

Belgacom company-specific programme

Innovation at the highest level

Since 2006 the Belgacom Group, Belgium's reference provider of integrated telecommunication services, has organised "House of Development III", a company-specific programme on innovation management for senior managers and high-potential employees. Vlerick offers its expertise in this field as external academic partner.

■ How important is training, specifically management development, to Belgacom?

Jean-Marc Verbist: "Training is a key focal point for Belgacom. Our own Corporate University, which has about 50 full-time staff, is tangible proof of that. All of our 17.000 employees receive in average 35 hours of training a year. Courses in management and leadership are aimed at the top 200, the 'high potentials' and team leaders in our organisation. Three programmes are specifically designed for senior managers and high flyers: 'House of Development I, II and III', which are tailored in-house programmes developed in close cooperation with external partners. HOD I is a four-day leadership programme, whereas HOD II focuses on financial management and strategy development. We also organise HOD III once or twice a year, drawing on Vlerick's expertise to enhance this innovation management programme. From a strategic point of view, developing innovations in-house is extremely important for Belgacom's future growth."

■ Why did Belgacom enlist Vlerick's help with this programme?

"There are three main reasons. Firstly, we firmly believe that the methodology and framework that Vlerick offers guarantee maximum impact. The learning curve for participants is steeper. The second point is that, although we possess practical expertise, the School can provide us with the latest academic insights into how to tackle innovation and how to incorporate it into a large organisation like Belgacom. Lastly, Vlerick professors, with all their knowledge of theory, are much better equipped to convince the participants of the importance of innovation."

■ Is innovation important for people in all kinds of jobs or do you make a distinction?

"HOD III is cross-functional. Our target group is Directors and key managers in different departments. The principle is that all of them will take part in the programme at some point or other. Initially, however, we do target people who come into contact with innovation on a daily basis, such as staff working in business development, marketing & sales, customer services and engineering.



Jean-Marc Verbist,
Belgacom's Vice President Human Capital

They deal with suppliers or customers and can easily pick up ideas and identify potential opportunities. In the programme we aim for a balanced mix of people in different jobs, as this ensures more productive interaction and stimulates networking."

■ What is the primary focus of the programme?

"The programme covers the whole innovation process: how to collect ideas, market them, make them profitable and implement them. Parallel to this, attention is devoted to presentation skills, namely how to successfully defend an idea to the Management Committee. One common strand of the five-day programme is that the participants embark on a business game, in which they have to implement each stage of the innovation process within a given context in a particular company. You can see that people learn really quickly with this kind of game. And that's the idea, of course. They become our 'agents of innovation' – people who fully understand the innovation process and can make an informed contribution to brainstorming sessions as part of their everyday jobs." ■