



Jürgen Rotzler, PhD
Head Products & Manufacturing at Solvias AG



Meet Our Expert: Juergen Rotzler

In this brand-new Meet Our Experts series, you will get the chance to meet our talented colleagues based in Switzerland, France and the US that are driving Solvias' success. In this interview, Juergen Rotzler (Head Products & Manufacturing Services at Solvias AG) shares the catalyst that ignited his passion for chemistry, provides a detailed glimpse into the dynamic work environment of a CDMO/CRO, and offers an exclusive preview of the exciting projects currently underway at Solvias!

Can you tell us about your childhood and how your interest in chemistry started?

I grew up close to the border of Switzerland, in a small German town. I had a very good and active childhood. The town is embedded in nature, and I've always enjoyed the access to green spaces. Football was a big part in my life. We were playing day and night! At the same time, I was always curious about building things and even wanted to become an engineer. Thanks to great teachers in high school, my interest in science further solidified. One of them had a significant impact on making us enjoy chemistry and that's when my scientific journey took off!

How did you refine your focus within the field of chemistry?

Because of my wide scientific interests, I initially wanted to go for an interdisciplinary study. Ultimately, I opted to study chemistry at the University of Basel, a more traditional academic discipline. During my PhD, I then focused on organic synthesis of designed molecules with potential applications in nanotechnology:

molecular electronics, optics and other fields of material science.

What prompted your transition from academia to industry?

Although I did a postdoc after my PhD, I was not really interested in pursuing an academic career per se. The main reason for the postdoc was to gain insights into the operational differences among various cultures, to learn how science is tackled in other countries. For that, I decided to step out of my comfort zone and go abroad. This decision led me to embark on a big adventure, as I headed to Columbia University in New York City. I ended up having a great time, learned a lot and met great people.

Teaching is something close to my heart and the reason for lecturing some years at university. Interestingly, some of my students back then are now part of my team! One of the things we hear regularly is this "war for talent". And I think training young talents is the best way to approach it. You train these new generations of scientists, help them grow, get better, and eventually

turn them into experts, so that they can help pass on this knowledge and experience to our clients.

However, the strong focus in pharmaceutical industry of translating scientific know-how into direct applications for the patients, was a driving factor behind my desire to enter industry.

What do you find most fulfilling about working at a CDMO/CRO?

For me, it's always important to have diversity in what I do. At a CDMO/CRO, you get to work on so many different compounds with different customers. Within our Products & Manufacturing Services unit, here at Solvias, we have a highly flexible structure that allows us to collaborate within different teams on different projects. One day you have a complex heterocycle to deal with; on a separate occasion you have to build in multiple stereocenters in a molecular scaffold; and a few months later you're working on complex cross coupling chemistry, etc. That's what attracted me to join a service provider and that's what I recommend to my students who wish to learn in a fast-paced and highly dynamic environment. *Essentially, supporting our customers to achieve their goals and empowering them in the development of innovative therapies for patients across the globe, by giving access to our expertise, experience and tools that they don't have in-house, makes working at a CDMO/CRO very fulfilling!*

Can you elaborate on your current role and responsibilities?

I joined Solvias as a Chemist [at the bench], 10 years ago, and climbed the ladder to become a Product Manager, then Head of Operations and

eventually, the business unit (BU) Head of Products & Manufacturing Services. A big part of my current responsibilities is to interact with clients, to bring expertise and help them achieve their goals faster, so that patients worldwide can benefit from it. I also oversee the profit & loss (P&L) of our department to guarantee economic success, ensure that operations deliver on time in full and am responsible for strategic planning within the BU. That is, envisioning our future direction and identifying fields we should be exploring to enhance our client service. It's not just about adopting new tools, performing basic research, or innovating, but my job involves determining how to effectively bundle technologies to deliver better solution packages to the client. As a member of the Executive Committee, I also help in collaboration with my colleagues to shape the global direction and regularly tackle other business aspects such as operational excellence and commercial excellence.

All these duties allow me to learn a lot. At the moment, I'm also covering some vacancies by sponsoring the Procurement and the Contracts Management team. These participations aren't just about administering tasks to others but involve taking proactive steps to make sure that we're, collectively, driving the entire organization forward, which is what I appreciate about working at Solvias.

What are the current market needs and trends in the product & manufacturing space?

There are several things going on! What I have to say is that the Products & Manufacturing Services business unit operates exclusively in the small molecule world and therefore my answers are focused on that. With more and more companies using novel approaches to accelerate the drug discovery

and development process - speed becomes paramount.

Another thing is that there is an effort to merge the small and large molecule world or be at the interface between both. Talking about bioconjugates, ADCs, peptides, or oligonucleotides. In this regard, another interesting and up-and-coming class of molecules are protein or molecular-glue degraders, small molecules that are not meant to inhibit a protein but rather triggering the cell's own degradation mechanisms. We see more of these concepts emerging. These concepts sit at the interface between small and large molecules, even though from a synthetic point of view, it's more small molecule. Questions like how to enable these new mode of actions, are on top of our mind. With that, we then make sure to merge our synthetical and analytical capabilities to bundle them into service packages. ***We not only strive to expand our scientific knowledge and expertise in new areas but also, further bolster our portfolio of solutions packages for our clients accordingly.***

Having witnessed and contributed to many of Solvias' significant milestones over the last decade, which projects are you most proud of?

What I'm most proud of isn't related to a specific project but rather, to what we have been able to achieve as a team and organization. ***We have so many experts in-house and by adding them early in conversations, they can truly guide our clients through the processes and on the best next steps. This approach has earned us today a reputation of being a true partner. Also, our clients are very pleased with our turnaround time and the quality of our work and tend to come back for more.***

Products & Manufacturing Services are also very diverse. ***We have our own products (ligands and catalysts) and have supported blockbuster APIs with them. Navigating our customers throughout the entire development cycle until their products reach the market, is what our experts invest their time and energy in.*** Another focus point is ensuring consistency in the quality of our work because interchanging qualities during process development is simply a nightmare. ***For years, Solvias has maintained a perfect track record of 99% on-time delivery rates in its ligand business, and that is only possible because our employees have this strong sense of responsibility, and truly understand that their work will ultimately affect millions of lives. Therefore, our team has an unwavering commitment to securing the supply chain.*** Even through COVID times, where the supply chain was completely cracked, we were able to navigate these troubling times seamlessly for our customers. I think that's a tremendous team achievement, one that took a lot of effort, but at the end was extremely fruitful.

What sets Solvias apart from its competitors?

There are many points that make Solvias stand out from the crowd. For one, it is the organization's ability to deliver quality excellence. Our clients have the possibility to access and directly interact with our scientists during projects. Again, we act as a true partner. That's why we also formed a global initiative called ***Science & Technology Management*** to ensure that we keep nurturing our scientific base. ***The operational challenge of delivering high quality results in a short time is crucial in such a competitive market, but I think Solvias has mastered this.*** Even if you're a brilliant scientist and deliver high

quality work, falling short on the speed requirement can render your service “worthless”.

Are there any exciting news or developments you would like to share?

We’re currently building a new GMP suite close to Boston (MA) in the US. That’s something very exciting! In Basel, we have a new high throughput screening device where we can optimize reaction development, starting from the initial experiment all the way to the demo batch. For instance, we’ve used it for catalytic transformations in the past but are also looking into expanding that into our typical API synthesis projects wherever possible. That in combination with digitalization upgrades, for example our electronic lab journal which has been around for more than 10 years, these improvements allow us to expand our offering as well as streamline processes through automation. *Also, we always develop our product portfolio, the newest addition are new base metal catalysts to move away from precious metal catalysis.* For me, catalysis is one of the key pillars when talking about sustainability, because we want to avoid waste.

Something Solvias continuously puts the focus on is mentoring and developing young talents, but also making sure to transfer this expertise to the clients. If projects become complex, we make sure people can have a “sparring partner”, by making principal scientists available, thereby allowing to keep those project on track. Finally, I think keeping pace with the current trends allows us to stay in front of the curve and adjust our offering based on the market’s needs. The *Science & Technology*

Management initiative was established based on this rationale.

How would you describe the work environment?

Solvias is in an interesting phase. The company is growing globally. Personally, I’m so proud of my team. They understand that they’re not only supporting the customers but ultimately the patients, and therefore are always willing to go the extra mile. This purpose and impact make the job fulfilling. And I think what attracts people to Solvias, is the diversity in the job. Whenever a colleague comes up with an idea, we take it seriously, discuss as a team and explore it. I also think that having 1:1 conversation and performance reviews at least three or four times a year, really allows to follow each of our colleagues’ individual growth, making sure that everyone is satisfied, fulfilled in their role, and help them reach their professional ambitions/goals. Also, everyone here is very respectful and supportive of one another. And we want to ensure that this stays the same as Solvias grows bigger. Because we can only effectively serve all stakeholders through a supportive mindset, preserving a can-do attitude, a good interaction and strong collaboration.

Outside of work, do you have any hobbies or interests that you enjoy pursuing?

I’m mostly occupied by my two wonderful kids. As a scientist, watching them grow and learn is fascinating. As mentioned earlier, sports has always been very important for me. What I do at the moment is a lot of running. I like to go for 10K runs, hikes, and also, especially in summertime, play tennis in a team.