

IRC EMEA: Navigating the Future

Stepan Motejzik | May 3, 2019

The spring summit of IRC leaders from Europe, the Middle East and Africa and guest leaders from major European enterprises gathered in London to grapple with a significant challenge of our times: how can businesses ride the storm of technological change and remain competitive? Can you calm the storm before it blows you off course?

Executive Summary

The London IRC EMEA 2019 conference focused its keynote event on navigating through a future of constant 'tech' changes and dynamics and asked its delegates to consider three challenges:

1. How to make organisations 'future ready'?
2. How to transform leaders to be 'future-fit'?
3. How to balance individual and organisational values and purposes?

The headline findings are:

- Embracing new and emerging technologies is essential to all strategic planning, to aid transformation and to benefit customers.
- Constantly be alert to the sources of 'tech' breakthroughs and look for alliances with cutting-edge 'start-ups' and strategic partnerships with developers.
- Development for leaders, their managers and the workforce must be 'career-long' and focus heavily on technical development. Without it you and your business can become irrelevant or extinct.
- Rapid technological change carries risks so mitigate them. First, everyone must speak the same tech language in the company – ensure all team members understand what everyone else in the room means. Second, always use technology

for a clear purpose and not just because it's there. We have to understand why the customer needs a solution. Third, risk is unsettling: be sure everyone understands why you are taking the risks and how you are managing them.

- Communicate! Communicate! Communicate! Explain, expand, explore with your teams
- Keep the Vision – but be nimble, flexible and agile to change the strategy when circumstances demand.
- Energy, enthusiasm and commitment are key attributes for leaders.

The central session of the Conference focused on key issues: how can we run businesses and equip managers and workforce alike to confront and overcome the challenges of a world in constant digital and data flux, a world in which leaders and employees must develop and 'up-skill' to remain relevant – because irrelevance leads to extinction.

The message from contributors was clear: ensure that technological development is embedded in the strategy and be certain that everyone in the workforce – staff and managers alike – stays relevant. To achieve that companies must train, develop, and empower staff themselves to grow. Equip them, communicate with them – and listen to them.

The tone of the day was set by David Haley, Senior Vice President of Atos, heading the BTS division which is a major business transformation leader. Atos provides global outsourcing services to clients such as the Olympic Games (IT and results), Aegon, BBC iPlayer and NS&I, Britain's national savings bank. His own division has 5,500 employees and turns over c£450m a year.

In his keynote address, he vividly described how technology and workforce development are at the heart of his business. It was essential that all senior leaders – including himself – were conversant in necessary technologies. Encouraging all employees to volunteer for the training, he described those wishing to transform their own careers and prospects become 'change agents', going back into the business to encourage others to follow.



David Haley, Senior VP of Atos, at the IRC EMEA C-Suite Summit 2019

The delegates then set out to discuss three questions about the survival and growth of businesses in a world in which change is constant, rapid and unpredictable:

- How do you create an organisation ready for the future?
- How do you transform leaders to be ‘future-fit’?
- How do you balance a company’s values and beliefs with those of its leaders and aspiring leaders?

These were the conclusions:

Organisational Readiness to Navigate the Future

- *Leaders with Customer-Facing Experience are the Key.* While organisational structures and technical capability are vital, managers without the breadth of experience and particularly of dealing with customers will fall short when the challenges arise.
- *Diplomacy.* Hakan Bortecene, Chairman of Turkish Bank, said diplomatic skills were essential too for modern leaders, not only to manage contracts and customers but also to handle employees.
- *Being Connected.* David Haley of Atos stressed the need for businesses to understand the new and emerging technologies – quantum computing, Big Data and 5G and others as they develop – to ensure customers could benefit.

- *Identify Future Competitors.* Though tomorrow's competitors may not yet even exist, future-proof businesses will aim to identify the most likely sources of competition. David Haley advocated leveraging SMEs because future leadership will come from different places.
- *Continuing Development.* Again David Haley, who emphasised this in his keynote address, underlined it – individuals must develop, or they risk being left behind. Clients expect continuing development, employers can enable it, but individuals have to be willing to engage.
- *Market Digital Services for a Purpose – Not Just Because They Exist.* Work with your customer in mind at all times and understand why you are advocating a course of action
- *Don't Make Assumptions About 'Tech' Adoption Among Customers.* Rosie Ayoub, UK MD of Norstat, a market research company, pointed out that while telephone polling remains an important tool, landline adoption has fallen in favour of mobile.
- *Working in Multiple Cultures.* Mike Evans, formerly Global Head of Media at Dyson, highlighted how colleagues in China work in a different culture to those in the USA or the UK – but simultaneously all work in the very particular 'Dyson culture'. That skill had to be learned.
- *Energy, Enthusiasm and Commitment.* These, declared Richard Boot, Chairman of IRC UK, were the key attributes for leaders.



Richard Boot, Chairman of IRC UK, at the IRC EMEA C-Suite Summit 2019

Transforming Current Leaders to be Future Ready

- *Speak the Same Language.* Klaas van de Poppe, CEO of the Ridder Group, agricultural technology providers, explained that in a world of multiple technologies and vast amounts of data it was essential that everyone on the board dealt in the same definitions and ‘languages’. By example, he described how a combination of new technologies like big data, artificial intelligence and robotics could create autonomous greenhouses, which will result in substantial yield increases for growers. However, that successful outcome can be achieved only if the board is fully aligned on what the benefits of these new technologies could be, but also what investments are needed to get access to it. As a leader of the company, you must ensure that there is a common understanding of what the added value of big data, artificial intelligence and machine learning could be for your business.
- *Invest in Yourself and with Start-Ups.* Klaas again – echoing David Haley - said he personally spent time studying AI as a vital aid in helping identify new and up-and-coming technologies the company will need access to he might hire. Get to know the world and mindset of start-ups too, he advocated. Young businesses are often first to the ‘tech’ breakthroughs but lack the structures and networks to develop a specific market segment. Strategic cooperation between a large company and a start-up can be a very powerful combination.
- *Keep the Vision, But Adapt the Strategy.* In a changing world, hold firm to the vision, ‘the red dot on the horizon,’ as Klaas described it, but be prepared to adapt the strategy to meet challenges.
- *Speed Is Essential.* Mike Evans added that speed is an essential partner to vision. Dyson, he said, is a disruptor. They test new technologies, and it is vital they learn very swift lessons and put them into practice.
- *Leading Without Authority.* Modern managers, Mike Evans declared, have to be influencers. In a global organisation, he must ‘influence’ those over whom he has no direct territorial authority to ensure the global strategy stays on course, notwithstanding the cultural and geographic prisms through which the message travels. Patrick Gutmann, CEO of UBA, observed that different markets had different expectations of leadership and styles. Some favour a harder, more driven style which others would reject. It was important to find a style that ‘fits’ without ever diverging from the core values.
- *Risk-Taking as Part of the Culture.* Mike Evans said risk-taking was essential. “If risk-taking is not in the culture of the company then that itself is a challenge.”
- *Communicate, Communicate, Communicate!* Colleagues pointed out that risk itself can create fear within a company and ‘fear is the enemy of innovation.’

Therefore, continual communication is essential. Employees are diverse and have widely differing mindsets. Everyone must feel included – so communicate and eradicate the fear.

- *Understand Your People.* Helen Curtis, HR Director of BACB, urged leaders to give employees time to think and talk more about what they were trying to achieve and how they were approaching their goals.
- *Keeping the Team ‘Together’.* Kevin Urrutia, Asurion’s Senior Director Technology, Europe, continued with the ‘people’ theme, saying he saw the workforce as ‘owners’ of the business. Helping employees to understand the core values of the business can help grow teams that are innovative and responsive.



IRC EMEA C-Suite Summit 2019 in London

Balancing Between Organisational Purpose and Individual Purpose

- *Keep the Mission Moving.* Values and attitudes change, and it is essential that leaders and managers keep a constant check through surveys and workshops. Employees must be part of this discussion; values cannot be forced upon them. Dialogue is vital if values are to be shared and transferred.
- *Feedback.* Internal communications are the key. Workers, especially younger employees, want feedback but Mathias Friedrichs, MD of IRC Germany, said new and quicker ways of feeding back needed to be developed to meet the expectations.
- *Changing Mind-Sets.* The appeal to staff cannot be based purely on financial performance – there has to be evidence of what some refer to as ‘the noble cause’

in the mission statement if it is to inspire employees. Again, Patrick Gutmann observed there has to be clarity about why the leadership is invoking change and this has to be backed by fact and emotional appeal, suggesting staff have to feel the need for the change. Not all will join, some will need persuasion. As well as flexibility, subtlety and adaptability, leaders need diplomacy to carefully manage staff and clients.

- *The Leaders' Check-List*. Finally, Marco Alemagna of IRC Italy, presented a 'checklist' of traits vital for future leaders: flexibility, adaptability, humility (give credit to the team and protect them), modesty, be a listener ("don't tell' – listen"), curiosity, energy, cultural awareness, challenge yourself and others – and 'be able to put yourself in someone else's shoes.



Stepan Motejzik

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Stepan has 15-year track record in business process management across multiple sectors. After his studies he spent five years leading nationwide projects and promotional campaigns in major Czech marketing and media agency. Then he extended his activities to a global level running key accounts in the luxury chandelier production before he felt in love with the HR industry where he remained until today, mostly being in charge of global process and project management.

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