

## **eXcellence: In a Class of Their Own**

**Recruiting the right people is only the first step. Ensuring they go on to develop professionally requires strategy. Now, thanks to Upstream Learning's eXcellence programme, BP staff have the help they need to fulfil all their career goals.**

With energy companies worldwide scrambling to find new talent to exploit today's complex reservoirs, BP's Upstream Learning is looking to stay ahead of the curve with the eXcellence programme. Catering for staff with fewer than 10 years' experience, eXcellence is designed to build deep technical expertise for those in roles ranging from geology to finance, preparing the workforce to meet future business needs.

"Like all energy companies, BP has a large population that will be exiting the company within seven to 10 years and there is a dearth of experienced professionals in some areas coming along behind them," says Don Shoultz, head of Upstream Learning. "That is due to a combination of factors: particularly the retirement of the 'baby-boomer' generation and the fact that fewer graduates in more recent decades have planned a career in the oil and gas industry.

"It adds up to a smaller talent pool, which becomes especially problematic when you consider the challenges the industry faces. The demand for talent simply outstrips the supply."

In fact, the numbers speak for themselves. According to Schlumberger Business Consulting, more than 22,000 senior key upstream professionals are expected to leave the industry by 2015, while only 17,000 younger ones join—a net loss of more than 5,000 experienced professionals.

The industry is now looking to undertake what is often called a 'great crew change' to replace the retiring baby boomers with younger talent—and there is stiff competition for the best recruits. One factor in attracting skilled people is the prospect of clear development pathways.

With this in mind, in 2009, Upstream Learning took a careful look at the development programmes of other major energy companies and found an opportunity to create a competitive advantage. The result is the eXcellence programme, aimed at employees in both petro-technical and business positions, in relatively early stages of their careers—including those who have completed the Challenge programme, which university graduates in the Upstream typically follow for three years after joining BP.

### **Guided development**

"A few years into a career, professionals typically become less intentional about their development and instead let it happen in an arbitrary way," says Shoultz. "At that same time, most companies—including BP—stop being prescriptive and depend instead on individual supervisors to guide the development of employees in their own fashion."

This is where eXcellence now comes in: it offers BP's upstream professionals customized 'roadmaps' for their careers, setting out pathways within specific disciplines. The programme develops employees on the job, as they continue to work in their chosen fields.

"Irrespective of discipline—whether you're in exploration or production, whether you're a doctor, lawyer or pro golfer—we all must continue to develop professionally. eXcellence adds structure to that development," says Lisa Towery, who leads the implementation of the programme for subsurface.

The eXcellence roadmaps consist of coordinated components for development: job experiences, formal classroom-based learning, online 'e-learning', informal coaching support and development reviews. These reviews are crucial to the success of the programme; they take place in addition to the annual MyPlan process, and involve the individual, his or her line manager, a technical reviewer who is a specialist in that field, and a process owner. The session provides an opportunity to tailor the roadmap to the needs of the employee, to make sure he or she obtains the right experience to reach their goals. "The roadmaps are structured, yes. But they offer individual flexibility as well. Although eXcellence sets clear standards, not everyone is the same and the aim is to encourage individuals to fulfil their potential," says Ralph Ladd, eXcellence programme manager.

The programme is also different from previous training and development opportunities in that its focus is performance-based. It goes beyond simply defining what competencies a person needs for a role, and concentrates on a systematic approach to training that is based on the actual tasks performed by the worker and the related knowledge, skills, and abilities that are required for competent job performance.



### **Demonstrating capability**

"What we want to know is not if someone has attended the course, but whether they can demonstrate the right capability, day by day, in their work," says Shultz. "What we have done with eXcellence is to define capability in terms of performance requirements—what it means in practice.

“And for very complex positions, such as petrophysics, petroleum engineering or reservoir engineering, the benefits of a performance-based approach are abundantly clear,” he adds. “It provides solid assurance that the person can perform each aspect of their job in practice as well as having the right competencies on paper.”

Roadmaps have been developed so far in a number of disciplines, including subsurface, projects, finance and human resources. But BP staff work in so many specialist areas that there is plenty of work ahead, as Ladd points out. “The programme is unprecedented in scope and scale—and it will revolutionize BP.” Shultz agrees: “We’re at a critical crossroads as we embed eXcellence in all the regions, sustain it and continuously improve it. Our job now is to execute it in a sustainable fashion so we all reap its rewards.”

**MAPPING THE ROUTE** 

**NEV JONES:**

“Before the development of the eXcellence programme, technical employees had to depend on the advice of a coach or mentor. The employee was dependent on the quality of the coaching,” says Nev Jones, director of geology.

Jones, along with Dave Whitcombe, former director of geophysics (now retired), worked with Upstream Learning to create the geoscience roadmap, with a number of interconnected routes for geologists and geophysicists.

“The magic of the eXcellence programme is the job-experience content. That’s where Upstream Learning brings real value to the roadmap construction, because they know how people learn. That helped us write the content in a constructive way,” Jones says. He and Whitcombe relied on subject-matter experts for the specifics of each roadmap.

“Previously, we had a programme called Competencies-on-Line,” Jones says. “We focused on the outcome—on how to measure capability, but we didn’t write down how to get there.

“Upstream Learning showed us how to focus on the task of an individual reaching their professional development goals. We learned that saying, ‘I’ll know it when I see it’ doesn’t help the person who’s seeking guidance about getting the right job experiences he or she needs to develop capability. The eXcellence programme content does this.”



### **ANGENI JAYAWICKRAMARAJAH:**

"After I completed the Challenge programme, I was curious to find out 'what's next?' in my technical development, and 'what am I missing?'" says Angeni Jayawickramarajah, a reservoir engineer in Houston.

"Once I learned about the baseline tool in eXcellence, I found an efficient way to identify my technical gaps by assessing activity sets and training courses related to reservoir engineering."

Jayawickramarajah, who started with BP in 2007, completed the Challenge programme in late 2009—just as the eXcellence roadmap for her discipline was being developed. "For reservoir engineers, the baseline tool is clear, and the discussion during my first development review was beneficial in identifying accomplishments, my gaps, and the actions I need to take to close those gaps."

She credits eXcellence with identifying the training options and future job roles she needs to take on to progress in her professional development. "As I build deep technical knowledge, I'm gaining the confidence to move from team to team, knowing that BP now has a standard definition of a well-developed engineer."

"I have friends who work for other companies, and they don't get anything like this level of corporate commitment. It's a huge investment of BP's time and money in my career, and I'm determined to seize the opportunity."

**Words:** Denise Allen Zwicker