

MATERIALIZING LEADERSHIP: FROM OIL AND GAS TO RENEWABLE ENERGIES

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“You have a whole generation now ready to handle this transition”



Following our series on transitioning from Oil & Gas (O&G) to Renewable energies, with 30 years of experience in Energy, from Melbourne to London, Oslo and Paris for companies like Seabird Exploration, CGG and Harkand, Christophe Debouvry, CEO of DORIS Group, gives us his point of view.

WALK US THROUGH HOW DORIS IS DEALING WITH RENEWABLES

Christophe Debouvry. DORIS has 4 main lines of activity including renewables. We have been active in this industry for about 20 years, involved since the early days when the UK started to launch offshore wind projects. DORIS developed this skill over the years in the context of the fixed wind turbines segment. We have since been working in different countries in Europe, pioneer in this domain, and we started developing in Asia 3 years ago with a great project and the opening of an office in Taiwan. We are a recognized and renowned renewables actor there and we are now looking towards South Korea and Japan.

THERE IS A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TOTAL AND DORIS, INCLUDING ON SUBSEA ACTIVITIES. ACCORDING TO YOUR EXPERIENCE - AND AS CEO - IS IT EASY TO TRANSFORM THIS KIND OF O&G RELATIONSHIP TO RENEWABLES?

It is not difficult. We are engaged into regular discussions at highest level with TOTAL and other players about renewable projects including offshore wind.

We can transfer skills from one sector to another relatively smoothly. Like for DORIS, most people dealing with offshore wind technology within oil companies have an O&G background.

In addition, DORIS has also designed a floating wind turbine. With TOTAL recently publicly announcing floating wind projects as part of their strategy, discussions on the topic are therefore totally natural between our two firms.

We have also been observing, for a few years now, the arrival in this market of start-ups that we did not see in O&G. However, they are usually not well equipped to handle long-term and complex projects and therefore do not represent a hurdle in our transition towards more renewables.

Economically speaking, **the main difference between O&G and renewables is project dynamic.** Development of wind farms takes time because they require a lot of authorizations and legal recourse. The pace is not the same. **The level of risk is also lower than in O&G and thus, the level of profitability.**

Talking about offshore renewables, we are dealing with:

- Fixed wind turbines: They represent almost all commercial wind farms in the world at the moment, **O&G experts clearly have the necessary skills and represent an asset** in the context of offshore wind farm developments.

The second advantage is our project management skills: **O&G professionals and service companies can handle complex projects from A to Z.** Throughout wind farm developments, a mix of relatively specialized people and services is required and leveraging the experience of O&G professionals to coordinate the various phases of each unique project is a real advantage. In O&G, we spend our life doing this and are therefore best adapted to apply our experience in this context.

As fixed wind turbines are installed in near-shore shallow water, the limit of our implication generally comes in the maintenance phase of installed wind farms for which local people, smaller boats and a lesser skill level are required. Need for our services is then generally more limited.

- Floating wind turbines: These lie in more than 50m water depth, further offshore. When this segment ramps-up, and it will, it will be interesting for us because the environment is more complex, with more sustained winds and harsher seas further away from the coast. This represents a situation that the O&G industry handles every day and where barriers to entry for newcomers will be high.

There are no borders between these two worlds when we speak about offshore renewables. DORIS has the reputation of having highly-capable engineers performing very complex tasks. The same skills can be made available to renewable projects. It is a continuum with different characteristics that is of real interest.

YOU ARE TRANSFERRING MORE AND MORE O&G ENGINEERS TO THE RENEWABLE SECTOR BECAUSE IT'S A GROWING PART OF DORIS BUSINESS.

WHAT DO THESE PEOPLE BRING IMMEDIATELY AND WHAT ARE THE THINGS THEY NEED TO LEARN?

DORIS has 55 years of experience with O&G developments. The move, in the past 20 years, towards renewables and offshore fixed wind turbines requiring project management and offshore installation with maritime resources gave O&G experts the advantage.

Today, we are at a turning point. The world has become more aware of the environment and climate change. Five years ago, there was a large proportion of marketing in the O&G companies' promotion of renewable facilities and products, but now things have changed and are moving fast.

The transition is launched at DORIS where we develop renewable technologies (wind but also projects on hydrogen) and we are also looking at reducing the carbon footprint in O&G. **We are dealing with renewable, sustainable, and social responsibility.** For the latter, for instance, West African national oil companies request our services to give insights on how to develop responsibly. We are also conducting an interesting pipeline project to bring potable water to a remote location in Chile.

We are also very active in **digitalisation**, and we signed 3 months ago a partnership with AVEVA and SCHNEIDER ELECTRIC, to put in common our knowledge on digital twins to optimize design, planning and people management on offshore platforms. This digital twin technology developed for O&G is directly applicable to the Renewable sector and puts us in a leading role.

There is a global movement in which we believe, and which is imposing, and will impose, itself. It is an evolution of great interest to a lot of our young engineers.

ENGINEERS ARE PUTTING PRESSURE TO WORK ON RENEWABLES?

Of course! As I said before, what was societal pressure on companies to go from O&G to renewables has now levelled up, Europeans being at the forefront, but now, there is also internal pressure from engineers to create a more responsible world, especially important to the younger generations.

In-house, there is an obvious enthusiasm among our teams and this evolution provides them with the feeling of working for a better and more responsible future for the company, their family and friends, and the world.

The traditional world of O&G is used to making highly technical one-off projects but sometimes has difficulties to transition to large series of structures. Working on wind projects, we clearly benefit from having a mix of people used to dealing with such large series and O&G professionals. Combined with the enthusiasm fostered by economical and societal issues, **you have a whole generation now ready to handle this transition.**

Another thing appeals to engineers when working in the renewable segment: before, O&G professionals used to travel on all continents to work, but nowadays the younger generation is less eager to do so. Most of the O&G fields are located in exotic destinations whereas, for renewables, most developments are made in developed countries. Europe being pioneer, followed by North-East Asia, the USA (around Boston mainly, where we also have an office). Place of work and less business travel will represent an advantage pushing young generations to make the first step into the renewable world more easily.

AND AS A CONCLUSION...

From a technological perspective, there is still a lot to discover. **Renewable energy as it is today cannot provide all our energy needs.** And this brings new complexities like large-scale energy storage. We need to continue working to optimize existing and find new green and renewable energy solutions. Hydrogen may be part of the equation. There is in any case a real opportunity for engineers to reflect on how to move things forward and play a key role in the energy transition momentum the world is engaged into today.