

**Managing internal network activities in
Key Account Management – a case study**
[Competitive paper/ Special track Key Account Management]

Barbara Niersbach¹

Bjoern S. Ivens¹

Catherine Pardo²

Alexander Leischnig¹

¹Otto-Friedrich-University Bamberg, Feldkirchenstraße 21, D-96045 Bamberg (Germany),

[barbara.niersbach@stud.uni-bamberg.de, +49.163.2504767]

²EM LYON, Avenue Guy de Collongue, Ecully Cedex (France)

ABSTRACT

Key Account Management (KAM) provides two major challenges for firms. First, it requires the management of a firm-external network (relationships with customers). Second, it requires the management of a firm-internal network (relationships with various departments within the company). Academic research on internal KAM activities and relationships is limited and presents several open questions. Our paper aims to understand the management of internal KAM activities and relationships. We examine the nature of the Key Account manager's (KA Manager's) role in the internal network and identify two key characteristics to be associated with the effective cooperation in the internal network: commitment and trust. Intra-organizational trust and commitment can be considered within the KAM team as well as towards the related departments of a KAM team, the KAM Director or the organization as a whole. We investigate how these constructs strengthen a KAM team internally and externally and, therefore, lead to competitive advantage. We use a case study approach that includes 35 in-depth interviews conducted with three KAM teams and related departments of a globally operating pharmaceutical company. The results reveal differences in all three teams. They suggest that commitment and trust within the firm (e.g., commitment to team, director, related departments, and company) affect the cooperation within KAM teams, between KAM teams and between KAM teams and other departments. The results confirm that the KA Manager's performance requires cooperative behaviors and productive management; and that commitment and trust are key characteristics for an effective internal cooperation. At last, the case study illustrates ways how to strengthen commitment and trust in a KAM team.

Keywords: KAM, internal activities and relationships, commitment, trust

INTRODUCTION

Key Account Management (KAM) is “a concept through which companies introduce the principle of relationship marketing into their customer policy and become closer to the customer. They select important customers in order to – based upon an increased individualization of business processes – better interact with them and possibly integrate them into value creation” (Ivens and Pardo 2007, p. 472). This implies that a company’s performance depends on its ability to manage a limited number of customer accounts, the so-called key accounts (KAs). KAs are customers that have strategic importance to the selling organization (Håkansson and Snehota 1995; Ivens, Pardo, and Tunisini 2009).

By definition, a KA is managed in a specific way; that is in an idiosyncratic form of management including dedicated actors, activities and resources (Homburg, Workman, and Jensen 2002). The objective of this specific treatment is to create incremental value within those strategically important relationships. Certain authors use the term “relational value” to describe such a situation (Pardo et al. 2006). KAM is typically implemented through a KA Manager¹ who, in many cases, works with a temporary or permanent KAM team to serve the KA.

KAM differs from classical sales management in that KA Managers fulfill a coordinating role between two networks of relationships. On the one hand, they need to manage a set of relationships between their own company and the KA. These relationships typically comprise contacts with units such as purchasing, logistics, or R&D on the customer side. This range of contacts is typically broader as compared to the contacts a classical sales representative needs to manage. On the other hand, KA Managers need to manage a network of relationships inside their own company. Because a KA Manager is a relational coordinator between the strategically important account and his own firm, he draws upon the required units inside his own company (such as production, logistics, finance, R&D) in order to optimize value creation for the customer (Pardo, Ivens, and Wilson 2014).

As a consequence, the KA Manager needs to manage both an internal and external network of business relationships with individual or organizational actors. A business network is defined as a set of two or more connected business relationships in which each exchange relation is between business partners being conceptualized as collective actors (Emerson 1981). In our research, we focus on the internal network of KAM. We consider internal KAM activities the set of management tasks (such as communicating, coordinating, or controlling) that a KA Manager needs to perform within and towards his internal network of relationships with individual actors or organizational units in order to create value for the customer company as well as for his own company. Note that this task exceeds largely the role played by classical sales reps in terms of scope and complexity.

Both sides of KAM, internal and external network management, are important elements of the KAM concept and required for KAM performance. From an internal perspective, KAM creates value for the KA and the supplier by coordinating numerous complex and customer-specific processes. From an external perspective, KAM creates value for the KA and supplier by constantly improving the fit between the selling organization’s value offer and the needs of the KA (Georges and Eggert 2003). Hence, KAM is a differentiated and idiosyncratic sales concept

¹ Note that a KA Manager can be a female or male employee. Bearing in mind that both genders can be represented in KAM, for the sake of convenience the masculine form “he” will be used throughout the whole paper.

with the aim to create value for both the seller and the buyer. In the long run, a well-established KAM can lead to a substantial competitive advantage (Pardo, Ivens, and Wilson 2014). In recent years, there has been growing interest in KAM, covering an ample range of topics. Homburg, Workman and Jensen (2002) identify three research areas. The first stream of research focuses on the KA Manager as an individual. The second stream is concerned with dyadic relationships between suppliers and KAs. The third stream deals with KAM programs.

Research on internal and intra-organizational aspects of KAM remains limited (Gosselin and Bauwen 2006; Pardo, Ivens, and Wilson 2014; Piercy and Lane 2006; Workman, Homburg, and Jensen 2003). Little is known about cross-functional interactions between KAM and other functional groups within the organization. Moreover, research has not explicitly studied how firms internally structure the management of relationships with their key accounts (Workman, Homburg, and Jensen 2003). Atanasova and Senn (2011) found that team performance in KAM is directly influenced by three team processes: (1) communication and collaboration, (2) conflict management, and (3) pro-activeness. However, marketing, management, and organizational research have barely discussed the KA Manager's internal cooperation and coordination challenges.

This article aims to draw more attention to this under-investigated area and aims to deepen the understanding of how KA Manager align and integrate their own work with other actors inside their company. Our focus lies on commitment and trust in a KA manager's internal relationship network. Meyer and Allen (1997) point out that the success of an organization depends on commitment and trust among its employees. In their understanding, trust in employees ensures commitment. Moreover the authors argue that the development of commitment is a natural process and that organizations need to understand the relevance of the individual behavioral consequences of commitment. The higher the level of knowledge and skills of the employees, and the better they are trained; the more likely those employees are marketable. For being competitive nowadays, organizations need to foster employee commitment within the organization (Meyer and Allen 1997). We study this line of thought with respect to KAM.

We organize our article as follows. We first illustrate how KAM in general and internal KAM activities and relationships in particular can be grounded in resource-advantage theory. Then, we elucidate the concept of internal KAM activities and relationships, and the role of the KA Manager in the internal relationship network. Next, we illustrate how internal activities and relationships in KAM can lead to competitive advantage. Drawing on commitment-trust-theory (CT-Theory) (Morgan and Hunt 1994) we argue, in a first step, that commitment and trust foster effective cooperation in the internal KAM network. We also elucidate the three-component conceptualization by Meyer and Allen (1991) and its implication for internal KAM activities and relationships. Then, we discuss the dyadic trust scale by Larzelere and Huston (1980) and their extension to trust in the internal KAM network. We present multilevel stages of commitment and trust in KAM throughout the different theoretical frameworks. Finally, we point out the influence of internal commitment and trust on internal cooperation as well as on the overall competitiveness of a firm. We present results from an empirical case study conducted in a large European pharmaceutical company. Based on the findings from this case study, we discuss managerial implications, limitations of the study, and avenues for future research.

RESOURCE ADVANTAGE (RA) THEORY

RA theory is an “evolutionary, disequilibrium-provoking, process theory of competition in which innovation and organizational learning are endogenous, and firms and consumers have imperfect information” (Hunt 2001, p. 527). RA theory holds that the organization is a combiner of heterogeneous, imperfectly mobile entities that are labeled ‘resources.’ The resources, when combined with heterogeneous demand, imply significant diversity as to the sizes, scopes, and levels of profitability of organizations within the same industry. More specifically, RA theory holds that the set of resources that is available to a firm determines the firm’s performance (Hunt 1999; Hunt and Davis 2008).

RA theory defines resources as the tangible and intangible entities available to the firm that enable this firm to produce efficiently and/or effectively a market offering that has value for some market segment(s). This theory expands the view of resources to include all entities that have an enabling capacity. It categorizes the multitude of potential resources as financial, physical (e.g., raw materials), legal (e.g., trademarks), human (e.g., skills of individual employees), informational (e.g., knowledge about consumers), relational (e.g., relationships with customers), and organizational (e.g., structural and process designs).

Because RA theory admits intangibles as resources and because it views firm resources as heterogeneous and imperfectly mobile, this theory can theoretically ground KAM. From its vantage point, the specific combination of organizational entities that constitutes a firm’s or a subunit’s approach can lead to superior outcomes as compared to other firms’ or subunits’ KAM approaches.

INTERNAL KAM ASPECTS AND COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

KAM implies the creation of a new mission (which involves the creation of a new job, new practices etc.) and its integration into the existing structure of a company (Pardo, Ivens, and Wilson 2013, 2014). The mission involves the coordination of supplier information and involves activities in time and space in relation to a customer in its entirety (Ivens and Pardo 2007; Pardo 2001). In order to treat KAs differently from other accounts, firms implement intra-organizational programs, systems, and procedures (Workman, Homburg, and Jensen 2003). Moreover, they put in place “special personnel directed at an organization’s most important customers” (Workman, Homburg, and Jensen 2003, p. 7). Hence, internal KAM aspects are an important element of KAM. In this article, we differentiate internal KAM aspects in internal KAM activities and internal KAM relationships.

Internal KAM activities

After having identified and analyzed KAs, the KA Manager is in charge of formulating and implementing suitable strategies for each KA. Against this background, two major tasks exist for the KA Manager: selling and managing networks. These tasks concern the external network as well as the internal network. On an operational level, he needs to develop activities in order to build, grow, and maintain valuable and profitable relationships with KAs in the long run. This includes implementation and control functions (Ojasalo 2001). Those activities comprise different time horizons, namely short-term, middle-term and long-term. They can have either a strategic or operational character. From an internal vantage point, the main challenge for the KA

Manager is to marshal resources from within the organization without having direct authority (Senguputa, Krapfel, and Pusateri 1997). This includes the integration and coordination of activities that may be developed between actors inside as well as outside the company. Thereby the strength or absence of specific activity links between actors shows relevant economic effects (Waluszewski et al. 2008). Thus internal KAM activities include the effective and efficient allocation, coordination of dedicated resources and their alignment with internal structures.

Internal KAM relationships

The KA Manager's role is a challenging boundary spanning task (Battencourt, Brown, and MacKenzie 2005). He needs to manage the customer side network, the internal network, and the relationships between these two networks (Spekman and Ryals 2012). In this role, the KA Manager has to achieve the company's financial objectives in dealing with the KA, and to create value for both, the company and the KA. We define internal KAM relationships the set of relationships that a KA Manager relies on in his internal relationship network in order to create value for the customer company as well as for his own company. In this context, internal KAM actors work alongside the KA Managers in the internal relationship network and can be classified partner, friend, rival or acquaintance (Krapfel, Salmond, and Spekman 1991). The internal relationship management task exceeds largely the role played by classical sales reps in terms of scope and complexity. Considering the fact that the KA Manager acts without hierarchical power in his internal relationship network, his success relies on goal compatibility as well as on interpersonal skills (Davies and Ryals 2013; Lawrence and Lorsch 1969).

Internal KAM aspects as a driver for competitive advantage

KAM is a management concept that commits considerable resources in order to increase the strength of the tie between strategically important customers and the firm. Moreover, KAM aims at improving both the effectiveness and the efficiency of the supplier-KA relationship for both the KA and the supplier. In order to reach its aims, KAM needs to combine several types of resources (mainly organizational, human and financial) (Hunt 1999). Competitive advantage emerges from the existence of distinctive competences within a company, which build upon superior skills and resources (Day and Wensley 1988). Previous work emphasizes that KAM can be considered a critical source for competitive advantage (Porter 1988). KA Managers with superior skills (i.e., distinctive abilities to perform tasks more effectively and efficiently than others) can be considered "a pattern of past investments to enhance a competitive position" (Day and Wensley 1988, p. 2). They allow safeguarding one valuable resource; that is the supplier's relationship with a strategically important customer, by coordinating several internal and external resources through cooperation with actors in an internal network. The moment when internal KAM activities and internal KAM relationships successfully integrate, it creates a positional advantage which, in turn, may constitute a competitive advantage.

COMMITMENT-TRUST (CT) APPROACH TO INTERNAL KAM ASPECTS

Efficiency in companies depends on the degree to which the organizational units are well aligned and, hence, work together as a whole (McAllister 1995; Pardo, Ivens, and Wilson 2014).

Efficiency, thus, relies on sharing information, a fair acquaintance with counterparts, reduction of conflicts, and the development of long-term relationships (Reisel, Chia, and Maloles 2005).

We examine the nature of the KA Manager's role in the internal network and identify two key characteristics associated with efficient cooperation in the internal network: commitment and trust. Research has shown a positive impact of intra-organizational trust and commitment on the efficiency of organizations. Intra-organizational conflicts can be extenuated when intra-organizational trust and commitment exist (Rouziès et al. 2005; Tan and Lim 2009). We explore intra-organizational trust and commitment at four different levels:

- (1) within the KAM team
- (2) within the KA Manager's network (interferences)
- (3) within the relationship KA Manager – KAM Director
- (4) towards the organization as a whole

All levels may have considerable influence on the efficiency and effectiveness of each KA relationship, the KAM program in general as well as corporate performance (Workman, Homburg, and Jensen 2003). We use three different theoretical approaches for investigating commitment and trust. All three theoretical aspects consider commitment and trust in a multi-level approach. The results of all three approaches lead to a distinction between the organizational, group and particular individual level:

- (1) Commitment-Trust Theory by Morgan and Hunt (1994)
- (2) Three-component conceptualization by Meyer and Allen (1991)
- (3) Dyadic trust scale by Larzelere and Huston (1980)

Focusing on the interpersonal context of commitment and trust in a network approach (KAM relationship network) and leader-follower relationships (KA Manager in KAM Director), the approach has a strong psychological and social influence. However, in a more managerial perspective, the focus also lies on efficiency and value creation. Our aim is to build the bridge between contemporary approaches with different roots in theories to an overall impact in internal KAM activities and relationships. In the following we present the three theoretical approaches. By doing so, we introduce different definitions of commitment and trust and thus draw an extensive picture of different academic perceptions.

CT-Theory by Morgan and Hunt extended to internal KAM aspects

According to Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 20) "those networks characterized by relationship commitment and trust engender cooperation (in addition to acquiescence, a reduced tendency to leave the network, the belief that conflict will be functional, and reduced uncertainty). All these "qualitative outcomes" contribute to overall network performance". They suggest that this applies not only to external relationships but "for all relational exchanges (p.34), such as for work relationships within a company.

Commitment is defined as "an exchange partner believing that an ongoing relationship with another is so important as to warrant maximum efforts at maintaining it; that is, the committed party believes the relationship is worth working on to ensure that it endures indefinitely" (Morgan and Hunt 1994, p. 23). Commitment is a fundamental concept for

understanding human behavior (Klein, Molloy, and Cooper 2009) since it reflects the moving spirit of motivation. Commitment is responsible for actions and decisions with long-term impact (Meyer, Becker, and Vandenberghe 2004), and it is essential for successful long-term relationships (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987; Morgan and Hunt 1994). In organizational management, commitment is considered a result of employee satisfaction (Meyer and Maltin 2010). It attaches employees to the organization and leads to less fluctuation (Meyer, Becker, and Vandenberghe 2004).

Trust is the basis for strong business relationships (Lewicki and Bunker 1996). It is a multidimensional, dynamic phenomenon that includes interpersonal, cultural, emotional, and cognitive dimensions (Lewis and Weigert 1985). Gabarro (1978, p. 294) defines trust as “the degree to which one person feels assured that another person will not take malevolent or arbitrary actions, and the extent to which one person can expect predictability in other’s behavior in terms of what is normally expected of a person acting in good faith”. A strong relationship involves a trusted and a trustee person (Doney and Cannon 1997; Six and Sorge 2008). The management literature identifies trust in organizations as acting between employees and the organization as well as between employees themselves (Sousa-Lima, Michel, and Caetano 2013). It implies that a person or organization will be fair, reliable, ethical, competent, and nonthreatening (Carnevale 1995).

Morgan and Hunt (1994) position commitment and trust as the two key variables between five antecedents and five outcomes and associate them with the effective cooperation that is required for relationship marketing success.

“Commitment and trust are “key” because they encourage marketers to (1) work at preserving relationship investments by cooperating with exchange partners, (2) resist attractive short-term alternatives in favor of the expected long-term benefits of staying with existing partners, and (3) view potentially high-risk actions as being prudent because of the belief that their partners will not act opportunistically. (...) In short, commitment and trust lead directly to cooperative behaviors” (Morgan and Hunt 1994, p. 22).

We extend CT theory to the realm of KAM. Inside the company and the internal network, the KA Manager and the KA team are viewable as internal service providers with the need to establish, develop, maintain, and manage long-term relationships. The KA Manager has an internal selling role. This person needs to represent the customer’s needs in the internal network. At the same time the KA Manager has to negotiate a wide variety of resources through the internal network (Lambe and Spekman 1997). We consider this internal selling role of the KA Manager to be equivalent - in several ways - to a supplier-customer relationship as described by Morgan and Hunt (1994). However, we believe that internal work relationships have idiosyncratic characteristics as compared to external relationships. Hence, we add two drivers to the CT framework, which we consider essential for internal commitment and trust: leadership style and interpersonal skills. This leads to an extended model of the CT theory as shown in figure 1.

Insert figure 1 about here

We consider this extension of two factors appropriate for the following reasons: First of all, KA Managers maintain interrelated relationships. Therefore, the behavior of any manager does not only evolve from the individual needs and motives, but from the personal interaction with his

colleagues. Interdepartmental cooperation is promoted by interaction outside of official channels (Lawrence and Lorsch 1967). Thus an effective collaboration between managers can be achieved by “being open and frank about their positions” in which “trust is a base to solve problems” (Lawrence and Lorsch 1967, p. 13). However, the internal structure of a KAM unit, the exchange rate within the internal network and the intrinsic willingness of KA Managers to communicate and cooperate must be established and strengthened by the KAM Director. A unit needs to be in a surrounding where it can perform the required tasks (Lawrence and Lorsch 1967).

This leads to our second factor and the assumption that the leadership style of the KAM Director might have the potential to influence the KA Managers’ trust and commitment. In this article, we focus on two major leadership styles which are highly regarded in the academic literature: the transactional and the transformational leadership style. While transactional leaders focus on the achievement of short-term goals while using rewards as incentives of performance, transformational leaders rather motivate their employees to consider priorities that go beyond their own individual interests (Smith, Andras, and Rosenbloom B. 2012). Transformational leadership style is considered to be the most flexible form of leadership in a rapidly changing environment (Bass 1985). It “encourages subordinates to place group vision, concerns, and goals above their own self interest for the benefit of the whole organization” (Smith, Andras, and Rosenbloom B. 2012, p. 435). Dubinsky et al. (1995) showed that employees who are led by a transformational leader become better problem solvers and often develop enhanced thought processes that heighten their confidence in their abilities to perform their job. As a consequence, and as an extension to Morgan and Hunt (1994), our study considers five additional hypotheses developed below.

H+1: There is a positive relationship between KA Managers’ interpersonal skills and the level of trust their internal network partners place in them

H+2: There is a positive relationship between leadership style and relationship commitment

H+3: There is a positive relationship between leadership style and trust

Finally, we look at the relationship between leadership style and interpersonal skills. Fiedler (1967) investigates different leadership styles and the association with the performance. His findings are relevant recognizing that the leadership style has an impact on interpersonal norms of a unit. Assuming that interpersonal norms and interpersonal skills are related, we hypothesize that:

H+4: There is a relationship between interpersonal norms and interpersonal skills

H+5: There is a positive relationship between a transformational leadership style and interpersonal skills

The CT approach also allows us to consider trust in organizations. Organizations are living systems whereas people are the organizational framework. Identify fusion in organizations occurs when people of organization get a visceral feeling of oneness with the organization (Swann et al. 2012). The union can be “so strong among highly fused persons that the boundaries

that ordinarily demarcate the personal and social self become highly permeable” (Swann et al. 2012, p. 442).

Trust in an organization can be illustrated by describing leader and employee behaviors (Bruhn 2001). Morgan and Hunt (1994) consider trust a major determinant of relationship commitment. Social exchange theory explains this causality with generalized reciprocity which states that "mistrust breeds mistrust and as such would also serve to decrease commitment in the relationship and shift the transaction to one of more direct short-term exchanges" (McDonald 1981, p. 834). We investigate those four different levels of trust by using the commitment trust scale of Morgan and Hunt (1994) as well as the dyadic trust scale of Larzelere and Huston (1980) as per particulars given below. In a KAM perspective, again we consider four levels to be important: company level, director level, team level, internal network level. We assume that trust and commitment can consolidate the internal cooperation between KAM and related departments, consequently between the company and KA; thus provoking a competitive advantage for the company.

Three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment by Meyer and Allen extended to internal KAM aspects

Academic research with the focus of commitment in the workplace has its roots in the Human Relations movement in the mid-20th century and gained in importance in the 1970s. Early popular academic researchers in this field are Lyman Porter, Richard Mowday and Richard Steers. Most of the studies in organizational behavior investigated the consequences of commitment at an individual level. However, organizational commitment was rarely conducted including more than one type of organizational commitment within one study. The first developments of multidimensional measures of commitment did not take place until the 1980s (Meyer, Jackson, and Maltin 2008). In our study we focus on one model that has received lots of attention in the academic research: the three-component model by Meyer and Allen (1991). The authors state that the various definitions of organizational commitment have one in common: “the view that commitment is a psychological state that (a) characterizes the employee’s relationship within the organization, and (b) has implications for the decision to continue or discontinue membership in the organization” (Meyer and Allen 1991, p. 67). Thus their multidimensional framework distinguishes three dimensions of commitment: affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment (Meyer and Allen 1991). These three mindsets comprehend distinguishable streams: affective attachment to the organization, perceived cost of leaving the organization, and obligation to remain (Meyer, Jackson, and Maltin 2008). Tests of the three-component model received empirical support and generally confirmed the multidimensionality of the construct (Allen and Meyer 1996). Until Meyer and Allen introduced the three-component-model, researchers have rarely investigated organizational commitment using all mindsets of organizational commitment in the same study. So far, there has been little empirical research investigating all three components within one study (Meyer, Jackson, and Maltin 2008). In our case, common to all conceptualizations of commitment is the perception that commitment binds a KA manager to the organization.

To the best of our knowledge, the three-component conceptualization of commitment has not been studied in the context of KA Managers. In the following we shortly illustrate the three approaches of commitment for our purpose.

Affective commitment

Affective or emotional commitment is the most prevalent approach to organizational commitment in the literature. It considers the emotional attachment of an employee to the organization.

“Affective commitment refers to the employee’s emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization. Employees with a strong affective commitment continue employment with the organization because they *want* to do so” (Meyer and Allen 1991, p. 67)

Affective commitment can be divided into 4 categories: (1) personal, (2) structural, (3) job-related characteristics and (4) work experience (Mowday, Porter, and Steers 1982). It could be shown that demographic characteristics (sex, age, and education) can be linked to commitment. However, former academic studies have revealed that the links between demographic characteristics and commitment disappear when work value and work rewards are monitored (Mottaz 1988). Nowadays, affective commitment and with it the desire to maintain in an organization are considered the result of work experience. It can be assumed that employees who make valuable work experiences in their company and expect them to continue, tend to be more affectively committed and stay in an organization. Those employees might even be willed to do some extra efforts, and thus contribute to the effectiveness of their organization (Meyer and Allen 1991). Applying this thought to KAM, it can be assumed that a KA Manager who appreciates the work experience in his job is more affectively committed than one who doesn’t. In other words this means that a highly affective committed KA Manager enjoys the membership in his KAM team and – in the best case – in the organization (Allen and Meyer 1990b). Hence he might be motivated to put some extra effort for receiving effective work results of the KAM team; and thereby strengthen the position of the KAM team within the organization.

Continuance commitment

“Continuance commitment refers to an awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization. Employees whose primary link to the organization is based on continuance commitment remain because they *need* to do so” (Meyer and Allen 1991, p. 67)

Hence, anything that increases the cost for leaving the organization could create continuance commitment. Thus it can be provoked by a very special job assignment which requires individual and special skills; and which will make it difficult for the employee to leave the organization due to less marketable skills. It is important to state that continuance commitment only develops when the relevant employee becomes aware of this special situation when testing the market (Meyer and Allen 1991).

A KA Manager hardly faces the situation of being dependent on an organization due to his special skills. He will rather get a very positive feedback when testing the market. This can be traced back to the miscellaneousness of skills a KA Manager has developed throughout his work-experience, combined with a profound and detailed market knowledge which makes a KA Manager a very interesting, possible employee also for other organizations. According to this, KA Managers can be expected to have a low level of continuance commitment.

Normative Commitment

“Normative commitment reflects a feeling of obligation to continue employment. Employees with a high level of normative commitment feel that they *ought* to remain with the organization” (Meyer and Allen 1991, p. 67)

This feeling of obligation to remain with an organization are often results from the internalization of normative pressure (Wiener 1982). In organizations this might occur when the organizational culture emphasizes the importance of the collective rather than the individual. On another level this could even be a sort of “expectation of an employee’s loyalty” towards the organization, also mediated by an organization’s cultural philosophy (Meyer and Allen 1991). It is an internalization process of experiences which in this case are by organizational in origin. They can also be cultural of familial in origin and become a complex psychodynamic process (Bowlby 1982).

Adapted this thought to KAM, normative commitment might be high when a KA Manager is with the same organization for many years and has somehow learned to be loyal to the organization. In a psychodynamic understanding, this loyalty to the organization can not only result because of organizational occasions, but because he has learned in a young age to value loyalty in a comprehensive manner.

Dyadic Trust Scale by Larzelere and Huston extended to internal KAM aspects

Many academic researchers have investigated the concept of trust and consider it a central feature of cooperation in organizations. In organizational behavior theories the concept of trust exist at different levels like at organizational, group or individual level (Korsgaard, Pitariu, and Jeong 2008). The academic literature of marketing management also distinguishes between trust on the individual level and trust on the organizational, corporate level (Bruhn 2001; Ojasalo 2001). Reichheld (1993) uses the expression loyalty to describe the phenomenon of trust. However, in the academic literature of marketing, management, and organization a precise definition of the construct loyalty has not yet been sophisticated (Ritter and Andersen 2014). However, leaders can express trust in three different ways – through information, control and influence. In the academic literature this is called the ‘spiral model of trust’. It means that trust is a reciprocal and incremental phenomenon. If trust is given through a leader and within a team, this tends to build greater trust among team members (Zand 1997). Hence effective KAM Directors could use this model to build trust in the KAM team employing three components: acceptance, tolerance for disagreement, and constructive use of people’s openness (Bruhn 2001).

We first focus on trust in KA Managers as an interpersonal phenomenon. In this understanding it can be defined “a willingness to accept a risk involving a trustee” (Korsgaard, Pitariu, and Jeong 2008, p. 89). In fact, trust in interpersonal relationships is a trait such as the propensity to trust (Rotter 1967). While focusing on trust in persons, “trust has been viewed a personality characteristic, an attitude, a rational decision, a preconscious expectation, and a willingness to be vulnerable” (Bruhn 2001, p. 19). Trust on the individual level is created; it is the result of a lifelong learning process and of mutual expectations and influences between two people (Bruhn 2001). In our study we explore different interpersonal levels in a KA Manager’s relationship network. For this matter we use the dyadic trust scale of Larzelere and Huston (1980). It is a tool which is “unidimensional, reliable, relatively free from response biases, and purposely designed to be consistent with conceptualizations of trust from various perspectives”

(Larzelere and Huston 1980, p. 595). Originally it has been developed to investigate interpersonal trust in marital partners, but can also be applied to other types of close relationships. By using the dyadic trust scale of Larzelere and Huston for our case, we deliberately touch the area of social scientific research. The authors suggest to also applying the scale to issues as personal growth in relationships, solving interpersonal conflict, and last but not least generate close personal relationships. Hence trust is defined the belief by one partner in the integrity of another individual. In this context a very important attribution is the benevolence of a partner which means the willingness of a partner to trust. Moreover the authors claim that trust is expected to be associated with commitment (Larzelere and Huston 1980). Finally, dyadic trust “would seem to be a prerequisite for commitment, with higher levels of trust necessary for higher levels of commitment (Larzelere and Huston 1980, p. 597).

We argue that the assumptions of the dyadic trust scale can be extended to our research question with good cause. First, close internal relationships between a KA Manager and its interferences are very often long-lasting sophisticated relationships which are entitled to a high level of integrity, maybe even higher as with marital partners since the position of a KA Manager implicates a high degree of professionalism. Second, we also investigate the connection between trust and commitment in internal KAM relationships and assume that trust has a positive impact on commitment. Thirdly, following the request of Larzelere and Huston (1980), we apply the dyadic trust scale for encouraging personal growth in the relationship network of a KA Manager while solving interpersonal conflicts. In addition we are convinced that it might be worthwhile to move beyond organizational behavior theories to broaden the hitherto existing view and invite new avenues for research.

RESEARCH APPROACH

To study internal KAM, we employed a case study approach.

“Case study research is, probably, the most popular research method used by industrial marketing researchers. This may be, in part, because of the nature of the subject. The main units of analysis are organizations and relationships which are difficult to access, and complex in structure in comparison with, for example, consumer markets” (Easton 2010, p. 118).

Our research approach focuses on the behavior of individuals and groups within one organization. The case study involves the KAM of a large European pharmaceutical company. Three KAM teams and their network within the company have been investigated over a period of nine months. Table 1 summarizes characteristics of the KAM teams. Note that team 3 is a sub-team of team 2 which means it has an own senior manager who reports to the director of team 2.

Insert table 1 about here

As suggested by Yin (1981; 1994) or Woodside and Wilson (2003), we use triangulated data from multiple sources. We collected written documents, company reports, strategy papers, internal newsletters, and internal documents about the KAM department. In addition, we conducted field studies including direct observations within the environment of the KAM teams. Finally, we conducted 35 in-depth-interviews with senior and junior members of KAM such as the CEO of commercial affairs, the directors KAM and directors of closely related departments as well as the members of KAM teams.

We used mixed methods in the interviews based on the premise that “case study can be done by using either qualitative or quantitative evidence” (Yin 1981, p. 58). The in-depth questions allowed the informants to answer without pressure of time; in this way informants were encouraged to express other relevant issues. For applying quantitative methods in the case study, a verbatim interrogation of the above mentioned scales was conducted in the interview. The interviews lasted between 90 minutes and two hours. We recorded all interviews and transcribed them verbatim using simple transcription rules.

To analyze the data, we followed recommendations by Spiggle (1994) who describes a set of sequential activities including categorization, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalization, integration, iteration, and refutation. We used the MaxQDA software program for analyzing the data.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Commitment and trust are two key characteristics which are considerably investigated. The results show differences in the teams concerning those characteristics and the cooperative and effective dealings in the internal network. In all three teams trust is the driver for commitment and mistrust the release of commitment. Hence trust can be considered the cornerstone of the internal cooperation. In a first step, we elucidate the findings of multilevel trust in internal KAM activities and relationships. We then represent the findings of multilevel commitment in internal activities and relationships. In particular, we summarize the results of the affective, continuance, and normative commitment scales which we surveyed verbatim in each KAM team. Finally we work out the effects of commitment and trust on the internal cooperation.

Multilevel trust in internal KAM activities and relationships

Team 1 shows a high level of trust towards the KAM Director and within the KAM team. The team members interact very openly and have a high degree of loyalty among themselves. They share customer-specific information such as pricing or contract-specific details. The level of trust towards the KAM Director is very high. The outcome of internal trust is open and cooperative relationships within the team and mostly in the internal network. However, members of team 1 consider the company to be disloyal toward employees due to numerous staff cuts within the last years and low salary growth rates. They describe the culture of the organization as financially and mathematically driven with a “soupçon of mistrust”. After all, distrust in the organization differs from distrust in individuals, since it is a cumulative process unless a major moral (as for example a new CEO) occurs (Bruhn 2001). This is precisely what has occurred in our case, offering a possibility for reversing distrust and stimulating a management of trust.

Team 2 does not agree concerning the different levels of trust. In line with team one, some team members perceive a culture of mistrust at company level. The level of trust within the KAM team and towards the KAM Director is not strongly consistent among all team members and could be strengthened. One reason for distrust within the team might be the recruitment policy of the KAM Director who has lately recruited team members at junior level with no insider knowledge of the organization. This missing knowledge about internal circumstances created a situation of deep uncertainty for the new team members. However, a trustful

relationship must be created over time through dialogue, conversation, and repeated interpersonal exchanges. Hence the KAM Director might establish a climate which allows and tolerates occasional failure – an essential baseline of trust (Bruhn 2001). The KA Director's leadership style may be another factor causing distrust within the team. It is described as being open and friendly but not reliable. This leads to unsolved conflicts and a loss of trust. Moreover, the KAM Director does monitor or control. The total absence of control may lead to low levels of trust. Nevertheless, the KA Managers consider the KAM Director a tolerant personality who gives lots of scope for development.

Team 3 As the results indicate, there is a violation of trust in the environment of team 3. The level of trust in the team is very low toward the KAM Director, the internal network and the team itself. The general perception of the team members is that the work environment is one of distrust. At the same time, the KAM Director's leadership style focuses on closely monitoring the work and performance of the subordinates, high supervision and establishments of team internal rules. Interestingly, this is the opposite approach as compared to team 2. This observation may hint to an inversely U-shaped relationship between leadership style and trust.

Insert table 2 about here

Multilevel commitment in internal KAM activities and relationships

Team 1 shows strong commitment to the KAM Director, to coworkers, and to the internal network. The KA Managers work in a cooperative atmosphere that favors the spreading within the team of "good practices" without the KAM Director having to monitor the use of such practices. The KA Managers do not feel a need for changes on any individual or company level. Within the team, there is a culture of open dialogue, a very high level of discipline, and a culture of strong participative decision making. KA Managers also show high trust in the KAM Director and KAM team. The KAM Director is considered being a regular consultant who delegates responsibility. The KA Managers describe him being cooperative but consequent at last instance.

Team 2 shows strong commitment to the company. The KA Managers highly appreciate working in an organization to which they feel committed to. They value the work conditions provided by the company. However, KA Managers show a moderate level of commitment to the team. The outcome is a low level of intra-organizational cooperation. The lack of team cooperation is extremely important in regard to recent research which has shown the effectiveness of less "formal" teams, based on the concept of "network" (Cross et al. 2008).

Team 3 also shows strong commitment to the company. The KA Managers are all at senior level and have worked in different responsible positions before becoming a KA Manager, and thus feel committed to the organization. The commitment towards the team is low. The KA Managers among themselves are rather in the position of "lone warriors" than co-workers.

Insert table 3 about here

In the following we consider the three components of commitment as suggested by Meyer and Allen (1991). We interrogated the items of the three scales at all interviewed KA

Managers of the three KAM teams. The responses to each item were binary coded. The two anchors scale was labeled with 'agree' or 'don't agree'. For easier administration, we skipped items 3 and 9 in the continuance commitment scale items. (R) indicates that the item is a reverse-keyed item (scoring is reversed). The results of the scale confirm the data which we have gained during the conversations in the interview. However, we were able to get a much deeper insight in the KA Managers' commitment to the organization. The three components by Meyer and Allen (1991) allowed us to reflect varying degrees of all the three. For instance, one KA Manager could have a strong attachment to the organization and a sense of obligation to remain whereas another KA Manager might think about working for another pharmaceutical company but realizes that leaving the organization would be detrimental from an economic point of view. The findings allowed us to get a deeper insight into a KA Managers relationship with the organization by combining all three forms of commitment. We could confirm that affective commitment was the strongest component of commitment whereas the least effect on commitment over all KAM teams seems to have the normative component.

Team 1 – Affective Commitment Scale Items

The main factor which has an influence on the desire to maintain membership at an organization is the result of work experience (Meyer and Allen 1991). Members of team 1 have been with the organization for many years, and have had the possibilities to gain some valuable work experience. As the results show, the KA Managers want to remain in the organization. We presume that they expect furthermore positive work experience in their position with the organization. Even though the sense of belonging is high, private factors (like family, personal situation) seem to have an even higher influence on the KA Managers.

Insert table 4 about here

Team 1 – Continuance Commitment Scale Items

“Anything that increases the cost associated with leaving an organization has the potential to create continuance commitment” (Meyer and Allen 1991, p. 77). Even though the KA Managers of team 1 are aware of their high market value (see items 5 and 6 in table 5), 4 out of 6 KA Managers consider it a matter of necessity (as much as desire) to stay with the organization. The continuance commitment is middle-rate. In the interviews we found out, that most of the KA Managers consider themselves being too old for finding an adequate job opportunity at another pharmaceutical organization.

Insert table 5 about here

Team 1 – Normative Commitment Scale Items

The KA Managers of team 1 have a low normative commitment to the organization which means that they have no sense of obligation to remain with the organization. They put their personal matters over the ones of the organization.

Insert table 6 about here

Team 2 – Affective Commitment Scale Items

Team 2 is the only KAM team that has team members at junior level (<3 years in the company). Those team members have not had the opportunity to gain as much positive work experience as team member who are in the company for a longer period of time. The sense of belonging and personal meaning is at a moderate level. Even though 4 out of 7 KA Managers state that the organization has a great deal of personal meaning to them, the overall affective commitment of team 2 is middle-rate and could be strengthen.

Insert table 7 about here

Team 2 – Continuance Commitment Scale Items

KA Managers in team 2 are not strongly continuance committed to their organization. They estimate their market value as being high; and therefore anticipate numerous possibilities to find an alternative organization to be with. It does not surprise that some of the KA Managers are afraid of leaving their job without having another one lined up due to the fact that there are also junior managers in the team (assuming that junior managers have not had the possibility to save lots of money throughout the little years being in the job).

Insert table 8 about here

Team 2 – Normative Commitment Scale Items

The normative commitment at team 2 is basically not existent. The KA Managers of team 2 feel not at all obliged to remain with the organization.

Insert table 9 about here

Team 3 – Affective Commitment Scale Items

The affective commitment of the KA Managers at team 3 is very high. All KA Managers have a strong sense of belonging to the organization. They have all worked for many years with the organization and gained lots of positive work experience which might explain the strong affective commitment to the company.

Insert table 10 about here

Team 3 – Continuance Commitment Scale Items

The continuance commitment in team 3 is quite low which means that a continued employment is not a matter of necessity for the interviewed KA Managers. None of them is afraid of what might happen if quitting the job before having another one lined up. They know about their highly appreciated position and thus high market value.

Insert table 11 about here

Team 3 – Normative Commitment Scale Items

Also in team 3, the KA Managers are quite lowly normative committed to their organization. Even though the value of remaining loyal to one organization is partly existent (3 out of 5), they don't believe at all that moving from one organization to another is unethical.

Insert table 12 about here

Effects of multi-level commitment and trust on the internal cooperation

Table 13 shows the cooperation of team 1 in the internal network. It is often described as being harmonious. However, the KA Manager elucidate that the quality of the cooperation depends on the individual counterpart; the less trustful the individual relationship, the worse the communication or less intense the relationship. We could observe a lack of trust in those relationships and therefore less commitment and mutual trust. A few departments describe an arrogant attitude when the KA Managers appear closed in the team. This is especially the case towards the classical sales department. This perception has to be scrutinized. If applicable there might be a need for a change management process in the group appearance.

Insert table 13 about here

As table 14 illustrates, the cooperation of teams 2 and 3 is less harmonious than in team 1. Many relationships in the internal network lack mutual understanding and repeated exchange. The KA Managers describe the relationships as distrustful, depending on their individual counterparts. The results indicate that the less trust exist between the KAM teams and related departments, the worse the cooperation. The results confirm that KAM teams' success requires cooperative work environments. In addition, the findings confirm the assumption that commitment and trust are key characteristics for an effective internal cooperation.

Insert table 14 about here

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to examine internal KAM relationships and the effects of multilevel commitment and trust on the internal cooperation. In this article, we take a first step in investigating trust and commitment on a multilevel basis. The main findings from our study show that commitment has a strong influence on the team performance in the internal network. Strong commitment strengthens the team spirit; the KAM team behaves as a whole in the internal network. This has a positive effect on the internal cooperation. By applying the three scales of commitment as suggested by Meyer and Allen (Meyer and Allen 1991), we could detect that affective commitment has the strongest impact on commitment. As we noted, trust arguably ensures the development of commitment. For example, KA Managers who trust in their colleagues and their director tend to become more committed than others. Hence one key

implication for managers is that trust and commitment have to be constantly strengthened within the KAM team and towards the KAM Director.

Increasing trust in internal KAM activities and relationships

In our case study, we find that trust is a major determinant of relationship commitment. Several factors play an important role for building a culture of trust in a KAM team:

- (1) Depth and strengthening of relationships
 - (2) Understanding roles and responsibilities
 - (3) Frequent, direct and timely communication
 - (4) Clarity and shared vision and purpose
 - (5) Honoring promises and commitment
 - (6) Understanding and respecting diversity
 - (7) Connectedness and public face
- (Bruhn 2001)

Depth and strengthening of relationships

For maintaining or building trust in a KAM team, it is essential that KA Managers know each other which means much more than knowing familiarities. It means “understanding an individual’s values, aspirations, talents, beliefs, fears, and shortcomings” (Bruhn 2001, p. 56). It is essential for KA Managers in a KAM team to understand each other’s work style, and to know about mutual strengths and weaknesses (Bruhn 2001). In our case, members of the KAM teams are consciously using individual strengths of team members for the benefit of the whole team, as for example special software skills.

Understanding roles and responsibilities

The role of the KA Manager within the KAM team and the whole organization has to be clear and understood. If the individual area of responsibility within the KAM team is not defined, confusion and frustration will enhance to the point of loss of trust. Without this clarity about roles and responsibilities, speculations in the organization can arise and erode trust (Bruhn 2001). It is essential for a KAM Director to establish a culture of clearly defined roles within the KAM team; and to prepare the KA Managers to pursue ‘internal marketing activities’ which help to understand the important role of a KAM team for the organization.

Frequent, direct and timely communication

“Timely communication that offers full-disclosure, and is shared appears to engender a culture of high trust. The absence of communication, on the one hand, often causes suspicion and creates rumors and gossip” (Bruhn 2001, p. 57). Thus KAM Directors should be aware of the power of an open communication to create trust within the KAM team. One possibility which we observed in our case is to involve KA Managers in the decision making process and thus establish a culture of trust between team members and leader.

Clarity and shared vision and purpose

One major aspect in a KAM team with a culture of trust is knowing what the KA Managers have in common, and what holds them together. The purpose and the vision of a KAM team should be known by any KA Manager of the team. Shared purposes, directions and visions are the main causes for maintaining trust in the KAM team.

Honoring promises and commitments

Only if promises are kept and commitments are honored, trust can be established and maintained (Bruhn 2001). One possibility to keep to this standard is to follow verbal agreements with written verifications. If a KAM Director is inconsistent in what he says or does, this can significantly erode trust among team members (Cangemi, Rice, and Kowalski 1989).

Understanding and respecting diversity

Nowadays KAM teams often constitute of multicultural team members. The diverse challenges in a multicultural team are for example different attitudes, behavior, values and communication. This diversity results in a higher complexity for managing and leading a KAM team. (Paul et al. 2004/2005). Hence the KAM Director needs “to create a culture of trust which is inclusive of the differences among its members” [...] “Creating a multicultural organization of high trust requires good listeners, respect for differences and a willingness to explore rather than win (Bruhn 2001, p. 58).

Connectedness and public face

Last but not least, a culture of trust will also enhance the external environment. The KA Manager represents the organization in the external environment; he makes the personal appearance towards the KA (“one face to the customer”). An organization will only be perceived as being trustful and worthwhile to develop external ties with, if it is a healthy organization with a high level of trust. In many cases, leaders are made responsible for a trustful environment. In the strict sense it is the organization which is responsible for providing trust. Therefore it seems obvious that an internal management of trust - in the KAM team as well as in the organization as a whole - will eventually determine the degree of external trust (Bruhn 2001).

Increasing commitment in internal KAM activities and relationships

So far academic research and discussions focus on the influence of management practices on employee’s affective commitment (Meyer and Allen 1997). “Affective commitment is arguably the most desirable form of commitment and the one that organizations are most likely to want to instill in their employees” (Meyer and Allen 1997, p. 67). However, there exist also management practices to influence the continuance and normative commitment of employees (Meyer and Allen 1997). For building initial predispositions for commitment in a KAM relationship network, it might be necessary to strengthen trust and commitment on a company level. This of course is a very challenging and more invasive process and needs to be agreed upon with the top management. After all, the organization needs to develop or foster efficient

Human Resource Management (HRM) practices to “manage for commitment”. Gaertner and Nollen determined that “psychological commitment is higher among employees who believe they are being treated as resources to be developed rather than commodities to buy and sell” (Gaertner and Nollen 1989, p. 987). When linking commitment to HRM practices, different stages can be considered:

- (1) recruitment and selection of KA Managers
 - (2) socialization and training of KA Managers
 - (3) assessment and promotion of KA Managers
 - (4) remuneration of KA Managers (compensation and benefits)
 - (5) HRM systems
- (Meyer and Allen 1997)

Recruitment and selection of KA Managers

Academic research within the person-job fit tradition found that employees who can make a certain job experience in their position which is congruent with their values or which meets their personal needs will be higher affectively committed than others (Meyer and Allen 1997). Eventually, some KA Managers may misconceive the position and role in their job. If individual values and needs are not fulfilled by the position in a KAM team, this might lead to less commitment at different levels. Also, some KA Managers may have attitudes that are inappropriate to their role. Changing these attitudes is a tedious and difficult process without having a guarantee for success. In any case, those attitudes should be taken in account when selecting new KA Managers. HRM processes should employ assessment processes that identify variables which affect commitment and trust. Certainly one important issue is the personality of a new KA Manager, that means in particular personal characteristics (Mowday, Porter, and Steers). In our case an indication for a committed candidate could be the desire to establish a long-time career as a KA Manager. An indication for a committed KA Manager could be a “sense of obligation” that a KA Manager has for his position as well as for the organization. The bottom line is that even small changes in an employee’s mentality can have a significant impact on the internal cooperation.

Socialization and training of KA Managers

Meyer and Allen (1997) see one way to build and strengthen the predisposition for commitment through socialization and training. It was found that the dimensions which have the strongest effects on commitment are investiture (versus divestiture) (Allen and Meyer 1990a; Jones 1986). Jones determines the investiture-divestiture dimensions as “the degree to which newcomers receive positive [investiture] or negative [divestiture] support after entry from experienced organizational members” (Jones 1986, p. 265). In our case, the commitment of new KA Managers could be strengthened when the KAM team uses investiture tactics, that means for example providing new KA Managers with a sense of self-worth or providing a supportive environment. In our case, this could be a ‘training on the job’ for a new KA Manager or a constant support through an experienced KA Manager. Training is often considered to be an essential part of the socialization process (Meyer and Allen 1997). Tannenbaum et al. (1991) found a positive correlation between commitment and employees’ motivation for training. Thus,

it can be suggested that KA Managers regularly get an opportunity to gather individual training experience and thus get a stronger organizational commitment.

Assessment and promotion of KA Managers

Upward movements of employees might also have an impact on the commitment of KA Managers (Meyer and Allen 1997). A higher commitment was found among employees who had been promoted. The perception of those employees was that the company feels committed to their employees which leads them to reciprocate (Gaertner and Nollen 1989). Promotion possibilities of a KA Manager in the team are rare. In his position, the KA Manager reigns supreme in the disciplines of marketing and sales. One mentionable possibility of promotion might be the role of leading a smaller KAM team within the KAM team itself, as for example leading a KAM team projects and concepts or leading a KAM support system. Another possibility, on rare occasions, is the promotion of a KA Manager to a KAM Director. However, possibilities of internal promotion are not a daily occurrence. All the more the necessity of acknowledgement within the organization plays a motivating role for the KA Manager. It would be wise by the KAM Directors to find ways of strengthen the internal acknowledgement of a KAM team and thus increase the affective commitment of KA Managers.

Remuneration of KA Managers (compensation and benefits)

Little academic research exists about the impact of compensation and benefits on commitment. Nevertheless, the remuneration plan could conceivably have implications for the commitment of employees (Meyer and Allen 1997). Even if a KA Manager might be saturated by his salary and benefits, which might be in rare cases, there might still be a possibility to strengthen KA Managers by means of intrinsic variables. However, if it is obvious that a KA Manager would appreciate a higher salary or some additional benefits, it might be a way to influence a KA Manager's commitment. Nonetheless, for an effective HRM practice and in order to avoid discord in a KAM team, it is essential to pay attention to an adjusted remuneration plan between KA Managers within a KAM team. The KAM Director could find ways to promote intrinsic variables to motivate KA Managers and thus increase organizational commitment towards the KAM team, the organization and most definitely the KAM Director.

HRM Systems

Meyer and Allen (1997) have shown that HRM practices of an organization have an impact on organizational commitment. Even though there exist various typologies to strengthen an employee's commitment by means of an efficient HRM practice, the authors focus on 'control' and 'commitment' strategies (Meyer and Allen 1997). "The focus is on developing committed employees who can be trusted to use their discretion to carry out job tasks in ways that are consistent with the organizational goals" (Arthur 1994, p. 672). The challenge of the HRM practices is to affect as much employees as possible. In order to increase organizational commitment of KA Managers as well as of all the other employees of the company, HRM practices have to find possibilities how to lead them in the desired direction.

On a more micro level, HRM practices and policies of the KAM Director may influence commitment of the KA Managers. In our findings we have observed this last stage that we consider to be crucial when linking commitment and trust to HRM practices. We could confirm $H+2$ and $H+3$, and thus that the leadership style of the KAM Director is crucial for building trust and finally commitment. We elucidate the implications of those findings in more detail:

Leadership style of the KAM Director

Our findings show that the leadership style of the KAM Director has an impact on the effective cooperation of the KAM team in the internal network. Prior academic researchers found that communication is an important component to build commitment (Schweiger and DeNisi 1991). Thus the transformational leadership style can have an impact on affective and normative commitment of the employees. KAM Directors could focus on the transformational leadership style for an effective KAM team management while increasing organizational commitment. In our case we could observe a modern form of transformational leadership style – coaching – which can be defined “a sequence of conversations and activities that provides ongoing feedback and encouragement to a KAM team member with the goal of improving that person’s performance” (Corcoran et al., p. 118)

However, it has to be kept in mind that ‘managing for commitment’ in many organizations can imply a management of change and that a ‘new’ HRM process has to be carefully developed and implemented. The top management role in this change process is indispensable. “CEO and leadership teams must be visible, people-centered, offensive, responsive, enthusiastic, and practice trust” (Bruhn 2001, p. 59). Again, communication is one of the most effective instruments for building commitment in an organization’s change management process (Schweiger and DeNisi 1991).

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

As in the case with most research, our work has several limitations. However, some of the limitations of our study might serve as sources of future research design. First of all, our findings result from one single case. Even though case-study based research remains appropriate for an issue like the one at hand, our case should be transformed to another case study environment to ensure that we are capturing the right connecting factors. It would be interesting to see if KAM teams of other big pharmaceutical players have to meet similar challenges in their internal collaboration. Also it might be worthwhile to expand the case in an inter-branch matter and identify key characteristics to be associated with the effective cooperation in the internal network. Second, our case stems from a specific national context. While extensive work on inter-cultural management has shown how strongly management may be impacted by culture, little research exists that attempts to identify if culture actually matters in key account management. Although we do not believe that culture modifies the basic concept of KAM, we do believe that the question of cultural factors has an impact on the level of internal commitment and trust in KAM teams and thus merits attention in future research. Thirdly, other measures of trust and commitment in internal business relationships might bring in further interesting aspects. There might be also other economic, procedural, structural or emotional factors that might have an impact on the internal cooperation of a KAM team. Fourthly, it might be desirable to investigate

the impact of the KAM Director's leadership style on the effectiveness of a KAM team. To the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical research about the type of leadership style which is most relevant to KAM Directors to increase the internal and external performance of their KAM teams. Finally, our study investigates the *internal* KAM relationship in matters of commitment and trust. It might be on behalf of researchers to investigate the *external* side of KAM relationships and the impact of multilevel commitment and multilevel trust towards the KA.

FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1 – CT Theory extended to internal KAM

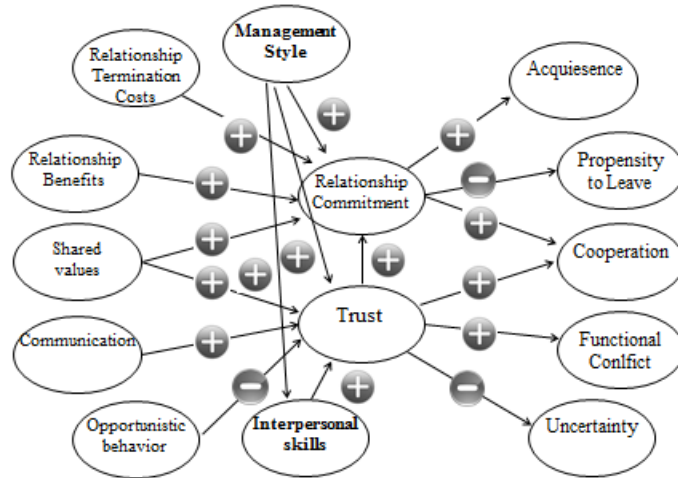


Table 1 – characterization of KAM teams (including KAM Director)

	Team size	Existence (years)	Composition (Junior/Senior KA Managers)	Composition (gender m/f)
Team 1	9	12	100 % Seniors	100% m
Team 2	7	8	71,43% Seniors 28,57% Juniors	57,14% m 42,86% f
Team 3	9	8	100% Seniors	77,78% m 22,21% f

Table 2 – multilevel trust in KAM teams

	KAM team 1	KAM team 2	KAM team 3
company level	○	n.s.	n.s.
director level	●	n.s.	○
team level	●	○	○
network level	n.s.	○	○

legend
 strongly existent ●
 not strongly existent ○
 n.s. no statement (general) in team

Table 3 – multilevel commitment in KAM teams

	KAM team 1	KAM team 2	KAM team 3
company level	○	●	●
director level	●	n.s.	n.s.
team level	●	○	○
network level	●	n.s.	n.s.

Legend
 strongly existent ●
 not strongly existent ○
 n.s. no statement (general) in team

Table 4 – team 1 - affective commitment scale items (KAM Director included)

<i>Affective Commitment Scale Items</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>don't agree</i>	<i>abstained</i>
1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization	5	1	0
2. I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it	4	2	0
3. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own	1	5	0
4. I think I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one (R)	3	2	1
5. I do not feel like „part of my family“ at my organization (R)	3	2	1
6. I do not feel „emotionally attached“ to this organization (R)	3	3	0
7. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me	4	2	0
8. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization (R)	1	5	0

Table 5 – team 1 - continuance commitment scale items (KAM Director included)

<i>Continuance Commitment Scale Items</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>don't agree</i>	<i>abstained</i>
1. I am not afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another lined up (R)	4	2	0
2. It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to	3	3	0
3. It wouldn't be too costly for me to leave my organization in the near future (R)	3	3	0
4. Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire	4	1	1
5. I believe that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization	2	4	0
6. One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives	1	5	0
7. One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice; another organization may not match the overall benefits I have here	2	4	0

Table 6 – team 1 - normative commitment scale items (KAM Director included)

<i>Normative Commitment Scale Items</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>don't agree</i>	<i>abstained</i>
1. I think that people these days move from company to company too often.	3	3	0
2. I do not believe that a person must always be loyal to his or her organization (R)	2	4	0
3. Jumping from organization to organization does not seem at all unethical to me (R)	6	0	0
4. One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that I believe loyalty is important and therefore feel a sense of moral obligation to remain	1	5	0
5. If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere, I would not feel it was right to leave my organization	1	5	0
6. I was taught to believe in the value of remaining loyal to one organization	4	2	0
7. Things were better in the days when people stayed with one organization for most of their careers	0	6	0
8. I do not think that wanting to be a „company man“ or a „company woman“ is sensible anymore	4	2	0

Table 7 – team 2 - affective commitment scale items (KAM Director included)

<i>Affective Commitment Scale Items</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>don't agree</i>	<i>abstained</i>
1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization	4	3	0
2. I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it	5	2	0
3. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own	1	6	0
4. I think I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one (R)	4	3	0
5. I do not feel like „part of my family“ at my organization (R)	4	3	0
6. I do not feel „emotionally attached“ to this organization (R)	4	3	0
7. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me	4	3	0
8. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization (R)	4	3	0

Table 8 – team 2 - continuance commitment scale items (KAM Director included)

<i>Continuance Commitment Scale Items</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>don't agree</i>	<i>abstained</i>
1. I am not afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another lined up (R)	3	4	0
2. It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to	4	3	0
3. It wouldn't be too costly for me to leave my organization in the near future (R)	5	2	0
4. Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire	3	4	0
5. I believe that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization	0	7	0
6. One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives	1	6	0
7. One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice; another organization may not match the overall benefits I have here	2	5	0

Table 9 – team 2 - normative commitment scale items (KAM Director included)

<i>Normative Commitment Scale Items</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>don't agree</i>	<i>abstained</i>
1. I think that people these days move from company to company too often.	0	7	0
2. I do not believe that a person must always be loyal to his or her organization (R)	7	0	0
3. Jumping from organization to organization does not seem at all unethical to me (R)	7	0	0
4. One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that I believe loyalty is important and therefore feel a sense of moral obligation to remain	0	7	0
5. If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere, I would not feel it was right to leave my organization	0	7	0
6. I was taught to believe in the value of remaining loyal to one organization	1	6	0
7. Things were better in the days when people stayed with one organization for most of their careers	0	7	0
8. I do not think that wanting to be a „company man“ or a „company woman“ is sensible anymore	6	1	0

Table 10 – team 3 - affective commitment scale items (KAM Director included)

<i>Affective Commitment Scale Items</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>don't agree</i>	<i>abstained</i>
1. I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization	4	1	0
2. I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it	5	0	0
3. I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own	2	3	0
4. I think I could easily become as attached to another organization as I am to this one (R)	2	3	0
5. I do not feel like „part of my family“ at my organization (R)	2	3	0
6. I do not feel „emotionally attached“ to this organization (R)	2	3	0
7. This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me	4	0	1
8. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization (R)	0	5	0

Table 11 – team 3 - continuance commitment scale items (KAM Director included)

<i>Continuance Commitment Scale Items</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>don't agree</i>	<i>abstained</i>
1. I am not afraid of what might happen if I quit my job without having another lined up (R)	0	5	0
2. It would be very hard for me to leave my organization right now, even if I wanted to	1	4	0
3. It wouldn't be too costly for me to leave my organization in the near future (R)	4	1	0
4. Right now, staying with my organization is a matter of necessity as much as desire	5	0	0
5. I believe that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization	0	5	0
6. One of the few negative consequences of leaving this organization would be the scarcity of available alternatives	2	3	0
7. One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that leaving would require considerable personal sacrifice; another organization may not match the overall benefits I have here	1	3	1

Table 12 – team 3 - normative commitment scale items (KAM Director included)

<i>Normative Commitment Scale Items</i>	<i>agree</i>	<i>don't agree</i>	<i>abstained</i>
1. I think that people these days move from company to company too often	2	3	0
2. I do not believe that a person must always be loyal to his or her organization (R)	0	5	0
3. Jumping from organization to organization does not seem at all unethical to me (R)	5	0	0
4. One of the major reasons I continue to work for this organization is that I believe loyalty is important and therefore feel a sense of moral obligation to remain	1	4	0
5. If I got another offer for a better job elsewhere, I would not feel it was right to leave my organization	2	3	0
6. I was taught to believe in the value of remaining loyal to one organization	2	3	0
7. Things were better in the days when people stayed with one organization for most of their careers	1	4	0
8. I do not think that wanting to be a „company man“ or a „company woman“ is sensible anymore	2	3	0

Table 13 – team 1 cooperation in the internal network

Department	cooperation	reasons
D1	(+)	excellent cooperation
D2	(+)	harmonious and regular exchange
D3	(o)	sometimes missing understanding
D4	(-)	problems of communication, missing framework
D5	(+) - (-)	communication problems depending on individual relationship
D6	(+) - (-)	different goals, depending on personal relationship
D7	(+)	harmonious and regular exchange
D8	(+)	excellent cooperation
D9	(-)	problems of communication

Table 14 – teams 2+3 cooperation in the internal network

Department	cooperation	reasons
D1	(+)	harmonious and regular exchange
D2	(+)	harmonious and regular exchange
D3	(o) (-)	resources, mutual understanding/misunderstanding
D4	(o) (-)	missing understanding of service, different understanding of business model
D5	(o) (-)	different perception, resources (temporal and financial --> budget)
D6	(o)	misunderstanding, enviousness, competitive situation, no information from senior manager
D7	(-)	resources, understanding/misunderstanding, no engagement, different goals and benefits of projects
D8	(-)	ambiguous responsibilities
D8	(o)	time delay in reaction

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