

# Visionary Leadership

Driving Engineering Excellence in Africa with Vishal Haripersad

In the realm of engineering and project management consultancy, few leaders embody the blend of technical expertise, visionary leadership, and deep commitment to social impact as vividly as Vishal Haripersad. As the Regional Manager of Knight Piésold Southern Africa, Vishal's journey is a testament to resilience, innovation, and a profound dedication to the development of Africa and its people.

## A Career Rooted in Passion and Commitment

Reflecting on his career journey, Vishal Haripersad recalls his early fascination with engineering. "My career journey in the civil engineering field has been a rewarding one," he says. Growing up in the Indian township of Chatsworth on the east

coast of South Africa, Vishal was captivated by the intricate balance between natural forces and human ingenuity. This curiosity led him to pursue a degree in civil engineering, driven by a clear vision of contributing to impactful infrastructure projects.

Vishal's professional path has been marked by diverse experiences and significant milestones. "Over the years, I have had the privilege of working on a diverse array of projects and meeting different people across the African continent," he explains. Starting his career at Knight Piésold's Durban office, he specialized in road projects and progressively took on various roles within the company. His dedication to excellence and passion for Africa's development propelled him to the leadership position he holds today.

"I am proud to lead a team that is as committed to innovation and sustainability as I am," he asserts, highlighting the collective drive for African excellence that defines KP Southern Africa, with a legacy dating back to 1921.

## The Influence of Engineering Expertise on Leadership

Vishal's background in civil engineering has significantly shaped his leadership style. "My inspiration to pursue a career in civil engineering stems from a deep-seated desire to create sustainable and impactful solutions for communities," he notes. This engineering foundation has endowed him with critical problem-solving skills, attention to detail, and a systematic approach to challenges.



Vishal Haripersad,  
Regional Manager,  
Knight Piésold Southern Africa

"Engineering teaches you to think critically and approach problems with a solution-oriented mindset," he explains.

These skills have been invaluable in his role as a leader, allowing him to navigate complex projects and diverse teams with precision and foresight. Vishal's leadership philosophy is also influenced by insights from business literature, such as Jim Collins' "Good to Great." He quotes, "Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice and discipline," emphasizing the importance of deliberate action and steadfast commitment to excellence.

### Spearheading Development in Africa

Vishal's passion for the development is evident in the initiatives and projects he has spearheaded. "I am deeply passionate about the development of Africa, its people, and its industries," he states. Under his leadership, Knight Piésold has undertaken numerous projects aimed at fostering growth and innovation. Notable projects include the Neckartal Dam in Namibia, the Azambi Hydropower Plant in the DRC, and Phase II of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project.

"Our commitment to Africa's development is rooted in a belief that our continent has immense potential," Vishal explains.

Beyond large-scale infrastructure projects, Knight Piésold engages in Corporate Social Investment (CSI) initiatives, giving back to students and communities. Programs like the Graduate Development Program,

bursary programmes, internal mentorship programs, and local upliftment initiatives at schools are designed to train and mentor young engineers, equipping them with skills to tackle future challenges.

A core belief of Vishal's leadership philosophy is the African concept of Ubuntu, which emphasizes interconnectedness and mutual respect. "Ubuntu, which translates to 'I am because you are,' is known by various names across Africa," he explains. This principle is deeply ingrained in Knight Piésold's company culture, fostering a collaborative environment where collective success is prioritized over individual achievements.

### Championing Diversity and Inclusion

One of Vishal's greatest professional achievements at Knight Piésold is fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace. He has been a strong advocate for creating an environment



where every individual feels valued and respected, regardless of their background. "We've put in the effort to ensure that women and people of color are well-represented on our board of directors and among our shareholders," he explains. This intentional effort to promote diversity is not just about meeting quotas but about recognizing the invaluable contributions that different perspectives bring to the table.

By ensuring a diverse representation, Knight Piésold benefits from a broader range of ideas and solutions, which is crucial for innovation and effective decision-making. This diversity enriches discussions, leading to more robust strategies and outcomes. Vishal believes that a team composed of individuals from varied backgrounds can better understand and address the needs of diverse communities and clients.

"This diversity brings a variety of perspectives to decision-making processes, strengthening the team and

driving innovation," he notes. By fostering an inclusive culture, Vishal has helped create a dynamic and innovative environment at Knight Piésold, setting a standard for excellence and inclusivity in the industry.

### Navigating Industry Challenges

The engineering consultancy industry presents several challenges, particularly in retaining skilled professionals. Vishal has proactively implemented a variety of strategies to address these issues and ensure that Knight Piésold remains an attractive place to work. One of his key approaches has been the focus on continuous professional development. By offering ongoing training and upskilling opportunities, Vishal ensures that employees can stay abreast of the latest industry trends and technologies, which not only enhances their professional growth but also contributes to the overall success of the company.

In addition to professional development, under Vishal's leadership a hybrid working system was implemented that provides employees with greater flexibility. This system allows staff to balance their professional responsibilities with personal commitments, which is particularly important in today's evolving work environment.

"We realized that allowing staff to have more flexibility in their workdays creates a better work-life balance, which has been instrumental in attracting and retaining top talent," Vishal explains.

Mentorship and development programs also play a critical role in Vishal's strategy. By pairing less



experienced staff with seasoned professionals, these programs foster a culture of learning and collaboration. Employees benefit from the knowledge and expertise of their mentors, while mentors gain satisfaction from helping to shape the next generation of engineers.

"These initiatives demonstrate our commitment to employee growth and development," Vishal asserts, emphasizing the importance of creating an environment where staff feel valued and supported.

Through these comprehensive strategies, Vishal is not only addressing the immediate challenges of talent retention but also building a sustainable model for long-term success and innovation within Knight Piésold.

### Ensuring Global Collaboration

Operating on a global scale, Knight Piésold emphasizes effective

communication and collaboration across diverse regions and cultures. Vishal Haripersad, Regional Manager of KP Southern Africa, underscores the principles of African excellence and Ubuntu, fostering a culture of mutual respect and interconnectedness. This approach is bolstered by regular virtual meetings, collaborative platforms, and a commitment to cultural sensitivity, ensuring seamless teamwork and alignment across international offices.

By embracing these principles, Knight Piésold facilitates an environment where team members feel valued and encouraged to share insights and perspectives. This cultural inclusivity not only enhances internal collaboration but also enriches the innovation process, enabling the company to deliver comprehensive solutions to complex engineering challenges worldwide.

Moreover, Vishal's strategy extends



beyond internal dynamics to encompass meaningful engagement with local communities and stakeholders. This proactive involvement ensures that Knight Piésold's projects are not only technically sound but also culturally and socially aligned with the regions they serve, fostering trust and sustainable development.

This integrated approach to global collaboration positions Knight Piésold as a leader in the engineering consultancy sector, capable of navigating diverse challenges while maintaining a cohesive global strategy focused on excellence and community impact.

### Vision for the Future

Looking ahead, Vishal Haripersad, Regional Manager of KP Southern Africa, is focused on sustaining the company's growth and fostering innovation while maintaining a steadfast commitment to sustainability and engineering excellence. His vision includes expanding Knight Piésold's presence in emerging markets, leveraging their extensive expertise to deliver impactful projects that promote economic development and environmental stewardship.

"We aim to broaden our footprint in emerging markets, utilizing our

expertise to deliver impactful projects," Vishal emphasizes. This strategic approach not only aims to meet current engineering challenges but also to anticipate and address future needs in diverse regions.

Through effective leadership and a dedication to empowering their workforce, Knight Piésold seeks to build a legacy of excellence. Vishal's leadership philosophy emphasizes creating opportunities for personal and professional growth within the company, ensuring that employees are equipped to drive innovation and success in their respective roles.

By embracing these principles, Vishal

Haripersad and Knight Piésold are poised to continue their contributions to Africa's development, shaping a future where engineering excellence serves as a catalyst for sustainable progress and community prosperity.

### Guiding the Future of African Business and Engineering

Aspiring business leaders in Africa face a journey filled with challenges and opportunities. Vishal Haripersad, Regional Manager at KP Southern Africa, emphasizes the importance of staying true to one's vision and values while embracing innovation. "Resilience and adaptability are crucial," he advises, underscoring the need to hire and empower talented individuals. "Creating an environment where people feel valued and respected is fundamental," he adds, highlighting the transformative impact on both company success and community advancement.

At Knight Piésold, nurturing future generations of engineers and project managers in Africa is a cornerstone commitment. Through comprehensive initiatives including bursaries, financial support, and hands-on training via the Graduate Development Programme, Vishal ensures that young professionals gain practical insights and skills.

"Our programs bridge the gap between academic knowledge and real-world application," he explains, preparing the next cohort of leaders to tackle industry challenges and drive innovation across the continent.

### Achieving Work-Life Balance

Balancing a demanding role in a global consultancy with personal life is no small feat. Vishal emphasizes

the importance of strict time management, setting clear boundaries, and engaging in activities that provide relaxation and rejuvenation. "My family is a crucial source of motivation and support," he says, underscoring the significance of spending quality time with loved ones.

Spiritual well-being, mindfulness, and physical exercise are also integral to Vishal's routine. "Practices like mindfulness enhance my focus and clarity," he explains, while regular exercise boosts his energy and mental sharpness. Engaging in outdoor adventures and reading are among his favorite activities for recharging. Additionally, working with like-minded individuals who are committed to Africa's growth is a significant source of motivation for him.

### Empowering Future Leaders

Empowering individuals and teams is a cornerstone of Vishal's leadership approach. He is deeply committed to nurturing talent and fostering growth within the organization. He shares a poignant success story from the KP bursary programme, which exemplifies this dedication. In this instance, a student from KwaZulu-Natal received a bursary to pursue a degree in civil engineering at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. This opportunity not only allowed the student to achieve academic success but also paved the way for a promising career.

Today the student has transitioned from being a bursary student to becoming a permanent and integral member of Knight Piésold's Structures team.

Vishal notes, "It was a defining moment in his career to witness the impact of investing in people and communities and the profound impact it has on someone's life."

He believes that providing educational opportunities and professional development is crucial for building a strong, capable workforce. This story highlights the importance of such initiatives in creating lasting change and fostering a culture of empowerment and growth within the company. By prioritizing the development of individuals, Vishal not only enhances the capabilities of his team but also contributes to the broader goal of sustainable development and progress in the engineering field.

### Conclusion

Vishal Haripersad's journey from a young engineering enthusiast in a small township in Durban to the Regional Manager of KP Southern Africa is a story of passion, dedication, and visionary leadership. His commitment to Africa's development, combined with his technical expertise and inclusive leadership style, has not only driven Knight Piésold's success but also inspired a new generation of engineers and leaders. As Vishal continues to steer the company towards a future of innovation and sustainability, his story serves as a beacon of excellence and a testament to the power of visionary leadership in shaping a better world.

