability of young people eager to make a mark for themselves in this profession," adds Mr Dasgupta.

Rahul Koul in New Delhi
(with inputs from Manasi Vaidya in Bangalore)