

Braver, Bolder, and Better: Breaking the Silo Paralysis

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As we continue to adapt and evolve to meet the changing needs of our fast-moving world, we see a sizable and growing prize for those who are willing to work and think differently, challenge traditional approaches, forge new working relationships, and act boldly.

This topic is one of the ten keynote program sessions at the 2021 SPE Offshore Europe (<https://www.offshore-europe.co.uk/>) to be held 7–10 September in Aberdeen to drive disruptive and forward-thinking conversations around the conference theme “Oil & Gas: Working Together for a Net-Zero Future.”

Since 2019 SPE Offshore Europe, we have witnessed significant change, even before we consider the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic. Societal interest in the climate and energy has rightly risen up the agenda, and the scale of expectation and pace of change demanded of our industry is high.

The need to accelerate the energy transition by investing in cleaner, low-carbon energy production is clear. But oil and gas will remain critical as major contributors to the energy mix for decades to come, and so responsible hydrocarbon production has a crucial role to play in the transition, underlined by the recently published UK Government North Sea Transition Deal.

So how can we be braver, bolder, and better—as individuals, as companies, and as an industry—to grasp that opportunity for change and do something positive with it?

We hear a lot about collaboration and its necessity, yet Oil & Gas UK’s (OGUK) 2020 collaboration survey indicates that perhaps, despite the best of intent, it is not universally translating into practice.

The term collaboration has somewhat lost its true meaning, perhaps through overuse and a shortage of genuinely

collaborative partnerships to inspire us. We can all tend to use the term loosely, forgetting that true collaboration can generate incredibly far-reaching and tangible value. We simply must put this right if our industry is to turn the challenge of the energy transition into an opportunity to thrive.

Partnering To Empower the Energy Transition

The first critical step to achieve greater collaboration is to acknowledge and accept that no individual, no organization, has all the answers.

Never has this been truer than now—as we seek to effect one of the greatest changes our industry has ever faced and are duty-bound to find new solutions at pace and scale. Rather than feeling we must each be the sole creator of our own solutions, organizations need to be better at articulating their problem and even better at inviting others to participate in the solution. We will not solve tomorrow’s problems with yesterday’s ideas—we must cultivate innovation and disruption in the way that we engage with one another and in the way that we work together.

A real blocker in realizing that mindset shift is often in the letter of our contracts. We feel so bound by the formal confines of our relationships with one another that we become unable or unwilling to explore new thinking, to be receptive to new ideas, and to create the space for the disruption that we so need. We must recognize trust as a key attribute of successful, collaborative partnerships.

We are too often inhibited by our insistence on knowing exactly how a piece of work will be planned and

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executed (and how much it will cost). We seem to convince ourselves that trying to do anything different or new is just too difficult—so we resort to the “tried and tested” approaches of the past.

Trialling a New, Deeper Relationship

Before the onset of the pandemic, bp and Wood set on a path to transform how we work, recognizing that, surely, what we can achieve together is far greater than what is possible in traditional client-contractor mode.

We agreed that we needed to do something fundamentally different.

Using agile methods, we integrated and co-located teams from each of our businesses to develop a framework and agree on the principles for an effective partnership. We agreed we would embed trust, empowerment, and simplicity at the heart of the team and integrate our collective competence, capability, and experience to unlock transformative solutions that neither of us could achieve in isolation.

We have been able to break down those long-established, and sometimes really challenging, barriers to collaboration and begin to make real the true potential of our shared strengths. This shift in mindset has made it possible to leverage the full breadth and depth of our organizations, tap into unobvious pools of expertise, and access diverse thinking. For example, being able to leverage Wood’s reliability specialists in the mining sector to combine surveillance data from different service providers has made it possible to create a clearer view of system-level vulnerabilities.

A shared willingness to fail fast but learn faster has become a core tenet of our relationship. Trusting that we share the same ambitions has unleashed a new level of creativity in our solutions development. Creating a culture where it is okay to get it wrong and knowing that the lessons will help us get it right has really been key.

With this renewed focus and momentum, we have been able to realize a step-change in how we approach, plan, and prepare for work offshore, supported by



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the myriad data that have been rejuvenated to create digital twins for several North Sea assets.

The results we are seeing are a direct result of the trust we have built—where bp is comfortable with presenting its challenges in full, and Wood is empowered to present the full extent of its capability and experience to help develop those new, impactful solutions.

Realizing the Power of Possible

While the pandemic brought numerous challenges to our industry, it has also shown the pace at which we can drive change when it is most needed. A notable example of that is the helicopter-sharing arrangement put in place to effect safe COVID-19-related medevacs from our North Sea assets.

In the pre-pandemic world, operators were accustomed to having sole custody of the aircraft they needed for their operations. But as the impacts of COVID-19 offshore became a very real issue, the industry recognized that a more collaborative approach was critical to prioritize safety and operational continuity.

In relatively short order, helicopter service providers and operators joined forces to create a shared, mutually beneficial solution that, ultimately, allowed the industry to continue to operate. The urgency drove rapid

agreement on more agile commercial arrangements and ensured this critical service could be operationalized in a timely manner. And so was born the COVID-19 Medevac Helicopter Service (CMED).

There can be no doubt that the pressure of the pandemic necessitated and accelerated this incredible example of cross-industry collaboration—and it demonstrated to us all the power of what is possible when we apply our collective muscle and strength behind a shared ambition.

Now we need to ask ourselves, what other opportunities can we unlock in this way?

It is not easy, but we have shown we can do it. It is clear that the value that can be achieved by sharing risk and reward far outweighs the behavioral and contractual difficulties of establishing collaborative partnerships.

2021 SPE Offshore Europe offers us an opportunity to raise the profile of great, collaborative behaviors and tackle the barriers and challenges that are limiting our own success. Working together for a net-zero future means that it is time to stop politely cooperating and start disruptively and productively collaborating by forging partnerships that will pave the way for a brighter, more sustainable, and more integrated energy future. **JPT**