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Interview with Catherine McGregor

EMBRACING TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION

How would you define the role of young people in the energy industry? What is the greatest contribution that the younger generation of today has to offer the industry of the future?

Today's generation has this formidable ability to connect to other people wherever they might be: they travel a great deal more and of course they use the Internet and social networks fluently. If you look at our industry, it is faced with ever-growing technical challenges and projects of massive scale, where multidisciplinary and geographically dispersed teams have to collaborate in order to meet these challenges. I really think that these requirements will play to the strengths of the younger generation.

Why is it, do you think, that some good ideas from young people do not get the chance to penetrate the organisation of a company? How is your company structured to absorb and implement new ideas contributed by young professionals?

Our industry has a reputation for being conservative: new ideas tend to be confronted with statements such as “but we've always done it that way.” However, much can be done to ensure that good ideas reach the right level of every organisation.

Giving responsibility to young people at an early stage of their career is a very effective way: if you have responsibilities, you can make things happen. An informal and accessible style of management is also very important to create an environment open enough for people to express their opinions and propose new ideas.

In my company we have a tradition of organising “InterChange Forums”: Every year, promising young employees are invited to spend



Training new Schlumberger field engineers and technicians takes place in one of four purpose-built learning centers around the world. The picture shows a classroom in the Abu Dhabi Learning Center

three days with senior managers; interacting with them in a relaxed environment; working on specific business issues and proposing solutions. It is rare that impactful business decisions are not made by the management team as a result of the feedback received from the participants.

How were you able to make an impact as a young professional in your organisation?

I held my first line management job fairly early on in my career. As a front-line manager you not only impact your customers but also the people working for you: their motivation, their view of the company and their professional ambition. Even on a small scale, this is very rewarding.

In the last few decades the oil industry has expanded massively, adding new technologies, countries and resources to the continuing challenge of extracting oil and bringing new products to market. Looking ahead, what do you think your generation has not achieved or could have done differently that should be the focus of the young professionals joining the industry today?

I think we must pursue faster new technology adoption... In turn, we must reduce technology development and testing times to deploy future game changers more quickly.

Which young person that you have met has most impressed you, and why?

I am often impressed by the young people I meet in my travels. The ones who stand out have often demonstrated an incredible adaptability when assigned to a new country, having overcome not just

the professional challenges but also the language and cultural barriers. I can think of an American engineer who spent his first field years in remote Siberian locations, where he was forced to quickly learn Russian in order to perform his job; or again a young Indonesian manager in Mexico who had earned the respect of her customers and her own team through her professionalism, her energy, and her ability to communicate with them in Spanish.

The oil industry is widely perceived as an old and traditional industry, not only because of its long history but also because it demands such a long learning period to master as a subject. At the same time, we have seen in the recent past the blossoming of new industries that are more dynamic, with faster career trajectories, more appealing and with many big companies led by young professionals. How do you view this discrepancy and do you think it is time for the oil industry to adapt to this new world order? If so, how should it do this?

In fact, I believe it has already adapted to a certain extent! Most companies suffer a shortage of key technical skills and respond by taking more risks on people, developing them faster than in the past. I truly believe the industry has fantastic careers to offer young professionals, careers that are dynamic, challenging and diverse. And, indeed, I see this trend continuing in the future.

Please, formulate one question that you would like to see answered by the youth.

Do you think we should better utilise social networks in our industry? How, to what intent, and what would be the impact, in your opinion? ■