A Day in the Life of an Accountant

8.00am
I arrive at the Aggreko PLC Glasgow office for a conference call with our Australian team to review their forecast for the remainder of the year. As a global organisation we always have an accountant working somewhere around the world! In this case, the 10 hour time difference makes early morning the optimum time for this discussion. Once complete, I will brief the Group FD and Financial Controller on any major changes or issues.

9.30am
Next stop is a review of my email Inbox, which can be filling up early, as our finance hubs in Dubai and across Europe have been working for a few hours already. Working in a plc environment means the variety of information requests and queries varies enormously. One email can come from our CEO looking for rental fleet statistics (our key KPIs are based around how effectively we use our rental assets) while the next could, for example, be a request for clarification of an acquisition accounting treatment.

2006 saw Aggreko make the largest acquisition in its history and the PLC finance team was involved in many facets of the process. As well as providing accounting guidelines to ensure consistent treatments in each country, we were involved in activities ranging from the financial diligence to building models to show how the acquisition would impact the Group’s performance. Even six months post-acquisition, there are still events on which we discuss and agree correct accounting treatments with our in-country colleagues.

11.30am
Included in today’s emails are submissions from each of our three regions providing initial, draft information on their revenues for the month, comparing them against budget and against the same month in the prior year. This information is used to provide the Group FD and CEO with an early view of our activity, prior to the month end results being submitted the following week. It also offers an insight into which parts of the business are performing and which product types have had successful months.

One benefit of working in a PLC environment is being able to discuss these results with key operational personnel, which as well as being interesting from a commercial perspective also gives us an indication of where potential risks lie. This type of work means that accounting at Aggreko is much more than number crunching! Once these discussions are complete, the revenue information is sent out to regional managing directors and their FDs.

1.00pm
Lunch is invariably a sandwich at my desk, giving an opportunity to catch up on news and sport headlines on line. Switching off from work for even a short period of time helps recharge my batteries for the rest of the day and self-discipline to make this time for myself is important.
2.00pm
Despite our operations being spread across the globe, there are plenty of opportunities for finance teams to share their experiences and best practices. We organise regular conference calls among each “group” of accountants (e.g. business analysts, tax managers, financial controllers) to ensure problems encountered in one country are not repeated throughout the group and to provide a forum for discussions around new ideas.

One of my roles is to organise the call for financial controllers, which involves controllers based in Dumbarton, Dubai, Rotterdam, Singapore and Texas. There is always something new to discuss and we cover external issues (for example, the impact of new International Financial Reporting Standards) as well as internal issues (inter-company re-hire rates, improving forecast accuracy). We limit these calls to an hour as the variety of subjects could otherwise see this continue until the evening!

3.00pm
Part of the plc team’s role in Aggreko is to work with our colleagues in each country and ensure that they don’t feel isolated or have any problems which they can’t tell us about. I have responsibility for our European business, which involves regular visits to Rotterdam, Paris and Barcelona, as well as the UK team based in Dumbarton.

Our business in Spain has grown rapidly in the last 18 months and there is a new finance manager in place. I catch a flight mid-afternoon which takes me to Barcelona in time to have dinner with him, giving us the opportunity to have a relaxed discussion away from the confines of the office. We are fairly close for a global group and this type of evening, coupled with an annual finance conference, helps build and maintain relationships. As a result, we have open, honest communication across the group.

I will stay in Barcelona overnight and spend tomorrow at our site there, which will let me review some files, discuss some items which came up during dinner and consider the morale/wellbeing of the finance team as a whole.

The ability to visit different locations increases my knowledge of the Aggreko business, which in turn means my input into commercial and operational discussions offers some value to the non-finance personnel involved. There are very few stereotypical accounting roles in Aggreko – rather than being simply a service function, most finance teams work in partnership with their operational counterparts, making them an integral part of the business.

Career Progression
I graduated with an MA (Hons) from Glasgow University in History and then qualified as a Chartered Accountant with MacIntyre Hudson (London). I spent three years working for Ernst & Young in the Caribbean before returning to Scotland, working in a division of the Weir Group for a further three years. From there I moved to Aggreko, firstly as Group Financial Accountant for 18 months, before moving to my current role as European Controller.