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CS-18-007
January 2016

Eden McCallum: Consulting Redefined

In November 2015, having drinks in the 18th-century Schloss Sihlberg, which overlooks the Zürichsee in Switzerland, partners of the London-based consulting firm Eden McCallum celebrated the opening of the company's second foreign office, in Zurich. Five years earlier, amidst doubts about how the firm would survive the global economic downturn, the partners had considered closing its first foreign office, in Amsterdam, to save money. At that time, however, they had resisted the pressure to retrench, and now they were glad they had done so. Having survived the downturn, the company was thriving, and they were ready to expand again.

Former McKinsey consultants Liann Eden and Dena McCallum had founded the company in 2000 in London, based on the idea of using a pool of freelance consultants, who would be allocated to projects secured by the company. Over the years they had assembled a pool of over 500 consultants whom they worked with very regularly, and several hundred more specialists whom they employed more infrequently. The company had also evolved into a partnership, with 15 partners and associate partners. Now, enjoying wine as they viewed the Zurich skyline, they reflected on the road ahead. The issues they faced were very different to those of a few years earlier, but challenging nonetheless.

Although they believed there remained ample opportunities for growth in the UK and Dutch markets, they realised that opening a third office, in Zurich, would bring additional complexities and coordination costs. Moreover, their ambitions did not end with Europe; they had long discussed opening an office in New York, to provide access to the vast American market for consulting services. Although they were enthusiastic about growth, they wondered how the company would cope, whether their value proposition would remain distinctive as the firm expanded, and how they would attract and retain the people in the various markets – independent consultants, partners and staff – needed to make the expansion a success.

This case was prepared by Freek Vermeulen, Associate Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship at London Business School. London Business School cases are developed solely as the basis for class discussion and are not intended to serve as endorsements, sources of primary data, or illustrations of effective or ineffective management.

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