



Empowering Change in a Global Organisation

David Comeau, Criticaleye Board Mentor and former President for Asia Pacific at Mondelēz International, tells Dawn Murden how he motivated his leadership team through a period of organisational change

What organisational change took place at Mondelēz?

Mondelēz transformed from a country-focused set of independent operating units into a category-focused global organisation without borders. I think a lot of people struggle with this pendulum swing between how centralised or de-centralised a company should be.

It was critical to make changes as the rules and responsibilities were not clear and we had layers of decision-makers that were conflicting.

For example, there was a brand manager for Oreo in Latin America who thought they were growing the brand globally, but there was also a brand manager in each country.

We hadn't addressed how the local teams would be involved or how the new order was going to run; it was difficult to accomplish anything.

We worked with the countries to redesign the organisation and asked their opinion on the best way to accomplish what we were trying to do. Collectively, we

designed a structure that would allow us to operate globally but still be effective on a local basis.

What impact did this change have on the team dynamic?

Once we had a broad and deep alignment on the goals and objectives of the new organisation, the enthusiasm of the team was much higher. People were bringing more aggressive plans and asking for more investment, which was supported across the organisation. There was more momentum. >



How did you empower your leadership team in APAC?

We wanted to be known as an inclusive leadership team. We would go out of our way to bring people from other countries into our team-building sessions and discussions.

We became known as the team that got it right. We were actually asked to help out others and share some of the things we had done to accelerate our progress.

So, it was important to bust silos across the company on a global scale?

As a leader you have to lead by example. You cannot encourage siloed behaviour; the risk is that a lot of the people who operate in silos are functional experts and that creates a barrier.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR FORMER SELF?

Have the courage to think beyond the limit of your mind.

A lot of companies are caught up in planning conservative three to five per cent growth, but there should be room for people to ask what they need to do to hit 25 per cent. That sort of aggressive thinking opens up a lot more opportunities.

When I was younger I tried to come across as a dependable, reasonable business leader, as opposed to a creative, breakthrough leader. Only later did I focus on breakthrough leadership.

Did you face any challenges in achieving that?

I always encouraged my team to speak up early and often so that issues didn't fester.

If there were members of the team that were having difficulties I would address them individually to bring them back on track rather than calling them out publicly.

Did you encourage the use of leadership development tools?

Yes. There has to be room for self-development as part of building a high-performing team; this is where 360 degree feedback and individual leadership training comes in.

Every team meeting should have an agenda item that furthers the development of the team. I always weaved agenda points into every team meeting that drove us to improve.

However, it's important to remember you never finish building a high-performing team, you're always having to readjust. You never get there, you're always going there.

Did you seek any help from HR when it came to strengthening the leadership team?

Absolutely. I found it instrumental to develop a partnership with the human resources leader to develop unique ways to build the team.

We would have strategy sessions on actions to take; it could be as simple as identifying who needed further self-

development training, or the experiences we wanted to give the leadership team as we moved forward.

For example, at one point we felt that we spent too much time in the office and not enough in the retail environment. So, we had a full day meeting presenting and discussing our agenda, while travelling around the city on a bus. We stopped every 30 minutes to go into a store and then talked about what we saw.

It was a stimulating and non-traditional way to engage the team and also build some experiential learning. ■

David was a speaker at Criticaleye's Asia Leadership Retreat, in association with Accenture and CEIBs. Find out more [here](#)



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David is a board mentor at Criticaleye.

His most recent executive role was as President of the Asia Pacific region for Mondelēz International, where he was responsible for all biscuit food operations in the Asia Pacific region with a \$1.5 Billion portfolio and significant in-market organisations in both India and China.

He was directly responsible for developing iconic brands, such as Oreo, Chips Ahoy! and Belvita, and has over 28 years' experience in the consumer food industry.

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