

Eckhard von Münchow: Taking Corporate Real Estate in Europe by Storm

› Eckhard von Münchow, currently Head of Strategy and Operational Excellence at **Nokia Solutions and Networks (NSN) Real Estate**, is a fairly new entrant to the Corporate Real Estate (CRE) industry – and a passionate one. His path to CRE has been circuitous, with much of his career spent working for **Siemens AG** in multiple capacities, such as Corporate Business Development, Sales, Product Management, Investor Relations and Quality Management. “It wasn’t until 2007, when NSN was created, that I started working in CRE. Until then, I was only a customer of CRE,” von Münchow says.

The Value of CRE

As an outsider, von Münchow’s opinion of CRE wasn’t very good. “I saw CRE as more of a distribution center for real estate,” he says. “You only went to the CRE function if you wanted some space in a building, and even then, it wasn’t always easy to get the results you wanted.” But von Münchow says that opinion changed after he became a CRE executive.

“I had always wanted an office of my own, and after 20 years, I finally got one. But my experience in working out of an office, in which I was by myself, was not great,” he recalls. Von Münchow says working at a computer screen all day, with very little or no interaction with

colleagues, had a detrimental effect on his health, body and mind.

After moving into the open office at NSN with phone rooms, he began to see the possibilities in CRE and the open-office concept.

Enabling the Employee

The more involved von Münchow became in CRE, the more compelling he found it. “Working to create an inspiring work environment, helping to make the work lives of 50,000 colleagues better – that’s amazing. That triggers my enthusiasm for CRE,” he says. This desire to ‘enable employees’ is what drew von Münchow to the **CoreNet Global ‘Corporate Real Estate 2020’** project, in which he served on the Partnering with Key Support Functions team.

His desire to offer company employees attractive workspaces that facilitate communication and interaction led him and a colleague to found ‘**Munich Offices - Take a look**’, a local networking initiative based in his home city of Munich, Germany. “The idea is to visit the open office of a different company every other month,” he explains. “About 200 individuals have participated over the past three years. It’s a great way to experience different workspaces and learn about change management, employee involvement and inspiring designs.”

The network is open to CRE, HR and IT colleagues, as well as works council members. It also offers evening workshops on related topics, such as the multigenerational office, acoustics, home office,

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Eckhard von Münchow and author Sonali Tare pose for a photo at CoreNet Global's Atlanta headquarters.



happiness at work, technology, and more. “Munich Offices” is the local partner of the CoreNet Global Central Europe Chapter.

Making Waves and Keeping up with Trends

When asked what he believes are the major trends in CRE, von Münchow says, “Working to understand the business better is key. I also see an ongoing trend to outsource operational tasks to external experts, and taking this beyond traditional to transformational outsourcing, where the industry is not allowed to stand still. The demand to make operations more efficient is high.” Von Münchow adds that this is changing the role of CRE executives, who must learn how to talk to the rest of the organization, understand the implications for CRE, and translate the business needs into specific actions for the collaborators. Additional outsourcing, he argues, clearly increases the need for performance management.

Von Münchow says he'd also like to see more transparency in CRE. He notes that while some organizations have lots of data on things like cost, footprint and

number of employees, this data is not always adequately presented to inform CRE decisions. “Benchmarking may demonstrate the increased professionalism in CRE. This helps the industry to keep up with the pressures exerted by the corporations’ executives,” he says. And, he adds, meaningful Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on cost, satisfaction or flexibility will help to align the efforts of brokers, design specialists and facility managers. “Data-based coordination of these three functions offers great benefits and increases levels of service.”

Facing the Unexpected and Succeeding

Eckhard von Münchow joined NSN Real Estate at a challenging time. “We had two companies (the telecom infrastructure divisions of Nokia and Siemens) coming together to form a new joint venture organization. This meant that we had to contend with two different cultures and management systems,” he recalls. Ultimately, the transition was a success.

Another success the CRE team enjoyed involved gauging customer satisfaction

in customer relationship management (CRM); von Münchow and his team initiated surveys to help CRE better understand the needs of 300 internal stakeholders, the NSN decision makers. “The first survey, an online questionnaire, asked for ratings. The results showed preferences, but they weren’t necessarily actionable,” he says. “The second time around, we asked more personal questions like, ‘what are your business challenges?’ and ‘how can CRE help you to meet these challenges?’” These answers triggered customer-oriented activities and greatly improved personal relations, von Münchow says.

Being Truly CoreNet ‘Global’

“My involvement in CoreNet Global began in 2007 at the Berlin EMEA summit. This was my first interaction with CRE outside of NSN and it was eye-opening,” von Münchow says. He eventually became a member and was invited to be on the board of the Central European Chapter. Apart from participating in the ‘Corporate Real Estate 2020’ project, he has also presented at several Discovery Forums in Europe.