

Cultivating the Technical Talent of the Future

In a business that has a reputation for being ruthlessly cyclic, it is relatively comforting to know that we are currently in an up cycle of great activity and likely to remain there for some years. The world's oil and gas production is strained by demand, and oil prices continue to rise. Ask most people in this business and they will tell you they have never been busier.

So far, so good. But looking to the future, we see looming capacity shortages not just in technology and equipment, but also in that most precious resource of all—people. For years Schlumberger has based its vision on three key principles: people, technology and profitability—I suspect most exploration and production businesses claim similar guidelines. It is not surprising that the category “people” heads the list, because no business succeeds without talent. Most worrisome for some, however, is the availability of technical talent.

There has been much talk in recent years about the impending “crew change,” which refers to the fact that a majority of the industry's technical talent is approaching retirement while too few young experts are being trained to replace them. Exacerbated by today's strong growth, the effects of the crew change are beginning to be felt, but this talent shortage phenomenon is primarily seen in the West. The number of petroleum engineering graduates entering the workplace from US universities dropped dramatically in the mid- to late 1980s and never recovered, but the number graduating in Asia-Pacific countries, to mention just one area, is now huge. There is no crew change in those emerging economies.

At Schlumberger, we see two essential components to securing tomorrow's technical talent. First—and this was a bet we made 25 years ago—is to hire engineers and scientists in every country where we worked, in numbers roughly proportional to our activity in each country. Then we opted to treat everyone the same, from training, to career, to compensation. That is why today we are a veritable United Nations of engineers, and we do not worry about a crew change of our own.

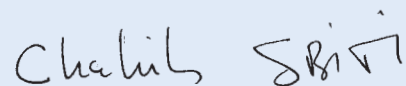
The second component is deeper and grew naturally from the first. It comprises a portfolio of educational initiatives in all countries where we work—some relating to our business, others addressing social needs. It started with simple university relations to back up our recruiting, but this activity now encompasses 140 engineering schools worldwide. We promote numerous sabbatical programs for

professors, liaisons between African scientists and top Western universities, a program called Faculty for the Future that funds women professors, and more programs too numerous to mention here. Contributing to university excellence remains a high priority.

Recognizing that we could contribute at all stages in the educational chain, we founded the volunteer-based Schlumberger Excellence in Educational Development (SEED) program that connects under-resourced schools to the Internet and provides them with a comprehensive, multilingual science education Web site and access to practicing scientists and engineers. It has taken time, but we have now connected 131 schools in 32 countries. In Africa, 30,000 schoolchildren have access to this program. In several countries, we have brought many children together in workshops to study environmental and other issues.

The Schlumberger Foundation is another mechanism at our disposal to promote education, particularly science education. This foundation supports students from developing countries, helping them attend United World Colleges, a respected worldwide educational network, and also maintains the traveling “Lab-in-the-Lorry” program that brings experiments and scientists to children.

The technical talent of tomorrow is everywhere to be seen. Just give everyone the chance to become tomorrow's engineer and scientist—we believe that is the secret to securing technical talent for the future.



Chakib Sbity

Executive Vice President, Schlumberger Oilfield Services
Paris, France

Chakib Sbity, Executive Vice President of Schlumberger Oilfield Services (OFS), manages oilfield technology development and all operations in the OFS business segment worldwide. Prior to assuming this position in 2003, he was president, Middle East and Asia, Schlumberger OFS for two years. He also served as director of personnel, Oilfield Services, Paris; and vice president, Wireline & Testing, Europe, Africa and the Mediterranean. Chakib joined Schlumberger in 1981 as a field engineer after studying electrical engineering in France.