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A Joint HR/Technical Discipline Approach to Recruitment, Development and Retention of Talent Worldwide

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Abstract

Today's high-oil price environment is providing a number of challenges for the industry, be they technological, political, economic, or a combination of all three. One of the economic drivers is manpower: the shortage of skilled labour – a product of industry layoffs and limited recruitment during the downturn, and the resulting closure of university departments specialising in the different oil-industry disciplines, at a time when high oil prices render previously uneconomic projects attractive and lead to an increase in activity – means that companies must become more imaginative in terms of sourcing, developing, and retaining talent. This population is becoming difficult to attract, and increasingly willing to 'jump ship', at the first opportunity in order to advance their career or increase their remuneration. The human resource challenge has never been so critical, nor so prominent, hence the need for innovative solutions. An integrated HR/Technical Discipline approach can ensure that we maximise technical excellence across the system and optimise resource allocation without sacrificing individual career development and growth aspirations.

Introduction

The forces that have combined to produce the context for the industry today were for the most part foreseen: the crew change, the limits to production capacity due to periods of underinvestment given the low oil-price context, the rise of India and China. Less predictable was the timing: these elements would converge and leave everyone scrambling for resources, both human and material. Just after the second oil shock, in the early 80's many oil companies launched a huge hiring program. Conversely, the low oil prices in 1986 and in the 90's led most international oil companies to drastically reduce their staff. Consequently, the EP workforce age pyramid is not very well balanced. In most groups, the age pyramid is indicative of this phenomenon, as it shows a peak figure not far from 50 years of age.

In order to compensate for the wave of retirements that have begun and will accelerate over the years to come, and given the long learning cycles for our technical disciplines, we re-launched our recruitment effort in the year 2000. By 2007, E&P recruitments had tripled. Currently 70% of recruitment is being carried out in the affiliates worldwide, compared to 30% at the Headquarters in France.

As a result, we are now in a transition period where we have many young recruits who need to be trained and many experienced seniors whose careers are lengthening, especially in Europe. Our challenge is to accelerate time to autonomy. This is essential because:

1. The transition period will not last for long;
2. Graduate students cite career development and job scope/responsibility as main factors of attraction (Figure 1, Schlumberger Business Consulting 2006 O&G HR Benchmark) and skills acquisition acceleration will provide them with the opportunity to take on greater responsibilities earlier on in their careers;
3. New learning methods and knowledge transfer may shift the experience curve to the right, resulting increased performance levels from existing staff (Figure 2)