

FIELD SERVICE NEWS



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**BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE
SERVICE MODEL WITH
REMOTE SERVICE AS THE
DEFAULT**



UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS CHANGE FOR REMOTE SERVICE IS BECOMING A CRITICAL AREA OF FOCUS FOR THE FIELD SERVICE SECTOR

We have seen the field service sector take a quantum leap forward in the last two years in terms of the widespread adoption of remote service delivery as an accepted approach to keep our customers' assets up and running and resolve their problems quickly and effectively.

For some companies, the adoption of remote service delivery was a patch, a work-around, a means of getting the job done in times of enormous disruption. However, many had already acknowledged the extensive role remote service delivery would play in the future of their service operations. For others, they were perhaps caught in the middle.

On the one hand, these companies were ready to embrace a bold new approach to delivering maintenance and serving their clients more efficiently while improving the bottom line.

However, it was a journey where the destination seemed like a dot on the horizon, many years away. There would be significant challenges to overcome, including establishing the processes that would allow for a radical shift in core business processes.

However, perhaps the most significant barrier would be convincing the customers that this was a journey they would also want to take. The benefits of embracing remote service weren't just the benefits of a leaner shift-left policy of the service provider.

This wasn't merely an opportunity for the service provider to reduce costs and retain fees. The customer needed to see that by embracing remote service as part of the service offering, they would be receiving better care, greater uptime, and almost instant resolution to any problems that may arise.

The arguments for remote service were well laid out, yet, when taking a new

turn so sharply away from the status quo, even the most compelling cases can take time to take root. Remote service was, until the pandemic at least, a tough sell.

Yet, for all the pain and hardship it wrought, the pandemic made us as an industry realise that remote service lived up to all the hyped potential, and now the discussion has been flipped. The customer who steadfastly refused to see the benefits of remote service is now asking for those exact same solutions.

Most field service companies introduced some layer of remote service to find a means of working throughout the lockdowns. However, the solutions and processes in place were often rudimentary in nature and clumsily executed.

Now, with remote service becoming an integral part of the service portfolio, we must anticipate that simply being able to offer remote service delivery is not enough; being able to do so in a professional manner that delights our customers will soon become table-stakes in the ever-increasing list of expectations our customers hold.

In many ways, the technology is the easiest part of the puzzle; for FSN PRO subscribers, there is already [a raft of premium resources outlining technology selection and best practices for driving the adoption of remote services](#).

However, having held several interviews and workshops in the last six months with a number of field service management professionals, what many are finding more challenging is developing and executing the process changes required.

With this in mind, Field Service News has partnered with [Konica Minolta and AIRe Link](#), to produce this white paper that looks at how they have moved their business to one where the approach to service and maintenance is to move towards remote service becoming the default first resolution.

THE SHIFT TO REMOTE SERVICES AS DEFAULT IS NEITHER AN OPERATIONAL DISCUSSION NOR A TECHNOLOGY DISCUSSION, IT IS A STRATEGIC BUSINESS DISCUSSION

To begin, we must acknowledge that the move to remote service becoming the dominant means of service delivery is not a discussion simply around service operations, nor is it based around technology. While both of these areas are crucial aspects of the conversation, they should not be the primary drivers.

The move to remote service-as-a-default has to be viewed as a significant strategic shift across the whole business. The primary reason for this is that by moving to remote service as the first means of resolving our customers' service requirements, many of the old facets of the service contract become largely obsolete.

In a world of remote-service delivery, the standard Service Level Agreements (SLA) that we are all accustomed to, are in many ways are no longer required. SLA adherence was a crucial element within the service contract in the past.

However, as our industry has moved towards servitization, a guarantee that a field service engineer would be on-site to resolve a problem within a set time of a fault being logged makes way for guarantees of uptime. In this setting, resolving issues remotely becomes even more critical.

The reality is that potentially remote service allows the service provider to assist the customer almost instantly, something that, even with the most efficient service operations in the world, isn't possible without placing a field service engineer on the customer's site 24-7 – which is, of course, cost-prohibitive for almost all service scenarios.

Ultimately, with the key trendlines of increasing servitization and the adoption of remote service solutions converging, some significant strategic changes at the business level need to be considered as we move forward.

"We started with a remote-by-default project to enable ourselves to have centralised specialist support for our field service engineers (FSEs)," explains Ged Cranny, Senior Consultant, Konica Minolta BEU.

"This allowed field service to be more agile, rather than just direct service as a default. It also meant we could utilise our field service partners more effectively. Additionally, it has enabled our FSEs to become generalists as well.

"Prior to the pandemic we had set ourselves the target of getting to just 20% of our service operations being direct visits by utilising predictive maintenance, monitoring tools and the bi-directional flow of data."

It is an ambitious target to have in their sights even in this post-pandemic world, yet with their direct visits already reduced to 30%, it is one that Konica Minolta appear to be well on their way towards achieving.

It is also an essential target, with one of the primary sectors they operate within, the print and managed document services space, having previously moved largely to a 'pay-per-print' model, the onus on maintaining customer uptime while keeping the service operation profitable, is vital.

However, with over 2,500 field service engineers working across 27 countries, it was no small task to undertake such a considerable shift in operational strategy.

So how did they approach it?

"We built out a clear understanding of what our parameters were that allowed us to develop some clear change management steps," Cranny explains.

"We identified three reasons where there was a specific case for us to have an engineer visit the customer's site. These were for installation or collection, the fitting of a part that is not replaceable by a customer, or an on-site service that the customer is willing to pay extra for."

"The process has to start at the factory and go right the way through the business," comments Laszlo Szilas-Neff, Head of Service in Cluster East Europe & Hungary, Konica Minolta Business Solutions.



“By this, I mean that moving to remote service-as-a-default isn’t just an area that impacts the service operation team. There are some fundamental pillars within the move to remote service-as-a-default, including essential process changes and technology introductions within the service organisation. However, this all needs to be supported by the product.

“You have to devise and then deploy the systems that will enable you to move to remote service as a default,” Szilas-Neff continues.

“It is, of course, crucial not to find out at the end of the process change that some of the new assets in development will not have the functionality or the connectivity to allow you to execute your remote service strategies.

“Remote-as-a-default, is all about engineering. It is about engineering the machine, and it is about engineering the processes. These two areas have to be undertaken together and to achieve that all sides of the business most be working towards a common goal.”

Of course, achieving this synergy across multiple different areas of the business

is often dependent on a sponsor at the executive level- someone who can sit across the various business units and see the broader holistic picture.

However, the rewards for both the service provider and the customer when such an approach is well executed can be astounding.

“Let me give you an example,” offers Cranny.

“One of our customers is a major supermarket chain, and they wanted to update the firmware on all of their assets. Before we made the shift towards remote service as the primary means of completing this type of work, we calculated that this would have resulted in 1,200 incidents to our portfolio for our engineers to fix in the UK alone.

“We used the bi-directional tool and worked with their IT team, and within just seven days, every store and their head offices were all updated. Obviously, this delivered a cost-saving for us, but it also had a massive beneficial impact to the customer who saw us as more of a services company than simply a hardware provider.”

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- Lazlo Szilas-Neff, Konica Minolta

WHAT DOES THE INTRODUCTION OF REMOTE-FIRST MEAN FOR SERVICE OPERATIONS?

In the previous section of this white paper, we put forward the argument that for any move to remote service to be successful, it must be viewed as a business-wide initiative rather than one that is limited solely to the field service operation.

While this is true, we also should not overlook the fact that the field service business unit will be impacted by such a change the most, and it is the field service business unit that needs to be prepared to be the engine room in driving this change.

“BUILD YOUR CHANGE MANAGEMENT PROJECT WITHIN CLEARLY DEFINED PARAMETERS AND ENSURE YOU SET GOALS THAT UNDERSTAND HOW YOUR PRODUCTS WILL IMPACT YOUR SERVICE BUSINESS...”

- Ged Cranny, Konica Minolta

So from a practical level, what does the introduction of remote working mean for the field service team, both in management based in head office and for our field service engineers and technicians currently working in the field?

Crucially as we have already touched on in this paper, the thinking and vision that will propel a move to adopting remote service-as-a-default has to be embedded into a long-term view of organisational change.

“You’ve got to think about the long-term future,” comments Cranny.

“With any new project you will always get a boost around ten or fifteen

percent initially, but after a while things will normalise and that initial boost will disappear and you will be back to normal.”

For those looking to replicate the Konica Minolta model that places remote service as the default approach to service delivery, while the most direct impact relates specifically to the service operations team and the processes they follow, that shift has to be undertaken at a company-wide level. Ultimately this means the first layer of focus needs to be with the product development team within the organisation.

“So one of the things that we began with was looking at the products,” explains Cranny.

“For us, we typically have a three to five-year churn on products. Therefore, we knew that if we started a policy to make sure that we could remotely access all products, this policy would have to start in the factory and would take about five years to be fully bedded in across the company and across all of our customers’ assets.

“Then you can build your change management project within clearly defined parameters and ensure you set goals that understand how your products will impact your service business. We were able to look at this and identify that even our biggest customers would totally refresh their machines within a five-year period and with assets that had much improved connectivity and serviceability, we could see that our need for field service engineers would be greatly reduced.”

However, while the beginning of a journey to remote service becoming the default go-to option for the service delivery team is dependent on the cycle of product churn and the development of assets capable of operating within such a context, this does not mean that the service operation must wait until this cycle is completed. The change that Konica Minolta both saw on the horizon and initiated themselves meant that they could proactively rethink their service operations.

Most importantly, they were able to identify how such a drastic sea-change in the way service is delivered would impact the existing workforce and prepare both their workforce and their processes accordingly, well ahead of time.

“We knew with the way the product development was moving, and with the drive to move towards becoming a services organisation that we would have a pool of engineers that wouldn’t be required for as many direct service calls but we would also have new needs and requirements for these technical people elsewhere within the organisation,” Cranny states.

“We looked at the situation, where we were going and we understood we had to use those engineers elsewhere in the organisation. Our view was why bring in people from outside the business to fill these new roles, why not retrain and repurpose that knowledge and skill set that already existed within our company?”

“We have our own training schools across Europe so we started retraining our own people, creating the time for our engineers to be retrained, so our people and our organisation could adjust to the new world we were walking into.”

Of course, the other critical aspect of arriving in this new world that Cranny describes is convincing the customer that the move to remote service-as-a-default is in their interest as much as it is in our interests as service providers. Win-win conversations are often touted as the pinnacle of good business innovation, yet the truth is that often something may be dressed up in this way but falls short on one side or the other. The result is that there is often a reluctance to accept win-win arguments at face value.

Indeed, much as we outlined in the previous section of this report, when

looking at the internal change management discussion, we must approach the sometimes complex discussions with our customers as part of an external change management process. In framing these conversations in such a way, we can return to the fundamental tenet of change management- to win the hearts and minds of those we are looking to bring through the change process.

Again, these conversations will invariably sit within the field service business unit, as this is where the changes to process will be most visible to the customer.

However, once again, Cranny points out that while the service operation leaders will be those at the vanguard of delivering and executing these significant shifts and advising the customer as part of that journey, the wider business must understand and support the service operations team in this venture.

“We want to be able to supply the customers that we have worked alongside for the last twenty, thirty years in print, with their cloud services, their print services and their software services,” Cranny continues.

“All these technologies, we can train our technical people to support. However, the strategy has to be built all the way from the factory, all the way through the senior management but also across all departments – everyone has to understand what the service business unit is setting out to achieve, what we are trying to create. This is essential so the customer feels comfortable with what Konica Minolta were doing.”

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THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES THAT MUST BE APPLIED TO DRIVING REMOTE SERVICE ADOPTION

While as we have discussed earlier in this paper, the shift to remote-service delivery is as much related to process change as it is to technology adoption, technology's role in an organisation's ability to effectively deliver remote services cannot be overlooked.

As any service management leader who has implemented a technology solution will attest, driving user adoption is the fulcrum of whether the project is a success or failure.

“WHY DO WE WANT TO ESTABLISH REMOTE AS DEFAULT? HOW DO WE ACHIEVE THIS, AND WHAT BENEFITS WILL DOING SO BRING? ONCE WE HAVE IDENTIFIED THAT STRONG VISION OF WHAT WE ARE SETTING OUT TO ACHIEVE, WE CAN BREAK THINGS DOWN INTO MORE MANAGEABLE ASPECTS...”

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The introduction of new technology within the service operations chain can often fail to hit the predicted return of investment, not because the tools or systems were inadequate to do the job but simply because the user adoption remained poor.

Of course, proper change management will help drive user adoption of any new technology. If done correctly, the shift in overarching business strategy that the effective adoption of remote services as a dominant part of the service

portfolio requires will also establish core processes that drive user adoption as a natural bi-product of that change.

However, we still want to ensure that the transition from on-site to remote service being the primary mode of service operation is as painless as possible. To achieve this, we need to ensure that user adoption of the technology is fast and widespread.

History shows us that for any technology to be quickly assimilated within business operations, it needs to be effortless to use.

Introducing a new technology that is seamless to use, that is intuitive, and that makes the end-users life easier will always have a greater chance of securing high adoption rates within a shorter time frame than a technology that is complicated to get to grips with.

Similarly, it is also crucial for the end-users to understand why technology has been introduced and, in the case of remote service, why such a significant evolution in the way the business approaches service and maintenance is being undertaken.

“The most important thing is to outline the vision,” states Szilas-Neff.

“What is it that we want to do? Why do we want to establish remote as default? How do we achieve this, and what benefits will doing so bring? Once we have identified that strong vision of what we are setting out to achieve, we can break things down into more manageable aspects to understand.”

It is through a process of clearly identifying the vision of the company at the senior level that the various layers of operational management were able to articulate what this vision meant for the multiple stakeholders within the business.

This includes outlining to the the front-line field service engineers the changes that would be coming, why these are important for the business as a corporate entity going through a necessary period of evolution and then perhaps most importantly how these changes would impact the field service engineers



themselves and what the benefits of adopting these new tools and processes would be for them.

As Cranny explains, “It is not just about the service business. It is about all the different areas of the business and explaining the why.”

“When it comes to the field service teams, explaining why is absolutely vital,” he adds. “You are going to have to take some of your field service technicians as specialists and put them on the remote service desks, and the first thing they are going to do is slow down because they don’t want to take the work from their friends who are still in the field. So what you have to do is explain the why and what the why looks like.

“You have to explain to your field service technicians that the world is changing and the way their role will change. We traditionally, as an industry, viewed the world as ‘you are x-type of an engineer, you are a y-type of engineer, but in today’s world, we have to teach our engineers to be engineers of everything; they need to be generalists and then we have to get our specialists to support them from the remote desks.

“If we explain this correctly to our existing field service engineers and technicians, we can communicate that we are not moving to a position where we are removing their jobs. Instead, we are enhancing their jobs.

“Explaining the why, allowing the engineers to understand that why better can, in many ways, even allow for the ‘how’ to be shaped by the field service workers themselves. For example, like most companies in the field service sector, we face a challenge with an ageing workforce. Yet, what is to stop an engineer on the fringe of retirement, easing down to three days a week logging in remotely to support those field service engineers in the field as well as customers, rather than spending five long days on the road every week?

“This is a win-win. The engineer gets a better work-life balance at a time of life where they may not want to be spending so much time away from home, while we retain that the talent, knowledge and expertise within the business.”

As Cranny alludes to, ultimately, in any change management process, you need to win the hearts and minds of your colleagues right across the business and having a clearly defined vision of the change you would all be undertaking together is a vital first step towards achieving that.

Having then established and articulated the vision, Konica Minolta as an organisation was able to develop a change management strategy that was based on three foundational pillars – organisational, technological and collaborative.

As Szilas-Neff explains, “the first of the three pillars we built our strategy around was organisational. We needed to understand our organisational structure better. We needed to identify who would be undertaking the remote service delivery? Then we needed to sit back and establish the driving motivational aspects for that team and map out how we would be tracking their performance.

“The second pillar was the tools we would utilise for remote service delivery. For us, we developed our tool internally, AIRe Link, but we still had to establish how we could measure the usage.

“It is not just enough to have the tools available; they have to be used, so we made our second pillar not only identifying and implementing the technology but also how and when it was to be used.

“The final pillar was to ensure that this was seen across the business as an endeavour that needed to be embraced. This needed to be seen within the business as something that impacted the whole organisation, not just as a project that was only related to the service department.

“We realised that we needed to establish a remote service as a default mindset for the whole organisation – which included marketing, sales, senior management – basically, it has to be a mindset that runs from the factory throughout the entire business,” he added.

WHAT ARE THE KEY CRITERIA FOR A REMOTE SERVICE ENGINEER?

Whether a service organisation is to take Konica Minolta's path of taking and retraining their existing field workforce or hire a new group of technical workers to step into remote service engineer roles, it is vital to identify what type of skill set is required to take on this new way of working.

So in this final segment of this white paper, let us take a moment to explore the key attributes of remote service engineers.

MATURITY AND EXPERIENCE:

As we touched on earlier in this paper, an ageing workforce crisis has been looming across all areas and industries encompassed in the field service sector for some time, and with each passing year, it is getting closer.

However, the creation of remote service delivery solutions can, in many ways, flip this challenge on its head and turn it into a significant opportunity to retain those engineers who may be working their way towards leaving the organisation and taking decades of knowledge and experience with them.

The potential of working from a central location, or even from home as a remote service engineer, instead of facing the long and often gruelling days on the road that is the life of the field service engineer, may well appeal to many of our more seasoned engineers that are in the latter part of their careers.

Similarly, as remote service offers the ability to support many more customers per day, the opportunity for these engineers to move from a full-time to a part-time role may also be appealing to both the engineers themselves and the service organisation.

Suppose the technology is intuitive and easy to adopt, such as the AIRe Link solution that Konica Minolta has developed. In that case, the transition for a field service engineer with their vast knowledge and experience should be relatively seamless.

It will provide the service organisation with precisely the type of problem solvers they need to support additional field engineers and the customers alike.

STRONG COMMUNICATION SKILLS:

However, while technical knowledge and hands-on experience must form the backbone of a remote service engineer's skill set, they also need to be effective communicators – and this is something that may not be a natural component

in many field service workers' skill sets. While the role of the field service technician has evolved quite significantly in recent years to become aligned with customer-facing, brand ambassador qualities, it is essential to remember that much of the customer discussions an engineer would have, would be before and after the moment of service.

Indeed, the main body of the field service engineer or technicians' customer engagement will come after the solution has been provided, offering them an opportunity to present themselves as trusted advisor who has already solved the customer's problem.

This is a very different conversation than guiding either their field service colleague or even the customer through a solution. The period while undertaking the maintenance can often feel the strain of time pressures, mainly when the problem is more complex than usual.

Therefore, the effective remote service engineer must be part educator and part guide as he helps those on-site through any maintenance or repair calmly and methodically.

Augmented reality tools, such as those available in AIRe Link, can help with communication; invariably, messages and commands are more easily conveyed through visual means than verbal communication alone; however, the remote service engineer will still have to be a strong verbal communicator while always maintaining an approachable manner.

They cannot expect the person they are guiding to have the knowledge they do, so they mustn't lose patience. Yet, at the same time, they shouldn't lecture down to those they are helping, as this can drive subtle hints of frustration and even alienate those they are supposed to be helping – which of course, doesn't lend itself to either good customer experience or good internal cooperation.

PRIDE IN BEING THE BEST:

One final aspect that may be overlooked is the importance of establishing the remote service team as the pinnacle of knowledge and expertise within the organisation.

To successfully capture the best of the field service engineering workforce and translate their expertise into a team that can support far more customer challenges per day, it could be advisable to position the remote service team as

an elite group of service technicians.

There is a specific personality set that could be sought within those you are looking to transition from field service engineers to remote service engineers.

You want your remote service engineers to have an inherently strong work ethic, to be the type of people who love being able to solve the problems that others could not, while simultaneously being prepared to immediately take that solution and share it both with the field service engineer or customer in front of them on the call, and also if possible, with the broader organisation either through a recording of the live call or with an article crafted for a knowledge bank.

Ultimately, you want a remote service team that prides themselves on being the best technical experts within the organisation and who takes great satisfaction in knowing that their work is driving the entire organisation forward into a new era of customer service excellence.

While these individuals may be few and far between in your early team analysis, for these are very much the diamonds within the rough, rest assured they will be there. Many field service engineers and technicians have all the natural traits that are the foundation of such attributes.

They are genuine problem solvers, can work independently, and inherently want to make things work as efficiently as possible – whether that be the machines they service or the processes they work within.

By defining a straightforward ethos early within the development of the remote service team, by creating the collegiate approach of a team working together towards a more productive future for customers and colleagues alike, it is possible to develop a culture where pride in the job done can become a natural bi-product of the teams' output – and it can develop far faster than many might think.

EACH ORGANISATION IS UNIQUE:

Of course, these are just some initial ideas of what could form the DNA of great remote service technicians.

Much depends on the team you have at your disposal, and as we've touched on earlier in this paper, defining the vision of what remote service as a default would mean for the organisation.

However, precisely as per the discussion around the value perception of the customer, the organisation that sees the adoption of remote services as merely a cost reduction exercise, where the role of remote support is viewed as a cheaper alternative to direct on-site service delivery in the field, is almost certainly destined to fail.

Whereas those who take the position that remote service as a default is a business-wide service strategy that will both drive profits and improve the service delivery given to customers, just as Konica Minolta has done, will likely go on to flourish.

“ULTIMATELY, YOU WANT A REMOTE SERVICE TEAM THAT PRIDES THEMSELVES ON BEING THE BEST TECHNICAL EXPERTS WITHIN THE ORGANISATION AND WHO TAKES GREAT SATISFACTION IN KNOWING THAT THEIR WORK IS DRIVING THE ENTIRE ORGANISATION FORWARD INTO A NEW ERA OF CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE...”



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