Pierre Perez – Managing Director, Servier India

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Drawing on over 30 years of industry experience across a wide range of global markets, Pierre Perez today adopts an open-minded approach to leading Servier's operations in India. Having fostered a collaborative and communicative working environment at the affiliate, Servier India has achieved double-digit annual growth, expanded its portfolio, and established India as a hub for developing, manufacturing, and exporting products globally. Perez also outlines how the company is prioritising patient affordability, engaging in scientific communication, and leveraging digitalisation to enhance healthcare services.

How have your past roles in various global markets prepared you for the challenges in leading Servier's operations in India?

My 30-year journey has involved various positions across different regions, starting in France, and transitioning through diverse roles in sales, marketing, and operations management. These experiences across North Africa, South Africa, and the Gulf countries provided exposure to distinct cultures, markets, and operational challenges. This exposure honed my leadership skills, fostering openness to new ideas and innovation, which significantly aided my approach to managing operations in India. The Indian market, recognized for its innovation, creativity, and dynamism, posed some complexities in regulations. Navigating these complexities, while ensuring quality and compliance, has been a central focus in our operations in India.

India, known as “the pharmacy of the world” for its extensive product range and unique formulations, poses regulatory intricacies affecting sometimes the speed of market authorization. Navigating these complexities requires a focus on maintaining quality and seizing opportunities while ensuring compliance with stringent regulations.

When the possibility of moving to India arose, what were your initial thoughts regarding the assignment given the level of complexity and challenge inherent in such a move, and how did your prior experiences in South Africa and Dubai prepare you for this transition?

Originally, the plan was for me to go to South Africa, but the proposal to head to India came from a higher authority within the company due to India’s growing potential and the need for a leader who could bring a human touch to the management team. My prior success in Dubai and the team’s positive response there led to the belief that a similar leadership approach could work in India. Arriving in India, I found a highly talented and committed workforce with an incredible work ethic, often working long hours, and weekends, and showing a strong dedication to growth. Yet, I encountered a significant focus on work over personal life, which led me to strive for a better work-life balance for the team. The culture then emphasized hierarchy and reserved communication, which was a stark contrast to my previous experiences in more open, multicultural settings. Additionally, India’s large field force setup was in contrast to the smaller team structures I was accustomed to in the Gulf region, thus impressing upon me the scale and potential for impact in my new role as a managing director. Over time, I worked to establish a more transparent, open communication style, breaking barriers and encouraging feedback and expression among team members at all levels. Although challenging, this effort has borne fruit, thus significantly improving the organization’s culture and fostering a more open, communicative environment.

How do you manage the cultural differences in the workplace, particularly when it comes to the balance between work and personal life in India? Could you detail your approach in fostering a more open, communicative environment and the challenges you faced in achieving this in the organization?

When I first arrived in India, I was impressed by the numerous talents we had in the team, by their know-how, by their commitment and dedication to the company and by the number of hard workers (working during the day, night and weekends, and even not taking their leaves). So, I felt a

strong need to re-establish a better work-life balance for the team.

I also noticed a very hierarchical structure not empowered enough, working too much in silos, not challenging the status quo and not so open to transparent and open communication and feedback.

The distinct contrast in cultural approaches between India and my prior working environments led to an initial challenge, as I personally favour a collaborative, team-oriented approach over a hierarchical management style. To overcome this, I emphasized being part of the team rather than just being the boss giving orders. I have promoted empowerment, cross-functional collaboration and challenging the status quo mindset. Engaging with the team and fostering this collaborative spirit took time and effort. It involved earning trust and understanding the team's needs, encouraging open discussions, and appreciating their efforts. I needed to encourage a culture where failures were seen as learning opportunities and where team members could freely express themselves. This cultural shift took time, perseverance, and patience. Despite the challenges, I received positive feedback to the changes implemented, resulting in increased engagement, transparency, and improved communication within the team, and therefore to a more productive and positive work environment. Additionally, it allowed for a more human-centric approach to management, focusing on consistent performance but with a balanced, positive, and learning-oriented mindset.

What have you been focusing on since you took over your current role and key milestones accomplished?

When I first started, my primary objective was to re-engage and motivate the team to drive performance. Over time, we achieved a steady double-digit growth rate of about 15-16 percent annually and have ambitions to maintain this pace or even accelerate it in the coming years.

Our portfolio has expanded significantly, and one standout opportunity lies in India's unique capability to develop single-pill combinations. This is a significant advantage and has allowed us to enrich our product portfolio, especially in cardiology and diabetes. Furthermore, our market dynamic here has facilitated enriching our product range by licensing in products from other CMOs, providing us with a dedicated portfolio that caters to the patient's needs.

In addition to expanding our portfolio, our big milestone achievement was establishing India as a potential new hub for developing, manufacturing and exporting products to the rest of the Servier Group across the world. Our successful engagement with CMOs, stringent quality standards, and

commitment to ensuring our products meet the same quality benchmarks as those manufactured in France have been key factors in our success.

The landscape of health expenditure in India is primarily driven by the private market, with out-of-pocket expenses being the dominant mode of payment. However, our strategy aims to ensure patient affordability and access to quality medication. Despite challenges, we have managed to maintain a competitive price while offering superior quality, thereby ensuring accessibility without compromising on our high standards.

How do you maintain strong relationships with doctors and healthcare providers in India and how does your company leverage scientific communication to deliver added value beyond just providing medication?

In India, building strong connections with doctors and healthcare providers is crucial. We have a deep respect for the medical profession and understand that individuals holding a doctorate are highly esteemed in the Indian culture. Leveraging this understanding, our team maintains strong relationships with these professionals. We've been operating in the country for 36 years and have built a robust reputation for scientific communication, ethical promotion, and the quality of our products. This has given us a competitive advantage over local companies.

Our approach emphasizes going beyond the mere promotion of our products. We focus on providing solutions that cater to the specific needs of patients. This includes improving adherence to treatment, which is a significant concern, especially due to the high cost of medications. Many patients struggle to afford their prescriptions and often discontinue their treatment, which is detrimental to their health. We offer added value through education, aiding patients in understanding the importance of adherence to their prescribed treatment.

Moreover, digitalization and the integration of technology into our services are key elements of our strategy. Our plan includes leveraging our omnichannel approach to improve communication and services for healthcare providers and patients. For instance, we're working on digital solutions to support adherence and improve the overall patient experience. We've also initiated projects using platforms developed within the Servier group for the benefit of both healthcare providers and patients. The introduction of digital solutions will significantly enhance our services in terms of patient care, allowing for a more comprehensive and effective approach to healthcare in India.

Servier secured some significant acquisitions and tie-ups in the oncology space this year. How can multinational companies such as yours improve the level and availability of cancer care solutions in India?

Oncology is a significant new therapeutic area for us considering the high prevalence of cancer, with India ranking among the top three countries globally on this score. Our ambition is to become a renowned, focused, and innovative player in oncology by targeting difficult and hard-to-treat cancers and to ensure patients benefit from our innovative treatments.

Regarding access and affordability, we've initiated patient access programs and special schemes to ensure patients can benefit from treatments at lower costs in India compared to other regions. We are in the process of recruiting the best talents in India to build a strong Oncology team and to launch 4 new treatments following the successful registration of products for pancreatic cancer and acute lymphoblastic leukemia, set to be launched in 2024. We are also actively working to bring targeted treatment options for cholangiocarcinoma and acute myeloid leukemia for patients in India. And even before the product registration, we're working to ensure patients have access to these treatments.

Do you feel the significance of steering this extensive global strategy within India and leading your team towards a comprehensive and inclusive approach?

Within the Servier 2030 ambition framework, the focus is to elevate India to a priority country for the group. This vision involves accelerating investment safely, expanding our reach for our cardio-metabolic franchises and introducing our oncology portfolio in India. We've aligned the transformation plan for India with the Group 2030 plan, focusing on positive social impacts, and making quality healthcare accessible and affordable. The strategy aims for us to become more agile, be a digital performer, and attract and develop a passionate and proud workforce. The implementation of Servier 2030 is a constant topic of discussion and direction for the team, engaging them to embrace the shared vision.

Is there anything else that you think should be conveyed?

I find the latest initiatives by the Indian authorities to be very promising. The plan for 2047 focuses on encouraging innovation and supporting research and development in India's healthcare sector, aiming to enhance the landscape for more local and global clinical trials. There's a notable shift

towards ensuring access to innovative medicine rather than merely being a country known for its generics, thus fostering more investment and innovation for both local and global companies.

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