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# 50 years of innovation

### As mining evolves, so has the company's ability to meet clients' need for sustainable solutions

● Celebrating its 50th year, SRK Consulting recommits to the value of innovation – especially in its core industries such as mining, where risks and challenges grow steadily in complexity.

When the founders of SRK Consulting – Oskar Steffen, Andy Robertson and Hendrik Kirsten – set up in Johannesburg in 1974, their very business concept was an innovation: providing specialist consulting in geotechnical services and tailings design. This was unusual in an era when mining houses tended to be self-contained, generally employing all the skills they needed for their operations.

Growing to a 1700-strong global network of engineers and scientists has proved their vision. Honouring their golden anniversary, SRK Consulting has chosen "Innovation in Focus" as its theme for 2024, says Tim McGurk, group CEO of SRK Global.

#### Complex demands

"Innovation was a key driver in the company's founding and our people continue to build on that legacy," says McGurk. "The projects we undertake with our clients are becoming increasingly complex, so it is inevitable that we renew our commitment to innovation in our work as we reflect on our past and future."

He says innovation is not just about technology, though that plays an important role; it's also about the approach of tailoring

services to meet clients' need for sustainable solutions.

The company's innovative approach has been nurtured by creating the right culture and structure to attract bright people into building their own practices within the group, says SRK global chair Alejo Sfriso. Innovation is an outcome, not a top-down business plan.

"Financial results and staff growth are also outcomes," says Sfriso. "Even new service offerings are not planned, but the result of our people's awareness of market opportunities, which they naturally pursue following their individual interests."

#### Diversifying as risks grow

Over five decades, the company's fields of operation have expanded significantly. Having started in the traditional technical fields of mining, engineering and geology, SRK Consulting developed extensive capability in a variety of related fields from water management to environmental and social impact assessment, says Andrew van Zyl, MD of SRK Consulting South Africa.

"Just as mining develops and evolves new understandings of



Rehabilitation of the Nacala Corridor railway line, which runs through Malawi and Mozambique

how the sector interacts with our natural and social environment, so our services have grown to encompass many more disciplines. Over recent decades, the industry has realised just how central these aspects are to the sustainability of the sector; for our part, this has meant innovating roles and standards for environmental and social experts, for instance."

#### Supporting innovators

Technology has also become an ongoing focus, with in-house efforts to free up internal innovators to explore and implement novel solutions to some of the mining industry's most complex challenges. According to Tracey Drew, principal consultant and head of data services at SRK Australia, SRK Consulting recognises that innovation thrives on the exchange of ideas.

To pursue this approach, SRK holds biannual innovation workshops to encourage thought leaders to step outside the box and stimulate creativity by breaking away from traditional workspaces. These workshops serve as a meeting point for SRK's engineers and scientists to share their ideas with like-minded creators.

A good example of the

power of these workshops is the software package developed by tailings consultant Jonathon Eldridge and his team at SRK Australia. This digital tool assists in the easier interpretation of in-situ geotechnical testing, offering significant value to SRK's clients.

The innovative software was one of three ideas whose further development received internal funding. Another idea was an integrated valuation platform with a database and custom browser front end, which allows complex, multiple-method valuations entirely outside spreadsheets. A third innovation was a unified geotechnical logging system for quality data capturing.

#### Nurturing talent

SRK attracts skilled, passionate people who thrive on working in multidisciplinary teams to create sustainable solutions for clients.

"We work hard to retain a relatively flat structure, with a strong culture of encouraging people, even junior staff, to contribute ideas and actively participate in solutions," says Sfriso. "This approach nurtures personal confidence and professional growth – key ingredients for forging the kind of innovations our clients need."

"Underpinning the company's future is its culture of empowered people choosing to work together, which will support its growing diversity and its reputation as a world-wide mining consultancy of choice." ✕

Sales: Debbie Montanari



Andrew van Zyl,  
MD of SRK Consulting  
South Africa