

Global Account Management and Its Challenges

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Thesis
Professional Sales
2018



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Degree program Bachelor's Degree of Professional Sales	
Report/thesis title Global Account Management and Its Challenges	Number of pages and appendix pages 53 + 7
<p>This thesis goes further into account management and especially, global account management and its challenges. The objectives for this thesis are to find out what global account management is, what are challenges global account managers face in their jobs and what are the most common type of challenges. In addition, the thesis wants to find out how global account managers overcome the challenges they face and are there any similarities between the theory and real life.</p> <p>The theory consists of account management, key account management and global account management. The reason for this is that global account management is an account management model, like key account management, and it is important to understand the relationship of those three. Account management is a way of categorizing customers in certain groups and determining which way offer solutions to them.</p> <p>Key account management goes further from this, because the goal for these customers is to become a key supplier whenever they need something. It is also important to know, that always the biggest customers are not necessarily key accounts. It all comes to cost efficiency and strategy. Global account management is very much like key account management, it is just done in a larger and more complex scale, globally.</p> <p>On top of the theory, a qualitative research was made for the thesis. The research focused on the challenges that Finnish global account managers face and how they overcome the mentioned challenges. The research was done by interviewing five global account managers that have experience working in Finland with global accounts abroad. The research methods were defined by the criteria for qualitative research and the persons who were interviewed had to have experience in global account management.</p> <p>The main content for the results was about the challenges that global account managers face in their work and possible underlying reasons for this, solutions how global account managers overcome the challenges that the managers were mentioning during the interviews. Overall, global account management is complex and challenging environment to work in and it requires effective communication throughout the company and a well – functioning team to support the account manager.</p> <p>The thesis was made between August 2017 and February 2018. If the planning for the subject of the thesis, writing process, research and final touch – ups, the process took approximately seven months.</p>	
Keywords Global account management, key account management, account management	

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1 Introduction

Globalization is the changing force that has made the world smaller. This means that the distances that have previously seemed too long are now crossed in few seconds, with only one click. People are connected through globalization not only in their personal lives but also professionally through businesses. For example, culture and cross - cultural negotiation are something companies must face nowadays. This thesis is about the challenges account managers face in global account management and it will be explained further with the theory of account management and a qualitative research interviews.

The inspiration for the topic came from a course about global account management in student exchange that took place in the Netherlands in spring semester 2017. The writer believes the information from the research and further introduction to global account management through this thesis would be valuable for students of professional sales. Businesses need to keep up with the changing world and so do the sales people. Nowadays the customer isn't necessarily even in the same country, which means that sales managers need to be able to lead in a global environment.

Today's leaders must be aware of how to cope with globalization through their actions for example by considering the cultural differences of the customer. Sensitivity to differences can enhance the success of sales and create value to the customer. This leads to better relationships and better sales. One of the key elements that impact companies are digitalization and globalization.

1.1 Research

This research is about account management and it focuses mainly in global account management. This is because there is a lot of information about key account management easily available but not so much about global account management. The reason for this topic is the personal interest in global markets and work opportunities but also the importance of larger understanding of account management. In a world that is constantly molded by globalization, the writer believes this kind of research brings valuable information to the study program and in the courses of professional sales. Today's sales people must be aware of global challenges and how to overcome them.

The main objectives for the research are:

What are the challenges in global account management that account managers face?

Sub questions of the research are:

- a. What is global account management?
- b. What are the most common challenges?
- c. How global account managers overcome these challenges?
- d. Are the challenges similar to what is mentioned in the theory?

The research is made using qualitative methods because the answers can't really be measured by numbers. The writer believes that this type of method brings out the answers better. The information is collected by half structured interviews with closed and open questions by interviewing young Finnish global account managers that have study background in Haaga – Helia and the study program of professional sales. It was preferred that the interviews were done face to face but if that wasn't not possible, they were also done by phone. The reason for preferred face to face interviews was that the writer believed there is less room for misunderstandings during the interviews. It was also easier to understand what the subjects mean and, ask further questions. In addition, the interviews were anonymous which increased the quality of the interviews. This means that the subjects didn't have to leave valuable information out. The results will be visualized in a PowerPoint presentation that is meant for teaching purposes.

1.2 Haaga – Helia

The thesis is made to Haaga – Helia University of Applied Sciences degree of professional sales. The purpose of this collaboration is to produce new research information about global account management to the sales degree's new teaching module. The students from the sales program might also work with global accounts depending on the company they start working after university, which is why it is important for them to understand the challenges they might face. This is the reason why the results of the research are important for students, Haaga – Helia and everyone who works in global account management.

Haaga – Helia is a university of applied sciences and it has five campuses of which three are in Helsinki. It is one of the biggest universities of applied sciences in Finland with approximately 10 700 students and 640 staff members. Haaga – Helia offers education in

various branches such as hotel and restaurant, business, sports, travel, professional sales, finance, computer sciences and journalism. (Haaga – Helia 2017.)

The degree of professional sales is strongly about personal growth and development of one's skills as a salesperson. The goal is to create a strong base through business studies and training which gives possibilities to success especially in B2B sales. The alumni of professional sales understand the importance of sales in different organizations and account management and have the skills to achieve the set goals. The degree also focuses on improving the student's communication and presentation skills in a digital environment. The job titles this degree prepares the students for are for example a store manager, sales manager and key account manager. (Haaga – Helia 2017.)

1.3 Key Terms

The key words in this thesis revolve around *account management* and especially *global account management*. Account management is the action companies perform to meet the demand and to keep their customers satisfied. When done well, account management can save unnecessary expenses from a selling company. If the accounts are chosen and categorized right, there are possibilities to develop the relationship further into a key account or global account status.

One form of account management is *key account management* or *KAM*. In key account management the most potentially beneficial customers are labelled as *key accounts* and their needs will be taken care of by a *key account manager*, also referred as *KAM*. The goal of key account management is to build a strong partnership between the buyer and the supplier.

Because of the globalization, some of the customers can be global companies, which means that account management has to evolve. This leads to *global account management* or *GAM*. The global accounts are companies that work in more than one country and their business processes are executed on a *global level*, this will be explained further in detail later in this thesis. Usually companies have a team that has the responsibility to manage global accounts. The person who is responsible for a global account is called a *global account manager* and they are also referred as *GAM*. Global accounts can also be key accounts.

2 Account Management

This chapter focuses on account management and how customers develop from account to a Key Account. First, we look on what key account management is and how it differs from “normal” customers. Both key account manager and key account management are referred as *KAM*. Account management is something every company should stop and think for a while and they should be able to name their own key accounts without a problem. It is important to recognize the right customers, to make the business profitable. Later in this chapter, it is also explained further how the journey goes from a normal customer to a key account. The main stages of the journey of KAM are also explained.

2.1 Why to Focus on Account Management

The benefits of account management can be vaguely divided in two categories. First, account management gives deeper insight about customer behavior to supplier and explains better why customers are buying the product or services in the first place. On the other hand, account management increases the effectiveness of marketing and sales. The better understanding of customers a company has, the better strategic decisions and analysis it can make about their account management. (Mäntyneva 2003, 12.) In other words, account management is basically the “farming” team of the company. This team works within sales and is responsible for nurturing the wanted long-term relationships. The goal is to understand customer’s business needs, plan how to meet those and increase customer satisfaction. (Breiner 15.4.2017.)

It is simply not possible nor financially wise to serve all the customers the same way. There are customers whose potential simply isn’t enough for the effort of expensive customized services and marketing for example. This means that a company should focus their energy to categorize prospects to make an effective plan on how to approach them. One of the criteria to make customer segments is the customer’s willingness for a long – term relationship. In this case the customers can be divided in three groups:

1. Interested in being a customer
2. Neutral in being a customer
3. Reluctant in being a customer

(Mäntyneva 2003, 27.)

The financial potential of the customer can also be used as segmentation criteria. The matrix below shows how potential customers are categorized by their potential benefit and their benefit now for the supplier. The most valuable accounts are the ones that are highly

beneficial at the moment but have also potential to grow even more beneficial in the future. On the contrary, accounts supplier should consider letting go are the ones who have small amount of benefit currently and small potential for future benefit. In traditional customer segmentation methods, the customer base can be divided in various subgroups. The products or services are then being differed to these subgroups by the communication channels that each group uses, for example through social media or printed media. It is also important to take note if there is a noticeable development in time and are there common directions where the accounts are going. Some of the accounts might even move in the matrix. (Mäntyneva 2003, 27. – 28.)

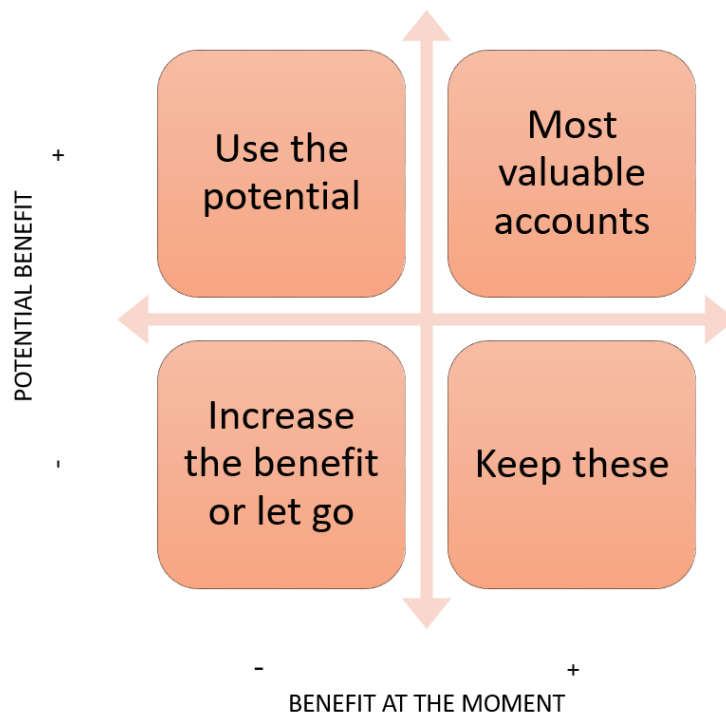


Figure 1. Customer segmentation based on current and potential benefit (Mäntyneva 2003.)

2.2 Journey to a Key Account

This chapter explains further in detail how the journey goes from a normal account to a key account. The main stages of the journey of KAM are opened and, also compared if there are any differences to global account management. In the end it is about the relationship between the buyer and the supplier, whose goal is to get a well-functioning long lasting relationship with the buyer.

The stages of the journey to a good relationship are pre-key account management where customer's need for the product is established. Salesperson guides the development by focusing on establishing the relationship. Early stage is where transactions take place and where the selling company tries to increase the volume of the business. This stage is about the potential of KAM relationship, but commitment hasn't been made yet (Cuevas, Donaldson & Lemmens 2016, 129 – 130.) In the middle- stage the seller becomes a preferred supplier for the customer. The partnership stage is where supplier and buyer form a well-functioning partnership and the parties identify opportunities to for integrating processes. Finally, the synergistic stage where supplier and buyer integrate their activities to deliver more value to their customers. (Honeycutt, Ford & Simitrias 2003, 255 – 256.) This process is visualized in the figure 2.

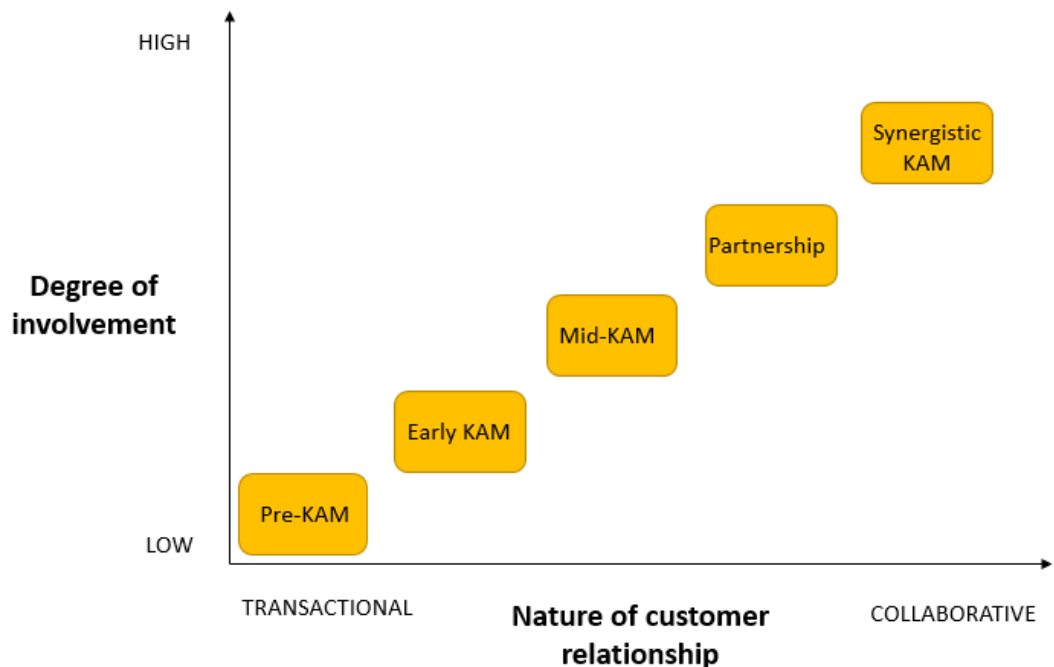


Figure 2. The development of customer relationship (Honeycutt etc. 2003, 255.)

Cuevas, Donaldson & Lemmens have similar view of the types of business relationships in account management than what Honeycutt etc. mention. The pre- and early KAM are exploratory relationships, which is about the potential of KAM - relationship but commitment hasn't been made yet. Mid – KAM is a basic KAM relationship where business is being done mainly in one on one negotiations. The relationship is still a bit distant. Cooperative and Interdependent KAM relationships are a bit more advanced where there are multiple links working between the two companies. The relationships are close between the supplier and the customer. These are like partnership relationship in the figure 2. The

final stage is integrated KAM relationship where the company boundaries are blurred, and the two companies almost operate as one. (Cuevas, Donaldson & Lemmens 2016, 129 – 130.)

A lot of companies walk into the pitfall of automatically assuming their biggest customers are automatically the key accounts. This is not true in all cases and instead of focusing on the company's top accounts the attention should go to the accounts that have the most potential to grow. There are several methods on how to choose or determine the key accounts, John Staples mentions three critical steps in his article from Sales Benchmark Index. The steps are:

1. Conduct a Portfolio Analysis
2. Tie company's overall strategy to the selection
3. Start with a pilot (2 – 3 accounts) then expand.

Conducting a portfolio of the existing customers gives a good insight of what type of customers the company has now and what is their potential for the future. The first step of portfolio analysis is to compare the last three years of revenue and the annual cost of what it takes to support the certain clients. This is the moment where it can be seen if the company is losing money on those accounts they thought were their key accounts. After this the company should determine cost and growth potential of its accounts for the next three years. It should also be remembered that the long-term relationship is a two – way street and so companies should define what type of buyers it is looking for. (Staples 3.7.2017.)

Woodburn and McDonald state that a company should be able to identify the customer's attractiveness as in how much potential they have instead of focusing on their performance today. Under resourcing the potentially growing customers is a serious mistake that companies do far too often. Staples also mentions revenue potential, so taking that into account, it is something companies should be aware of. There are three main categories of selection criteria:

1. Outcomes: Financial outcomes
2. Customer needs: Opportunities for product/service differentiation
3. Customer attributes: Risk reduction; working together

The financial outcomes are seen as hard criteria and customer attributes as soft criteria. A bit similar method with hard and soft criteria are also used by Yip and Bink in global account management. Suppliers should focus on having a balanced spread of criteria

that will reflect how much the customer could and is willing to offer for them. What is also important, is to figure out the best way to measure customers against the set criteria. (Woodburn & McDonald 2011, 34 – 36.)

The next step Staples mentions is to determine some criteria for the key accounts and thus tie the company's strategy around KAM. A common mistake that happens is to have the "we want it all" mentality and to choose too many criteria. Good key account selection criteria should be limited approximately between three and five, for example revenue potential, product fit and growth potential. (Staples 3.7.2017.) The criteria should be determined together by a management group that represents equally all departments of the company (Bacon 23.3.2017.).

Final step is to try this in real life. Few pilot accounts should be chosen so that it is possible to notice early what works and what doesn't. The critical factor that determines company's success during the implementation is to promise nothing they are not able to deliver. This is something Honeycutt mentions as well about global account management and it is strongly linked to the trust the supplier is building between them and the buyer. The phase of implementation depends on the company and some take longer than others to make KAM work as a part of their strategy. (Staples 3.7.2017.)

2.3 Key Account Management

Key Account Management or more familiarly known as KAM is a strategy that focuses on long-term investments of resources into a customer that offers a significant return on this investment. To maintain the lasting relationship the seller has a cross-functional business team that has very defined goals, roles and, obligations. Everyone knows what the target is and where their place is. In this model the seller's goal is to become a key supplier to the customer and this status is achieved by a deep understanding of customer's needs and wants. In the end, it's all about finding a mutually beneficial plan for both parts. (Cheverton 2015, 8 – 9.)

Why choosing the right customers is important for companies? If companies focus all their energy in wrong customers or try to give same amount of attention to all their accounts, they are not going to be able to make that work. Focusing on unprofitable accounts is not only a waste of time but it's also a waste of money. Like Woodburn and McDonald mention, the biggest customers are not always necessarily the best. It is crucial to company's own success to recognize the right customers. By doing that it is easier to give better and more organized services to the accounts. It also saves expenses of innovative strategies

and customized deliveries for example. (Woodburn & McDonald 2011, 28 – 29.) Key account managers invest all their company's possible resources to come up with value-based solutions that meet not just customer's but also their company's strategic goals and at the same time drive the potential for growth in the future. (Breiner 15.4.2017.)

2.4 Key Account Categories

Key accounts can be organized in different categories based on the closeness of the relationship between the buyer and the supplier. This determines the way the customers should be approached and what are the next actions considering the relationship and partnership process. Choosing the key accounts and the selection criteria is mostly the same than in regular account management. In this chapter, different types of key accounts are explained further and how they should be managed. Bacon divides customer relations in following categories that can be seen in figure 3.

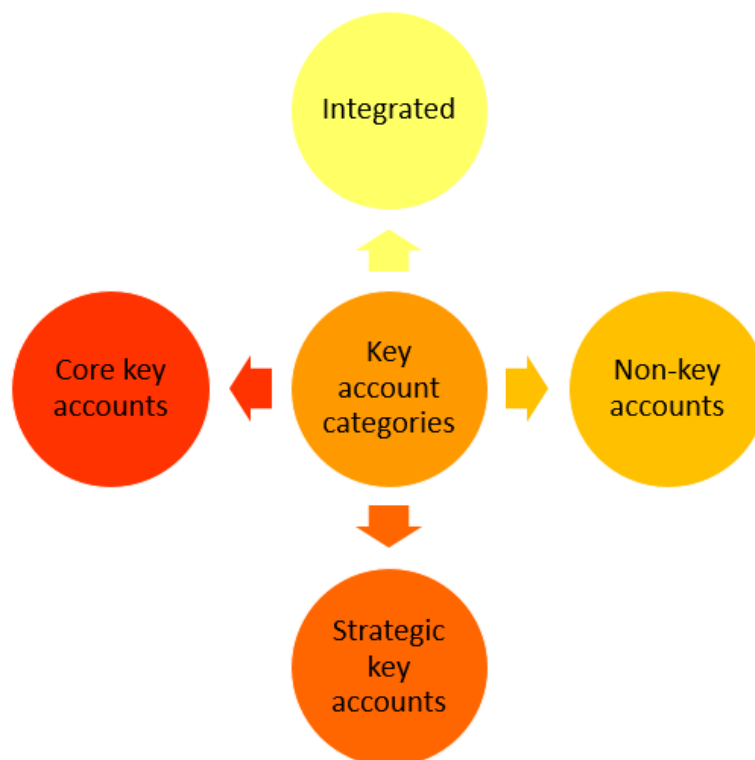


Figure 3. Key account categories according to Bacon (2017.)

Integrated relationships are always partnerships where organizations coordinate together about activities across a wide range of different functions. Companies spend significant time together working on their strategic plans, prioritizing product developments and joint

marketing efforts, for example. In this stage both parties acknowledge the importance of the other. The feeling of trust is also shared, which is the product of closely working together. (Bacon 23.3.2017.)

According to Bacon, the integrated, Non-key accounts are some of the best, most loyal, happiest and successful customers. They may not have the potential to grow or help open new market areas the way key accounts can, but they play a vital role in success and profitability. These customers require a high level of service and support but also recognize the value that is created by the seller. These accounts are prone to have the highest profitability profile of all customers. (Bacon 23.3.2017.)

Strategic key accounts are some of the most fun to work with because both sides are oriented to make strategic plans that will benefit both. Therefore, these accounts have the greatest upside growth potential in them. With these accounts, a significant medium to long-term growth is expected in revenue and profit potential. This justifies managing these customers at break – even or negative margins. It is not recommended to have a lot of these accounts but because they can make a difference in profit it is recommended to have a few. (Bacon 23.3.2017.)

Core key accounts are the ones where both companies have invested a lot in the relationship that has become deep and enduring partnership. From these accounts, only a moderate growth is expected but they are still the best relationships of all segments. The goal with these customers is to optimize their profitability and at the same time these accounts will push the seller in new directions while the seller will mutually do the same. (Bacon 23.3.2017.)

3 Global Account Management

The latest challenge of companies worldwide is to be able to manage even bigger, global accounts. Hoenycutt & Ford define global account management as an action that organizes company functions to serve customers in a global perspective. (Honeycutt etc. 2003, 102.) Naturally global account management is extended from national account management. The early adopters of this model were mostly big technology companies. (Yip & Bink 2007.) Further in the text global account management will be referred as GAM.

GAM is time consuming and challenging and sometimes requires companies to develop customer headquarters by the account manager. This is of course for the key global accounts because it takes a lot of resources from the company itself. This headquarter oversees the account team that has been assigned to the client. The team usually consists of members that have been specialized in the core functions such as product design, applications, logistics, sales support and marketing. (Honeycutt etc. 2003, 102.)

3.1 How to Define GAM

The nature of the account management is to follow the nature of the customer, which leads to one of the first obstacles in global account management; is the customer truly global and how is that determined? There is a big difference between international and global customers. International customer simply operates in more than one country, which makes it about the company's geographical presence. The global on the other hand implies something different than just geography. (Cheverton 2008, 3.)

Before going from international to global, there are three tests that should be applied to the account to determine if it truly has potential of growing global according to Cheverton.

1. Does the company have consistent needs in different countries, which it has to create globally consistent solutions that are measured by globally consistent standards?
2. Is some of the company's operational level global? For example for suppliers that means that their customer has a global procurement operator.
3. Has the company demonstrated the ability to make global decisions.

If the answer to these questions is yes, then it is appropriate to talk about a global account. (Cheverton 2008, 3 - 4.) In their article in Harvard Business Review, Yip and Bink also discuss which customers actually are suitable candidates for GAM. Like in KAM,

quality over quantity. This means that there isn't a certain number or size of the global customer that justifies it to be global account. However, there are some selection criteria that helps managers in evaluating if the customer would be profitable when offered the possibility of GAM. These criterias can be divided in two categories, *hard and soft*. The latter criteria isn't measurable and they depend partially on gut feeling. The categories are visualized in figures 4.

The hard, *quantifiable*, are:

1. Size and revenue potential
2. Geography
3. Integration capabilities

The soft criteria includes:

1. Strategic importance
2. Fit in strategy, culture and geography
3. The relationship

One of the most important points to take into account is the potential in customer's size and revenue. Instead of focusing on their current status, it is far more important to find out new opportunities in sales. The reason why this is important is because some bigger customers only want global discounts, not a global relationship that would be beneficial for both parties. Geographic spread is also linked to the potential size of the customer. If the customer's business is focused in one market only and smaller operations are located outside of its home country, a national approach would be better. However, if the customer has located large businesses outside of its home country in several locations, it would be more suitable for GAM. (Yip & Bink 2007.)

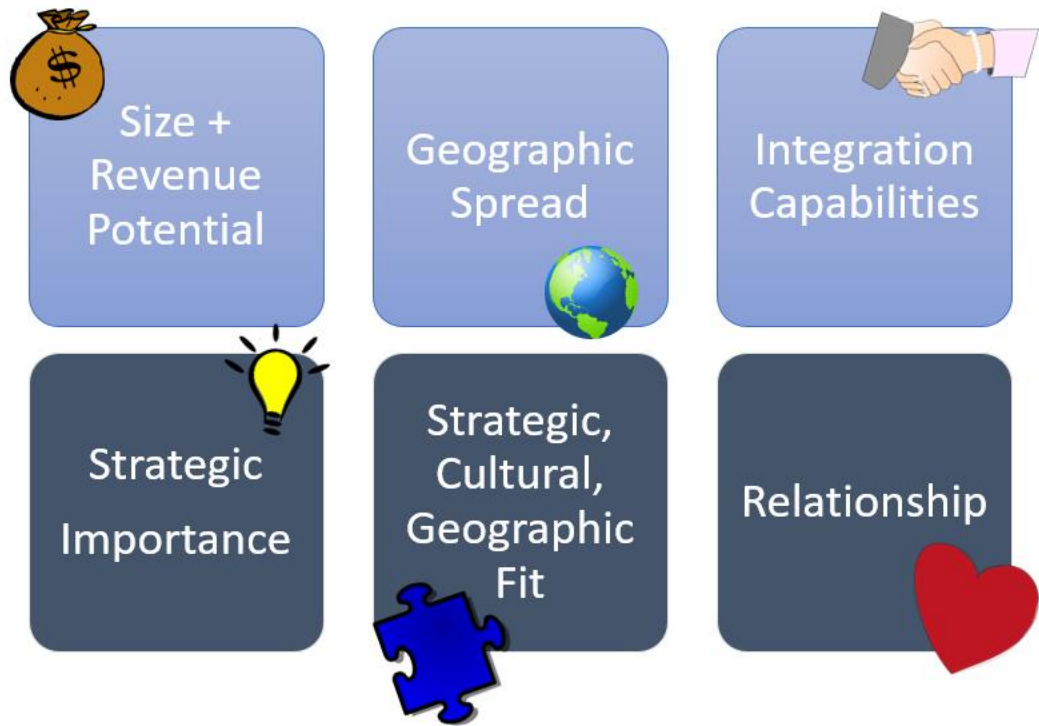


Figure 4. Modified GAM Selection criteria (Yip & Bink 2007.)

What also should be considered in the selection criteria are the customer's integration capabilities. This criteria is summed up in figure 6. Global account status shouldn't be offered if the possible account doesn't have the required structure, information system that it need for integration and coordination of global businesses. (Yip & Bink 2007.) This criteria is in some sense similar than what Cherverton mentions in his book about the selection criteria and three questions that should be applied when determining if an account is truly global. A company can have three degrees of integration capabilities: *low*, *moderate* and *high* (Yip & Bink 2007.)

Capabilities in integration are *low* when company's strategies such as business module, value chain, brands and products are mostly developed at a national level. Every country unit has their own operations. For example the processes are national variations from the corporate approach instead of being same in every country, which would be global. This means there is no universal corporate culture either. In this kind of companies only few core functions like R&D, production of for example product design are managed by a global team but nothing else. (Yip & Bink 2007.)

A company that has *moderate* capabilities in integration has strategies that are developed in country, regional and also global levels. Approximately half of the core functions are

managed by global teams and information is shared more globally than nationally. In these companies a senior executive level shares common culture but employees in lower-level have their own national cultures. Here some improvement is noticeable but for example the company culture is still a bit polarized.(Yip & Bink 2007.)

In a company that has *high* integration capabilities it has mostly globally developed strategies. Almos all of the critical information is collected in global, regional and levels. In addition, most of the core functions are coordinated by the global teams. Important information is captured from any part of the company and is globally shared as fast as possible. The company culture is truly global throughout the whole organization. (Yip & Bink 2007.)

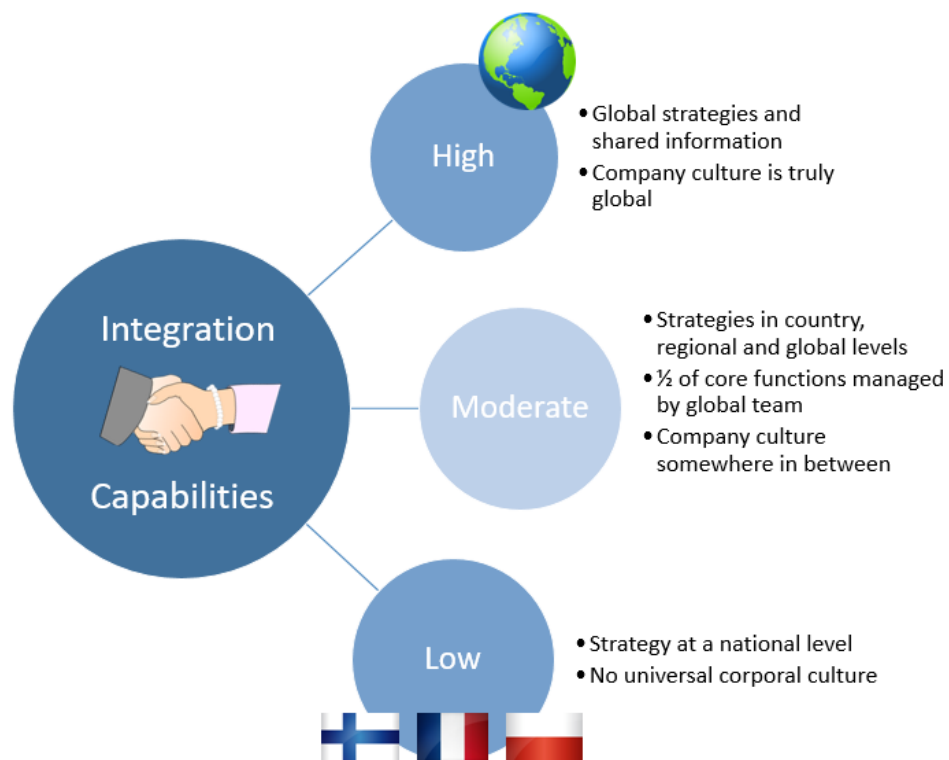


Figure 5. Integration capabilities of the global account (Yip & Bink 2007.)

Other criteria in determining if the customer should be given a global account status is its strategic importance. Generally, a customer can be seen as strategically important when if it has high enough profile that influences other companies to buy same supplier's products. These kind of customers demand naturally more attention from the suppliers because they can be critical to supplier's strategic goals. It's also be a great loss financially if a relationship would end with a customer that buys for example 10% of the supplier's total production. (Yip & Bink 2007.) Like Honeycutt mentions about customer

relations, it is extremely important to be able to maintain a good and profitable relationship with well fitting strategic accounts.

Customer's strategic, geographic and cultural fit are also something that helps a lot. Good example of this kind of fit is the joint marketing agreements of Royal Dutch Shell and a Finnish marine engine producer, Wärtsilä. Both companies wanted to expand their sales in India. Due this agreements they are offering a package of Shell's lubricants and oils with Wärtsilä's engines. They also promote each others product to their customers. In addition, in global relations, cultural empathy is important especially because the supplier has to be able to serve their global customers in their main locations. this can happen either by service operations or through local partners. (Yip & Bing 2007.)

Finally, if the supplier and the customer truly trust one another and value each other, their relationship is truly mutually profitable. When supplier is deciding if they should offer the customer a GAM status, they should pay attention if its going to enforce and develop into a trusting relationship. (Yip & Bing 2007.)

3.2 Customer and Supplier Compatibility

When companies start considering whether or not they should start applying GAM in their business, the first thing it should start evaluating is its products or services and what it has to offer. Good ones for this are products that have a high margin, they are globally consistent. The products also have to meet specifications across borders. This kind of products and services are for example computers, global fueling contracts, value – added commodities and food ingredients. (Yip & Bink 2007.)

Because of the high costs GAM causes to businesses, the products and services that are offered must have high enough margins to cover the costs of running GAM on top of the already existing national account management. What this means is that key customers who buy low – margin products should offer sweeteners such as high volume or service payments to the supplier before they agree to use GAM. (Yip & Bink 2007.) In order to create a profitable partnership, both parts should be ready to give something to the other.

If company's product range fits for global demands, next thing to consider is whether or not the customers want GAM. Many multinational companies are using global purchasing and supply – chain programs. This indicates that buyers are looking for products or services that are suitable for GAM. Some of these type of buyers have some standards that they expect from their suppliers, for example products and services that are

standardized globally or consistent service quality. However, if the customers are important to the company it is necessary for them to meet these demands. (Yip & Bink 2007.)

In addition, Cherverton brings out a good point in the suitability of the customer and the selling company: When focusing on customers capabilities, it is also extremely important to be able to recognize one's own. This means that the selling company must also recognize if they are able to deliver global offers. Customer's global ambitions should match with selling company's capabilities, like Yip & Bink also mentioned, in order for the global relationship to work profitably. (Cheverton 2009, 9.) Account manager is also responsible one for their team's loyalty. This is why they should never promise something to a large account if the company is not capable of delivering it. Not only would this damage the relationship with the customer but also the internal relationships. (Miller, Heiman & Tuleja. 2006, 13.) Figure 7. shows the capabilities of both parties and best actions for those.



Figure 7. The global fit between customer and supplier, modified from Cheverton (2009.)

If around a quarter of company's revenues come from global customers, no matter how they choose to do the purchasing, it is relevant to offer GAM to protect and make the relationship more profitable. Also, if the competing companies offer global account management as a solution to possible prospects, it is crucial to be able to answer to this competition. For global customers it is important selection criteria if possible suppliers offer global programs. (Yip & Bink 2007.)

When the customer has agreed to make a purchase, the account manager should work closely with the buyer. This establishes the relationship and it is important that the buyer has one contact where they can get answers to their questions, help for possible problems and a representative of buyers' needs. If the salesperson can maintain this relationship, it opens doors for the possibility of additional sales and remaining as the first option for the customer in the need of a service or a product. (Honeycutt etc. 2003, 82.)

3.3 Different GAM Strategies

After choosing the right customers to give a GAM status, the supplier must decide what kind of approach of global account management it is going to offer. There are few details that need to be taken in consideration. First one is how much power should be given to the GAM group and the national sales people of the company. Second one is finding the balance in creating individual GAM program to each customer while trying to keep its expenses low. (Yip & Bink 2007.)

According to Honeycutt, global accounts can be managed with three different approaches. In the first one, which is a bit traditional, companies have sales functions in each country with a global account manager. The GAM is then coordinating programs from one country to another. The second one is a matrix organization, which shares responsibility of global accounts between global and national account managers. The third approach transfers key accounts from traditional organization to global account manager. Program implementation is left to local sales forces. The first two are most common in global companies but the third one is trending. (Honeycutt etc. 2003,102-103.)

There can be multiple variations of how GAM can be done, Yip and Bink state that they are all different versions of the basic approaches: *coordination GAM*, *control GAM* and *separate GAM*. These approaches are visualized below in figure 8.



Figure 8. Gam types according to Yip & Bink (2007.)

Coordination GAM has a lot of power for national sales organizations when the GAM team is left weak. The main task of global account managers is to support the activities and coordinate sales of a global customer. Global account managers have also almost no authority in local operations. They also must get consent from a local operator before any new global activities in deals or terms for example. Coordination global account management is most useful if local relationships are highly valued and there isn't that big of a need to standardize services abroad. Banks and for example, suppliers that are not able to manage global customers. The advantages of this approach are that it is less costly because it doesn't require that much people and it doesn't disturb organizational structures that already exist. (Yip & Bink 2007.)

Control GAM is basically the same that Honeycutt mentions as well, where the responsibility is divided between national operations and global account management group. The power is still in the national side, but global account manager has the responsibility of the account. This model has usually a supporting team that for example manages the communication and information and creates plans for the customer. The team consists usually from departments such as R&D and account managers. Control GAM is more costs more than coordination GAM and demands more changes in the organizational structure, but it gives better balance with the global and local decision making. (Yip & Bink 2007.)

Separate GAM has its own separate unit that has complete responsibility of global accounts. The employees who take care of global accounts belong to this specific GAM organization. However, it is not fully independent. This unit does not have back – end functions like research and development or for example, manufacturing. The advantage of this model is the separation between the management of global and national accounts. Different employees serve global accounts which means that the quality of work is also better. Even though the model serves managing global accounts well, only a minority of companies use it. This is because creating own separate organization for GAM take lots of resources from company's other functions. *Separate GAM* is best suitable for a company whose global customers are big and profitable enough for such extra costs. (Yip & Bink 2007.)

3.4 Challenges in Global Account Management

Even though global account management is a final stage of corporate's organization structure's development, it is not easy. In the previous chapter global account management has been explained as a phenomenon and its different theories of choosing global accounts and how to manage them has been explained. Because global account management happens in a larger scale than national account management, it is important to understand the challenges it brings. The challenges can go from cultural differences and time zones to the difficulties different organizational structures cause. In this chapter some of the challenges are explained through theory.

Global account management seems to be somehow desirable goal but also inevitable for international companies. Big customers are usually interested in globalizing their supply chain management for example. GAM is also aligned with managing customer relations for example, what is a noticeable trend. However, there are some challenges that suppliers should be aware of and that can challenge managing global accounts. (Arnold, Birkinshaw & Toulan 2001, 8.)

One of the most common challenges perhaps is the unanticipated costs. This was mentioned earlier as well but it is something suppliers struggle with. For example, increased pressure on lower prices or greater discounts in volume are something that needs some balancing while trying to keep the customer satisfied. (Arnold etc. 2001, 8.) Globalization also puts strategic challenges on companies, the skill of being flexible and adaptable locally gets more difficult when a company starts to get more global. (Dewhurst, Harris & Heywood 2012.)

3.4.1 Organizational Structure

Establishing the relationship in GAM is its own challenge and companies need to develop a corporate structure that serves this purpose in global markets. This means that for the salesperson to keep their integrity when promising something to the customer, the whole company must work together to be able to keep what has been promised. Especially in Europe, the salesperson's integrity is highly valued. To keep this, a global firm must for example include the sales personnel in pricing, delivery and manufacturing decisions so that they also have further insight of these processes. One way, suppliers build and maintain customer loyalty, is to not promise more than you can deliver. (Honeycutt etc. 2003, 82.)

Like earlier mentioned, it is highly important to find where the GAM compatibility lies with supplier and the customer. Suppliers should stay with the model that is least challenging for them. This is because of all the difficulties that arise from the resistance against the change of organizational structure or increasing costs. In this case coordination GAM is the best solution. This model gives time for the supplier to gain some experience and makes the customer relationship deeper. At the same time, it takes in consideration customer's capabilities in integration. (Yip & Bink 2007.)

Jobber and Lancaster also mention some key – differences in GAM that make the account management more complex. What comes to organizational structure, the management of global communications and logistics sets challenges because everything is done in a larger scale. If there are problems with the communication chain, there can be major delays in business processes. Also, the location of global account managers is a challenge especially if there are some problem with the product in customer's country for example. The distance makes it difficult to tackle the issue efficiently. (Jobber & Lancaster 2003, 153.)

3.4.2 Clash of Cultures

In global account management the communication between different cultures and backgrounds is inevitable. This can be inside the company itself but also with customers. This sets challenges for companies especially when creating new contacts or forming new relationship. Even though GAM is B2B – sales it is still human to human communication and in that, even a small inconsideration might affect the sales if it's seen offensive. Nowadays companies have to be very careful in international business because of globalization the customer can be from anywhere. Because of this it is a challenge to understand how dif-

ferent cultures work and how to act in a negotiation situation without offending the other party. This chapter is about culture and negotiation and the challenges it brings.

Culture is something that affects in the way humans think and act and in that the society plays an important role. It teaches the specific norms that are then taken into the daily behavior. Honeycutt, Ford and Simintrias define culture as the behavioral traits that are acquired from and shared with the members of one's society. What is interesting in culture is that it is not inherited but instead it's purely something you learn. (Honeycutt etc. 2003, 18)

Especially in global business, the sales management is under the influence of cultures constantly. In this environment, it is highly important to be able to understand the impact of culture behind the interactions between salespeople and customers or even salespeople and their managers. Especially in negotiations, a sensitivity towards cultural differences may enhance the chance of success. When a salesperson is prepared well for the meeting and acknowledges the culture of the customer, they can adjust their choice of words, body language and actions can be used as part of the strategy in getting a positive outcome. In addition, this might even open an opportunity to develop a long – lasting relationship. (Honeycutt etc. 2003, 18.)

In cross cultural communication and negotiation there are always challenges involved. The more similar the cultural backgrounds of the negotiators are, the bigger chance there is for them to come to agreement and mutual understanding. In global account management, the challenge of course is that the customer for example, can be from a very different culture, which makes it more difficult to find common ground. To minimize the possibility of miscommunication, the sales team can utilize the team to match with the buying team. This can be done in a functional level (R&D, marketing, production) but also in a cultural level. (Honeycutt etc. 2003, 58 – 59.)

4 Conceptual Framework: Global Account Management and the Challenges

This chapter sums up the theory of account management, KAM and GAM and explains how they are linked together. What the writer wants to point out is that in order to be efficient in global account management, one must understand the core functions of account management and how to perform that on a national level so that it can be done globally. Selecting the right customers for key or global account status is always an extra cost for a company but if it is done right, the benefit from that is worth the risk. Also, when going global, there are always more people from different backgrounds that challenges the account managers to take these differences into account. This sum up gives the guidelines to the thesis and how the topic should be viewed.

To understand the challenges of global account management, it is important to understand the theory behind it and account management in general. Like mentioned in the chapter 3.4 global account management happens in bigger scale than national account management. Because of this it faces more challenges than key account management for example. Not only has the company evaluate whether the customer is suitable for GAM, it also must do some self - evaluation if it is ready to supply this kind of management. GAM is costly, especially if it involves some changes in the organizational structure. The relationship of the account management types is summed up in the figure 9.

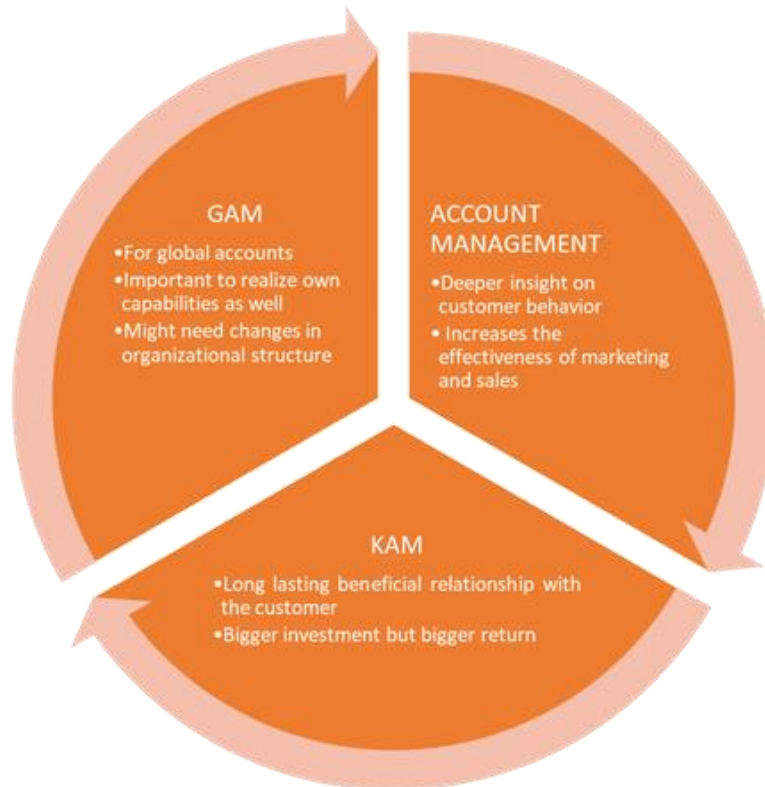


Figure 9. GAM in relation to other account types.

Account management and especially more strategic key account management, or KAM, form the theory base about account management and most of the theory base for GAM. In any type of account management, the goal is to be able to make smart decisions and maintain long relationship with the customer. Key account management focuses on putting more effort into figuring out who those key accounts are and how they should be managed for them to be profitable and maintain well-functioning relationships.

Global account management or GAM goes further from KAM because in this situation the customer is a globally functioning company. The processes are slower, meetings might be in different countries and of course cultural differences in sales are also involved. Like in KAM the goal is to form long lasting strong relationship with the customer. This relationship is even more important than in a national level because managing a global customer is even more expensive and takes a lot of resources from the company.

In GAM it is crucial to be aware of the compatibility of the supplier and the customer. This is simply because not every customer can or want to be a global account and in some cases the supplier isn't able to deliver global account management. When the compatibility is considered, also money and unnecessary work is saved. When the supplier knows

their position, it is easier to start forming categories for global accounts as well, like in KAM.

Challenges in GAM vary from company to company, but some of the challenges are quite universal. Culture is something that plays a big role in global sales and when it is acknowledged, the understanding from that can be used as a part of negotiation strategy. The more like each other the cultures are, the better the understanding is between the negotiators, for example Finnish and Swedish cultures versus Finnish and Spanish cultures. The understanding is better between Finnish and Swedish because they are both part of Nordic cultures which in general is quite similar. In figure 10. this process of GAM is shown in a visualized way.

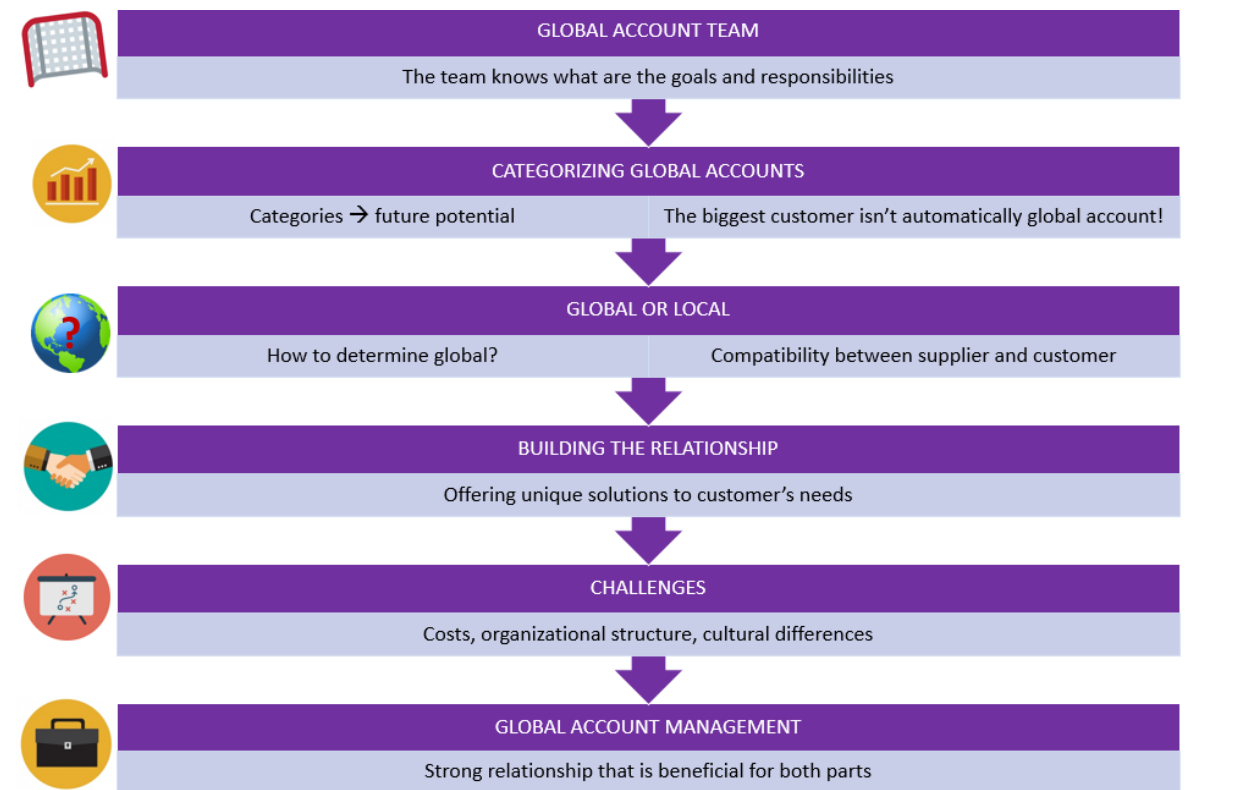


Figure 10. The summed - up process of GAM

Probably the biggest challenge for companies, according to theory, that manage global accounts is the organizational structure. This involves both the seller's and the buyer's companies. In the selling company, this means that for GAM to properly work, the whole organization must stand behind the sales team for them to be able to deliver what was promised. Also depending on the resources and the position of the customer, it is important to choose a safe strategy to make GAM work instead of trying to achieve too much

too fast. This leaves more time for the customer management and arising difficulties, such as high costs. Easier strategy enables a chance for learning and creating a deeper relationship with the customer.

Also, the negotiation processes take longer because of the distances and the size of the companies. In bigger deals, there's usually a whole GAM team and buying team that is trying to get to agreement. In different cultures time is also seen differently, which can affect to the phase of negotiations positively or negatively. Depending where the locations of the offices are, time differences can also be involved, which also sets its own challenge in communication between the companies.

These are some of the points that have been lifted from the theory because they seem to be logical and play a role in global account management. Of course, there are always some differences between theory and real life. These challenges however, must come somewhere to the theory but the question is, is it relevant for account managers that work with global accounts now. Do these challenges apply to negotiations that take place in 21st century and are there some differences that aren't explained in the theory so far? This is something the following research tries to understand.

5 The Process Behind the Research

Because of globalization and digitalization, the companies are dealing with bigger customers nowadays. Instead of only focusing on national markets, global customers and so global account management is something that is almost necessary if the business hopes to expand. Global customers can be risky but if they are managed wisely and strategically, they can be very beneficial accounts. However, when the business is being done over the country borders there are different challenges that need to be considered.

The goal of this research is to find out about the challenges account managers face in global account management and how global account managers describe, what global account management is. What is especially interesting during the research, is to find out if there are any differences in the challenges depending on the customer. And if not, are there some sort of universal challenges that apply to all account managers and their customers. Among the challenges, the research also wants to find out how the managers overcome the challenges they told about and are they similar compared to the theory. The answers are handled confidentially and anonymously to keep the research ethical.

The thesis is made for Haaga – Helia University of Applied Sciences and the degree program of Professional Sales. Instead of many separate courses, the study program will soon have several bigger modules that include more projects and where the content of the courses in the module support the practical learning of the projects. The teachers are designing the content of the modules and this thesis and its research is also made for the teachers. When the topic was suggested, it seemed to interest and fit to some of the modules about global business, which also brings value to the study program. The results, the thesis itself and a PowerPoint presentation of the summed – up results, will be used as a supporting material along with teachers' materials. This means Haaga – Helia has the right to use and modify the presentation for teaching purposes.

5.1 Stages of Research and Its Timetable

In the table number 1. the stages and the planned timetable for the research can be seen. This timetable has been made in the week 49, after the theory base has been finished. This choice was made because it seemed more logical to write the theory and the sum – up for it to fully understand the concept of the global account management. When the theory is mostly finished, it is easier to understand what is it that the research wants to find out and what parts of the theory need to be challenged or further investigated. First the planned timetable is explained further and after that it is compared to the actual timetable.

Table 1. The original and final plan for the research process

Week	Task (Planned)	Task (Actually happened)
50	Research methods, questions, LinkedIn	The tasks planned + interviews 1 and 2
51	Method choises, CHRISTMAS	The tasks planned + interview 3
52	Material and used analytical methods	CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY
1	Interviews/Results	Interview 4
2	Interviews/Results	Interview 5 + analyzing
3	Interviews/Results	Correcting theory, writing about risks
4	Interviews/Results	Results + Overview of the process
5	Results	Internship starts in the Netherlands
6	Results	Corrections from the teatcher + internship
7	Overview	Corrections + internship
8	Cogitation/Thinking in general	Corrections + internship
9	Reliability and overview	Modify PowerPoint presentation
10	Checkup	Thesis presentation + final exam
11	Hand in thesis	Hand in thesis

In the original plan, all the theoretical part about the research is planned to take place between weeks 50 and 52. Also, in the week 50, the request for global account managers was be sent for the interviews. The request was sent in LinkedIn and Facebook, in the own group for Haaga – Heilia alumni's. The reason for this choice is further explained in chapter 5.2. In the planned process the interviews took place in January, and according to the plan that was be the best - case scenario. Some of the results were analysed during the interviews and when all the interviews were done the weeks 5 and 6 were left to compare and report about the results.

Finally, after the results of the research were made it was planned to write the cogitation and evaluate the reliability and validity of the research. This took place in week 8 and in week 9 the overview of the thesis process and own learning process is evaluated as well. There was only one week planned for each because the writing is somewhat creative and subjective analysing of done work which isn't as slow process than the theory for example. Week 10 was left for possible corrections because the thesis had to be handed in the beginning of week 11.

After the invitation message had been sent in LinkedIn and in Facebook in the week 50, three of the first interviews have been held by the end of week 51. This means that the research process was ahead of the original timetable. Because the writing process for this thesis was quite long, it seemed smart to address some risks that might happen and affect the process. In the following table 2. the main risks for the writing process can be seen.

There's also further explanation about the risk itself and some actions that can be done to prevent the risk from happening.

Table 2. The risks of the writing process

Risk	What can I do to prevent the risk?	What do I do if the risk happens?
Getting ill	I take care of my health with making sure I sleep enough, eat well and exercise regularly.	I make sure that I actually rest and recover properly.
Burnout	I'll plan the process wisely so that I won't get too stressed from it. I'll also avoid working overtime.	I won't accept extra work and take it a bit easier with the writing if it is causing too much stress.
Breakup	Make sure there is time to maintain the long distance relationship. I'll visit the Netherlands during autumn.	Give yourself time to heal and use your support system and talk with them.
Close relatives gets severely ill or dies	There is nothing I can do to prevent this. What I can do is to stay in contact with them.	Talk with the counseling teacher.
Not enough interviews	I'll start looking for interviews early enough.	I try to compensate this part with other work.
Lack of motivation	I'll divide to work in small sections.	I'll motivate my self with rewards.

The most possible risks for the thesis process were the possibility of getting ill because of the influenza season and of course, the risk of getting flu for example is higher at universities and also in customer service, where the writer worked during the thesis process. The prevention for this risk was to take good care in general about their health. This included making sure there was enough sleep, preferably six to eight hours a night. Focusing on the quality of food and vitamin intake and regular exercise since these also have positive impact on one's energy levels and immune system. If the risk of getting ill would have happened, some time off from writing and proper rest to recover would have been needed. Thankfully, this risk did not happen during the process.

The other risk that was very common among the students is the lack of motivation towards the thesis. This risk is something that the writer was aware of since the beginning of the thesis process, which is why they wanted to get as much done as possible in the first months. Losing some of the motivation is at its highest due to a writer's block and during those times it feels that there isn't any process being made. This is something that easily happens in longer projects and it is good to be aware of. The prevention plan for this risk was to divide the work in smaller sections and focus on getting those done instead of stressing about the big picture, which was the whole thesis. This kept the interest and if there were moments where the process didn't move on at all move on, the author would focus on writing some other section instead. This way some progress was being made. When there were times the motivation was lost, the writer would set themselves rewards.

During the research process the writer was always a bit of ahead of the original timetable. This turned out to be very helpful when during Christmas break they received an acceptance of an internship position in the Netherlands. Because of this great opportunity to work for one of the most well - known brands in the world, some modifications to the thesis timetable had to be made. Because the thesis was almost done, it was decided that the third version would be sent for evaluation at the end of week four, 28th of January, because the writer would leave Finland in week five. This way the teacher could give final feedback about the changes to the thesis and the writer could get most of the work done before leaving Finland. This is a good real - life situation about adapting to a sudden change, because when the news from the internship arrived, there was only one and a half months' time to sort living arrangements in a condition where leaving would be possible. On the other hand, this also solves the problem with the risk of breakup since it makes some of the personal relationships easier.

5.2 Method Choices

In this thesis the sources for the theory have been collected from literature, blogs and articles online. Also, the interviews from global account managers can be counted as a source for this thesis and the research. The theory base, chapters 2 – 4, are guidelines to this thesis. These chapters are mainly based on literature, because there was already a lot of information available about the supporting theory of the thesis. The literature used is mostly from the library of the Haaga – Helia University of Applied Sciences. Theory of global account management itself was hard to find, which is the reason why there is not a lot of information written supporting it. Global account management is also often combined with key account management in real life since global accounts can also be key accounts.

The research method that was chosen for this thesis is qualitative, which means that instead of using numeric methods, the research focuses on a subject that can't be measured. The goal of a qualitative research is to get a grasp on a phenomenon and to answer a question "What is this about?". Qualitative research offers a chance to get a deeper understanding of its subject with using words and sentences instead of numbers. (Kananen 2017, 33, 35.) Also, it allows the subjects to describe and tell about their experiences and opinions of the researched phenomenon more freely. Because of this, the qualitative research method is more understanding and that way grants richer understanding about the topic of the research. (Tilastokeskus.)

There are some features that are common to qualitative research. Those features are for example: (Kananen 2017, 34.)

1. The research takes place in its own environment.
2. The material is collected from the subjects themselves in a proper interaction.
3. The material is collected by the researcher themselves.
4. The research material is from various resources using literature, pictures, interviews and so forth.
5. The analysing is inductive and interactive.
6. The focus is in the view of the subject.
7. The goal is to fully understand the phenomenon behind the research.

There are several different types of interviews that all serve different goal and suit for different purposes depending on what the research wants to find out or measure. The types differ basically through the factor how closed the questions are around the topic. The typical interview methods are structured interview, surveys, un – structured interview, themed interview and half – structured interview. (Hirsijärvi, S. & Hurme, H. 43.) Half structured interview means that the questions remain the same for every interviewee but the way they are asked might change a bit. The questions are also asked in the same order for every subject. (KvaliMOTV 2017.) It is also typical for half structured and themed interviews, that depending on the situation and the person who is being interviewed, the structure of the interview varies a bit. Some parts of the interview are closed for example background information and some questions are more open. (Hirsijärvi,S. & Hurme, H. 47.)

These features support the choice to approach the research questions from a qualitative perspective. Because the goal is to understand what kind of challenges companies are facing in global account management today and how they overcome these challenges. This kind of problem can't really be measured, which means that using interviews is the best way to understand the phenomenon of global account management. Interviews will also give further, personal insight of the account managers which is also one of the features of qualitative research. Also, face to face interviews are more reliable than online surveys for example, because of the smaller risk of misunderstanding of the research questions.

Also, it was noticeable that there isn't a lot of information about the challenges of global account management when the theory was gathered. A lot could be found about the strategies and the process of the development of the customer relationships but when searching theory about the challenges companies face, there wasn't much. There can be several

reasons for this. Either it isn't seen as that important that there would be much written theory about that, or it simply hasn't been researched before. It can also be that because of the fast development of digitalization and globalization, there isn't any recent data about the challenges of global account management.

This is one feature of qualitative research, it tries to find an explanation for a phenomenon that hasn't been researched before. In general, the less there is knowledge about the phenomenon, the more likely the research method is qualitative. It is only logical to discover first what the subject of the research is about, what affects to it and what are the relationship between the forces that affect the phenomenon. (Kananen 2017, 33.) This supports the choice of the qualitative research method in this thesis because like earlier mentioned, there isn't really much theory about the challenges of global account management. Also, the goal is to understand the other factors behind the challenges:

1. How account managers overcome the challenges?
2. Do the challenges change depending on the customer?
3. Are the challenges like what was found from the few sources in the theory?

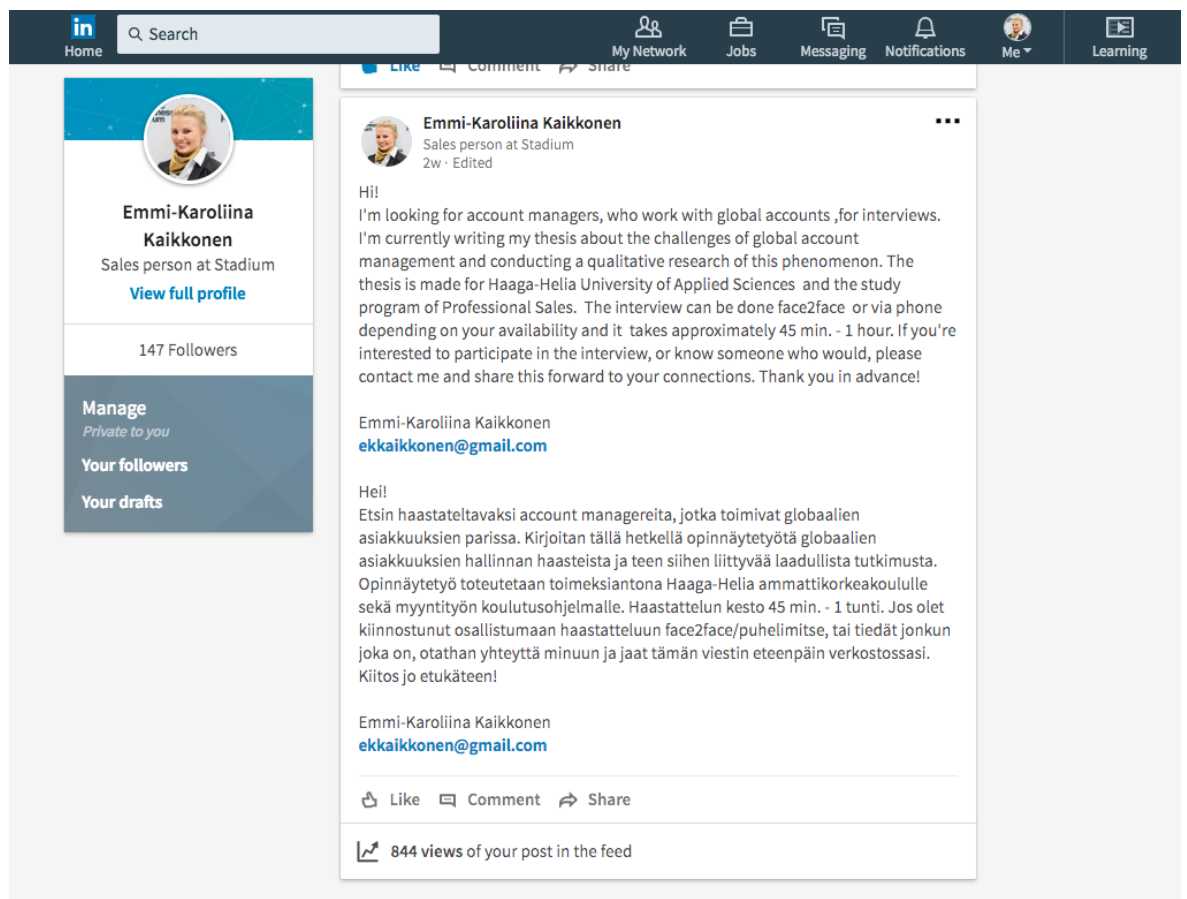
Overall the goal of the research and the phenomenon considered, it is safe to say that qualitative research method is suitable for this thesis. This method brings the results out in the best way and it also gives the possibility to understand the account managers' views of this issue in the best way possible.

5.3 Material and Used Analytical Methods

Because the research is qualitative, the material which is in this case the interviews are collected by interviewing different account managers who have work experience in global account management. The choice for interviews instead of surveys was clear, the clarity and minimized risk of misunderstanding.

Also, the interviews were good source for subjective experiences and thoughts about the challenges in global account management. The interviews were done in Finnish with Finnish speakers to close out the possibility of misunderstandings. Because the account managers were busy, some of the interviews were also done via phone to make the experience as convenient as it could be. This turned out to be efficient since the question sheet had been sent to the interviewee beforehand. All the interviews were also recorded for further analysis with the consent of the account managers.

The account managers that were interviewed were contacted using the networks through LinkedIn and in a Facebook group for students and alumni of the study program of professional sales. The reason for this choice was that through social media the post about the interviews would reach most visibility in a short time. This method turned out to be useful because the first three interviews were booked in the same day.



Picture 11. Screenshot of the LinkedIn post.

Like the picture 11. from LinkedIn shows, it has received 844 views on 22nd of December. The post was made on 11th of December so it has had a lot of visibility during those days. LinkedIn analytics shows that the post has gotten most of its visibility through second level network, which means that majority of the writer's connections have shared this post to their own network. This is a good example of the benefits of social media and digitalization itself. Unfortunately, no messages or contacts h made through LinkedIn. The reason for this can be the more professional environment where the level to reach out someone unknown can be a bit high. Other reason that might affect to this result is the amount of information published and shared on users' profile feeds every day. Because of this, one post like this can easily drown and become unnoticed.



Picture 12. Screenshot of the Facebook post.

In picture 12. the same post that had been published in LinkedIn, can be seen. Because of the atmosphere of Facebook, this message was written in a bit more familiar style. The reason for this was also the group itself where the post was shared. The message was published in the group for current and former students of professional sales, which means that some of them are already familiar with me, which made it easier to approach the topic. The post received six likes and three volunteers for interviews between the dates of 11th – 22nd of December. Explained like this it doesn't seem much, but it is important to keep in mind that these interviews were all planned on the same day the message was published. So, if it is being compared to LinkedIn, Facebook has been more effective.

Because the interviews were half structured, there were both closed and open questions in the interview sheet. The interview questions were divided by themes so that it was clear

to understand, and that the conversation would flow naturally from topic to topic. The questions can be seen from the attachments. All the information that was shared during the interviews has been handled confidentially and the account managers that were interviewed will stay anonymous as will the companies.

After the first round of interviews, second post was published on Facebook. The post contained the same information about the interview and some update about the thesis process itself. The reason why only Facebook was chosen for the second round was that the response rate there was better. In LinkedIn many connections shared the post of interview but there weren't any actual responses from the first or secondary connections.

6 The Challenges Account Managers Face in GAM

In this chapter the results of the interviews will be explained and analysed further. The results that are being explained are from a half structured qualitative research. The chapter is divided by themes that are in the interview sheet and it follows the structure of the interviews. First however there is a brief anonymous introduction that gives some understanding about the companies and account managers that participated in the interviews. The interview sheet can be found in the appendix 1. The interviews answer to the research questions that wanted to find out what global account management is, what kind of challenges account managers face in global account management and how they overcome these challenges. The reason why the results don't revolve around only the challenges is because to be able to understand the challenges, it is important to understand the relationships behind those challenges.

6.1 Background Information About the Interviews

In this research, five account managers from four different companies were interviewed. The companies work in Finland but also do business in other countries. What was common to these companies was that they all had global customers and some of the companies are also global themselves. Because the goal is to understand the challenges in global account management, it was important to find account managers that work with global accounts on day to day basis and truly have experience in working with them. In this thesis the account managers will be referred as A – D, to keep them anonymous. The reason for this is that it is a fair way to handle the answers and makes sure that the results are honest and neutral.

Table 3. shows further information about the account managers that were interviewed. This information can also be seen as other factors that might affect, but also explain the results of the research. The account managers interviewed were aged between 22 and 29 years. Their study background varied from high school graduate to a bachelor degree, which means that not all of them had graduated from a university yet. The work titles of the interviewees were either account manager or global account manager. Every one of them had work experience of working with global accounts. The experience varied between 10 months to four years. The overall work experience in the company were the account managers had this experience about global accounts varied between 10 months and five years and six months. All of them were Finnish.

Table 3. Other factors about the account managers.

Account Manager	Age	Study background	Position	Experience in the company	Experience in GAM
A	29	Bachelor	Global account manager	5 years 6 months	4 years
B	28	Bachelor	Account manager	2 years 6 months	2 years
C	25	Bachelor	Salespeson	2 years 6 months	2 years 6 months
D	25	Bachelor, not graduated	Account manager	1 year 2 months	1 year 2 months
E	22	Bachelor, not graduated	Account manager	10 months	10 months

Because of the age, study background and the work experience of global account management it can be said that the account managers are young and in early stages of their career. The positions in the companies they work might be their first even, since not all of them had graduated. However, this doesn't determine their capabilities and it would be short sighted to assume that they are inexperienced. Because of the lack of older account managers there isn't anything to compare the answers with, so these factors might have influence in the results. For example, the way challenges are seen in the global account management now represents only the view of account managers aged 22-29 years.

The interviews were done either face to face or via phone depending on the availability of the account managers. However, all the interviews were done so that the only participants were the writer and the account manager. This provided relaxed environment for the interview and instead of feeling distant, the interviews were more like conversations but still staying around the topic.

6.2 Selecting Global Accounts

The first theme in the interviews focused on the process of choosing global accounts. This involved questions about the criteria of how the accounts are chosen and what factors were seen important. In this section the account managers also told how many global accounts there are in general and how many of those they are responsible. This gives some understanding of the process of building the relationship with global accounts and helps to understand the amount of work the account managers are dealing with.

To find out if the account managers see global account management the same way theory explains it, the account managers were asked to define what global account management is in their opinion. The answers were pretty much the same: Global account management is account management of an important account, most likely with a key account status, that does business in a global level. This means that the business must be done in several countries, not just nationally in some other country. The account managers interviewed were responsible of 2 -15 global accounts. Picture 13. shows the visual representation of

the discussion about the selection process. The account managers mentioned certain selection criteria which will be explained further below.



Picture13. Visual representation of the discussion about selection of global accounts

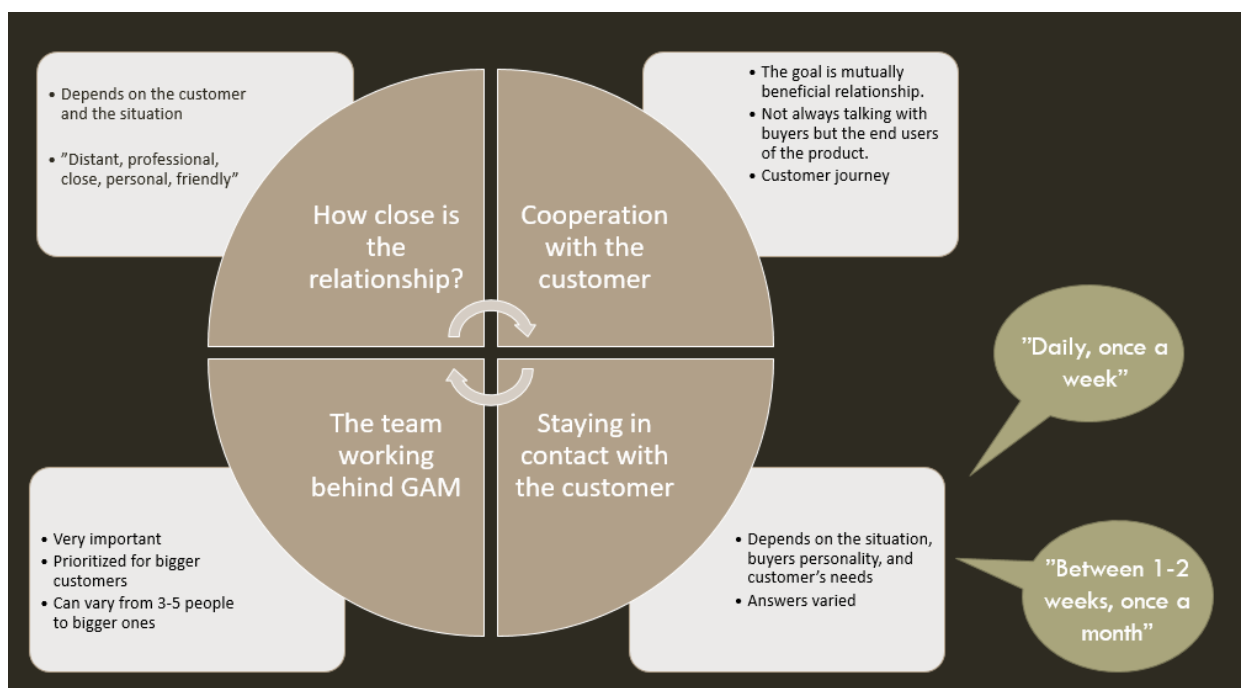
There were different answers about the selection criteria. Two of the account managers told that in their company, they don't really choose the customers, but they are more likely to be assigned from the country of the head office where the sales want to be made. The three others however, all mentioned the possible customer's size of revenue. The reason why this was mentioned is the fact that the account must be worth of the investment since there are always risks. Other factors that were mentioned was the potential brand value that the customer can give and the selling company's own potential in revenue possibilities.

About the importance of future potential, there were some divided answers. Four out of five account managers thought future potential in the possible customer is important. It gives a chance for growth especially if it is something worth investing. It was mentioned that it is important to evaluate if there is future potential and if the investment is wise. One of the account managers thought that the future potential is important in some cases, but if the salesperson is inexperienced, the future potential in a customer might be harmful. The importance of the potential customer should meet the experience of the seller. Other account manager also mentioned that it is good that there is a potential of growth, but is it's lacking, it's not automatically a reason not to take the customer.

6.3 The Customer Relationship with Global Accounts

This section focuses on the type of relationship the account managers have with their global accounts. This involves how they prepare for meetings and how they communicate with the customers on day to day basis. The team behind the sales operations and its importance to the account managers is also explained through the interviews in this chapter.

When the account managers were asked to describe the closeness of their relationship with their global accounts the answers were divided. Approximately half said that they would describe the relationship distant when half described the relationship close. In close customer relationships the meetings were not always in the office but for example in a hockey match or during a dinner. However, in meetings like these, there were still a goal of making profit and aiming for the cooperation. It was also mentioned that the personality of the buyer and the situation of the customer relationship as in, is there a negotiation going on etcetera, affects the closeness of the relationship.



Picture 14. Visual representation of the customer relationship

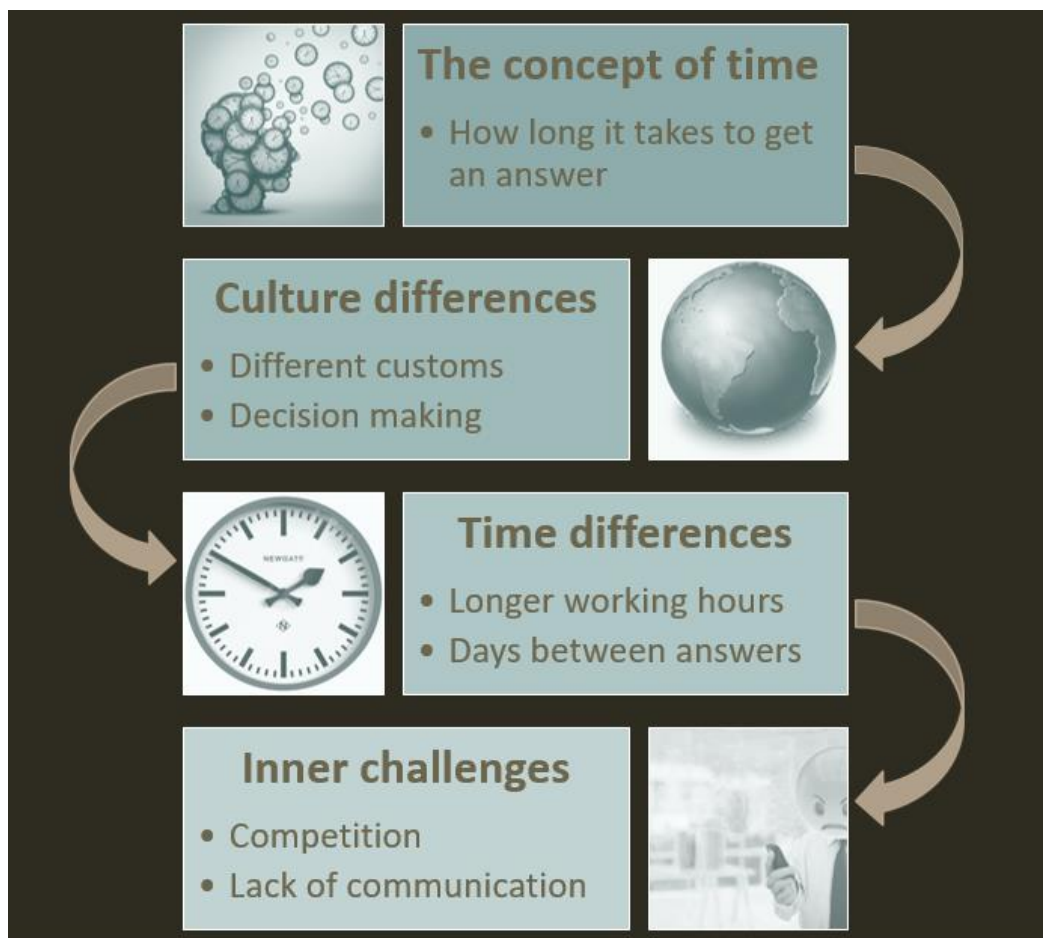
Other subject where the answers varied a lot was the frequency of staying in contact with the customers. Again, this depended very much on the situation now. If there weren't any negotiations or the customer wasn't contacting about a need of a product, the account managers were contacting them less frequently. In situations like this the customer was contacted once between one to two weeks or once a month. One account manager also mentioned that the buyer's personality can also determine the contacting frequency since

some just prefer more distant relationship. In situations where the account manager was either in charge of only few accounts or there were negotiations going on the customer was contacted daily or at least once a week.

What was also seen important was the team working around the global account. The size of the team varied from only few persons to the whole network of the seller's and buyer's teams in different countries. In one company the team was prioritized depending on the account's difficulty, so in accounts that didn't involve as much work the team wasn't necessarily used.

6.4 The Challenges

The last section focuses fully on the challenges that account managers face in their work. The challenges mentioned in picture 14. are the most common challenges that the account managers interviewed mentioned. On top of these challenges some more uncommon challenges will also be mentioned.



Picture 15. The most common challenges global account managers face

In picture 16. the challenges go from most common challenge mentioned to the challenge that account managers least felt as a challenge. Like it can be seen, the concept of time was seen as one of the biggest challenges during the interviews. This means especially the differences of for example “how answering someone soon might mean three days or three weeks” depending on the culture. However, the account managers mentioned the concept of time usually separately from culture differences. The reason why this is a challenge in global account management is that especially when decisions need to be made or that account managers need a response from a customer or a colleague from other country’s office, different ideas of what a quick or slow answer is, make effective communication difficult. Few examples of this were given, in general the more south the other culture is, the more relaxed concept they had towards time. This means longer periods between answers.

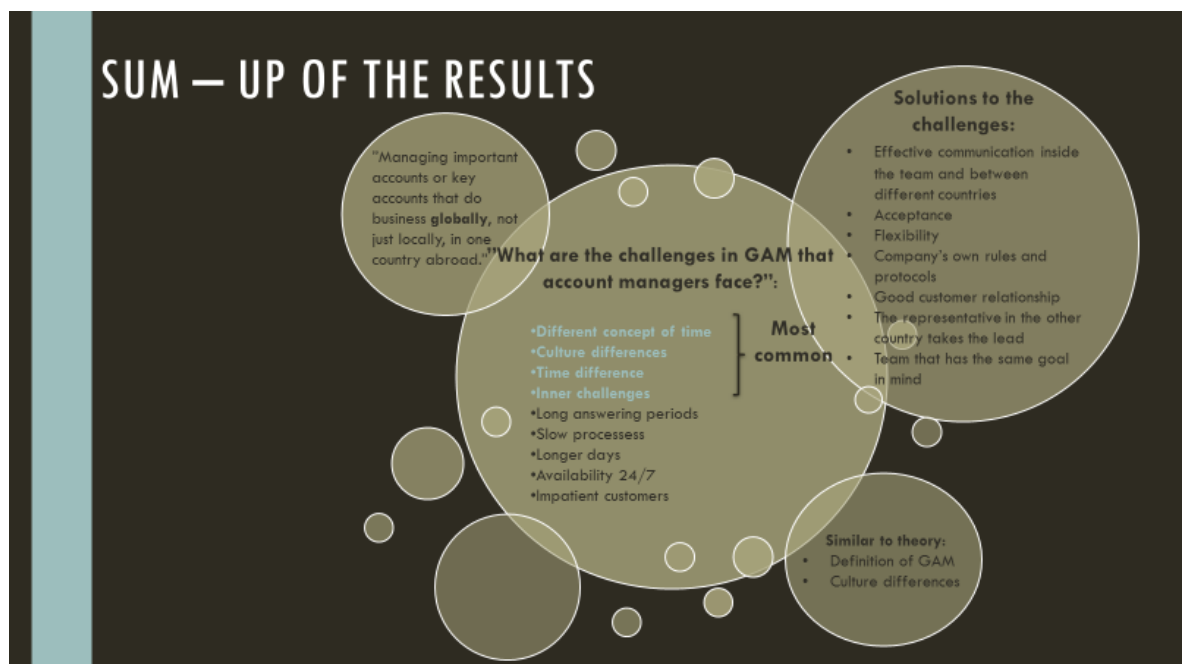
The second challenge that was often mentioned was culture differences in general. In some answers this included the concept of time but in most cases not. Other cultural difference compared to Finnish culture that was a challenge was the decision making. In Finnish culture the decisions are made in a straightforward manner and they must meet the deadlines. Interestingly, in some of the interviews the account managers used Sweden, the neighbouring country as an example. What was mentioned about Swedish business culture was that the decision making there takes noticeably longer because it is preferred to decide when everyone involved agrees on this. This was a challenge when for example the Finland’s head office needs a decision being made but the Swedish office hasn’t made their mind yet and this prolongs the whole process. In Asia on the other hand the decisions are being made in a fast phase.

The third noticeable challenge that was mentioned during the interviews was time differences. Especially during the negotiations this was something that needs flexibility because if the customer is for example in America, the negotiations can’t be in Finnish business hours. An account manager must be flexible with this and change their working hours either later than normally or a bit earlier to be able to make the most out of the working hours of the day. What caused challenges was especially the fact that because of time differences, the working days might become longer than intended. However, not all the account managers interviewed felt that this was a problem. What time differences also cause is that if the communication is done by emails, to get an answer from a customer or a colleague from another country, it can take few days which makes communication slower.

The final, noticeable challenge that was mentioned in some of the interviews was inner challenges. The most common problem that account managers brought up was communication. Because there is a bigger team involved in global account management than in national account management, the communication inside the team and within the company in general plays an important role. This highlights especially if things don't go as they are planned. What was mentioned as very important in all the interviews, was the communication between company's different offices in different countries. Sometimes if there is a dissatisfied customer because of a system fail for example in Spain, the Spanish salesperson of the company could take care of the issue. Of course, in big companies and with big customers the communication must be quick, and it must reach everyone involved. If there are problems with this, it will also show to the customer and in worst case, there can be losses worth of millions.

6.5 Overview

In this chapter the overview of the results is given about the challenges the accounts managers face in their work is given and visually summed – up. In picture 17. the latest and most common challenges and solutions to them can be seen.



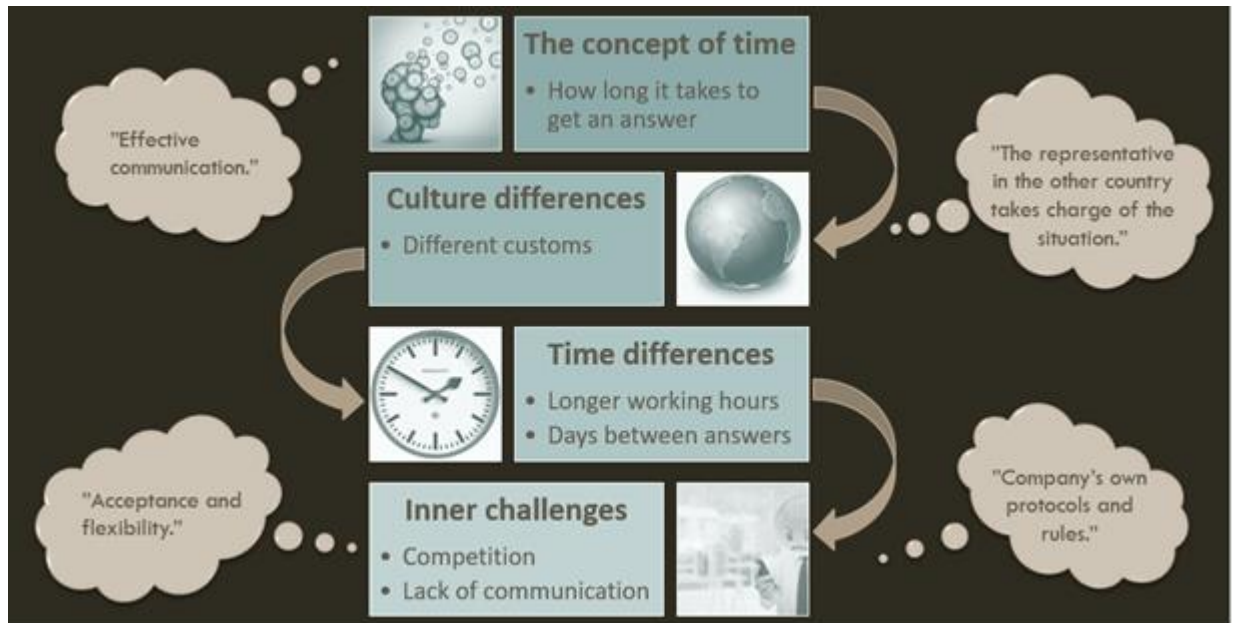
Picture 16. Sum – up of the results.

The latest challenges are in the biggest bubble because finding out recent information about the challenges global account managers face in their work was the biggest research question in the thesis. Inside the bubble there are also most common challenges that account managers face, that can be recognized from the blue font. "What are the most

common challenges global account managers face?” was one of the sub – questions of the research. The blue challenges are the ones that were repeated in every interview. It was an interesting fact that these challenges were discussed during every interview, even though the account managers were interviewed separately. The other two sub – questions were about the solutions to the challenges and about the similarities between theory and real life.

When the account managers were asked to describe by their own words what global account management means, the answers were very similar. The description is showed in picture 13. and 16. On top of the fact the account managers answered in this question in a similar way, they also described global account management in a way Cheverton describes it in theory. In both descriptions there was a difference between what is global and what is international, and that global account management is something that involves only truly global companies. What might affect this similarity in answers is the study background and relatively young age which means the time after graduation isn't too long.

In picture 17. the solutions for the most common challenges are visualized. These are solutions that the account managers interviewed mentioned either on a hypothetical level or from an experience. The most important solutions to the challenges in general but especially to the problem with different time concepts was effective communication. If messages or processes are made too complicated it simply slows down the communication between countries. For culture differences and different customs, the solution was that the representative of the country takes charge of the situation and makes an impact from inside of the other country's or customer's office.



Picture 17. Solutions to the challenges

For time differences, the solution is to change the working hours for later for example so that it would match the customer's county's working hours. Other solution for this was also just the fact that this is part of the job and it is something that must be accepted. Solutions for inner challenges were also, effective communication, but many also mentioned that there are already existing protocols and rules that are considered if there is competition of a customer for example. The protocols also help as guidelines if there are for example reclamations due to a lack of communication or because of a product.

The answers for these challenges may not necessarily represent all global account managers because the managers interviewed were all under 30 years. This might be a reason why for example the electronics used in online negotiations etcetera were not seen as a challenge or mentioned at all. What was also interesting to notice was that for example that the concept of time was one of the biggest challenges regardless of the gender of the account manager.

7 Conclusions

In this chapter, the results of the qualitative research in this thesis will be evaluated further and they will be combined with the writer's analysis, assumptions and own ideas. The results of the research will also be compared to the sum – up of the theory and evaluated if there are any similarities or did the results differ from it. The chapter focuses especially on the challenges global account manager face, the most common challenges and the similarities and differences of those compared to the theory. Also, this chapter evaluates whether or not the thesis met its goal through the research and how reliable the research is. At the end of the chapter the writer also gives their ideas for taking the research further and evaluates their own learning process.

7.1 The Challenges of Global Account Management

This thesis wanted to focus on the challenges in global account management and to understand the account management models behind it. To understand the challenges, it was important to understand the nature of global account management and its relationship to key account management, since often these two go hand in hand. The research wanted to find out the current challenges global account managers face in their work but also what are the most common challenges, how the account managers find solutions to these challenges and if there are any similarities to theory. The main objectives were set to the thesis, its theory and the research, and they were following (chapter 1):

- What are the challenges in global account management that account managers face?
- What is global account management?
- What are the most common challenges?
- How the global account managers overcome these challenges?
- Are the challenges mentioned similar than what are mentioned in the theory?

These objectives were met, and they were cleared out using the theory and the research. The theory helped to understand what global account management is and what are the most common types of challenges companies and account managers must be prepared for. The theory also answered partially how some of the challenges can be solved (chapters 2, 3 and 4). The research helped finding out about the challenges global account managers face because the challenges mentioned are from their personal experiences. Based on the interviews, some of the common challenges were found and the solutions how to overcome those challenges. Comparing theory and the research it was also possi-

ble to find some similarities between the two, but there were also few differences. Picture 18. shows how the theory and the research has combined in one cohesive piece around the main objectives. It also shows that all the objectives for the research and thesis were answered.



Picture 18. The main objectives answered and summed – up using theory and the results.

The challenges (current and most common) of global account management are summed – up in the picture. In addition, it also shows the solutions to those challenges and defines what global account management is, since it is often mistaken as international. The picture is supposed to be read in a following way. The biggest circle represents the core objectives of the thesis and the research: the challenges in global account management. This is part of the GAM process listed in figure 10. The challenges listed were found partially from the theory, but mostly from the interviews since there wasn't much theory about the challenges. The second biggest circle is about the solutions to the challenges, which was also one of the biggest objectives to the thesis, hence the size of the circle. The yellow one gives an answer to one of the objectives: What is global account management? The smaller circles are about the similarities of the challenges between theory and real – life experiences. Both similarities and differences were found and there can be many reasons to explain why that happened, neither are however wrong and it may represent the current time, or the age group of the account managers interviewed.

To be able to understand the challenges of something, it is necessary to understand the phenomena itself first. The theory defines global account management as a progressed and more complex form of key account management. It is also important to understand

the difference between global and international business. Truly global business is done in multiple countries with a customer that also does business globally, in multiple countries. The results were aligned with the theory (chapter 3.1. and 6.2.). It is extremely important to understand the definition, since it also affects the decision of whether the company is competent to provide services for global customers or not. The global fit between the supplier and the customer (chapter 3.2.) can also be one of the selection criteria for accounts and this was also mentioned in some of the interviews. This result of the similarity wasn't necessarily the most outbreking, but it was interesting and something the writer believes is beneficial and worth mentioning during teaching about global account management. Even though global account management is described as more complex than key account management, it was interesting to find out that the global account managers however, don't see the difference that major and prepare in a similar way to meetings and negotiations for example. It can be said that global account management is sort of like key account management but in a bigger scale, and shouldn't be seen intimidating.

The challenges were described in chapter 3.4. and the research confirmed some of the theory, but also brought new aspects to it (chapter 6.4.). The results indicated that there are lots of different type of challenges that global account managers will face in their work and some of them are more common than others. Some of the challenges are something that most of the people are already aware of such as culture differences, time differences and impatient customers. However, there were a lot challenges that were not mentioned clearly in the theory. These types of challenges were for example inner challenges on a corporation level such as competition, poor communication between the teams in different countries or the teams having different ways of measuring profit (global vs. local level). These challenges can be tough for an account manager to handle since they are happening within the company. Luckily, there are usually rules and protocols for situations like these and from inner challenges the most common one that was pointed out was inefficient communication. The inner challenges are highly interesting, and the writer believes these can be beneficial to acknowledge since there wasn't much theory available about it, but it clearly is something the account managers will face in their work.

The most common challenges that came up during the interviews (chapter 6.4.) as well were culture differences and especially different concept of time. Also, time differences and the already mentioned inner challenges were also most common challenges global account managers must deal with. The theory mentioned about the culture differences that especially with cultures that are very different from each other, there can be difficulties to reach common ground and misunderstandings in communication (chapter 3.4.2.). What was unexpected was that a lot of the account managers interviewed mentioned

Swedish negotiation culture as an example. Interesting in this is that both Finland and Sweden are part of the Nordic countries, it would be expected that the cultures are similar. However, what was seen frustrating was the difficulty of making a bigger decision, if everyone wasn't agreeing on it. Finnish people are more straightforward and not as afraid of naysayers compared to Swedish people. The concept of time was also seen challenging for example with countries like Spain, where the timetables are more flexible compared to Finnish punctuality. The solution for this and the culture differences was to accept it and make sure the company's representative in the other country takes the lead when it's needed.

Time difference was also seen as a challenge because it affects the communication between countries and the working hours. The interviews pointed out that sometimes the working hours prolonged and it needs adapting, for example starting work later in Finland because the customer starts work few hours later due to a time difference. However, when the differences were too big, it took approximately one day to get a reply from a customer or the representative in another country. This slows down the communication and makes it difficult especially if there is a case going on.

7.2 Suggestions for Development and Continuation

During the thesis process the writer got three ideas for the development projects for this topic that they would like to do/follow someone to do. These ideas are something the writer is interested in writing and doing more research about.

1. Further study about the challenges in global account management.
In this project it would be interesting to do similar research to a bigger group of global account managers from different countries. Because this research mainly focused on Finnish account managers, it would be fascinating to see what other cultures see as challenges and are there major differences. This would take the research on a global level and bring larger benefit to sales.
2. A book about the challenges and the solutions of global account management.
Taking in consideration of the fact that there isn't much literature available about the challenges of global account management it would be interesting and challenging to write one. Considering how important the subject is to companies, but also study programs would benefit from it since there isn't proper books that focus on the challenges.

3. A further study about the challenges of global account management for companies.

The writer believes it would be interesting to do further research about a global company/or a certain branch and find out what kind of challenges account managers face in that environment. The results could be presented to the company and help them improve their business processes.

7.3 Reliability of the Study

This thesis' research was made using qualitative research, interviewing global account managers. It is important to evaluate if the results are reliable. The key words reliability and validity will be explained further in this chapter and compared to the research made for this thesis.

In qualitative research validity is used to measure if the research is competent, which means that the research has been done right and that the conclusions are correct. The research has been done right when correct methods have been chosen and they produce wanted results. For a research to be valid, it must approach the phenomena in a correct way, which also affects the research questions and how they are planned. (Saaranen – Kauppinen & Puusniekka 2006.; Hiltunen 2009.)

The writer strongly believes this research is valid because there wasn't really any other way to properly research this subject. Because the research wants to find out the challenges global account managers face in their work, qualitative research is the only way to truly find out about the experiences of the account managers. The method was chosen after discussing about the subject and the objectives with the teachers in the thesis course, where one of those teachers was the thesis instructor of the writer. In addition, there wasn't much already existing research information about the subject, which made it impossible to use quantitative methods for example.

This type of research also kept the account managers interviewed and the companies anonymous. None of the participants' name or other personal information that could be used in identification is revealed, which allowed them to trust that they can answer to the questions honestly and openly. If the companies and the account managers who participated would be revealed in the thesis, that could have affected negatively to the results. Especially the answers regarding the inner challenges could have been shorter and not as truthful. Especially in that type of answers that evaluate the actions of the work community and colleagues, everyone tries to be cautious not to give incorrect information. The ac-

account managers interviewed knew that their answers would be handled anonymously and confidentially so they could be open with their answers. That itself enhances the validity of the research because it keeps the interviews honest.

From the beginning of this process, there weren't certain hypothesis how the results should be, because this is a topic that haven't been researched much. Also, the writer was genuinely interested and passionate about the topic and wanted to create something useful for the university, the branch of sales, the account managers interviewed and themselves. This also supports the validity of the research. During the process, the writer compared and questioned the answers to theory but also to other interviews. From the beginning there was a certain goal in the mind of the writer to find out something useful, but also to try to be critical on their own work so that the quality of the work would be good. Questions such as: "Why am I doing research about this? What conclusions can I make from this? Why does this differ from the theory? Why is this like the theory? Is this the best method for the research? How do I present the results?" were asked by themselves. This kind of critical thinking makes it safer to say that the research is valid.

In qualitative research, reliability measures if the results of the research stay the same when it's done again. The research can be either done again by other researcher or it can use new material, in this case other account managers. A research reliable when the results stay the same even after repeating it. This proves that the results are not the way they are only by chance. Research can be reliable even though it is not valid. In this case the chosen research methods can lead to interesting results, but they are not answering to the set objectives. (Hiltunen 2009.)

The writer believes that the research is partially reliable. The fact that all the account managers interviewed were under 30 years old Finns doesn't represent the challenges of global account management on a larger scale, but it answers for the group that was scaled down in the objectives. If the research would be repeated in some other country, the results could vary a lot from the ones done in Finland. Also, considering the fact, that only five account managers were interviewed for this research, the writer can't claim that the research is completely accurate. However, there were some similarities in the answers about the most common challenges and their solutions which gives some guidelines for further, more thorough research. Although, communication technology, way of working and businesses develop all the time and considering the lack of existing research material, the writer believes the research gives valuable, new information about the challenges of global account management. If the research would be done in a larger scale with international group of global account managers, the research could have better reliability.

7.4 Evaluation of the Thesis Process and Own Learning Process

The process of writing a thesis went over all easily and naturally. From the beginning, the writer had certain idea of how they want to execute the thesis and they feel they succeeded in it. Even though there are some parts in the thesis that might require further adjustments, it serves its purpose as covering a subject that hasn't been written about much, especially in theses. The writer also wanted the work to be useful for themselves instead of writing something irrelevant for months. This way the motivation towards the thesis stayed. The subject itself is something that has been useful for teaching purposes in Haag – Helia, which confirms that this work has value for others than the writer themselves as well.

In general, the subject was somewhat familiar to the writer from their student exchange in the Netherlands in Avans Hogeschool, but they also believe new things about it has been learned during the thesis process. Also, theory about account management and key account management was familiar from the study program of professional sales in Haag – Helia. The challenges however, were not as familiar compared to the GAM process for example. In the beginning the typical challenges like culture and time differences were the only one that could come to the writer's mind. The lack of research information didn't help either. This is the reason why the interest towards the challenges awoke and it is fair to say, after over six months of reading, writing and researching about the topic, it has become more and more familiar. The writer has learned academically useful knowledge about the challenges of global account management, but also useful skills in working life, the solutions for these challenges. Moreover, because of the interest towards working in a global company in an international team, the writer believes this thesis has improved their knowledge about such environment.

The writer was motivated during the whole process, even though writing wasn't always consistent, the topic was something that would be in their mind constantly. Especially during the research, the topic started to show itself in a new light, through the interviews and actual real – life experiences. The reason this so interesting to the writer is because they also want to become a global account manager in the future. What would also interest them, would be doing further research about the topic in a different country and give lectures about the topic. Due to globalization, digitalization and an easy relocation processes to work in other country in EU for example, bringing out the challenges and solutions in global account management would be highly useful to companies. The writer themselves is moving to the Netherlands for a second time because of a final internship in a global

company and can speak about the relocation process as a EU citizen from an experience. This is also why the thesis was not only useful for the writer but also very personal.

The whole thesis process has also been a learning process about oneself. The writer has never done an assignment this big before and sometimes there were difficulties with time usage, because during autumn, they still had few courses and work on top of the thesis. What was the most difficult time during the process however, was the lack of courses, when everything was finished, and routines such as going to school every day and waking up early. Also, being critical to own work can be useful to some extent, but working with one assignment for months can time to time bring out the worst of being critical to one's own work. In times like this the writer asked other people's opinions about their work, because after a while people become blind to their own work like writing errors for example. This turned out to be useful and brought more objective view towards the thesis.

What the writer is a bit critical about is the amount of account managers interviewed and some of the sources. The writer would have wanted more interviews, preferably around eight, so that the research would have been more reliable. What affected to this was probably quite late start for the research or they should have started booking interviews few months earlier than December. What the writer would have also wanted was diversity in the interviews since now the answers represent the challenges Finnish global account managers face. What comes to the sources, the lack of research and literature from the challenges was worrying the writer in the beginning. However, after a while they started to find bits of it aside with the bigger theories of key account management. The writer tried to combine old theories with new, fresh information from blog posts and the interviews and tried to use both Finnish and English literature. The topic is something that doesn't have much literature available in Finnish, which is the reason for the lack of Finnish sources.

Over all, the writer is satisfied with the thesis because it did answer the objectives and it is useful to the industry of sales. The work moves forward in a logical order from general information to more precise keeping the so called "read thread" throughout the work. The presentation in attachment 2. was viewed together with the teachers and they have full rights to use and modify it suitable for teaching purposes.

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Attatchments

Attachment 1. The structure of the interview

“The structure of the interview in the challenges of global account management.

This interview is for the research that’s goal is to find out about the challenges companies face in global account management. The thesis is made for Haaga – Helia University of Applied Sciences and the degree program of Professional Sales. Among the challenges, the research also wants to find out how companies overcome the challenges they face and are they similar compared to the theory. The answers are handled confidentially and anonymously. The answers are also meant for this this thesis only. Thank you in advance for your answers and participation!

Background information:

- **Name?**
- **Age?**
- **Degree?**
- **Sales training?**
- **The company you are working at the moment? Field? Turnover?**
- **Position in the company?**
- **How long have you worked in this company?**
- **How much of an experience (years) you have of global account management?**

Choosing global accounts:

- **How would you explain global account management?**
- **What methods are used when you choose to give a customer a global account -status?** (Compared to standard account management, compare the potential of the customer and other criteria.)
- **Do you think the future potential is an important factor? Why?**
- **How many global (key) accounts you have in total?** (In the company, to give some sort of scale like 3, 20, 100?)
- **How many global accounts are you responsible for?**

Relationship with the global accounts:

- **How do you prepare for a meeting or negotiation with global customers?**
- **What the cooperation involves?** (On a day to day basis, or if you are having a bigger case going on.)
- **How close is the relationship with the accounts?** (How often are you in contact, is the relation familiar or distant etc.)
- **What kind of team is working with the relationship?** (The team in your office, the customers buying/selling team, product development, manufacturing etc.)
- **How often are they contacted by your company?**

The challenges:

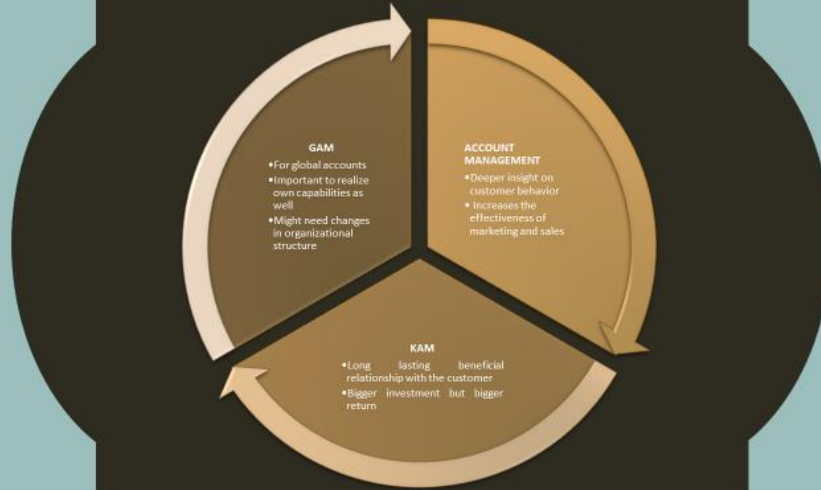
- **Describe the challenges you face when managing global accounts?** (Personally, and as a company. Think of challenges such as time difference, culture, technology used in meetings, costs etc.)
- **Do you have any internal challenges? Describe them.**
- **Do the challenges differ with customers? Why?**
- **How do you overcome the challenges?**
- **What kind of development have you noticed with the challenges your company faces with global accounts?** (For example, if there is a longer case, does building trust change the amount or nature of challenges?)
- **How fast is the development?**

(Is there anything else you would like to add?)”

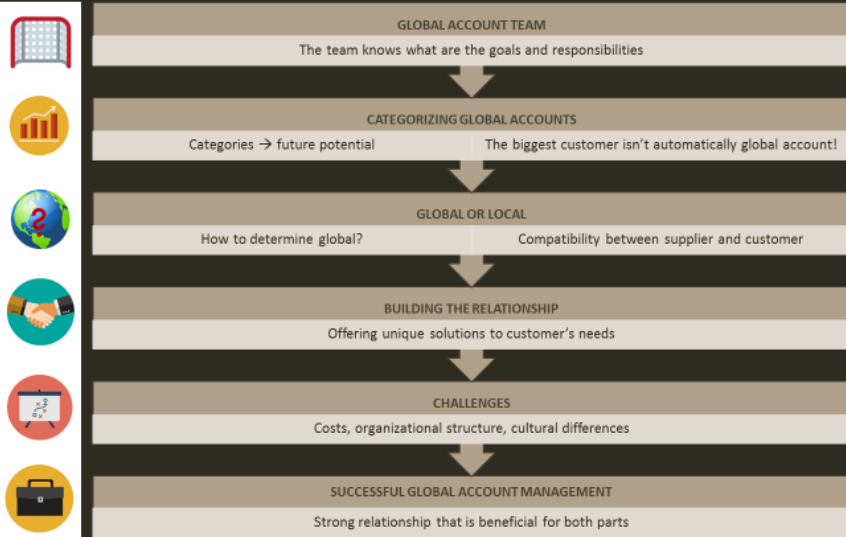
Attachment 2. Results summed up in a PowerPoint presentation



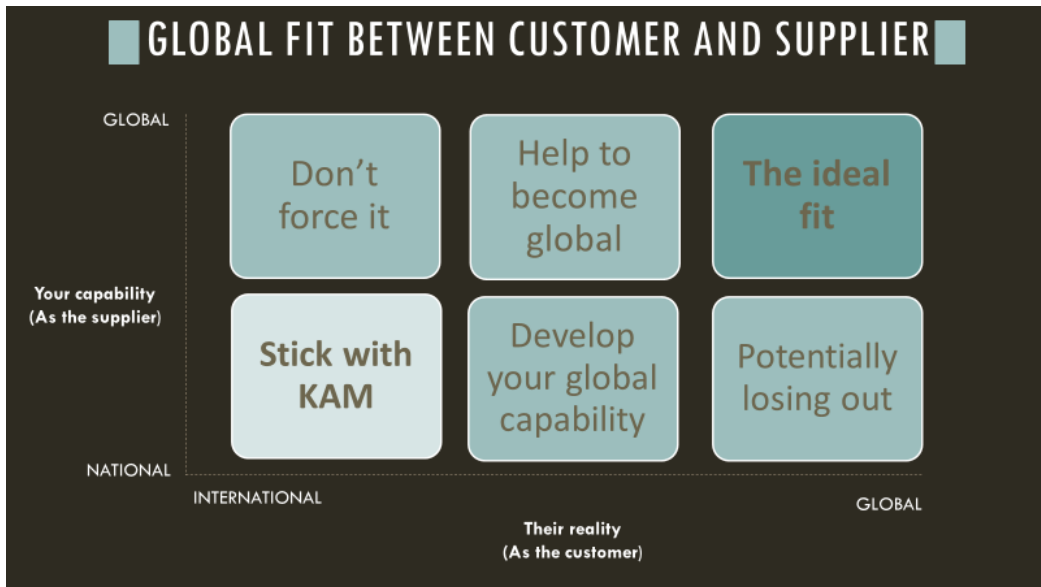
ACCOUNT MANAGEMENT/KAM/GAM



GAM PROCESS



GLOBAL FIT BETWEEN CUSTOMER AND SUPPLIER



BEHIND THE RELATIONSHIP

