

<b>Institution: University of Bath</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 19: Business and Management Studies</b>
<b>Title of case study: Managing Employee Commitment Across Organisational Boundaries</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>University of Bath research into employee attitudes and behaviours has underpinned changes at Alexander Mann Solutions (AMS), a global provider of Human Resource (HR) outsourcing and consultancy services to 45 major clients in 6 countries. The research has improved AMS's ability to understand and to manage employee commitment across organisational boundaries. As a direct result of this research, AMS have developed new processes and approaches that balance commitment to clients with commitment to the company. Specifically, they have enhanced their induction programme; increased training hours for technical staff by 15% and for managers by 45%; initiated a global teamwork award; introduced an electronic knowledge base; and established senior management development. Results have shown a 9% improvement in employee commitment, an 8% reduction on intention to quit, and a 5% increase in internal promotions.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Since 2001, members of the University of Bath, Work and Employment Research Centre (WERC) have been engaged in research into employee commitment and its impact on behaviour in Professional Service Firms (PSFs) (references 1, 2 and 6). The Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD) funded the broad underpinning research between 2001 and 2006 (source 1). Since 2007, the research has continued, with a focus on employees who interact routinely with stakeholders outside their own organisation – including clients, partners, suppliers, regulators and professional bodies. Such employees are often committed to multiple parties including their profession, their clients and their project team. The research – led by Nick Kinnie (at Bath since 1979; Professor since 2013) and Juani Swart (at Bath since 2002; Professor since 2011) – has investigated whether commitment to multiple parties weakened employee commitment to their employer; whether there were negative implications for staff retention; and what Human Resource practices might improve employee commitment across organisational boundaries (reference 2).</p> <p>The general aim of this continuing research has been to contribute to knowledge development and changes of practice to support organisations in the effective management of employees with commitments to multiple parties (references 3, 4 and 5). The research has proved to be important for two reasons. (1) It has challenged the conventional wisdom of extant research that saw the organisation as a single focus of employees' commitment. (2) The emphasis on commitment to multiple parties has generated insights on the links between how employees feel and how they behave in nationally and internationally dispersed organisations (references 1 and 2). The University of Bath researchers have also collected data from and engaged with Marks &amp; Spencer, the Natural History Museum, Iris, Business West and Taylor Bennett on employee commitment to multi parties. Alexander Mann Solutions (AMS) provides an example of the impact of the research within an organisation that has employees who work routinely with various parties across national and organisational boundaries. AMS has 1,600 employees, situated across the globe. The research undertaken within AMS (since 2008) has focused on two issues: (1) understanding the strength of employee commitment to various parties; and (2) identifying the influences on employee commitment.</p> <p>AMS staff and the WERC researchers collaborated on the design and implementation of an employee attitude survey called 'PulsePoint' (PP), which has been applied within the company approximately every six months for the past four years. Data are available from 8 PP surveys since 2009, and results are analysed by the Bath team. The surveys are supported by 35 interviews with key respondents in AMS. The interviews are designed to elicit contextual information and illustrations of the wider results from the surveys. The results from the PP surveys are</p>

disseminated within the company through feedback sessions involving: the discussion of the research findings with senior AMS staff; a presentation of the findings of each survey to the AMS leadership team; the facilitation of an Action Plan to be achieved before the next survey; and the communication of survey results to all employees.

The research has generated findings that “have provided essential data on the changes taking place in the attitudes of employees over time” (Source 2: Chief People Officer) and “these surveys have been vital to the development of our People Strategy over the last five years” (Source 3: Global Head of Human Resources). In particular, the research led to a new understanding of the extent to which AMS employees can be committed to other parties, especially clients. This has led to strategies to ensure that employees can also remain committed to AMS. Over time, the research has confirmed that: (1) employees who are highly committed to AMS in addition to other stakeholders are less likely to leave the organisation; (2) employee commitment to the client can be higher than their commitment to AMS, especially when they are based on client sites; (3) employees with 3-4 years’ experience often had unmet professional development needs and these employees’ commitment to AMS can be increased by improving the professional development opportunities available to them. The findings have led to significant improvements in induction, information exchange, communication and professional development.

### 3. References to the research

1. Swart J and Kinnie N (2013) ‘Managing multidimensional knowledge assets: HR configurations in professional service firms,’ *Human Resource Management Journal*, 23(2): 160-179. DOI: 10.1111/j.1748-8583.2012.00197.x
2. Kinnie N and Swart J (2012) ‘Committed to whom? Professional Knowledge worker commitment in cross-boundary organisations,’ *Human Resource Management Journal*, 22(1): 21-38. (*This paper directly references the research in AMS*). DOI: 10.1111/j.1748-8583.2011.00172.x
3. Swart, J and Kinnie, N. (2010) ‘Organisational learning, knowledge assets and HR practices in Professional Service Firms’, *Human Resource Management Journal*, 20(1): 64-79. DOI: 10.1111/j.1748-8583.2009.00115.x
4. Swart, J., Kinnie, N. and Lund, M. (2007) ‘Simultaneity of learning orientations in a marketing agency,’ *Management Learning*, 38(3): 337-357. DOI: 10.1177/1350507607079033
5. Swart, J., Kinnie, N. and Purcell, J. (2005) ‘Influences on the choice of HR systems: the network organisation perspective’, *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 16(6): 1004-10028. DOI: 10.1080/09585190500120780
6. Swart, J., & Kinnie, N. (2003) Knowledge-intensive firms: the influence of the client on HR systems. *Human Resource Management Journal*. 13(3):37-55. DOI: 10.1111/j.1748-8583.2003.tb00097.x

### 4. Details of the impact

The research undertaken by members of WERC has improved the relationship between employee commitment and work practices that necessarily cut across organizational boundaries. It has informed the development of new approaches within AMS that have improved the effectiveness of practices for multi-party working. A changed approach to the management of human resources in AMS has resulted in enhanced employee commitment and an increase in internal promotions.

The research in AMS is a demonstration of the importance of academic/ practitioner collaboration, and of the relevance and benefit to companies of applied human resource management research. AMS “have benefitted immensely from our long running association with the research team from the School of Management at Bath. They have not only provided the data essential to prompting our changes and then monitoring their impact but they have also provided an intellectual stimulus to myself and my team” (source 2 – Chief People Officer). In addition, the research “has provided vital information which has underpinned our strategic decision making and helped us to identify appropriate changes and innovations which have delivered tangible business benefits” (source 3 – Global Head of Human Resources).

The beneficial impact of the findings of the University of Bath research for AMS can be highlighted particularly in relation to two key HR dimensions: employee commitment and professional and career development.

**Employee commitment:** As a result of the Bath research, AMS has developed new work processes that make a stronger link between multi party commitment and business performance. These included: (1) significant enhancement of the corporate induction process to include issues that are likely to arise from multi party commitment (source 4); (2) introduction of 'The Hub', a company wide, on-line repository designed to improve employees' access to people and organisational information. For employees based on the clients' sites, this has improved their ability to remain in contact with the company (source 4). AMS has recognised that a key component of the improvement in employee commitment to multi parties depends on how the organisation's leaders communicate with staff. For example, members of the company Leadership Team visited over 400 employees on client sites in 2010; the PP survey results were published in 'The Point', a printed in-house magazine and 'CheckPoint', a series of Leadership Team video webcasts available to all employees. Improved guidance was provided to senior managers when managing communications (sources 5 & 6).

These benefits and changes in the company in terms of employee commitment can be evidenced through measures of employee attitudes and behaviours from the PP survey and other internal data (source 8). Employee commitment (scale 1-7) has increased from 4.93 (2009) to 5.38 (2011), a 9% improvement. Employees' intention to quit has been reduced from 3.20 (2009) to 2.94 (2011), an 8% reduction. A better understanding of the relationship between commitment and boundary spanning behaviour has resulted in: stronger employee commitment, higher numbers of internal promotions and transfers, leading to greater stability and knowledge retention. The changes AMS have made are significant in their support of growth. Between January 2010 and February 2011 the company increased their staffing by around 50% (source 2). The success of AMS during this period contributed to the company winning the 'Baker's Dozen' award – the main accreditation award for HR outsourcing.

**Professional and career development:** As a result of the Bath research, AMS has developed new work processes to more effectively support employees' professional and career development needs. In particular, the research has led to improvements in the approach taken towards managers with 3-4 years' experience, who were identified as having unmet training and development needs. The company has invested in professional development as a result of evidence from the research, which showed that improved opportunities for personal development are positively related to willingness to stay. AMS have increased technical and soft skills training by 15%; they have increased management development programmes by 45%, especially in the areas of performance management and coaching. AMS initiated a Leadership Academy, which 60 senior managers have attended (source 7). The company has improved the agility of its HR processes in response to employee and manager feedback on boundary spanning problems and issues, allowing localised promotion decisions and performance management decisions within accounts and functions (source 2 and 7).

The benefits and changes in the company in terms of professional and career development can be evidenced from PP and other internal data (source 2). The proportion of the workforce promoted internally rose from 10% to 15%. AMS employees have experienced an increased ability to move positions across boundaries within AMS and to improve skill development. This has led to 240 internal moves in 2010. The success of these changes was confirmed when AMS gained industry recognition as the recipient of an Investors in People Bronze Award and the Polish Investors in Human Capital Award (source 7). A recent (2013) CIPD publication on employee commitment and behavioural change (source 9) has extended the reach of the research beyond AMS and provided a model of good practice for other professional service firms.

## Impact case study (REF3b)

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

1. CIPD outputs relating to the underpinning Bath research: *People and Performance in Knowledge Intensive Companies: A comparison of six research and technology organisations* (2003); *Managing the Careers of Professional Knowledge Workers* (2004); *Managing People and Knowledge in Professional Service Firm* (2006); *Managing Across Boundaries: Human Resource Management Beyond the Firm* (2007).
2. Testimonial letter of evidence from the Chief People Officer at AMS
3. Testimonial letter of evidence from the Global Head of Human Resources at AMS
4. Internal AMS publication: 'Launchpad'
5. Internal AMS publication: 'Talking Point – A Finger on the Pulse'
6. Internal AMS publication: 'Global Citizenship Report 2010'
7. Internal AMS publication: 'Global Citizenship Report 2011'
8. The AMS 'PulsePoint' (PP) data.
9. CIPD report from the Bath research: '*Innovative Outputs: A balancing act*' (2013).