

**The Need for Wise Heads on Young Shoulders—Preparing
The New Young Leaders**

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This paper explores three dimensions of developing young talent after they leave formal education, often university. Those dimensions are “what wisdom do we want to impart to the heads on young shoulders”, “for whom is that wisdom”, and “how will we go about building that wisdom in those young heads”.

What Wisdom?

Ours is the era of competencies. In this era, we identify the competencies in which we want our people to be capable at levels such as:

- Awareness
- Knowledge
- Skill in application
- Mastery

Each of these (ASKM) can be demonstrated to a review/evaluation panel of more experienced colleagues, or can be shown in field practice. The desired outcome is upstream capability to find and produce oil and gas with minimal resource waste and maximum value to customers

There are lots of competency areas. One independent oil company built its competency matrix for eight upstream disciplines. Leadership competencies were deliberately excluded from the competency matrix. This competency matrix contained 604 competencies. Do we have our young professionals specialize in order to gain depth in a discipline? Do we have our young professionals move among the eight disciplines in order to gain breadth of knowledge and experience?

Some enterprise cultures prize specialization most. Other enterprise cultures prize generalization most. Disciplines and functions tend to look inward, emphasizing specialization and depth. Enterprise view values generalization, flexibility to assign its professionals, and adaptation to new circumstances (new geologies, new reservoir characteristics, etc.)

Each approach builds a type of wisdom that is quite valuable. Knowledge and experience with wells can lead to cost effective decision making. Knowledge and experience with sick wells can lead to recovery volumes that would be left in the ground otherwise. Moving from wells expertise to sick wells expertise requires

hands on experience, knowledge transfer from more experienced colleagues, and formal learning of both causes and cures for sick wells.

Likewise, generalization has its value. It has been common for upstream professionals to change jobs about every four years. Doing so means new geography, new geology, new technical challenges, and new colleagues. The skills of being new successfully are not easily taught. The skills of being new are very valuable to an upstream enterprise.

The skills of being new can greatly aid enterprise level decision making by adding the multiple discipline perspective that includes technical, commercial, and even new ventures. The mindset of being new can be matched with the personality types who seek such new challenges. These young professionals can add the adaptive ingredients needed by mature organizations that can be difficult to sustain in large, bureaucratic IOC's and NOC's.

A Framework for Examining “What Wisdom”

The wisdom that sustains our organizations can be first broken down into:

- Task Skills
- Behavioral Skills
- Business Skills.

These three skill “baskets” are all necessary for those who will lead large elements of an enterprise. At the top of an enterprise, business skills and behavioral skills will likely dominate daily decision making. Experienced people leading functions or disciplines will require both business skills and behavioral skills for daily interaction. Task skills will play a role in daily decisions as well.

Wisdom for those with young shoulders will first emphasize task skills. An upstream oil and gas company may hire the university graduate, then spend a year or more formally educating the recent hire in a variety of topics. A bit of behavioral skill (awareness or knowledge) may be included. A small exposure (awareness) of commercial skills may be included. But this career stage will be dominated by task skill formal education.

Career Selection and Career Paths

One independent oil company wanted to be sure that it has a sufficient supply of future leaders. In doing so, the company evaluated new graduate hires on task, behavioral, and commercial skills they had developed to date. This company used a selection model based upon:

- Intellectual Capacity
- Achievements to Date
- Relationship Skills Demonstrated

The company called this its capacity, achievements, relationship (CAR) model.

The company deliberately “over-hired” for best and brightest talent. Recognizing that not all best and brightest will move to leadership positions, the company policy was to insure sufficient numbers of top generalization talent by over-emphasizing that career path. This was balanced by a system of talent management within disciplines and functions using skill pool managers.

A few years later, the company wanted individual young professionals to understand the development system better. Using the company’s internal internet, a Job Experiences Navigator (JEN) was created. Your author was one of the four creators of this tool.

The JEN tool defined three idealized career “destinations”. They were:

- Discipline Expert

- Discipline or Functional Leader
- General Management

For Discipline Expert, criteria included papers published, external and internal recognition, and being the “go to” person in the person’s field of deep expertise. This recognized specialist was to have depth of knowledge and experience that was unrivaled in the enterprise.

Discipline or Functional Leader criteria included thorough knowledge of the discipline or function, though it should be noted that the leader need not be the deepest task expert in the discipline or function. The demands of leadership make it imperative that a task expert remain up to date, not the person serving to lead the discipline or function.

General Management used the Harvard Business Review definition of general management. Here the leader has more than one function or discipline reporting to him/her. Thus general managers must have experience in more than one discipline or function, must have strong behavioral skills, and must have strong enterprise level business skills. These business skills must include both project economic evaluation and the ability to structure agreements with capital suppliers, customers, and resource holders.

The Job Experiences Navigator allowed young professionals to make appropriate choices of developmental experiences and activities after they were hired and as their careers progressed. This made it possible for young professionals to have more effective development conversations with bosses, mentors, and skill pool managers. More effective development decisions resulted.

How Will We Go About Building Wisdom in Those Young Heads?

Three primary mechanisms can aid the learning of young professionals. These mechanisms are:

- Experience
- Coaching and Mentoring
- Formal Learning

Several major companies outside our industry have found these three mechanisms for learning useful. Two companies, General Electric and Honeywell, have studied the impact of these three mechanisms upon career success.

Study results concluded that the most successful professionals 25 years after leaving university gained 70% of their knowledge leading to that success from Experience. Coaching (from good bosses) and Mentoring (from good mentors) accounted for 20% of success. Formal learning AFTER UNIVERSITY accounted for 10% of success.

Is the “HOW” part of our career development system breaking down? In some companies, there are too few bosses who will take a developmental role with young professionals. Mentors, where they exist at all, may provide advice based on their own career experiences 20-30 years earlier. Changes in technology, work behavior, and business requirements may overwhelm both coaches and mentors. Plus, the rewards for time spent coaching and mentoring are few.

Cost pressures on businesses have tended to favor the benefits of specialization in careers just when flexibility and adaptability have become prized business dimensions. Worse, centralization, with its arguments for standardization and “global service” can lead to nationals receiving far less of experience, coaching/mentoring, and formal learning than would happen if more national and regional approaches were taken by operators.

Formal learning after university faces its own challenges. Sending individuals to Harvard, Wharton, London Business School, INSEAD, or IMD (among many

others) is expensive, time consuming, and has impact only on the individual. Such sessions can be especially valuable, however, to prepare your best leaders in the business skills arena for general management roles.

Formal learning during career is increasingly turning to in-company sessions for teams that include task skills, behavioral skills, and business skills. And a new dimension is being added. On-payroll or external consultants work in the business along side of the teams and individuals being developed. This touches the young heads we wish to make wise as well as their bosses who may need to be more up to date.

It is likely that this mechanism of internal or external consultants for knowledge transfer can help us bridge the gap between the deeply experienced professionals now retiring from our industry and the young professionals now entering our industry. Evidence for this trend can be found each time an NOC in the region hires a retiring expat to extend his/her contribution to the NOC.

Conclusions, Summary, Advice

Begin your consideration of whom to make wise before hiring. Hire for intellectual capacity, achievements, and demonstrated relationship capability.

Have frameworks that help guide policy and action in the creation of “wise heads on young shoulders”. Competency frameworks help in all three areas—task skills, behavioral skills, and business skills.

Know when a young professional should be aware, have knowledge, demonstrate skill, or demonstrate mastery. Mastery is demonstrated when a person can create this skill in others through teaching, coaching, mentoring, leading, influencing.

Have clear alternative career trajectories in mind. One will be a best fit for young professionals.

Include the voice of the young professional in career development decisions.

Teach bosses and mentors to use inquiry rather than advocacy to explore the generation of wisdom in young heads.

Use free resources to discover more about steps one can take. Readers are welcome to visit my web site at www.kengrahamphd.com to read “Seven

Essentials of Mentoring”, “Getting Beyond Accidental Leadership”, the Leadership Insights series, and the guest author article by Roger Colmer.

Added Resources

See especially Leading with Questions by Michael Marquardt. This is one of the best books about use of inquiry to develop others that this author has seen. Both bosses and young heads can make very effective use of these practices.

About the Author

Ken is a consultant, primarily in international oil and gas, in business strategy, and leadership development. He serves regularly as a facilitator for GetEnergy, Ltd of London. Ken serves as business skills and behavioral skills faculty for EMBA programs in Europe and the US. Ken designs and delivers leadership assessments, in-company learning sessions. Ken frequently serves as a conference speaker.

Earlier this decade, Ken served as Head, Global Leadership Development for Royal Dutch Shell E&P, working in its 56 upstream countries.

Ken has been a private pilot since age 20. He delivers airplanes for a US manufacturer. Gulfstream Aerospace is one of his leadership development clients.