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“*And one by one the nights
between our separated cities are joined
to the night that unites us.*”
Pablo Neruda, on love and separation

Who were your role models during the pivotal stages of your life?

My mother is a force of nature, has more integrity than any other person I know, and has managed to weather both good times and bad with a calm humanity and deep generosity of spirit.

What are your top attributes of a successful leader?

1. Vision
2. Determination
3. Persistence
4. Focus

From a global perspective, who inspires you in the power sector?

Mr Tantra Thakur – he is particularly known for having led the first electricity trading company in India/South Asia as chairman and managing director from 2000-2012. He led the company to diversify into financial services through PTC India Financial Services Limited and co-sponsored the first Energy Exchange in India.

Not only is he someone who has developed a vision for bringing better energy services to a country of over one billion people, but he has done so with a keen awareness of energy's importance to long-term socio-economic development.

What leadership qualities are lacking in the African power sector and how can they be overcome?

In Africa, there is a deep respect for protocol and whilst this has its advantages, it can undermine the ability of leaders to be radical and to pursue their visions.

Like any skill, the core ability needs practice and the right environment to flourish. That environment very much depends on supportive colleagues and family, on positive role models and an open and welcoming society.

What values do you demonstrate as a leader?

I asked our non-executive director, Penny Herbst, to answer this question for me. She responded: “Courage, persistence, resilience, excellence; in brief - never say die!”

What is your greatest weakness and strength?

Nicola Tesla, who was from my mother's village in Croatia, said that, “one must be sane to think clearly, but one can think deeply and be quite insane.” I think I have a tendency to go for ‘deep immersion’ in

my ideas, and this can be both a weakness when they are perceived as impractical dreams and a strength insofar as it impels me to think around the impediments that hold my ideas back.

In short, there are times when one needs to be a diplomat and recognise genuine obstacles and times when it is a disadvantage. Then, as Tesla is also credited as saying, “Our virtues and our failings are inseparable, like force and matter. When they separate, man is no more.” Therefore, I shall have to be content with my internal conflict.

What is the one thing in your opinion that people commonly misconceive about your character?

I have a tendency to come across as being forceful. It has taken time to develop and communicate my vision for Africa GreenCo.





I am passionate about the idea, and have very specific opinions as to execution. Therefore, the force with which I come across is symptomatic more of my straight-talking character and enthusiasm for the Africa GreenCo concept than any desire to wrestle elbows or tread on toes.

How do you motivate a team after experiencing a defeat at a time of low energy and enthusiasm?

Leading by example is the only way – there can be no time for low energy and enthusiasm about one’s own ideas and visions. If the team deflates and sinks, one’s ideas and visions sink with it.

In the short-medium term what do you foresee for Africa’s power future?

We need more structural change in the short and medium term in the

African power sector. Currently, financial and credit support from the African and international development community for energy projects in Sub-Saharan Africa is provided largely on a project-by-project basis through provision of grants, equity investment, debt finance and guarantees. This approach to support the sector is piecemeal, and often lacking in co-ordination. Even with this extensive and multi-layered support, the bankability of supported projects usually relies heavily on (often already heavily indebted) governments assuming very large contingent liabilities to backstop the obligations of un-creditworthy off-takers as well as various sovereign risks.

This is a sticking plaster, not a real cure, plastering over individual projects through financial support or guarantees whilst further indebting governments cannot solve the underlying structural and market weaknesses and thus facilitate long term sustainable power

sector development. Africa GreenCo, a non-for-profit entity, proposes the introduction of an independently managed, creditworthy (targeting A credit rating), intermediary off-taker and power trader to sit between renewable electricity generation companies on the one hand, and state owned and private sector off-takers on the other. It would operate as a member of the African regional power pools, aggregate off-taker credit risk and diversify both supply and demand side risk on a regional basis. In doing so, the proposed entity will unlock existing, available sources of capital which are currently under-utilised due to a shortage of bankable projects. Perhaps more importantly, it will make financing the sector fundamentally more attractive and accessible to private sector sources of capital whilst at the same time reducing pressure on utilities as well as financial liabilities for sovereign governments.

Is there an increased need for sector crossover and are we seeing enough of this in Africa?

An integrated approach to energy development is key both on a national and regional basis. To date most interlinkages within sector and across national borders has meant that success in one area or location has often come at the expense of increased problems elsewhere. Energy, water and food security, communications, land use and associated strategies, development policy, and climate policy all continue to be addressed in isolation, or subject to friction between ‘competing’ government departments. Over the year’s regional power pools have developed and matured and the African Development Bank’s New Deal on Energy for Africa calls for an integrated approach focusing on more regional integration.

How important is bilateral trade between Africa and foreign countries?

Learning from countries with a similar market blue print and context is key. The Power Trading Corporation of India (PTC India) was established to act as a credit risk mitigating intermediary off-taker for privately financed regional power generators. In the process, it catalysed the entire Indian regional power trading market.

As noted by Tantra Thakur, founder and former CEO of PTC India: “Establishing an aggregator who not just plays an interface with utilities, IPPs, industrial buyers and integrated transmission companies but also works through credit enhancement methodologies, will provide a high level of comfort to investors and lenders both. In any of the cases, this entity can be used as an interface with existing and functional pools to help spreading their depth and operational performance.”

Are there any achievements/challenges that your residing country has experienced across the power value chain?

Privatisation in the UK has come both with benefits, such as affordable pricing and direct market access for industrial customers, as well as challenges, such as complex tariffs and with an over-reliance on state intervention to fund non-gas generation. The latter issue has particularly led to much lower levels of grid capacity compared to 10 years ago, and it is interesting to watch the response to this. ■