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Shifting Strategies

In his first eight months of leadership, Managing Director of Konica Minolta Australia Dr David Cooke has radically transformed the culture and processes of the company.

Images by Scott Ehler

“If you get the internal stuff right, then the external things like market share, growth, and profitability will follow. It’s my intention to focus quite a bit of attention on culture.”

- David Cooke

Konica Minolta Australia is undergoing an extensive period of transformation as Managing Director Dr David Cooke implements a raft of changes to the company’s culture, operations, and values. As the Australian arm of a global print-solutions and software corporation, Konica Minolta Australia is introducing innovations and daring developments that the organisation’s global network will explore and emulate in coming years.

David says he first joined the growing company eight years ago after gaining more than two decades worth of experience in the print- and IT-solutions industry. “I have previously worked for two of our large competitors,” David says. “In April of this year, I was appointed to the position of managing director of Konica Minolta. A key point of difference is that I am the first non-Japanese managing director of Konica Minolta.

“There’s a little bit of a trend globally to have local people as the country manager, rather than

rotating Japanese executives from head office through each region. Australia has now gone that way as well.”

David says he will take action on his clear plans and intentions as the company evolves. “I intend to focus on culture. I actually feel that it’s important from the point of view of making Konica Minolta a better place to work for and with, but also because I believe a lot of our future success will be based on cultural change within the business.

“If you get the internal stuff right, then the external things like market share, growth, and profitability will follow. It’s my intention to focus quite a bit of attention on culture. In fact, I recently met with an external consultancy company that will give me a bit of a hand with that.”

This external consultancy company will help Konica Minolta accurately analyse its culture and processes using its innovative Market Responsiveness Index. “We’ll survey every single staff member within Konica Minolta to get their opinion on whether they think our organisation is a customer-focused or customer-centric company, as

well as what areas we could improve in,” David says. “We’ll do regression analysis on all of that information and compile it into a benchmarking exercise. We’ll determine where we are today and where we want to be in the future.

“It also compares us to a number of other organisations in their >



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database, not just within the technology field but other companies globally. We think that's a pretty good starting point to measure ourselves, take a hard look in the mirror, and take it from there.

“When I've mentioned it to staff members in the lift or canteen, they have been thrilled with the idea because they finally get a say in the shaping of the company. They need to know that I value their opinion. Through some mechanism or another, I want to



talk to everybody that I can within the business.”

David's proactive approach will ensure that he sparks significant shifts within the company, which he says was in sore need of an overhaul. “I probably have some criticisms about the way the organisation was structured in the past. Maybe ‘criticism’ is too harsh a word; but when you move from Japanese management to Australian management, you're inevitably going to get different management models being rolled out and used.

“All of my MBA studies and doctoral studies have informed me about certain management practices that I'm very comfortable with. However, I haven't necessarily been able to implement those broadly across the business.

“In the past, we've been a bit too siloed and departmentalised. Parts of the company were working autonomously from each other. One of the key things that I'd like to achieve is a far more integrated structure with increased communication between departments.”

To meet this goal, David says he will introduce a range of initiatives to Konica Minolta. “I've already started to implement a regular letter from the managing director at the end of every month informing staff about our financial results and market share and things like that, which was information not previously shared with them.

“That's received a very good response from people, many of whom stop me in the corridors and thank me for letting them know where they fit in the greater scheme of things. It's very simple stuff. It's in every MBA textbook and it's been taught at Harvard for 100 years; but as a Japanese company, we haven't necessarily applied all of these principles in the past.”

The power of transparency and open communication cannot be

overemphasised in the business world. David says he's already reaped substantial benefits from this approach. “An organisation is its people; and since I've notified people of the fact that I'm very open to receiving feedback, I've already had several employees make appointments to come and see me. They share the good, the bad, and the ugly about their job, their department, and the company.

“It's very valuable, and it will help me make the appropriate changes that we need to make, rather than just making assumptions from my level about what we need to change. There are plenty of people out there who can tell me, and they'll be spot on.”

David also liaises and communicates with the Konica Minolta head office in Japan to discuss developments and innovations for the company. “Head office and my boss support me, but it's up to me how often I want to have that contact. There are all sorts of reports that head office requires to go through regularly that are generally compiled by other people in the organisation, like financial reports, inventory levels, and things of that nature.

“I've just been given a brief to get on with it. I asked a very simple question of the senior manager whom I report to when he came out here to install me. I asked him, ‘Why did you give me the job?’ He paused briefly, smiled, and said, ‘Because I know you'll do a great job.’ I then asked him, ‘May I ask why you have me directly reporting to you?’

“He has global responsibilities and looks after a range of different countries, while Australia represents about 2 per cent of Konica Minolta's global turnover. He paused again and said, ‘Because I know you're going to be very innovative as a managing director and implement some very good policies, procedures, and methodologies within the company in Australia. By reporting directly to me, I've got a clear line of sight

so that I can take those ideas and use them around our global operations.’ I thought that was a great vote of confidence. He's there when I need him.”

This relationship will prove crucial in the future as Konica Minolta, both domestically and internationally, faces the same challenges as its industry. “Sales are relatively flat for technology at the moment, and it's a very competitive industry,” David explains. “There are lots of choices when it comes to network printing and scanning, document-management software, and software to provide greater security on networks. All of these things are needs that companies have that are supplied by multiple vendors and which tend to suppress margin.

“We have those challenges, and we seek to differentiate ourselves from our competitors. I have some strategies around that, and they're largely to do with who Konica Minolta is. If the technology is similar, then there has to be something else that sets you apart. I'm trying to do that through people and attitude.”

Since taking over as managing director, David has been using a simple mantra, which is that he wants Konica Minolta to become synonymous with a company that cares. David says he spoke to all of his staff and channel partners about caring in three areas.

“I want us to become synonymous with caring for the people who work for and with Konica Minolta, as well as caring for our customers and caring for the community in which we operate. I think if we can actually fulfil the idea that we do genuinely care and we can become known for that, people will gravitate to us.”

This caring culture will be supported by the exceptional technology of Konica Minolta. “The technology that's made by our Japanese parent company wins multiple awards worldwide year in, year out,” states David. “*Buyers Laboratory International* is a US



magazine that tests this type of technology constantly. Every year, they do a big wrap-up of which vendor in this space has the best line of the year, taking all their products and determining, after all the testing, which is the best. Konica Minolta has won that three years in a row, which has only ever happened once before, in the 1990s.

“The technology is great, but the Konica Minolta brand is not as well known as some of the brands we compete against, so what's our main point of differentiation? Our people and our attitude. We're a very flexible company. We have an ethos of listening and responding to our customers' needs. If we drop the ball, which we do occasionally, as nobody's perfect, we'll always respond very quickly. That's what our customers who are engaging with us tell us.”

To reinforce this ethos of listening and caring, David says he and his team invest in staff training and development. “We do what I imagine a lot of companies do, which is investing into learning and development internally. We're constantly taking people through courses around dealing with customers and being more customer-centric.

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- David Cooke

“We also pay for external personal development. People can make submissions to go on a course, a two-day seminar, or an MBA program, and we'll fund those things either with the staff member or, depending on their role within the company, the whole thing.

“Getting outside Konica Minolta, learning through external bodies, and being exposed to other people from other programs and companies is going to reap massive rewards for us when they come back with that knowledge. I won't say that we're totally a learning organisation yet, but we're moving in that direction in terms of a substantial cultural shift.”

Konica Minolta is consistently growing and changing as David improves not only its staff training and culture but its technology and systems as well. “We are a technology company ourselves, so we're selling technology to enable processes and successful growth within our client base, and obviously we use our own technology inside the business,” says David. “At the same time, in terms of other technology, we're making very big investments in our ERP systems and we're virtualising servers.

“We have a lot of people on the road outside the organisation >



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As any technology company will know, flexibility and mobility are essential to ensure the sustainability and productivity of an organisation's operations and offering. David's long-term, big-picture approach can be felt in every corner of Konica Minolta, including its corporate social-responsibility program.

"Corporate social responsibility is something that I've personally embraced and believe in," David states. "For all corporations, irrespective of my personal interest, I think it just makes sense because I believe that society has an expectation these days that if you're drawing profits from the community, then some of those profits should go back to the community.

"That's done simply through employment and things of that nature. But if you look at most large Australian companies, they all kind of get that and have heard that message. Generally, you'll find that they're partnering with various charitable organisations.

"I believe the benefits for a corporation are twofold, both internal and external. The internal tend to be around staff engagement with charitable partners, volunteering days, and working within the charity itself. The external ones tend to be brand recognition, with your brand held in greater esteem by the community at large because of your association with the not-for-profit community."

David asked staff to vote on what charities they'd like to support in various categories. Staff chose Landcare Australia in the environmental sector, The Smith Family in the social sector, and the Breast Cancer Network of Australia in the health sector. Konica Minolta works closely with these charities and encourages staff to get involved. Additionally, David says they recently added a fourth charity in the humanitarian sector.

"Project Futures raises funds for the Somaly Mam Foundation in Cambodia, the Salvation Army Safe House in Sydney, and Child Wise in Melbourne. Those three organisations are all devoted to ending human trafficking and sexual exploitation, and providing counselling and safe environments for people who have been rescued from that type of life. We've recently become very strongly engaged with Project Futures here in Sydney."

Partnerships with important charitable partners, internal partnerships with staff, and external channel partnerships will encourage collaboration and communication across Konica Minolta and its relationships. As the company continues to develop, David says, the people and the organisation's culture and attitude will be a critical component of its success.

"We're very much in growth mode. Looking at the latest market-share figures, we've just moved up one spot to third, which we're very happy about. We're all about engaging with companies and government departments across Australia from the largest down to SME level.

"We've previously been known as a hardware company selling network printing, copying, and scanning devices, but we're increasingly leveraging off that existing relationship since we've become trusted technology advisers, and we're starting to talk to them more broadly about their needs," David concludes.

"We're starting to develop a much broader solutions business around software and IT services, so offering a broader range of services and taking our customers on that journey with us is one of the ways we're growing our presence in the Australian market."

A caring culture and a focus on its people and partnerships will serve Konica Minolta well in coming years as the technology industry rapidly evolves. •