



## **Commercial Training, Talent Development and Retention** **Flip van Koten** **ExxonMobil Gas & Power Marketing Company**

### **BACKGROUND**

Professional development is structured on the basis of a long-term vision that aligns with the business needs of an organisation. Initial and subsequent assessments of each employee's skills and interests are essential to ensure this alignment and, at the same time, to grow and retain talent over an entire career. The development of these skills is facilitated by targeted individual training plans and meaningful job assignments.

A development framework is most effective when it recognises the stages of career development, defines essential skills, and implements training and other support mechanisms necessary to accelerate the contributions of individuals in the day-to-day business of the organisation.

A multifaceted training plan incorporating technical, commercial, individually effective and leadership-based curricula facilitates the development of a broad professional foundation. Such training is most effective when available in multiple formats, including formal instructor-led sessions, symposia, master classes, computer-based training, and one-on-one interactions with mentors and subject-matter experts.

Employees benefit from a training curriculum founded on a robust framework that promotes ongoing capability and skills development for all career stages, prioritising unnecessary training redundancies, revising existing courses in line with changing business needs, and developing new course offerings to fill existing and anticipated gaps. The focus of the framework is on the development of key skills, and on the integration of the training curricula across the corporation to ensure that employees develop sufficient competency in essential skills beyond his or her own specific disciplines.

ExxonMobil's Upstream Commercial training recognises the existence of common commercial skills across many disciplines and functions, and thereby enables employees to more efficiently transition between diverse job assignments. The result is more effective resource deployment and enhanced career-long development. Cross-functional involvement of internal and (as appropriate) external subject-matter experts in the design, development and delivery of training ensures effective and comprehensive results.

To confirm learning transfer and the business impact of commercial training, pilot studies have been initiated to enhance how training effectiveness, once participants have returned back to their jobs, is currently measured.

Commercial training will play a crucial role in filling skill gaps resulting from future demographic changes. Thus, there needs to be an emphasis on nurturing competitively distinguishing skill development to meet specific business needs.

## **AIMS**

Commercial skills have been important to ExxonMobil's success throughout its history. Employees have long held what we call "commercial" roles, as is typical across the oil and gas industry, as business analysts, strategic planners, negotiators, commercial designers, contract developers, contract managers, project managers and land representatives. These roles exist across ExxonMobil's Upstream business, from exploration to development to production, and in the development of markets to commercialise natural gas discoveries.

In addition to their individual functional company assignments, employees recognise separate identities by their disciplines – Geoscience, Engineering and Commercial – and are grouped into what we call resource organisations, skill areas or job families. These three groups make up the Upstream Professional Development structure, now firmly established in ExxonMobil Upstream companies. Such an organisational approach facilitates the identification and implementation of best practices, while ensuring essential skill advancement through a broad suite of career development opportunities within an employee's own discipline.

Upstream Professional Development is a systematic and deliberate approach to the creation of organisational capability and capacity. It executes one of ExxonMobil's fundamental business principles: the commitment to develop the highest quality, motivated, diverse workforce.

Upstream Professional Development encompasses technical/commercial skill development, as well as individual effectiveness and leadership behavior growth. The system leverages individual interests, provides structured career-based tools to develop individual capability, and delivers technical and commercial professionals who differentiate ExxonMobil in the execution of business needs. Professional development is achieved through a partnership between employees and supervisors, and mentors and development advisors.

### **Upstream Professional Development**

To ensure consistent and effective professional development, a common and interdependent framework has been created for Upstream Professional Development. The framework's organisation allows employees to focus on the most relevant components through each progressive stage of his or her career. The framework is applicable to all Upstream professionals, both those in technical/commercial assignments and supervisors/managers. The following sections describe various components of the framework.

### **Leadership Roles and Responsibilities**

ExxonMobil's Upstream management provides leadership, commitment and active participation; sets expectations; and provides resources to ensure successful professional development. A multilevel governance structure is in place to provide the needed organisational support.

The top level of this structure oversees Geoscience, Engineering and Commercial professional development and ensures consistency among the three functions. The next level is established within each of these three functions. These resource organisations ensure a sustained competitive advantage by developing technical/commercial capabilities to anticipate and meet changing business needs, with optimum sizing and deployment in each respective function.



For Commercial professionals, managers and supervisors are primarily responsible for implementing the Commercial career development process for their direct reports. Professional development advisors are assigned and engaged in stewardship, communication, employee skill development and training, technical/commercial training curriculum development, and deployment.

A Technical/Commercial employee actively participates in his or her own career using company tools/resources, conducting skill-gap self-assessments and communicating interests to supervisors.

### Functional Skills – Commercial Skills Framework Example

The Commercial organisation recognises a Commercial Skills Framework, with more than 30 different foundational commercial and business knowledge skills. These skills reflect current and future business needs applicable to Commercial professionals across Upstream companies. Capability profiles for each skill use matrices of requirements, with four competencies progressing from “basic/developing” to “competent” to “expert” and finally to “advanced expert.” Although the specifically defined commercial skills are different from one another, competency levels for each are definable within a general structure (Table 1).

Basic or Developing Competency	Competent	Expert	Advanced Expert
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proficiency expected of everyone in the Job Family/Skill Area</li> <li>Knowledge of fundamentals and terminology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has applied knowledge to routine assignments, with little supervision</li> <li>In-depth understanding of key technologies and practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has applied knowledge to non-routine applications and problems</li> <li>Reflects solid understanding of fundamental principles underlying technology and practices</li> <li>Recognized expert within ExxonMobil</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has addressed the most complex applications and problems across the Upstream</li> <li>Has applied integrated perspectives across skill areas</li> <li>In-depth understanding of limitations, risks and uncertainties of underlying technology</li> <li>Recognized expert within industry</li> </ul>

This table shows the general expectations associated with each proficiency level as it relates to technical or commercial skills.

Table 1: Capability profiles

Each of the indicated general elements is the basis for a specific corresponding element in an individual skill definition. The result is a uniquely defined set of competencies for each skill in the Commercial framework. Note that specific commercial skills are reviewed periodically to ensure alignment with existing and future business needs.



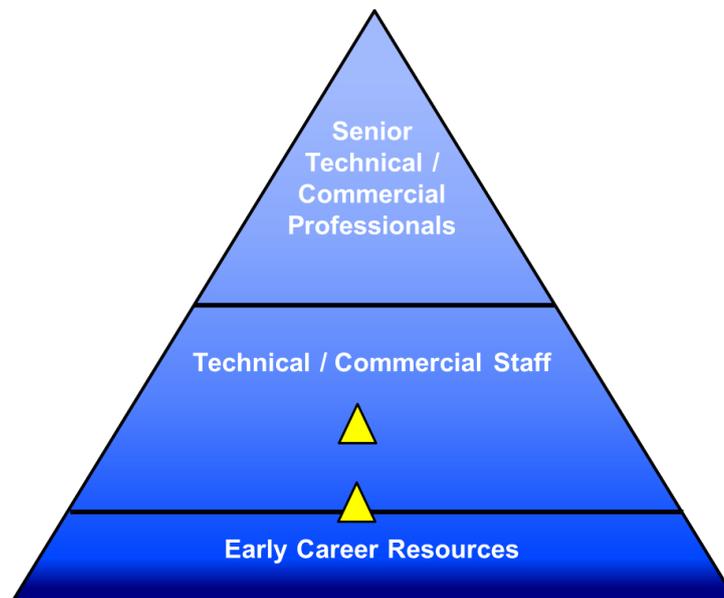
Skills and competencies are the key tools to manage and steer career development. A successful employee will enhance skills, add new capabilities, and gain expertise in the company and the industry throughout the course of his or her career. Each skill definition identifies required/recommended training, general knowledge and meaningful experiences in order to be considered proficient at each of the four competency levels. An employee periodically assesses his/her own competency levels, which are then validated by supervisors, professional development staff, and, as needed, Technical/Commercial experts.

### **Individual Effectiveness and Leadership Behaviors**

In addition to technical/commercial expertise, employees will need to develop individual effectiveness skills and leadership behaviors over his or her career. Regardless of whether or not an employee is in a position of formal authority, the growth of these latter skills and behaviors positively impacts the likelihood of success of the organisation and increases employee personal satisfaction.

### **METHODS Career Stages**

Professional development at ExxonMobil is a career-long process starting from early career entry, to making individual contributions as a member of the Technical/Commercial staff, to recognition and more significant contributions as a senior Technical/Commercial professional (Table 2).



 **Technical/ Commercial milestones**

Table 2: Professional Development career structure

At each career stage, employees are expected to increase his or her skills, contributions and leadership behaviors. The latter may involve mentoring, instructing, sharing and transferring knowledge within the workgroup, leading teams, and influencing work

approaches/processes/directions, all while establishing a reputation of credibility and integrity.

### **Early Career Stage**

In the early career stage, an employee begins applying a structure to his or her career development, acknowledging individual interests and company business needs. The right alignment is key to motivating the development of skill capabilities so critical to the success of the enterprise. With input and support from supervisors and professional development advisors, employees will create an individual development plan to address skills, training, meaningful experiences and assignments that align with his or her desires and company business needs. The employee, supervisor and professional development advisor will review and update this plan regularly throughout the employee's career.

### **Onboarding**

For those new to ExxonMobil, the Upstream business or their work group, there are resources, tools and programs in place to support a smooth transition. There are structured communication plans and mentor assignments initiated for campus hires once the employment offer is accepted. An experienced hire or transferring employee from another area of the corporation also receives specific communications regarding his or her transition, and will participate in a skill/experience "gap analysis" process, the results of which will contribute to the employee's individual development plan.

### **Mentoring**

Mentors are experienced professionals who share their knowledge, wisdom and experience with other professionals in a nonreporting relationship. Mentoring is an essential element of employee assimilation and development, aiding in understanding the organisation and supporting successful interaction with its systems and networks. At different stages in their career, an employee might be a mentor or a protégé. Even at later stages, a formal, structured mentoring program provides more experienced professionals the opportunity to broaden his or her perspectives and interests, advance skills, take on responsibility for the development of others, and enhance his or her impact on the business through the contributions of others.

### **Advanced Skill Development**

To assist employees beyond the early career stage in targeting their individual development plan, separate recommended skill competency milestones have been established at five and 10 years of employment. Training activity and meaningful experiences coincident with achieving these competency milestones are envisioned for each employee.

### **Senior Professionals**

Senior Technical/Commercial professional roles exist across all of ExxonMobil's Upstream companies. The program for these employees enhances technical and commercial capability/competitiveness through the development of critical skills. These senior roles have been created to identify and develop individuals who demonstrate the potential to progress to these levels of knowledge, skill and capability. Advancing to these roles takes place over a career.

Meaningful experience, deep and broad knowledge, critical thinking skills, individual effort, and influential leadership behaviors are elements that senior professionals have developed and demonstrated.



Senior professionals are deployed globally to ensure appropriate individual career development and optimal placement for effectiveness and efficiency, considering the long-term needs of the company.

### Curriculum and Training

Training facilitates the acquisition of skills and knowledge and is most effective when combined with meaningful experiences. As part of an individual development plan, an employee selects training from the available curricula aligned with his or her current work assignment and long-term goals. The training plan is completed with input from supervisors, mentors, professional development advisors and training staff. Employees leverage central learning management systems to register for applicable training.

An employee's learning is enhanced and reinforced through personal networks created among participants and experts at training sessions. Supervisors discuss training with employees before and after sessions to identify and reinforce knowledge gained as it applies to current assignments. The use of all of these methods helps ensure knowledge retention once an employee returns to their job, and maximises learning transfer and business impact.

Curriculum committees are responsible for managing their businesses' individual curricula. Committees provide recommendations for improvement of training/learning in their respective job family or skill area. These committees ensure that existing training is aligned with skill competencies and is focused on meeting business needs. Since externally provided, publicly available training is also considered part of an employee's individual development plan, curriculum committees determine which skills are best developed through external training and identify courses that meet those needs.

### Functional Training – Commercial Framework Example

The Upstream Commercial Training Framework (Table 3) has been developed in alignment with ExxonMobil business needs to guide career-long Commercial learning and advancement of supporting skills for all Upstream employees. The framework creates the foundation for a curriculum that is comprehensive, globally consistent and progressive. It is integrated with the entire compilation of ExxonMobil learning experiences, including other job families' curricula (e.g., onboarding and technical training) and other job assignments. Integration enhances the learning roadmap available for employees, providing them with clear and consistent expectations for future training offerings and other job experiences.

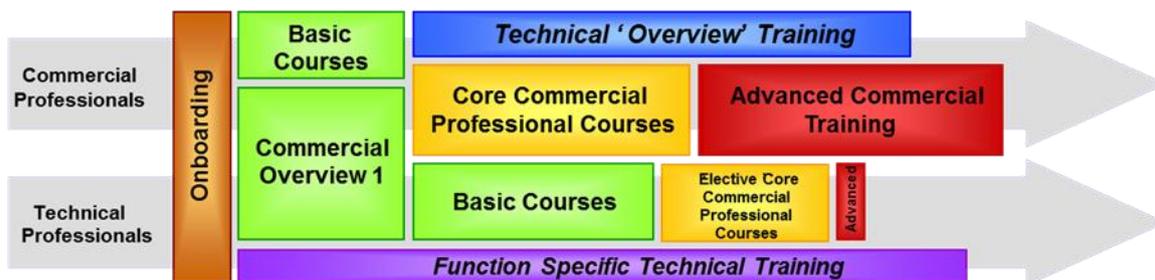


Table 3: Upstream Commercial Training Framework



The development and maintenance of the curriculum is led by an internal Commercial Training team that works in partnership with ExxonMobil subject-matter experts, business line and Commercial resources representatives, and management from across the Upstream. The objectives of the training team are to employ effective methods to deliver training and to facilitate support and reinforcement to promote learning transfer.

Along with developing new training courses for the curriculum, the team monitors the impact and applicability of existing courses and identifies areas for improvement. Continuous improvement is important to ensure that the curriculum continues to have the desired business impact. In addition, with increased access to third-party online resources, the team integrates such resources with existing instructor-led training, as well as other online learning resources.

Commercial professionals also attend “Technical Overview” training courses to ensure that they have the appropriate technical context for their work. Such training provides necessary grounding in engineering, geological concepts and applications involved in the oil and gas industry.

Likewise, and as indicated in the Upstream Commercial Training Framework, Upstream Technical professionals attend training from the Commercial curriculum to develop the commercial context for their technical work. Commercial training is but one element in their individual development plan, as it must be integrated along with function-specific Technical training.

### **Individual Effectiveness and Leadership Training**

Leadership behaviors and individual effectiveness skills are integral and complementary to the functional expertise of every employee, and are required for a successful career and to meet the business need.

Training programs to develop these behaviors and skills are offered to employees at different stages in their careers. The courses share a common goal of developing exceptional leaders while providing distinctive curricula and formats shaped to meet the varying challenges and opportunities inherent across the organisation.

### **Training Effectiveness**

ExxonMobil invests large amounts of money annually in training and workforce development to ensure success and to maintain a competitive advantage. Each employee’s active participation in training – and their corresponding feedback – is critical to the delivery of world-class learning. Measurement is critical to determine to what extent the learning transfer occurred and to capture the resulting business impact.

ExxonMobil has long been using predictive reaction surveys and knowledge assessment tools – and in selected cases, follow-up surveys with participants, supervisors and peers – to assess learning transfer once employees are back on the job. A broader use of the follow-up surveys is being considered to better assess the effectiveness of training.

An effort is ongoing to improve measurement data collection and reporting through the use of third-party online surveys and reporting software. This new system provides additional capabilities and tools that we expect will enhance understanding and application of participants’ feedback gathered through post-event and follow-up surveys.



### **Knowledge Transfer/Wisdom Sharing**

The application and sharing of knowledge and wisdom an employee accumulates is a significant part of that employee's contribution to the company. The company encourages:

- Sharing information, know-how and knowledge in every direction at all levels.
- Efficient and effective access to accumulated knowledge, information and experience.
- Personal ownership of continuous learning.
- Accelerating the accumulation of meaningful experiences.

Employees gain knowledge over the course of their careers through meaningful experiences, training, networking and mentoring. Wisdom represents a unique combination of knowledge, intuition, judgment and insight, drawn from prior practical experiences and the ability to effectively apply them.

Although knowledge transfer and wisdom sharing are frequently thought of as functions of age or experience, employees at all career stages have a responsibility to both learn and contribute. Almost any interaction an employee has with another person can be used as an opportunity to share or receive knowledge/wisdom.

Formal and informal tools and programs are available to help employees learn from others, as well as transfer his or her knowledge and wisdom, such as:

- Symposiums, conferences, workshops, forums, "lunch-and-learns," and informal group meetings in formal and informal settings: to share knowledge about relevant projects/topics with current and future applications.
- Structured training: formal instructor-led training, computer-based training, e-learning and on-demand training and webinars.
- Communities of practice/networks: associations of internal subject-matter experts to share best practices and offer consultation on business matters.
- IT solutions: software to promote/enhance global sharing of data and best practices, and collaborative dialogue and communications.
- Publications (internal and external) and third-party sources: access to technical and commercial industry publications and third-party software to provide on-demand learning.

### **Skill-Gap Analysis/Closure**

The business environment is constantly changing, and the challenges faced by ExxonMobil change with it. The internal job families and resource organisations regularly conduct systematic, quantitative and qualitative analyses on available skill sets to ensure that employees' skills are being developed and applied efficiently to address business-driven challenges, both short and long term. These analyses identify current and future gaps by demographics such as experience, company or region.

### **Stewardship and Improvement**

Systems are in place to regularly monitor and improve Upstream Professional Development. Job family/resource organisations compile an annual stewardship report addressing major objectives and initiatives. Networks of professional development advisors meet regularly to identify and share best practices.



### **SUMMARY/CONCLUSIONS**

Through its deliberate structure and application, the Upstream Professional Development program at ExxonMobil plays an essential role in achieving the high standards required for company success. The program for Commercial professional development exemplifies the many processes, tools and resources in place to align employees' long-term career development interests with business needs. Employees actively engaged in their own career development while performing stimulating work assignments is a compelling recipe to retain an organisation's all-important resource, that is, its talented workforce.

Meeting the world's energy challenges requires world-class people. One reason for ExxonMobil's success is its ability to attract and retain the brightest minds. ExxonMobil's goal is to develop employees to have the highest technical and leadership capabilities in the industry. Recognition of the company as a technology leader in the oil and gas industry is in no small part due to the presence of its world-class workforce. ExxonMobil is committed to continuous innovation because the world's growing and evolving energy needs demand nothing less. This commitment, combined with its talented people and financial strength, is a powerful advantage.