Scaling Customer Support for International Markets in a B2B SaaS Company

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the scaling of customer support for international markets in a B2B SaaS company. The commissioning organization is Linear Oy, a Finnish software company serving the real estate industry, which is currently expanding its operations to European markets. The objective of the thesis is to formulate concrete development recommendations for scaling customer support internationally.

The study was conducted as a development research project during autumn 2025 and spring 2026, combining a theoretical literature review with an empirical survey. The survey was targeted at professionals in customer support leadership roles in international B2B SaaS companies and received 14 responses, which is a significant number given the seniority of the target group. The data were analyzed by thematically coding the open-ended responses and calculating distributions for the structured questions.

The central finding is that customer support scaling challenges are primarily qualitative rather than quantitative: increasing ticket complexity emerged as the dominant challenge (79 % of respondents), while volume growth alone was cited by only 21 %. Artificial intelligence was identified as by far the most important scaling enabler, and its adoption is well-established: 93 % of respondents reported using AI in customer support and 79 % reported it as widely used in their organizations. A high-quality knowledge base emerged as an essential foundation for AI solutions, while insufficient documentation directly undermines the reliability of AI-generated responses.

The development recommendations for the commissioning company are structured around five areas: (1) a phased AI and automation strategy in which knowledge base development precedes AI deployment, (2) systematic knowledge base development using a docs as code approach, (3) an international operating model combining a standardized global framework with market-specific adaptations, (4) a structured collaboration model with product development for systematic root cause identification and resolution, and (5) a KPI framework to support scalability monitoring. The recommendations are applicable beyond the commissioning company to other B2B SaaS companies at a similar stage of growth.

Keywords
Customer Support, B2B, SaaS, internationalization, scalability, artificial intelligence, knowledge base

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Tämä ylemmän ammattikorkeakoulun opinnäytetyö tarkastelee asiakastuen skaalaamista kansainvälisille markkinoille B2B SaaS -yrityksessä. Työn toimeksiantaja on suomalainen kiinteistönvälitysohjelmistoa tarjoava Linear Oy, joka laajentaa nyt toimintaansa Eurooppaan. Tutkimuksen tavoitteena on muodostaa kohdeyritykselle konkreettiset kehittämissuositukset asiakastuen skaalaamiseksi kansainvälisille markkinoille.

Opinnäytetyö toteutettiin tutkimuksellisena kehittämistyöprojektina syksyn 2025 ja kevään 2026 aikana. Tutkimuksessa yhdistettiin teoreettinen kirjallisuuskatsaus ja empiirinen kyselytutkimus. Kysely suunnattiin kansainvälisissä B2B SaaS -yrityksissä asiakastuen johtotehtävissä toimiville asiantuntijoille, ja siihen vastasi 14 henkilöä. Vastausten määrä on merkittävänä, kun kyseessä on johtotason ammattilaiset. Aineisto analysoitiin teemoittelemalla avoimet vastaukset ja laskemalla monivalintakysymysten jakaumat.

Tutkimuksen keskeinen löydös saatujen tulosten perusteella on, että asiakastuen skaalautumishaasteet ovat ensisijaisesti laadullisia eivätkä määrällisiä: tukipyyntöjen kasvava monimutkaisuus nousi hallitsevaksi haasteeksi (79 % vastaajista), kun taas pelkkä volyymin kasvu mainittiin haasteena vain 21 prosentilla. Tekoäly tunnistettiin ylivoimaisesti tärkeimmäksi skaalauskeinoksi, ja sen käyttö on vakiintunutta: 93 % vastaajista ilmoitti käyttävänsä tekoälyä asiakastuessa ja 79 % ilmoitti sen olevan laajasti käytössä organisaatiossaan. Laadukas tietopankki osoittautui tekoälyratkaisujen välttämättömäksi perustaksi, kun puolestaan puutteellinen dokumentaatio heikentää suoraan tekoälyn vastausten luotettavuutta.

Kehittämisehdotukset kohdeyritykselle on jäsennetty viiteen kokonaisuuteen: (1) vaiheistettu tekoäly- ja automaatiostrategia, jossa tietopankin kehittäminen edeltää tekoälyn käyttöönottoa, (2) tietopankin systemaattinen kehittäminen docs as code -mallia hyödyntäen, (3) kansainvälinen toimintamalli, jossa globaali perusrakenne täydentyy markkinakohtaisilla käytännöillä, (4) yhteistyörakenne tuotekehityksen kanssa juurisyiden tunnistamiseksi ja korjaamiseksi, sekä (5) KPI-mittaristo skaalautumisen seurannan tueksi. Kehittämisehdotukset ovat sovellettavissa myös muihin vastaavassa kasvuvaiheessa oleviin B2B SaaS -yrityksiin.

Asiasanat
Asiakastuki, B2B, SaaS, kansainvälistyminen, skaalautuvuus, tekoäly, tietopankki

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1 Introduction

Over the past decade, software business has increasingly shifted toward cloud-based service models. In the Software as a Service (SaaS) model, software is delivered as a service via the internet, enabling continuous development and scalable operations. At the same time, customer expectations regarding service reliability and availability have grown, as SaaS products often form a central part of customers' daily business operations.

The growth of SaaS companies is commonly driven by international expansion. When a company extends its operations to new markets, the customer base, support ticket volume, and service complexity all grow simultaneously. Internationalization brings distinct challenges for customer support: the need for multilingual support, differences in time zones, and varying cultural expectations place demands that traditional resource-based scaling alone can no longer meet. Without a structured operating model, the support load can become unmanageable, degrading the customer experience and the company's competitive position.

The rapid development of artificial intelligence has significantly transformed the customer support landscape. Automation and AI-based solutions offer new ways to serve a growing customer base without proportional increases in headcount. Leveraging these solutions, however, requires strategic planning, a high-quality knowledge base, and an understanding of where technology most effectively supports customer support. This thesis examines how a B2B SaaS company can build an internationally scalable customer support model by combining technological solutions, effective processes, and proactive preparation for internationalization.

1.1 Objective

The objective of this master's thesis is to produce concrete development recommendations for the commissioning company, Linear Oy, on how customer support can be scaled in a controlled manner for international markets. Linear Oy is a Finnish B2B SaaS company providing software for the real estate brokerage industry. It expanded from the Finnish domestic market to the Baltic region in 2025 and is planning broader growth in European markets in the coming years. The ability of customer support to scale in a controlled manner is one of the key prerequisites for this internationalization.

The research is conducted as a development research project combining a theoretical literature review with an empirical survey. The theoretical section examines customer support organizational models, technological solutions, and the distinctive features of internationalization in a B2B SaaS

context. The empirical section collects expert insights from internationally operating B2B SaaS companies and analyzes them in relation to the commissioning company's current state.

The outcome of this work is a set of development recommendations related to the customer support operating model, support processes, technological solutions, and preparation for internationalization from a customer support perspective. The aim is not only to describe the challenges related to customer support scalability, but to produce a practical and contextually suitable development direction for the commissioning company. Although the work focuses on one commissioning company, its results can also be applied more broadly to other B2B SaaS companies at a comparable stage of growth.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions are rooted in the thesis objective of understanding how customer support can be effectively scaled to an international level in a B2B SaaS environment.

To address these objectives, two research questions were formulated:

- What challenges does a B2B SaaS company face when scaling customer support for international markets?
- What approaches and solutions support the scaling of customer support in an international B2B SaaS environment?

The first research question, "What challenges does a B2B SaaS company face when scaling customer support for international markets?", was chosen because it helps identify the key problems and constraints that hinder the growth and effectiveness of customer support in an international operating environment. Understanding these challenges is a prerequisite for building realistic development measures that fit the company's context.

The second research question, "What approaches and solutions support the scaling of customer support in an international B2B SaaS environment?", complements the first with a development-oriented perspective. It maps the process-related, technological, and organizational solutions that companies can use to improve customer support efficiency without a proportional increase in resource requirements. This question enables the formulation of concrete development proposals for the commissioning company.

Together, these two research questions form a coherent whole, in which the first question focuses on understanding the phenomenon and the second on identifying solutions. The first research question examines the challenges related to customer support scaling in an international B2B SaaS environment. This creates the basis for understanding the phenomenon and helps identify

the key problem areas related to, for example, support processes, resource management, and the distinctive features of the international operating environment.

The second research question, in turn, examines solutions to these challenges. It investigates what technological, organizational, and process-related solutions support customer support scaling. The examination of these solutions is grounded in the theoretical framework of the thesis, which covers, among other things, customer support organizational models, service management principles, and the role of automation and AI in developing customer support.

The research questions are thus directly linked to the theoretical framework of the thesis and enable both an understanding of the phenomenon and the formulation of practical development proposals for the commissioning company.

1.3 Scope

The scope of the study is limited to B2B SaaS companies operating in Finland, as the commissioning company operates in Finland in a business-to-business environment and is expanding from Finland to international markets. The study focuses on business-to-business customer support (B2B), where customer relationships are typically long-term and support requests are technically more complex compared to consumer business (B2C). B2C customer support typically emphasizes high volume and standardized interactions, and such operating models are therefore not directly applicable to the context of this thesis.

The study is limited to SaaS companies (section 2.1), as this reflects the commissioning company's business model. The business model of a SaaS company (section 2.1.2) differs from other companies and determines what kind of customer service customers need or expect. The thesis seeks solutions specifically for startups and SMEs, because the challenges they face in scaling customer support differ significantly from those of medium-sized and large enterprises. In startups and SMEs, customer support is often developed with limited human and financial resources, often without established processes or enterprise-level systems in place. Moreover, rapid customer base growth can strain customer support disproportionately, as a larger customer base generally means a proportionally larger number of support tickets, making cost-effective and quickly deployable scaling solutions particularly important. Large enterprises, by contrast, typically have dedicated customer support organizations, sophisticated support processes, and greater resources, which is why their challenges and solution models are not directly applicable to the context of this thesis.

The study is limited to proposing development recommendations and operating models for the commissioning company for scaling customer support. The outputs include, for example, process descriptions, role and responsibility assignments, and technological development proposals based

on a literature review and an analysis of the commissioning company's current state. The thesis does not include practical piloting, implementation, or impact measurement of these solutions, nor the analysis of their results. This scope was defined because the commissioning company was not undertaking significant international expansion during the thesis period (autumn 2025 – spring 2026), meaning that practical implementation and impact assessment of the recommendations fell outside the thesis timeline.

1.4 Use of Artificial Intelligence

This study made use of AI-based tools to support the writing and development process. The primary tool was ChatGPT, used to assist with structuring text, language editing, generating structural alternatives, and clarifying wording. The use of AI was limited to this supporting role and was not used to produce the research data, analyze the survey data, or formulate the research findings. All conclusions and interpretations are based on the author's own analysis.

During the planning phase of the study, AI was used to outline the structure of the work and to generate ideas for survey questions. During the writing phase, AI was used particularly for critical review and formatting of text paragraphs: the author produced the content and AI served as a quality reviewer and a support tool for linguistic expression. This approach is consistent with Haaga-Helia's guidelines on the use of AI, according to which AI may function as a writing aid as long as the responsibility for content and scientific reasoning remains with the author.

Keenious, a tool specialized in searching for academic articles, was used to find sources. Keenious was used to identify relevant sources for the research topic and to map adjacent topics and theoretical perspectives related to the subject. The actual evaluation, selection, and in-depth reading of sources was conducted by the author.

1.5 Terminology

Business Models and Operating Environment

SaaS (Software as a Service)	A software delivery model in which software is provided as a service via the internet on a subscription basis. The service provider is responsible for the infrastructure and updates. (Section 2.1)
B2B (Business-to-Business)	A business model in which a company sells its services to other businesses. B2B customer support is typically more technically complex and customer relationships are longer-term than in consumer business. (Section 2.2)
B2C (Business-to-Consumer)	A business model in which a company sells its services directly to individual consumers. B2C customer support emphasizes high volume and standardized situations. (Section 2.2)
Scale-up company	A company in a rapid growth phase that has found a functioning business model and is actively scaling it. (Section 4.2)

Customer Support and Organizational Models

Customer Support	A reactive function in which the company responds to customer support requests. The goal is to help customers resolve issues quickly and with high quality. (Section 2.3)
Customer Success	A proactive function whose goal is to ensure the customer's long-term success in using the service through anticipatory engagement. (Section 2.8)
Tier model	A multi-level customer support model in which support requests are divided by expertise level (Tier 0–4). The goal is to route requests cost-effectively to the right level. (Section 2.4)
Tier 0	The self-service level of customer support: knowledge base, chatbots, and other channels where the customer resolves the issue without human contact. (Section 2.4)
Swarming	An operating model presented in ITIL 4 in which the necessary experts are immediately assembled around a support request without hierarchical escalation. (Section 2.3)
Knowledge Base	The company’s documentation repository containing guide articles and solution descriptions. Functions both as a customer self-service channel and as the knowledge foundation for AI solutions. (Section 3.2)
Omnichannel customer support	An operating model in which the customer can contact support through multiple channels and customer support has a unified view of the entire contact history. (Section 2.3)

Metrics and Service Levels

KPI (Key Performance Indicator)	A performance metric used to monitor operational effectiveness and achievement of objectives. (Section 2.5)
SLA (Service Level Agreement)	A service level agreement that defines the target level of service to which the company commits, such as the response time target. (Section 2.5)
CSAT (Customer Satisfaction Score)	A customer satisfaction metric measuring satisfaction with an individual service interaction. (Section 2.5)
NPS (Net Promoter Score)	A customer loyalty metric: how likely is the customer to recommend the company to others. (Section 2.5)
FRT (First Response Time)	First response time — the time from the customer's contact to the first response. A typical SLA target. (Section 2.5)
AHT (Average Handle Time)	The average time to handle an individual support request. Describes the efficiency of the support process. (Section 2.5)
FCR (First Contact Resolution)	First contact resolution rate — the proportion of support requests resolved on the customer's first contact. (Section 2.5)
ITIL 4	The international IT service management framework (2019) that emphasizes collaborative service management and the swarming model. (Sections 2.3–2.4)

Technology and Artificial Intelligence

AI agent	An autonomously operating AI solution capable of resolving support requests without human intervention. (Section 3.3)
RAG (Retrieval-Augmented Generation)	An AI approach in which a language model retrieves information from the organization's own documents in addition to its general training data when generating responses. (Section 7.3)
Hallucination	A phenomenon in which AI generates seemingly plausible but incorrect responses. The risk increases with an insufficient knowledge base. (Section 3.4)
Docs as code	A documentation management model in which documentation is maintained in version control alongside code and updated as part of code changes. (Section 7.2)
NLP (Natural Language Processing)	Natural language processing — a domain of AI that enables the understanding of text or speech. A key technology in chatbots. (Section 3.3)

2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is built from several complementary perspectives that enable examination of customer support scaling in an international B2B SaaS environment. The framework integrates the distinctive features of software business, customer support organizational models, and the perspectives of service management and customer experience.

The first key perspective is the SaaS business model and the differences between B2B and B2C (Sections 2.1 and 2.2), which determine the continuity of customer relationships, the revenue logic, and the strategic importance of customer support. The second key element of the framework relates to customer support organization and support models (Sections 2.3 and 2.4). The work draws on the traditional multi-tier customer support model (Tier 0–4) and the collaboration-based swarming model highlighted in the ITIL 4 framework. These models allow analysis of how customer support can be organized effectively so that a growing support load and the challenges of internationalization do not degrade service quality.

The third perspective examines the measurement and management of customer support quality (Sections 2.5 and 2.6). KPI metrics, SLA definitions, and customer experience metrics form the basis for managing customer support scalability. These metrics enable assessment of how customer support performance and customer experience evolve as the company grows and expands to new markets.

The framework accounts for the role of customer support as a source of learning and value creation in a B2B SaaS company (Section 2.7). Customer support is seen not only as a reactive support function but also as a key source of knowledge that supports service development, strengthening of customer relationships, and building of customer success. Finally, Section 3 examines technological solutions in support of customer support scalability. This section focuses particularly on customer service platforms, the knowledge base as a self-service tool, automation, and AI.

The theoretical framework formed through these perspectives directly supports the research questions. The framework creates the basis for identifying customer support scaling challenges and enables examination of various process-related, technological, and organizational solutions in the international B2B SaaS context.

The selected perspectives support the research questions of the thesis from several angles. Examination of the SaaS business model helps understand the distinctive features of software services and why customer support is a central part of a SaaS company's operations. Examination of the differences between B2B and B2C environments in turn explains why customer support in B2B

SaaS companies is often more complex and requires different competencies than in consumer services.

The sections addressing customer support organizational models, such as the multi-tier support model and the swarming model, provide the theoretical basis for examining support structures. These models allow analysis of what operating models support the effectiveness and scalability of customer support in a growing organization. In addition, the sections on measuring and managing customer support offer a perspective on how support performance can be systematically monitored and developed.

The section on technological solutions complements the framework by examining the possibilities of automation and AI in developing customer support. These technologies can reduce manual work, improve the efficiency of support processes, and enable customer support to scale in an international SaaS environment. Together, these perspectives form a whole that enables examination of customer support scaling challenges and possible solutions from the perspective of the research questions.

2.1 What is SaaS, i.e. Software as a Service?

SaaS, or Software as a Service, is a software delivery model in which software is not delivered to the customer for local installation; instead, the service provider maintains it on its own servers, typically in a cloud environment. The software delivery model generally refers to the way in which software is made available to users and who is responsible for the software's infrastructure, maintenance, and updates. In the SaaS delivery model, software is accessible to customers via the internet using, for example, a mobile device or computer, and the customer typically pays a recurring subscription fee for its use (Marston et al., 2011). Well-known examples of SaaS applications include Spotify for consumers and Salesforce for businesses.

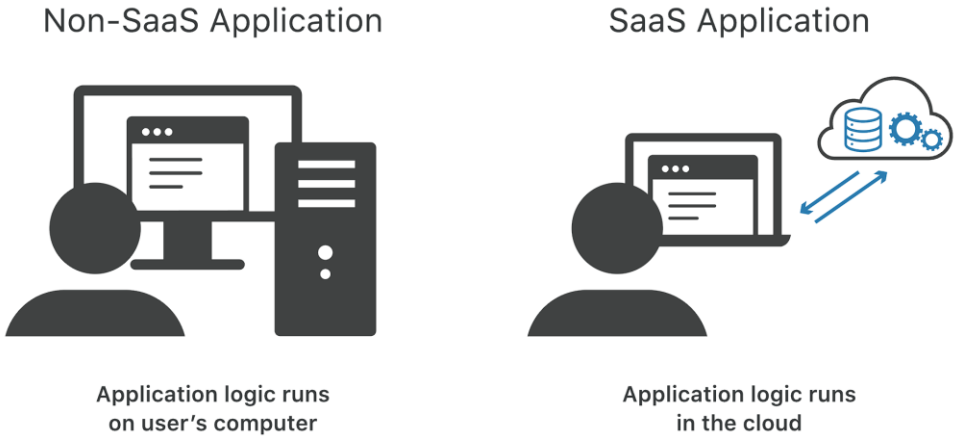

Figure 1. Non-SaaS vs SaaS (adapted from Cloudflare 2026)1

The roots of the SaaS business model extend back to the late 1990s with the ASP (Application Service Provider) model, in which a service provider delivered third-party software to customers via the internet. The ASP model reduced the customer's responsibility compared to the traditional on-premise model, in which software was installed and maintained in the customer's own IT environment. On-premise solutions were, however, both costly and limited in scalability (Santhosh et al., 2024).

ASP solutions also did not scale efficiently, as they were largely based on single-tenant architecture in which software was maintained as individual customer installations. This required updates and changes to be implemented separately for each customer and limited the realization of economies of scale. Additionally, the slower internet connections of the era undermined the usability of these solutions (Benlian and Hess, 2011).

The rapid development of cloud computing in the early 2000s and improved internet connections enabled software vendors to offer software to customers via the internet (Santhosh et al., 2024). The multi-tenant architecture became established as the standard for SaaS software, in which a single software installation serves all customers while keeping each customer's data separate. This enables the service provider to operate in a cost-effective and scalable delivery model, as the software does not need to be customized and maintained separately for each customer (Laatikainen and Ojala, 2014).

Salesforce can be considered an early success story of the SaaS model, demonstrating the commercial potential of cloud-based enterprise software. Since then, the SaaS model has become the dominant way to deliver enterprise software, and its significance was further highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when remote working and flexible software solutions became widespread (Santhosh et al., 2024).

2.2 Differences Between B2B and B2C Environments

The customer base of SaaS companies can be divided into business customers (B2B) and consumer customers (B2C), and the choice of target market significantly influences the product's features, the sales model, and the organization of customer support and customer success. In B2B SaaS companies, customer relationships are typically long-term and business-critical, which places higher demands on customer support in terms of expertise, response times, and the management of customer-specific context compared to consumer markets (Rėklaitis and Pilelienė, 2019).

The choice of customer segment between B2B and B2C guides a SaaS company's key strategic decisions, such as the pricing model, service scope, sales model, and the organization of customer support and customer success (Bektas, 2022). In a B2B context, this influences whether the

support model emphasizes self-service and automation or expert-driven and more personalized support. According to (Bektas, 2022), B2B customers' questions are more complex, which requires customer support to be more expert-driven than if the customer segment were B2C. More complex questions also make it more difficult to use automation and AI in customer support, making customer support scaling more challenging for B2B customers than for B2C customers. This perspective is also central in this thesis, which examines the scaling of customer support in a SaaS company, as the customer segment establishes the starting point for the selection of support models and scalability.

2.3 Customer Support and Its Tier Definitions

Customer support is by nature reactive, responding to customer contacts and ensuring that customers receive high-quality responses to their inquiries as quickly as possible. Customers may send various types of contacts, generally referred to as support requests or tickets. Support requests are typically classified into three categories: customer problem resolution, feedback and development suggestions, and error reports.

The handling of support requests may also involve, where necessary, analyzing the customer's or service's situation and managing further escalations. Support requests have traditionally arrived by phone or email, but it is now common to aim for omnichannel support, where customer service is also available via chat and instant messaging applications, with the customer's contact history seamlessly available to customer service (Silva, Silva and Dias, 2024). This allows the customer to switch communication channels, for example from a chatbot to a phone call, and customer service can immediately see the context of the customer's previous contact. This enables a smoother customer experience, as the customer service agent can immediately see at the start of a call where the customer's conversation left off with the chatbot.

Customer support has traditionally been organized as a multi-level service model designed to route support requests efficiently to the appropriate expertise level and to ensure service quality, response time, and cost efficiency. This structure is generally referred to as the tiered support model, which is divided into three or four levels depending on the organization's scale and the depth of technical support.

A more recent practice that has gained traction as an alternative to multi-level customer support is tier-less support or swarming, which ITIL 4 (AXELOS, 2019) advocates in place of the traditional tiered model. In these models, the first level of customer support is intended to resolve the entire support request without escalating it to a higher level, or a higher level does not practically exist at all.

The multi-tier support model enables efficient use of resources and scalability.

- Tier 0 reduces manual workload and enables 24/7 customer service availability.
- Tier 1 resolves the majority of volume quickly and cost-effectively.
- Tier 2–3 ensure that more complex problems are resolved permanently.
- Tier 4 brings collaboration with external parties as a managed part of the service process.

From the perspective of the ITIL v3 framework (AXELOS, 2011), the purpose of different support levels is to facilitate service management so that issues progress to the right expertise level without duplication or delays. This structure is particularly important in SaaS companies, where service continuity, customer experience, and supporting an international customer base require an effective escalation and prioritization model.

According to ITIL 4 (AXELOS, 2019), however, a multi-tier support model can lead to siloing and slower problem resolution, as support requests move hierarchically from level to level. ITIL 4 no longer describes the support process as a multi-tier structure; instead, it emphasizes a collaboration-based swarming model, in which the required expertise is brought together around the support request without hierarchical escalation.

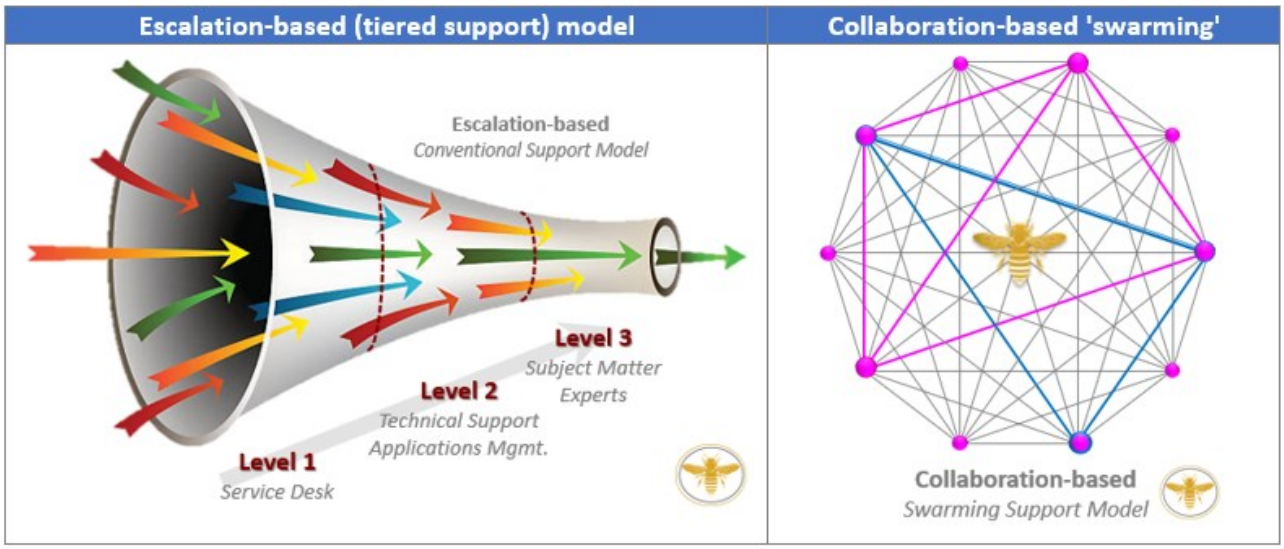

Figure 2. Swarming model (adapted from DGCpartners 2021)2

The swarming model has, however, been criticized on the basis of several sources (Writer, 2019; Stevens-Hall, 2019) from a resource efficiency standpoint, as it can simultaneously tie up multiple specialists, including more expensive resources such as software developers, on cases that Tier 1 could have resolved independently (Stevens-Hall, 2019). Particularly in SaaS organizations, involving software developers directly in support work is not cost-effective, as their primary role is continuous product development. For this reason, it remains appropriate in many SaaS companies to

maintain at least a two-tier support model, in which Tier 1 handles customers' first contacts (e.g., email, chat, or phone) or operates a swarming model, and Tier 2 handles the more technically challenging cases.

Ultimately, the most suitable support model depends on the organization's structure, technology, customer base, and the nature of the service. A single model does not fit all, and in practice many companies combine the strengths of different models, leveraging the efficiency of the multi-tier model and the flexibility of the swarming model.

2.4 Tier Levels and Their Significance in Customer Support

The multi-tier customer support model is one of the most common ways to organize technical customer support in software and IT service organizations (AXELOS, 2011). The core purpose of the model is to divide support work across different expertise levels so that simpler support requests can be resolved quickly and cost-effectively, while technically more complex cases are directed to specialists. Such a structure helps manage a growing volume of support requests and supports the scalability of customer support as the company grows.

In this thesis, the tier model is examined particularly from the perspective of customer support scalability. The model enables analysis of how support work can be distributed effectively across different roles and at what point automation or AI can replace or support human work. Examining the tier model also helps understand how customer support resources can be allocated effectively in an international SaaS environment.

Tier 0 – Self-service covers all channels through which a customer can resolve their issue without human assistance. These include, for example, the knowledge base, chatbots, and AI-based support systems that leverage the company's knowledge base. The goal of Tier 0 support is to reduce the load on support teams by providing answers quickly and cost-effectively.

Tier 1 – First-line customer support handles the customer's first contact, typically by phone or email. Typical tasks include resolving general inquiries, providing usage instructions, managing user accounts, and basic technical issues. The goal is to resolve as large a proportion of support requests as possible without escalation, that is, without transferring the ticket to the next support tier (AXELOS, 2011). This level frequently uses the company's knowledge base to find answers for customers.

Since Tier 1 handles the largest share of customer support load, it typically requires the largest number of customer support staff. On the other hand, the support requests it handles are also the

simplest in nature, and therefore the most easily manageable by AI. For these reasons, this area is considered the most easily scalable and automatable with AI (Team Capacity, 2023).

Tier 2 – Technical customer support resolves problems that could not be handled at the previous level. These include more technically demanding support requests, such as diagnosing user errors and application errors, and configuration issues.

Tier 2 typically requires deeper technical expertise and access to backend systems to find the root cause of the support request. Tier 2 typically identifies whether the support request is a user error or an application error. In the case of an application error, it is analyzed as thoroughly as possible, seeking the root cause and ways to reproduce the error. Finally, Tier 2 escalates the fix of the application error to the next level by creating a ticket for the product team.

This level benefits significantly from various AI solutions, such as using AI to resolve technical issues and translating proposed solutions into more easily understandable language for customers.

Tier 3 consists of the product team, which includes software developers, quality assurance, and also product expertise such as the product manager. Most often, Tier 3 support requests involve resolving application errors, which often require input from both software developers and other members of the product team to determine the correct behavior of the application in the given error situation.

Tier 3 support requests can also be the most technically advanced investigation cases, requiring source-code-level examination of feature logic, particularly when the behavior has not yet been documented in the company's knowledge base. In this context, a need to improve the company's Tier 0 help center is often identified.

Tier 4 – External service provider or a team that is in contact with an external service provider. This level comes into play when the problem is related to an external component, partner, or service that the company does not control itself. It is typical for SaaS services to integrate with multiple different services, which sometimes creates situations where a disruption in the company's own service is caused by an external service provider, necessitating contact with that external provider.

Swarming support – collaboration-based swarming is the support model presented by ITIL 4 (AXELOS, 2019) that replaces traditional hierarchical multi-tier customer support. Its core principle is that a support request does not progress stepwise from level to level; instead, a swarm is immediately formed around it at the outset, consisting of all the specialists needed to resolve the case. This eliminates the delays caused by the traditional escalation process and information flows directly to the right people.

In the swarming model, one customer support agent acts as the primary owner of the case, but other specialists such as software developers, product managers, or integration specialists participate in the resolution process as soon as their expertise is needed. The support request remains with one owner throughout, which improves accountability, information flow, and customer experience. Unlike in the tier model, the problem is not transferred forward but is handled collaboratively.

The advantages of swarming include faster resolution, better knowledge sharing, and direct collaboration among specialists, which reduces errors and accelerates learning. It is particularly suited to SaaS environments where the complexity of support requests varies, and the resolution process benefits from simultaneous contributions from different teams. Several international technology companies, such as Salesforce and Atlassian, have adopted swarming precisely because it enables more efficient collaboration between support and product development (Cannon-Brookes, 2016; Najib, 2023).

2.5 Measuring Customer Support Quality and Handling Support Requests

In customer support, it is essential to handle support requests quickly, with high quality, and efficiently. According to Mwegerano (2014), high-quality handling of support requests or rapid resolution of error situations can significantly affect customer satisfaction. According to De Matos, Henrique and Alberto Vargas Rossi (2007), an error in service or a problem situation can be an opportunity for a company to strengthen the customer relationship, if the situation is handled promptly and effectively. This phenomenon is known as the Service Recovery Paradox (SRP). The research emphasizes, however, that although customers may be even more satisfied after a well-handled problem situation than after error-free service, this does not necessarily lead to increased customer loyalty. Problem situations should therefore always be avoided as a first priority, but when they do occur, customer support plays an important role in ensuring customer satisfaction.

Measuring customer support quality is a central part of a company's ability to scale its operations in a controlled manner for international markets. From a scalability perspective, the company must be able to serve a growing customer base without degrading service quality, response times, or customer satisfaction. This requires systematic measurement of support process performance using various metrics that generate data on the success of customer support and the value experienced by the customer (Robinson and Morley, 2006).

These metrics are generally called Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Customer support KPI metrics can be divided into four categories:

1. Customer experience metrics such as Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT) and Net Promoter Score (NPS) describe the perceived value of the service and customer loyalty. These

are particularly important in the SaaS business model, where ongoing customer relationships are based on satisfaction and trust (Rafiei, 2024).

2. Operational metrics (First Response Time [FRT, time to first response] and Average Handle Time [AHT, average handling time]) measure efficiency and resource utilization. These assess whether the support team can handle a growing volume while staying within SLA targets (AXELOS, 2019).
3. SLA, or Service Level Agreement, is a service level agreement that defines the target level of service to which the company commits to serving the customer (AXELOS, 2019). For example, a company may set the KPI metric FRT as an SLA target, defining a one-hour response time for contacts. It is typical to define different FRT times for different customer tiers, e.g., one hour for Premium customers and 24 hours for Standard customers.
4. Resolution-focused metrics such as First Contact Resolution (FCR, first contact resolution rate), Reopen Rate (RR, ticket reopen rate), and Escalation Rate (ER, escalation rate, i.e., the rate of ticket transfer from one support level to another) describe the quality of the support process and the success of problem resolution. They indicate how well processes support the rapid and permanent resolution of customer needs. Based on the research by Abdullateef, Mokhtar and Yusoff (2011), resolution-focused metrics have a strong connection to customer satisfaction. Support requests resolved on the first contact yield the highest customer satisfaction.

2.6 KPI Metrics in Support of Scalability

KPI metrics support the scalability of a SaaS company in two ways. First, they provide a real-time picture of the balance between service capacity and demand. In line with ITIL 4's Capacity and Performance Management principles, if demand exceeds the support team's processing capacity, service levels and KPI will inevitably deteriorate (AXELOS, 2019). Thus, KPI monitoring functions as an early warning system that helps anticipate resource needs before quality declines or SLA targets are exceeded.

Second, KPI metrics support strategic decision-making in international scaling. When customer support expands to new markets, the metrics can be used to identify geographic or cultural differences in support needs and to assess which processes can be automated and where local expertise is required. KPI data thus serves as the basis for prioritized development measures, such as increasing automation, expanding self-service channels, or establishing new support teams in different time zones.

Research indicates that the balance of the KPI framework is critical. Emphasizing efficiency alone (e.g., short handling times) can lead to poorer service quality, while a one-sided focus on customer

satisfaction can increase costs and undermine scalability (Robinson and Morley, 2006; Manzoor, 2018; Rafiei, 2024). Companies that scale best are able to combine these perspectives and use KPI data as a tool for continuous improvement, maintaining consistent service quality even as volume grows.

Overall, measuring customer support quality forms a strategic management tool for a SaaS company, enabling data-driven scaling, resource management, and continuous development of customer experience in an international operating environment.

2.7 Customer Support as a Source of Organizational Learning

Mwegerano (2014) broadens the perspective on customer support by stating that effective management of support requests also serves the organization's internal learning and continuous service development. In other words, customer support acts as a data collection point that is the first to observe customer challenges, errors, and usage patterns of the SaaS service.

This occurs in practice by analyzing customer requests. For example, if certain topics recur frequently, these should be escalated to internal review and the root cause investigated. For instance, a particular feature may be difficult to use, generating support requests caused by an unclear user interface. In this way, customer support can help identify internal areas for improvement in the SaaS service. Analyzing customer requests and making improvements based on them can thus reduce the load on customer support, which helps in scaling customer support.

2.8 Customer Support's Role in Customer Relationships and Value Creation

The purpose of this section is to explain why customer support plays a central role in developing customer relationships and delivering customer value in a B2B SaaS company. The section helps to understand that if customer support becomes excessively burdened and does not scale in a controlled manner as customer numbers grow, the result can be a deterioration of customer experience and a reduction in the customer's long-term value.

In B2B SaaS companies, customer relationships are by nature ongoing and not just a single service event. Dwyer, Schurr and Oh (1987) suggest that a customer relationship develops in stages toward trust and commitment. The role of customer support is emphasized in this process, as every contact and interaction can reinforce the customer's experience of being valued and cared for. This feeling increases trust in the company and supports the development of a long-term customer relationship.

Customer support is now recognized as an important element in maintaining customer satisfaction and customer relationships. Sheth, Jain and Ambika (2020) describe customer support as occupying a key position in connecting customers and the company. For many customers, customer support is the most visible part of the company, which is why its quality significantly affects the customer's overall experience and perception of the company. Lusch, Vargo and O'Brien (2007) emphasize that the interaction between the company and the customer is a central part of value co-creation, where service is seen as a strategic means of creating customer experience and long-term value. This perspective applies directly to customer support as well, which functions as a significant touchpoint in the creation of value and the formation of the customer's experience.

Traditionally, customer support may have been viewed primarily as a necessary cost item, but Sheth, Jain and Ambika (2020) encourage a shift in thinking so that customer support is seen as a value-creating part of the business. This is because satisfied customers remain paying customers for longer, whereas poor customer service may lead them to switch to another provider. In addition, customer support, operating at the customer interface, has first-hand knowledge of the state of the customer relationship and of customers' needs. This knowledge can be used to develop new features that better meet customer needs, which in turn can further strengthen customer loyalty.

The customer understanding accumulated through customer support also enables it to contribute to customer success efforts, which represent another key customer-oriented function in SaaS companies. Particularly in growing and internationalizing SaaS companies, collaboration between customer support and customer success is central to ensuring that the value of customer relationships and service quality can be maintained even as operations scale.

2.9 Customer Success

The customer success component is briefly included in the study because it is a growing and significant part of customer relationship management, and customer support and customer success can also be handled within the same team. In addition, customer success helps manage and prevent customer support load. The proactive operating model of customer success supports the scaling of customer support by reducing the volume of reactive support requests and anticipating risks related to customer relationships.

Customer Success (CS) is a continuation of nurturing the value of customer relationships, and according to Hilton et al. (2020) it has become a very popular area for SaaS companies in recent years. Hindeyeh (2019) described in a LinkedIn data-based report that demand for the Customer Success Manager (CSM) role had grown by as much as 736 % from 2015 to 2019. While customer support is by nature primarily reactive and responds to customer support requests, CS is proactive

and based on anticipatory and regular interaction with the customer (Hochstein et al., 2020). The role of customer success is to identify potential risks in the customer relationship at an early stage and to support the customer in the effective and purposeful use of the service.

CS, or Customer Success, systematically monitors various metrics and analytics related to the customer relationship, such as the extent to which each service is used, the stage of the customer journey, whether customer satisfaction has remained at the target level, the revenue generated by each customer, and the customer churn rate (Hochstein et al., 2023). If anomalies are identified in these metrics, such as a paid add-on service not being used as expected, CS can proactively contact the customer to determine whether they are satisfied with the service and why they may not be using it. These interactions also provide a valuable opportunity to gather direct customer feedback on the service. Such contacts can also foster a sense of being valued and cared for, which strengthens the customer relationship (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). CS often also plays a role in supporting upselling and expanding the customer relationship, as it can recommend additional services or functionalities that improve the customer's success with the service. For this reason, customer success is an integral part of the sales strategy in many SaaS companies (Hochstein et al., 2023).

A systematic and data-driven customer success operating model also supports the scaling of customer support, as it helps anticipate customers' needs, reduce unexpected support requests, and allocate resources more effectively. In this way, CS and customer support together form a whole that supports the growth of a SaaS company, the retention of customer relationships, and long-term value creation.

2.10 Customer Success and Customer Support as Separate Functions

The preceding section examined customer success from the perspective of its goals and operations as part of customer relationship management in a SaaS company. This subsection focuses on the distinction between customer support and customer success specifically from an organizational and structural perspective, and on how separating or combining the roles affects the scalability of customer support.

In most SaaS companies, a dedicated Customer Success team separate from customer support has been established, responsible for the long-term development of customer relationships and supporting customer success. Customer support, in turn, focuses on customers' support requests and ensuring service functionality. Although both roles operate at the customer interface and deal in part with the same customers, their operational focus and time horizon differ significantly:

support is reactive and transactional, while customer success is proactive and relationship driven. (Hochstein et al., 2020).

In some organizations, customer support and customer success are handled within the same hybrid team, particularly in smaller or early-stage SaaS companies. Such a model can be resource-efficient, but it may create challenges in work prioritization. Reactive support work often takes up a significant portion of time, which can undermine the ability to invest in the proactive and planned work required by customer success.

Separating customer support and customer success into distinct but closely collaborating functions can support the scalability of customer support. A clear division of labor enables customer support to focus on efficient case handling and response times, while customer success can be responsible for the comprehensive development of the customer relationship and the realization of value. At the same time, effective information flow between the roles is essential so that customer understanding is maintained and the service experienced by the customer remains consistent.

The organizational arrangement between customer support and customer success thus constitutes an important structural starting point for scaling customer support in SaaS companies. The clarity of roles and collaboration directly affect how efficiently customer support can be developed to meet the demands of a growing customer base and internationalizing operations.

2.11 Challenges in Customer Support Scalability

The situation can be illustrated with an example. If a company has 1,000 customers generating an average of 1,000 support requests per month, on average one customer generates one support request per month. Assume that a four-person customer support team operates at full capacity in this situation and achieves its KPI targets, such as response time and resolution speed. If the company gains a new customer, for example 100 new users, the number of support requests can be expected to grow by approximately 10 %, from 1,000 to 1,100 per month, assuming other conditions remain unchanged. It is, however, typical that new customers' support needs are above average during the initial onboarding phase and decrease over time as customers progress along the learning curve. Without a corresponding increase in resources, this additional load leads to service capacity being exceeded, which is directly reflected in customer support's key KPI metrics, such as the previously described lengthening of response times and deterioration of resolution speed (AXELOS, 2019). From a service capacity and service level management perspective, the situation degrades customer experience and can negatively affect customer satisfaction.

In such a situation, the company must make a strategic decision about scaling customer support. Typically, four strategic options exist: first, adding customer support resources to increase

processing capacity and maintain service levels; second, lowering service level targets and accepting slower response times and a possible decline in customer satisfaction. This option carries a significant strategic risk, as declining customer satisfaction can in the long run undermine the company's reputation and customer loyalty. The company must assess at what point the deterioration of customer satisfaction becomes more costly than hiring new customer support resources. This decision is a key part of the company's service strategy and resource prioritization. The third and, for this thesis, the most significant option is technological solutions such as automation and AI. The fourth option is various more efficient operating and organizational models, such as more effective knowledge sharing. The latter two are examined in more detail in the following chapters, as these are the approaches the company should aim for if resource growth is not an option.

As the company grows to become the market leader in its domestic market, customer support may face scaling challenges depending on the size of the domestic market and the average frequency of customer support contacts.

2.12 Challenges in Customer Support for an Internationalizing SaaS Company

A company's internationalization changes the customer support operating environment and brings challenges that differ qualitatively from those caused by domestic market growth (Johanson, Vahlne and Johanson, 2009). Customer base growth no longer only increases the volume of support requests; in an international environment, the demands placed on customer support become more complex due to linguistic, cultural, temporal, and organizational factors. The combined effect of these factors complicates the scaling of customer support and highlights the need for systematic service capacity and service level management.

One of the most central challenges of internationalizing customer support relates to language and communication quality. Customer support situations often require precise and context-specific communication, where even minor misunderstandings can lead to incorrect solutions, longer processing times, and degraded customer experience. When customers are served in multiple languages, the language requirements for support staff increase, and the time spent processing support requests may lengthen. This is directly reflected in key KPI metrics of customer support, such as response times and resolution speed.

Another significant challenge relates to time zones and service availability. In international SaaS operations, customers often expect support within their own local working hours, which places pressure on customer support resourcing. The company must decide whether to offer customer support around the clock or concentrate service in certain time zones. Both options involve cost

and quality considerations: around-the-clock support increases resource requirements, while a more limited-service window may reduce customer satisfaction in certain markets.

Cultural differences form the third key challenge area. Customer expectations regarding service quality, communication style, and problem resolution speed vary between different countries and cultures. For example, attitudes toward response times, escalation practices, and formal communication may differ considerably. If customer support operates on the basis of uniform processes without cultural sensitivity, there is a risk of declining customer satisfaction even if the service formally meets the established KPI targets. From a service management perspective, this emphasizes the importance of qualitative factors in customer experience alongside purely quantitative metrics (AXELOS, 2019).

Internationalization also increases the organizational burden on customer support. Support teams may become geographically dispersed, complicating information flow, knowledge sharing, and the maintenance of uniform operating models. In a distributed support organization, the importance of documentation, knowledge bases, and standardized processes is highlighted. Without sufficient process maturity, support staff productivity may decline, and the approach to resolving support requests may vary considerably across teams. This increases variation in service quality and undermines the predictability of customer support.

In addition, an internationalizing company must account for local regulatory and data protection requirements, which can affect customer support operating models. For example, requirements related to data privacy and the handling of customer data may vary between market areas, increasing the complexity of customer support processes and requiring close collaboration with other organizational functions. This underlines the role of customer support as part of the company's overall service strategy rather than merely an operational support function.

In summary, the challenges facing customer support in an internationalizing SaaS company extend beyond a growing volume of support requests; above all, they concern increasing operational complexity (Johanson, Vahlne and Johanson, 2009). Language, time zones, cultural differences, and organizational dispersion form a whole that complicates the effectiveness of traditional resource-based scaling solutions. Managing these challenges requires a strategic approach in which customer support scalability is examined from the perspective of processes, technology, and operating models. This provides the basis for the following section, in which automation and AI are examined as solutions to international customer support scaling challenges.

3 Technological Solutions in Support of Scalability

Examining customer support scalability and internationalization challenges requires an understanding of what technological and operational solutions customer support typically builds on in the current situation. The technological operating environment of customer support has developed significantly in recent years, and customer support development can no longer be examined without taking automation and AI into account. Modern customer service platforms already inherently include automated functions and AI-based features whose aim is to improve the processing of support requests, enhance service quality, and enable the scaling of customer support (Ekechi et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2024).

This section first examines the key principles of customer service platforms, after which it moves on to the role of automation and AI as part of these platforms. Finally, chatbots and virtual customer service agents are addressed separately, as they constitute the most visible area of AI use in customer support.

3.1 Customer Support Technologies and Their Role in Scalability

Customer service platforms form the technological foundation of customer support in most SaaS companies (Rastegar-Panah, 2026). Typically, these platforms are based on a ticket-based operating model in which customer contacts are received from multiple channels, such as email, chat, WhatsApp, or web forms, and routed to a centralized system for handling by customer support. This is referred to as omnichannel customer support. The platforms enable the classification, prioritization, escalation, and monitoring of support requests throughout their lifecycle.

Widely used customer service platforms, such as Zendesk, also provide SLA-based management, reporting, and measurement of customer support performance using KPI metrics. From a service management perspective, these features support the operational manageability and transparency of customer support, which are prerequisites for measuring and maintaining service quality (AXELOS, 2019). The measurability of service quality is essential for determining, as customer numbers grow, at what point customer satisfaction is affected and additional resourcing becomes necessary.

Although customer service platforms improve the efficiency and manageability of customer support, their basic logic has previously been largely ticket-based and tied to human work. This means that customer support capacity has grown mainly linearly with the number of support staff, which has imposed constraints on cost-effective scaling. In international SaaS operations, this resource-based scaling model quickly reaches its limits when the volume of support requests, language

requirements, and service availability expectations grow simultaneously. For this reason, companies have had to examine alternative technological means, such as AI and automation, for developing customer support and enabling cost-effective growth. In addition, in recent years, customer support platforms have continuously incorporated new AI and automation capabilities.

Section 3.3 moves on to examine the role of automation and AI as enablers of international customer support scalability. These solutions are analyzed as a response to the limitations of current technologies identified above, and as part of a strategic approach to developing customer support.

3.2 Knowledge Base as the Foundation for Customer Support Self-Service and AI

A central part of modern customer support technology is the knowledge base, which functions both as a self-service support tool (Tier 0) and as a shared knowledge source for customer support. The knowledge base typically contains documentation, frequently asked questions, guide articles, and solution descriptions through which customers can resolve their issues independently without contacting customer support. From a self-service support perspective, the knowledge base is one of the most cost-effective means of improving customer support scalability, as a single high-quality article can serve an unlimited number of customers simultaneously across different time zones (Salesforce, 2026).

In service management literature, the importance of knowledge bases is emphasized particularly in preventing support requests and managing service capacity (AXELOS, 2019). In international SaaS operations, the knowledge base also supports multilingual customer service, as guides can be available in all required languages. Most modern customer service platforms, such as Zendesk, include an integrated knowledge base solution through which the same content can be utilized for customer self-service, as an internal resource for support staff, and as the knowledge foundation for the platform's AI or a custom AI solution (Rastegar-Panah, 2025).

The importance of the knowledge base is further emphasized when adopting AI-based solutions. AI and particularly chatbots and response systems based on natural language processing require a high-quality, up-to-date, and structurally consistent knowledge base to function reliably. Without a well-maintained knowledge base, AI solutions are forced to rely on scattered or inconsistent data, which degrades response quality and can lead to incorrect solutions (Ngai et al., 2021).

In this sense, the knowledge base serves not only as the central element of self-service support but also as an indispensable starting point for training AI and for effectively utilizing it in customer support operations. Its development and maintenance is therefore a strategic investment that supports both the cost-effective scaling of customer support and the successful deployment of AI solutions in an international SaaS environment.

3.3 Automation and AI as Enablers of International Customer Support Scaling

Modern customer service platforms increasingly incorporate automation and AI features whose primary goal is to reduce manual work and speed up the processing of support requests. Automation in customer service platforms typically refers to actions based on predefined rules or machine learning models, such as automatic classification, routing, and prioritization of support requests.

The AI-based features of customer service platforms expand automation possibilities particularly in high support volumes (Ekechi et al., 2024). For example, ticket classification based on machine learning models can identify the subject and urgency of a support request without manual processing and route it to the correct support level. In addition, AI can suggest ready-made responses to support staff based on previous solutions, which shortens resolution times and standardizes service quality. Zendesk commonly refers to these functions as AI-assisted support (Marshall, 2025).

The latest AI-based features of customer service platforms also enable automated responses to incoming messages in the customer's language (Ekechi et al., 2024; Kamatala and Naayini, 2025). These most advanced AI features, which independently generate responses, are referred to as AI agents. On the other hand, AI agents also include independently operating AI tools outside customer service platforms that are capable of handling more complex tasks and working in a team-like manner together with other AI agents (Gutowska, 2025; Kamatala and Naayini, 2025).

3.3.1 AI Chatbots in Customer Support

The field has rapidly transitioned in recent years from early rule-based chatbots to AI-based chatbots, which represent the most visible area of AI solutions in customer support. They often act as the first point of contact in customer support and provide customers with an immediate response to simple and frequently recurring questions. This transition has been accelerated by the rapid pace of AI development in recent years and the significant growth in popularity of generative AI such as ChatGPT (Kim, Kim and Baek, 2025). AI chatbots use natural language processing (NLP) to recognize the customer's question and provide an appropriate answer without human contact (Ekechi et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2024). These therefore represent a further development beyond the AI-assisted support features of customer service platforms discussed in the previous section.

According to research and expert reports, AI chatbots can significantly reduce the workload of customer support teams by independently resolving a large proportion of routine questions. According to a study by Kamatala and Naayini (2025), AI chatbots can reduce customer service costs by as much as 30–50 % while simultaneously speeding up response times and accuracy. In an international environment, chatbots enable service availability across different time zones and in multiple

languages, supporting the scaling of customer support without a corresponding increase in resources.

3.3.2 Conversational AI as the Newest Opportunity in Customer Support

The most recent AI development in customer support is conversational AI based on speech recognition, which leverages natural language processing (NLP) and natural language generation (NLG) and is integrated into telephone-based customer support systems. For a long time, speech recognition technologies were not reliable enough for customer service use, especially in languages other than English, and their use was limited by poor speech recognition accuracy, unnatural speech synthesis, and conversational latency, among other factors. In recent years, however, developments in conversational AI-based solutions have been significant, and voice-based AI has become a viable option for supporting telephone customer service (Wang et al., 2023; Chen, 2025).

Speech recognition-based conversational AI adds a voice channel dimension to multichannel AI-powered customer support, particularly in SaaS companies where phone calls constitute a significant share of support requests. In such cases, voice-based AI can bring considerable benefits to customer support scalability by automating routine calls and providing customers with an immediate response without waiting. At the same time, it can reduce the workload of customer support staff and enable resources to be directed toward more demanding support situations.

The deployment of voice-based AI in customer support does, however, require a hybrid model in which the customer has the option, when needed, to easily transfer to human service.

A study by Wang et al. (2023) showed that AI based on speech recognition effectively automated simple support requests, but errors occurred in more complex matters and the need for human contact increased. Despite this, the number of customer complaints decreased permanently after the AI solution was deployed, suggesting that when properly scoped and supported, voice-based AI can improve customer experience.

A key ongoing challenge in adopting voice-based AI is technology's relative novelty in a customer support context, which may undermine organizational confidence and slow deployment. Additionally, integrating voice AI into existing customer service platforms and telephone systems can be a technically and organizationally demanding project. For these reasons, the deployment of AI based on speech recognition requires careful planning, clear use case boundaries, and phased implementation as part of the company's broader customer support development strategy.

3.4 Summary of the Benefits and Risks of Automation and AI in Customer Support

The key benefit of AI in customer support scaling relates to its ability to process large volumes of data and learn from customer support situations over time. By analyzing previous support requests, AI systems can identify recurring problems, suggest solutions to support staff, and even anticipate future support load (Ghosh, Ness and Salunkhe, 2024; Lin et al., 2024). AI solutions are also capable of creating ready-made guide articles from recurring questions or suggesting improvements to existing articles in the company's knowledge base (Marshall, 2025). These features support proactive service management, where issues are addressed before they escalate into an increase in the number of support requests.

In an international SaaS context, these features bring significant benefits, such as multilingual, time-zone-independent 24/7 customer support and a more consistent service level across different market areas. At the same time, they also reveal their limitations. Automation and AI work most effectively in recurring and predictable situations, but complex or sensitive customer situations still require human input. On the other hand, automation and AI free up time for customer support to handle the most complex situations with higher quality, and customer support is able to handle a greater number of support requests without increasing resources — enabling, in short, the scaling of customer support.

Automation and AI are, however, also associated with limitations and risks that are particularly prominent in international customer support operations. Not all customer situations are predictable or resolvable in an automated manner, and a chatbot that operates incorrectly or misinterprets the emotional context can degrade the customer experience especially in culturally sensitive situations. A study by Han, Yin and Zhang (2023) showed that correctly calibrating the personality of AI is important for customer satisfaction. According to the study, an overly positive tone in complex or difficult situations may irritate customers or feel unprofessional. In addition, deploying AI solutions requires high-quality data, particularly a high-quality knowledge base in the SaaS context, clear processes, and sufficient organizational maturity (Ghosh, Ness and Salunkhe, 2024; Lin et al., 2024).

One of the biggest problems with AI solutions is hallucination, meaning the generation of seemingly plausible but incorrect responses (Zhang et al., 2025). Hallucinated responses may sound logical, and the customer may not notice the error until the incorrect AI response has already caused a broader problem. Hallucination can occur if the AI's source material is contradictory or contains gaps, if the AI does not quite understand the question, or if the AI has not been optimized to indicate uncertainty frequently enough when it is unsure of the response (Zhang et al., 2025). A typical situation might be that a chatbot claims to a customer the existence of a feature that has not been implemented in that particular service but in some other service. The chatbot's training data

may contain a reference to a feature in another service, causing it to hallucinate that the feature is also present in similar services. Such situations can easily lead to customer dissatisfaction. Hallucination can be mitigated by maintaining the highest-quality possible knowledge base, configuring the AI to express uncertainty when appropriate, and regularly testing for hallucination errors. Errors stemming from AI hallucination can probably never be entirely eliminated, but the same applies to responses given by humans.

From a strategic perspective, automation and AI therefore do not replace customer support staff but complement them. In an internationally scalable customer support model, an effective approach is based on a hybrid model in which AI and automation handle high-volume routine cases and human specialists focus on complex, business-critical customer situations. This enables cost-effective growth of customer support while maintaining service quality and customer satisfaction.

In summary, automation and AI form a key enabler of international customer support scalability in SaaS companies. They provide a means of responding to growing support load, language and time zone challenges, and cost pressures without degrading customer support quality. The successful utilization of these solutions, however, requires strategic planning, process development, and integrating technology into the company's overall service strategy.

3.5 Ease of Use of SaaS Software User Interface as Prevention of Support Need

Although knowledge bases, automation, and AI solutions are key means of improving customer support scalability, an essential way to reduce the customer support load is to prevent the generation of support requests before the customer feels the need for help. In the context of SaaS software, this means designing the user interface and user experience such that the software guides users to act correctly, understand the service logic, and resolve the most common problems independently without separate instructions. Although there is limited peer-reviewed research on the connection between user interface ambiguities and customer support load, the phenomenon is widely recognized in practical SaaS development and expert literature (Bryniarski, 2023; Das, 2025; Revival Pixel, 2026; Spotlight Studios, 2026).

UI-driven prevention is based on the idea that a large proportion of customer support requests do not stem from actual software errors, but from an unclear user interface, insufficient cues, or user uncertainty about the correct way to use the service. In such situations, the customer may turn to the knowledge base or contact customer support, even though the problem could have been resolved directly in the user interface through, for example, clearer terminology, contextual instructions, or visual cues (Revival Pixel, 2026).

A guiding user interface can include, for example, step-by-step onboarding guides, context-sensitive tips, field validations, anticipatory warnings, and clear feedback on user actions. Such solutions support user learning during the use of the service and reduce the need to search for separate guide articles.

Customer support plays a central role in identifying UI and error communication development needs, as it often serves as the first point of contact for ambiguities experienced by users. Recurring support requests caused by unclear error messages or uncertainty generated by the user interface provide valuable information about system deficiencies that may not be detected during product development or testing. When customer support systematically collects and communicates these observations to product development, individual support requests can be identified as part of broader structural issues. This enables a shift from reactive problem-solving to proactive development of the user interface and error communication, which reduces the support load and supports the long-term scalability of the SaaS service.

From a customer support scalability perspective, UI-driven prevention is cost-effective (Monaco, 2023). A single UI improvement can simultaneously affect all users regardless of customer count, time zone, or language. UI guidance does not, however, eliminate the need for knowledge bases, automation, or customer support, but complements them. At best, SaaS company's customer support model is built in layers such that the UI prevents support needs, the knowledge base and chatbots resolve simple problems, and customer support focuses on complex and business-critical situations. Such a whole supports both the quality of customer experience and the cost-effective scaling of customer support in an international operating environment.

4 Research and Development Methods

This section describes the approach taken for the empirical part of the study, the data collection methods used in the work, the type of research conducted, and the analysis method. The section also describes the implementation of the methods.

4.1 Approach

A case study was selected as the research approach. The choice is based on the nature of the research problem, the research objectives, and the context-dependent nature of the phenomenon studied. The objective of the study is not to produce statistically generalizable results, but rather to develop a deep understanding of how customer support scaling for international markets can be approached in a B2B SaaS company.

A case study is well suited as an approach for development work when the aim is to deeply understand the object of development and generate new development proposals (Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti, 2015). Customer support scaling in international SaaS operations is such a phenomenon, as it is simultaneously influenced by technological solutions, organizational structures, processes, and customer behavior.

The strength of a case study lies in its ability to combine multiple data sources and perspectives in examining the same phenomenon. In this work, the case study approach enables analysis of the commissioning company's current state, operating models, and development challenges as a whole, taking into account both the internal organizational perspective and the requirements for managing and developing customer support in an international context. This approach also supports the use of qualitative data, such as survey responses, as part of the analysis.

4.2 Data Collection

A survey was used to collect data. The original goal was to collect research data using qualitative methods, particularly semi-structured thematic interviews. According to Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti (2015), qualitative methods are used in scientific research to study topics that are not well understood in advance and that require more in-depth examination. It is important to examine the research topic holistically, and quantitative methods do not allow for obtaining the necessary information. Prior research on customer support scaling in a B2B SaaS context is limited, making a qualitative approach particularly appropriate for this study.

Efforts were made to find interview participants from so-called scale-up-stage, rapidly growing B2B SaaS companies that have already internationalized or are currently expanding to international

markets. Such companies were particularly relevant for the study, as they have recent practical experience of scaling customer support in an international operating environment. Suitable companies and participants were sought on the LinkedIn platform among individuals in key customer support roles, such as Support Lead, Support Manager, Head of Support, VP of Support, or Support Operations. Customer support leadership is primarily responsible for customer support resourcing, operating models, and scalability at various stages of company growth.

Participants were primarily sought from Finnish or Nordic B2B SaaS companies that have expanded to international markets. However, it became evident fairly quickly that only a few companies suitable for the study could be found specifically in Finland. This significantly limited the number of potential interviewees, as in a B2B SaaS company, depending on the organization's size, typically only about 1–3 individuals work in customer support leadership roles. For this reason, the search for participants was expanded after about a week to include European and North American B2B SaaS companies as well.

Recruiting participants for interviews, however, proved challenging, and interview invitations did not receive a sufficient number of positive responses. The data collection method was therefore changed during the study to a survey, so that participating in the research would be easier and more flexible for potential respondents. The survey allowed participation with less time investment, which increased the likelihood of receiving responses from busy international experts.

The survey was implemented using the Webropol tool and included both structured and open questions. This was intended to combine the comparability and analyzability of quantitative survey research with the deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon offered by open responses. The survey was targeted at individuals working in leadership roles related to customer support or customer operations in B2B SaaS companies.

Reaching participants on LinkedIn also proved challenging, as accepting a connection request is in practice a prerequisite for approaching individuals about their interest in participating. Sending connection requests began in early February 2026 and continued for approximately a month, until the trial period of LinkedIn Premium ended and enough responses had been collected for the study. Connection requests were sent to approximately one hundred people from about 50 different companies. Approximately 30 % of these accepted the connection request. Ultimately, approximately 14 % of individuals contacted responded to the survey, resulting in a total of fourteen responses.

The number of respondents in the study remained relatively small, which is typical in studies where the target group is a limited group of experts. In this study, the aim was to find experts specifically from B2B SaaS companies in the scale-up phase. However, the number of such companies is

relatively limited, as is the number of individuals working in customer support leadership roles within those organizations. For this reason, the aim of the study was not to produce statistically generalizable data, but to collect qualitative expert insights through the open-text survey fields on the studied phenomenon. From this perspective, the data from fourteen respondents provide valuable and practically grounded information on the international scaling of customer support.

Since the survey included both structured multiple-choice questions and open questions, the study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative elements. Such an approach can be seen as a so-called mixed methods study, which combines the comparability of quantitative analysis with the deeper understanding offered by qualitative data about the studied phenomenon.

4.3 Data Analysis

The survey data analysis was conducted in two phases according to the nature of the data. The responses to structured multiple-choice questions were analyzed quantitatively by calculating response distributions and percentages, which are presented in Section 5 as tables. The responses to open questions were analyzed qualitatively through thematic coding.

Thematic coding involves organizing the data according to recurring topic areas. The approach supports the research objectives, as the research questions and the survey questions derived from them already form clearly defined thematic clusters. Thematic coding enables systematic structuring of the data and comparison of different respondents' views with each other (Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti, 2015).

Merely identifying regularities, however, does not always suffice for a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, which is why attention was also paid to divergent views and observations in the analysis. Divergences can reveal the diversity of the phenomenon and uncover factors that do not emerge when examining only the most common responses (Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti, 2015).

The themes identified from the open responses were related to the theoretical framework of the study, allowing for assessment of the extent to which the empirical data confirms, supplements, or challenges the observations of the theoretical section. The analysis is exploratory in nature: the aim was not statistical generalizability, but the systematic identification of expert insights and practical experiences.

4.4 Reliability and Ethics of the Study

The reliability of the study is examined in this section from the perspectives of both validity and reliability, and the credibility and transferability of qualitative research. Since the study utilizes both quantitative and qualitative elements, both approaches to assessment are justified. The validity of the study was strengthened by targeting the survey at experts working in customer support leadership roles in B2B SaaS companies. The questions were formulated on the basis of the theoretical framework, ensuring that the survey measured phenomena central to the research questions. Open questions enabled the examination of the phenomenon from the respondents' own experiential perspective, which strengthens the credibility of the data (Ojasalo, Moilanen and Ritalahti, 2015).

The reliability of the study is supported by a standardized implementation method: all respondents answered the same questions on the Webropol platform, and the response options were uniform. The analysis of open responses was based on systematic thematic coding, the steps of which are described in Section 4.3.

Several factors, however, limit the reliability of the study, which should be openly recognized. First, the number of respondents remained relatively small, which limits the generalizability of the results. Second, LinkedIn-based recruitment may have produced a self-selected group of respondents who are particularly interested in developing customer support and AI. Due to these limitations, the results should be interpreted as indicative expert insights rather than as statistically generalizable conclusions.

The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of good scientific practice. Participation was voluntary and anonymous: no identifying information was collected from respondents, and it is not possible to identify individual respondents or the organizations they represent from the results. Respondents were informed of the purpose of the study before completing the survey, and the data were used solely for the research purposes of this thesis.

5 Research Results and Analysis

This section presents the results of the survey and analyzes them in relation to the thesis's two research questions: what challenges are associated with scaling customer support for international markets in a B2B SaaS environment, and what approaches support scaling. The section first examines the profile of respondents and the general reliability of the data, after which it moves to the actual research questions. The results are continuously examined in relation to the thesis's theoretical framework, enabling an overall picture of the studied phenomenon to emerge from the data.

The survey was conducted on the Webropol platform in February–March 2026 and was answered by a total of 14 experts. Data were collected from international B2B SaaS companies, and the aim was to find individuals specifically working in customer support leadership roles with practical experience of scaling customer support in growing software service companies. The survey included both structured multiple-choice questions and open text fields, through which respondents could describe their experiences in more detail. Respondents were able to answer the survey in either Finnish or English. The majority of responses were submitted in English; Finnish-language responses have been translated into English for this version of the thesis.

5.1 Respondent Profiles and Background Data

The study's respondents provide comprehensive representation of customer support leadership roles in international B2B SaaS companies. The role distribution of respondents is clearly weighted toward management levels: 36 % (5) were at middle management level and 57 % of respondents (8) worked at senior management level, for example in Head of Support, Director, or Vice President of Support roles. Only one respondent represented Tier 1-level customer support, and none represented Tier 2-level customer support. This respondent structure is appropriate for the study, as strategic decisions regarding customer support scaling and internationalization are made precisely at these organizational levels.

Table 1. Respondents' roles

Role	**n**	**%**
Senior management (Head of Support / Director / VP)	8	57 %
Middle management	5	36 %
Tier 1 customer support	1	7 %
Total	14	100 %

The company size distribution is weighted toward large organizations: 71 % of the companies represented by respondents employ more than 200 people, and only one company falls in the 20–50 person size category. This naturally reflects the fact that those with the most experience related to international expansion and customer support scaling are representatives of organizations that

have already grown. It may also indicate that the company's headcount grows significantly with international growth. In retrospect, I noticed it would have been good to create an intermediate level of 200–500 people and a final category of over 500 people, as some participants may have been from an even larger company than 500 people. The original intention was, however, to primarily seek smaller companies in a growth phase, but ultimately not enough respondents from such companies were found.

Table 2. Company size of respondents

Company size (employees)	**n**	**%**
Under 20	0	0 %
20–50	1	7 %
50–200	3	21 %
Over 200	10	71 %
Total	14	100 %

In terms of customer base, a clear majority, 64 % (9), operated in a pure B2B environment. Three respondents represented both B2B and B2C companies and two mainly B2C companies. By industry, by far the largest group was the SaaS and technology sector (79 %, 11), which confirms the relevance of the data for the study. The remaining respondents represented the AdTech and HR technology sectors.

Regarding support models, 64 % of respondents (9) reported their company using a tiered support model, i.e., the traditional multi-level support structure. Five companies (36 %) did not use the traditional multi-level support structure, but alternative models. Among the alternative models, one interesting one was skills-based routing, which was in use in three respondents' companies. In this model, specialists focus on different areas of the product and tickets are routed to the right experts. Especially when the product is extensive, it may be challenging for everyone to know the product at a sufficient level. In this case, specialization in different areas may be the most effective way to ensure that every support request gets a high-quality response quickly.

Another interesting model was the pod structure, in which customer support consists of multiple multi-skilled teams, where such a pod team takes one support request at a time and handles it within the team from start to finish. In this case, the team must have sufficient competence to communicate with the customer, know all areas of the product, and make code changes when necessary. There would be multiple such teams to prevent tickets from accumulating. This model sounds good in the sense that support requests would not be left waiting for a transfer from one level to another, but the whole team would be actively working around a single support request. On the other hand, this model is the most resource-intensive, as incorporating multiple multi-skilled teams in customer support would require a significantly more mature SaaS company with considerably

more resources to maintain a large customer support team. At that point, we would no longer be talking about scaling customer support with growth.

One interesting observation was that a tiered model can coexist with skills-based ticket routing as well as teams dedicated to certain regions or 'Premium' customers. All these observations were important: they suggest that the traditional tiered model has begun to be replaced by more flexible structures, which is in line with ITIL 4's swarming thinking.

5.2 Challenges in Scaling Customer Support – Research Question 1

The subsequent questions of the survey were directed at answering the research questions. The first research question examines what challenges a B2B SaaS company faces when scaling customer support for international markets. Based on the data, the challenges can be structured into three main themes: growing complexity of support requests, resourcing and documentation challenges, and information flow problems with product development. In addition, the data point to a broader shift in the role and nature of customer support work, driven particularly by the introduction of AI.

5.2.1 Ticket Complexity as the Dominant Challenge

By far the biggest scaling problem identified was the growing complexity of support requests: 79 % of respondents (11) selected it as one of their three biggest challenges. This result is particularly interesting because the growth in the volume of support requests received only 21 % support (3). Traditionally, customer support scaling has been thought of primarily as a volume problem in which headcount grows in step with customer numbers, but this data shows that the problem is more qualitative than quantitative.

Table 3. Biggest challenges in scaling customer support (14 respondents, multiple choice max 3 answers)

Challenge	n	% of respondents
Growing complexity of support requests	11	79 %
Insufficient documentation	6	43 %
Resource shortage	5	36 %
Information flow with product development	5	36 %
Growth in support request volume	3	21 %
Unclear user interface / error messages	2	14 %
International customer base	1	7 %

The open responses significantly deepen this observation. Multiple respondents describe how AI and automation have taken over a large proportion of simple support requests, resulting in the

cases remaining for human agents being, on average, considerably more complex than before. One respondent describes the phenomenon directly:

> "We use AI agent that is handling most of the volume. What's left is very complex issues."

A similar theme emerges in multiple responses. As the product grows and the customer base expands, support requests shift from basic 'how does this work?' questions to increasingly deep integration issues, edge cases, and customer-specific configurations that are difficult to reproduce and diagnose. As one respondent describes:

> "As a product grows, support questions usually become more technical and nuanced. Early on, most requests are simple 'how-to' questions, but over time they shift toward edge cases, integrations, and deeper troubleshooting. These issues take longer to investigate and often require coordination with engineering or product teams."

This observation is directly in line with the theoretical framework of the thesis. In the tier model, the significance of precisely Tier 2 level is emphasized when problems exceed first-line resolution capacity and require deeper technical expertise. Simultaneously, the growth of AI at Tier 0 and Tier 1 levels means that the traditional tiered structure is changing: the role of human workers is shifting ever more clearly toward technically demanding situations that require deeper product knowledge. One respondent summarizes this development direction as follows:

> As AI continues to progress it's more capable of solving the easier cases that would typically be handled by Tier 1 and Tier 2. As a result, the tiered model of support is no longer going to be valid in a few years. At least in the traditional sense.

This view is significant, as it challenges traditional tier thinking and supports the direction of the swarming model described in ITIL 4, in which skills-based, flexible teamwork replaces hierarchical escalation. In practice, multiple respondents report having moved or moving toward skills-based routing, in which tickets are directed straight to the right specialist rather than to a tier level.

5.2.2 Documentation Gaps as a Critical Bottleneck

The second most common challenge was insufficient documentation, which 43 % of respondents (6) selected as one of their three most central problems. The result is particularly significant because documentation quality is directly connected to almost all other challenges: poor documentation complicates the onboarding of new agents, slows the resolution of support requests, undermines AI functionality, and increases the need for escalation to the next level in tiered support. One respondent describes the intertwining of documentation and product complexity as follows:

> "Documentation and product complexity come in pair. The public documentation does not keep up with the product, consequently AI cannot handle complex scenarios, and human agents have to escalate to engineers to clarify the logic."

This observation confirms the view presented in the theoretical framework that a high-quality knowledge base is a prerequisite for self-service and the functionality of AI solutions. Without an up-to-date and comprehensive knowledge base, AI deployment produces low-quality responses and increases the hallucination risk, which in turn degrades customer experience and burdens human agents again.

5.2.3 Resourcing and Information Flow with Product Development

Resource shortage and information flow problems between product development and customer support both received 36 % support (5). These two challenges are interconnected: in dispersed multi-location organizations, product development expertise is often concentrated at headquarters, while customer support teams operate in different countries or time zones. This adds delays to the resolution of technical issues and increases pressure at Tier 2 level. One respondent concretely describes how geographic distance complicates both resource transfers and knowledge sharing:

> "The staff most experienced in onboarding new hires are largely based outside of my (emerging) home region, yet the expectations for the speed of their ramp-up are roughly the same as for those agents based closer to company headquarters."

This problem intensifies as internationalization progresses, when support teams disperse and maintaining a shared context becomes more difficult. The changed support load with company growth also emerges in the open responses: multiple respondents describe how the workload has not grown linearly with customer numbers, but the nature of the work has changed qualitatively. In particular, the growing share of enterprise customers has raised the level of requirements in terms of response times, expertise, and customized solutions.

5.2.4 Changes in Support Load with Growth

The question about changes in support load as the company grows produced multidimensional responses. A significant observation is that several respondents report the absolute volume of support requests declining or stabilizing, even though the customer base has grown. This has been attributed mainly to two factors: improvements in product usability and the introduction of AI. One respondent describes this phenomenon directly:

> "Surprisingly the volumes drop despite the number of active users grows. One of the theories is that the customers use AI (e.g. ChatGPT) to troubleshoot their issues and it doesn't prompt them to submit a ticket."

This is a relevant observation also from the commissioning company's perspective. It suggests that customers' own AI use has begun to function as an unofficial Tier 0 level, which can reduce the overall volume of support requests without the company's own knowledge base or chatbot being directly responsible. At the same time, the nature of the work has changed to be more demanding:

growing customers bring higher expectations, more complex use-cases, and a broader need for product expertise. One respondent aptly summarizes the qualitative dimension of the change:

> "The type of workload has changed significantly. In the past 5 years we moved from handling low to high complexity tasks, responsibilities from DevOps/SRE teams partially moved to Support. We are generating additional value to customers by implementing small customizations."

This describes the broadening of customer support's strategic role: instead of purely reactive problem-solving, customer support has begun to create additional value for customers proactively, which aligns with the Customer Success thinking described in the theoretical section expanding to become part of support operations.

5.3 Solutions and Approaches to Customer Support Scaling – Research Question 2

The second research question examines what approaches and solutions support the scaling of customer support in an international B2B SaaS environment. Based on the data, the solutions can be structured into four main themes: AI and automation, knowledge base and self-service, processes and standardization, and organizational factors. These themes emerged from both the multiple-choice questions and the open responses.

5.3.1 Artificial Intelligence as the Primary Scaling Enabler

The use of AI in customer support is very common in the organizations surveyed. 79 % of respondents (11) reported their company using AI extensively as part of customer support, and only one respondent reported being in a pilot phase. A chatbot or AI assistant was in use in 93 % (13) of respondents' organizations.

Table 4. AI utilization rate in customer support (14 respondents)

AI utilization rate	**n**	**%**
Widely in use as part of customer support	11	79 %
In limited use	2	14 %
Pilot / trial phase	1	7 %
Not in use	0	0 %

The breakdown of support channels shows that email is still in use everywhere (100 % of respondents), but chatbot or AI assistant (93 %) is already nearly as common. A knowledge base or self-service channel was in use in 86 % of organizations, which confirms the theoretical section's observation about the growing importance of the Tier 0 level.

Table 5. Support channel usage in respondents' organizations (14 respondents, multiple choice)

Support channel	n	% of respondents
Email	14	100 %
Chatbot / AI assistant	13	93 %
Knowledge base / self-service	12	86 %
Phone	8	57 %
Live chat	6	43 %
Omnichannel support	4	29 %

In the open responses, AI repeatedly emerges as the most important single scaling approach. Respondents' attitudes are mainly positive but also include critical and careful-implementation-oriented views. One respondent summarizes the significance of AI for scaling very briefly as imperative:

> "AI agent is imperative to scaling."

Another respondent describes more broadly how AI has already changed the support team's daily work:

> "It will change the industry massively. It's already capable to do majority of the work the humans do, but it requires some work to optimise things before the impact hits hard."

Multiple respondents also raised the impact of AI on the nature of support load: when AI handles routine tickets, the cases left for human agents are complex, raising questions about the long-term relevance of KPI metrics. One respondent aptly describes this tension:

> "Very positive impact on the org, apart from the remaining questions being super complex so it raises the question of KPIs long term."

This observation is theoretically significant. It suggests that traditional customer support performance metrics, such as First Contact Resolution (FCR) or Average Handle Time (AHT), may no longer be directly applicable to measuring the performance of an AI-assisted support organization. When simple cases disappear entirely from measurement data, the KPI values of the remaining cases inevitably deteriorate, even if overall performance improves. Alternatively, AI-assisted support requests may need to continue to be included in KPI measurement.

5.3.2 Concerns About AI and Controlled Deployment

Although the attitude toward AI is mainly positive, three recurring concerns clearly emerge from the data: quality degradation, employee concerns about job security, and the complexity of deployment. These are not merely theoretical threats, as respondents refer to concrete examples, such as Klarna, which had to rehire support staff after laying them off following an AI investment:

> "We want to avoid big mistakes like Klarna, who fired the majority of its support staff and rehired them after customers complained about the support received by AI."

Employee concern about job security recurs in multiple responses. This is an organizational culture challenge that directly affects the acceptability and adoption of AI solutions. One respondent concisely describes the twofold nature of the situation:

> "On one hand it helps, on the other hand it reduces jobs."

The need for controlled AI deployment is emphasized in responses. Multiple respondents emphasize that AI should complement human work, not replace it hastily. One respondent summarizes this perspective clearly:

> "It's a game changer – just want to use it thoughtfully and be able to shift focuses for existing teammates as AI handles more of the Tier 1 tickets."

5.3.3 Knowledge Base, Self-Service and Documentation

The development of the knowledge base and documentation emerges in the open responses as the second most important scaling approach alongside AI. The result is also consistent with the theoretical framework: Section 3.2 describes how the knowledge base serves as the foundation for all AI solutions, and AI cannot produce high-quality responses without a high-quality knowledge base. One respondent describes the relationship between self-service, documentation, and usability:

> "Easily accessible documentation and an overall system that is as intuitive as possible, ease of use always reduces the need for support."

Another respondent summarizes the key scaling elements as follows:

> "AI, Documentation, Self-service, capacity planning, performance management, operational efficiency."

5.3.4 Processes, Standardization and Collaboration with Product Development

Alongside technological solutions, the significance of processes and standardization clearly emerges from the data. Particularly in internationally operating organizations, maintaining consistent processes across different regions is a key scaling challenge. Multiple respondents emphasize that processes must enable both global consistency and local flexibility:

> "It's very important that the international team can operate with the same processes, while still be able to address some region specific needs. These special needs could come from cultural differences, different market conditions, competition."

Collaboration with product development emerges in the data as one of the most significant long-term scaling approaches. One respondent presents a particularly interesting perspective, according to which the most important task of customer support is not merely to react to problems, but to bring observations to product improvement:

> "Collaboration with product and development. Support is there to reduce friction and the friction is usually caused by something in the product you support. Taking the signals and improving product is the single most impactful method."

Another respondent confirmed that improving the product (in terms of usability) can slow the growth of the support team relative to customer numbers and keep customer base growth sustainable from a customer support perspective:

> "In our case the workload has not grown in the same pace as commercial numbers. We've been able to improve the product as we go, which have helped us scale. In that sense the growth has been sustainable."

These views are directly in line with Section 2.7 of the theoretical section, in which customer support is described as a source of organizational learning and SaaS software development. In practice, the data collected by customer support on recurring problems is valuable input for product development and can reduce long-term support load by addressing root causes.

5.4 Internationalization Challenges and Their Management

The impact of internationalization on customer support scaling was examined through both a structured question and several open questions. The overall assessment of the additional challenges brought by internationalization on a scale of 1–5 was on average 3.2, suggesting that internationalization is perceived as a significant but not insurmountable additional burden. No respondent indicated that internationalization brings no additional challenges whatsoever.

Table 6. Impact of internationalization on customer support scaling challenges (14 respondents, scale 1–5, average 3.2)

Assessment (1=not at all, 5=very much)	**n**	**%**
1 – No additional challenges at all	0	0 %
2	2	14 %
3	6	43 %
4	5	36 %
5 – Very many additional challenges	1	7 %

5.4.1 Time Zones as the Dominant Challenge

Time zones emerge clearly as the largest single internationalization challenge: 64 % of respondents (9) selected it as one of the three most challenging factors, and it also recurred as the most mentioned single challenge in the open responses.

Table 7. Biggest internationalization challenges in customer support (14 respondents, multiple choice max 3)

Internationalization challenge	n	% of respondents
Time zones	9	64 %
Language barrier	5	36 %
Cultural differences	5	36 %
International recruitment	5	36 %
Local working practices and expectations	4	29 %
Product localization	2	14 %
No significant additional challenges	0	0 %

The time zone challenge is particularly difficult to resolve from a resourcing perspective: either the company invests in around-the-clock coverage by recruiting in different time zones, or it accepts delays in service levels for certain markets. One respondent summarizes the challenge in a practical way:

> "It's mostly about having agents with the language skills working during the particular hours. If we have just one agent, when they are out, the customers get support in English. Hiring more than one is commercially unreasonable."

Another respondent also describes the same problem, focusing more on the challenge of time differences on response times if customer support is not organized across different time zones:

> “Customers may submit requests outside of an agent’s working hours, which increases response times and can delay troubleshooting if multiple back-and-forth messages are needed. To address this, companies often need distributed teams or around-the-clock coverage, which adds operational complexity and coordination challenges.”

These problems describe the everyday reality of a small or medium-sized internationalizing company: maintaining minimum staffing levels for speakers of certain languages is financially challenging when the customer base does not yet justify a full-time local support team. Real-time AI translation functionality emerges in the responses as a solution to this exact problem, and one respondent reports that it has already practically eliminated the language barrier:

> "AI helps us do this so we don't deal with typical language challenges. Only timezones."

5.4.2 Service Quality and Team Building Internationally

Another significant challenge of internationalization is maintaining consistent service quality across different market areas. This emerged in the open responses as the second most frequently mentioned challenge in international scaling:

> "The single biggest challenge is delivering consistent, high-quality support at scale while accommodating regional differences in language, culture, regulations, and customer expectations."

The balance between consistency and localization is an organizational challenge for which there is no single correct solution. Multiple respondents emphasize that local culture and leadership practices differ so significantly that a model copied from one location does not work directly in another. Leadership in particular emerges as a critical factor:

> "Leadership – company culture and leadership looks very different in different regions. While it would be nice to copy what works somewhere else, it's usually not possible and you need to adjust to local culture."

International recruitment received 36 % support on the challenge list (5), and in the open responses it is described concretely as an extremely demanding process. One respondent describes the challenges of building a new support team as follows:

> "The most difficult scenario was to build up our new support hub in Mexico, where we didn't have a local company presence. No legal entity, increased costs to bring people from HQ or other locations to transfer not just the knowledge, but also the company culture."

This observation highlights a dimension that is often overlooked in technology and process discussions: transferring company culture to a new region is just as important as transferring processes or systems. Without a shared culture and a consistent way of operating, a global support organization begins to fragment into regional silos, after which the consistency of service levels suffers.

One additional observation is that support staff recruited for new markets often experience particularly rapid internal career mobility, moving to other roles faster than colleagues in more established regions. This raises the costs of recruitment and onboarding and highlights the importance of making customer support an attractive growth platform rather than a transit point.

5.4.3 GDPR and Data Privacy as an Unexpected Additional Challenge

One challenge that received less attention in the theoretical section emerged from the data: data residency, meaning data location requirements and GDPR regulation. One respondent raised this specifically as the single biggest challenge in international scaling:

> "Data Residency particularly around privacy and GDPR."

Although this is only one respondent's view, it is significant particularly from the perspective of European SaaS companies. GDPR and national data protection legislation impose restrictions on, among other things, where customer data can be stored and how AI solutions may use it. This directly affects the deployment of AI solutions in international customer support and requires consideration already in the architecture phase.

6 Current State Analysis

This section describes the current state of customer support at the commissioning company Linear Oy as the starting point for the development work. The purpose of the current state analysis is to provide the contextual foundation for the development recommendations presented in the subsequent section. The section is based on the thesis author's own work experience at the commissioning company and on internal organizational knowledge and does not represent the results of the survey.

The current state analysis serves as context for the development recommendations in the next section, as customer support scalability challenges and technological development needs are not isolated phenomena but are tied to the company's business stage, customer base, and existing operating models. The section examines in particular the organization of customer support, the development of support load, and current processes and tools from a customer support scalability perspective.

The current state analysis is based on the thesis author's work experience at Linear Oy since 2021. For the first two years the author worked in a software developer role, after which he worked in technical customer support. For the last approximately one and a half years the author has worked as manager of technical customer support. This section first examines the development of customer support from a historical perspective and then the current operating model.

The thesis author has been involved in customer support operations almost since its founding, which gives him a comprehensive view of the development of customer support, customer base growth, and changes in support request volume. Based on this experience, it can be observed that the commissioning company's future growth plans will significantly increase the volume of support requests in the coming years. This forms the central background for this development work.

The commissioning company Linear Oy was founded in 2018, and development of its SaaS-based brokerage system began in 2019. The first users migrated to Linear in 2020, and the system's official launch took place in 2022. In 2023, Linear grew its market share in Finland to approximately 35 % and began expanding operations to Estonia. In 2024, Linear became the most widely used brokerage system in Finland, and the Estonian market share grew to approximately 10 %. In 2025, market share in Finland exceeded 60 % and in Estonia 15 %. The Estonian market has demonstrated that Linear's operating model is scalable outside Finland as well, leading the company to plan expansion to new European countries in 2026 and the following years.

The customer support team was established in early 2022, when customer base growth had led to a significant increase in support request volume. Before this, support requests were directed to a Slack channel monitored by the entire company staff. In the early phase, the model functioned reasonably well, but as customer numbers grew it began to cause inefficiencies. Resolving support requests tied up multiple employees simultaneously, and the division of responsibilities was not clear. As a result, handling of support requests was moved to the Zendesk customer service system, with initial handling responsibility resting with the entire Customer Success team.

Technical customer support was not differentiated in the early phase; instead, technical support requests continued to be routed to the Slack channel. As customer numbers grew, this model led to situations where the entire software development team participated in resolving individual support requests, which slowed development work. At this point, it was deemed necessary to centralize technical support requests for handling by one person. The thesis author then transferred from software development to technical customer support (Tier 2), enabling the rest of the development team (Tier 3) to focus on software development. Tier 2 support routes to Tier 3 only cases that require deep application logic expertise or fixing confirmed software errors. This operating model worked well until autumn 2025, when customer base and support request growth began to affect response times. During peak periods, other employees have since been brought in to assist with support operations in a controlled manner.

The commissioning company's customer support team consists of a small, multi-tier specialist team that is responsible for the operational activities of customer support. Customer support is divided into multiple support levels (Tier 0–Tier 3), whose purpose is to ensure efficient processing of support requests and appropriate allocation of specialists' input. Team size and resourcing are adjusted flexibly according to support load and business needs.

At Tier 0, the help center provides customers with documentation on the basic use of the brokerage system, more advanced features, and frequently asked questions. The help center functions primarily as a self-service channel but is also used as an internal knowledge source for customer support. Customers are guided to use the help center as part of the support process, and customer support links relevant guide articles to customers in connection with support requests. Despite this, customers' own proactive use of the self-service channel has so far remained limited.

The help center also functions as the knowledge base for the AI-based customer support solution currently under development. The completeness and accuracy of the help center are continually evaluated using feedback arising from customer support situations. If gaps are identified in the knowledge base, documentation is developed in collaboration between customer support, customer success, and the product team.

The commissioning company currently has over 2,500 real estate brokers as customers, some of whom operate in the Estonian and Spanish markets. In Finland, approximately 2,000 active users cover approximately 60 % of all real estate brokers in the country (Real Estate Brokers Association of Finland, 2026), making the commissioning company the largest operator in the Finnish market. Customer base growth has increased the customer support load, particularly in terms of phone calls and email support requests. The most of support requests are resolved at the first support levels, but some cases require deeper technical expertise and progress to higher support levels. This support model has enabled customer support operations to scale to a certain point but has simultaneously exposed the limits of the current resourcing model as the customer base grows.

7 Development Recommendations for the Target Company

This section formulates concrete development recommendations for the commissioning company Linear Oy based on the research results and the theoretical framework. The recommendations are structured into five areas: technological solutions, knowledge base and documentation, processes and organization, international expansion, and supporting KPI metrics. The development recommendations are prioritized according to the urgency of each need and the significance of the impact that implementation is estimated to have.

7.1 AI and Automation Strategy

Based on the research data, AI emerges as the most important single enabler in building internationally scalable customer support. A phased AI and automation strategy is recommended for the commissioning company, proceeding in a controlled manner from basic solutions toward more advanced use cases. In practice, this means that in the first phase the focus is placed on building a comprehensive and high-quality knowledge base, in the second phase on Tier 0-level chatbot and search solutions, and only after this on more complex AI agent functionalities.

The central conclusion from the research data is that AI should not be built on an incomplete or outdated knowledge base. If documentation is scattered, inconsistent, or partially outdated, the quality of AI-generated responses will deteriorate significantly. In this case, the risks are incorrect responses, hallucination, and degradation of customer experience. For this reason, knowledge base development is not merely one of several parallel development projects, but in practice the first and essential phase of the AI strategy.

Based on the research data, the introduction of AI also involves change management needs from a personnel perspective. The responses highlighted concerns that increasing use of AI may change job descriptions and create uncertainty about whether AI will take jobs away. For this reason, the commissioning company should communicate about AI primarily as a tool that supports work, not as a solution that replaces staff. In practice, this means open communication about how AI can reduce routine work, support specialists' decision-making, and free up time for resolving more complex customer situations.

For Linear Oy, a practical path forward would be to start with those customer support areas where recurrence is high and where responses can be produced reliably based on existing knowledge. Such use cases may include, for example, answering the most common questions, improving search functionality in the help center, generating draft responses for support staff, and preliminary classification and routing of support requests. In this way, AI can be introduced incrementally while

simultaneously assessing its impact on both customer experience and employees' day-to-day work.

7.2 Knowledge Base Development as a Strategic Priority

Based on the research data, knowledge base development emerges as the commissioning company's most urgent single development area in the early stages of internationalization. Examination of the current state shows that the Tier 0 help center has already been developed, but its use has so far remained limited. In light of the research results, there are two mutually reinforcing development needs related to this: improving the quality and discoverability of documentation and integrating AI-assisted search functionality into the help center.

In knowledge base development, the most critical factor is currency. If documentation does not keep up with product development, the result is recurring customer contacts, internal work inefficiency, and deterioration in the quality of AI solutions. A functioning Tier 0 level requires a systematic practice in which every new or changed functionality also leads to updating the corresponding documentation. The knowledge base should therefore not be seen as separate support material, but as part of the continuous lifecycle of the product.

One of the most systematic ways to ensure documentation currency is the docs as code model, in which documentation is maintained in version control alongside code and updating documentation is linked to the normal development process. In this model, approving a code change concern not only the technical implementation, but also ensuring that the corresponding documentation has been produced or updated. Traditionally, the challenge with this model has been that documentation is perceived by developers as an additional burden. AI can, however, significantly change this dynamic. An AI-assisted docs as code approach offers a compelling alternative to traditional manual documentation. In practice, this could mean that code changes automatically generate documentation drafts that a developer or other responsible person reviews as part of the code pull request. In this case, the manual documentation production workload decreases, but quality assurance remains with humans. It should be noted, however, that AI-assisted documentation management is still a developing area, and its production readiness has not been fully established, nor is there yet much practical experience with it from other SaaS companies. For this reason, the commissioning company is recommended to map available tools, conduct limited piloting, and actively follow development in this direction.

Knowledge base development should be seen as the foundation not only of self-service but of the entire customer support model. A high-quality knowledge base reduces recurring contacts, supports the onboarding of new employees, standardizes the quality of customer interactions, and

enables more reliable use of AI solutions. Based on the survey responses, customers' own use of AI tools may also lead them to the help center, where up-to-date articles can facilitate self-service. For these reasons, knowledge base development should be set as the primary priority among development measures.

7.3 Support Model and Processes for Internationalization

The commissioning company's current multi-tier customer support model has functioned appropriately in the domestic operating environment, but internationalization requires deliberate re-evaluation of the structure. The research data shows that many companies that have grown internationally have moved away from the traditional tiered support model toward skills-based ticket routing or operating models based on multi-skilled teams. In such models, the goal is to resolve the customer's problem as smoothly as possible without unnecessary transfers between different support levels.

Although the research data points to customer support models evolving toward more flexible solutions, in the early stages of internationalization, the commissioning company is primarily recommended to prioritize structural clarity, process documentation, and the standardization of responsibilities. Before broader dispersion of the team, it is important that customer support's core operating models, ticket routing principles, escalation responsibilities, response time practices, and documentation methods are clearly defined and easily applicable in different markets. Based on the research data, internationally scalable customer support requires both globally consistent and locally flexible processes. For this reason, the most appropriate solution for the commissioning company is to build a common global base model that can be supplemented with market-specific practices, for example regarding language requirements, customer expectations, local regulatory considerations, or industry-specific terminology. The commissioning company already has a preliminary operating model for the Finnish domestic market, but a separate international operating model is needed to support internationalization. In the early stages of expansion, it may also be strategically justified to prioritize support requests from new markets more strongly than other markets until the market position has stabilized.

Finally, once support models and processes have been documented, it is important to ensure that all related documentation is easily findable and usable. For this purpose, internal documentation should be integrated with the AI tool in use, for example through the RAG (Retrieval-Augmented Generation) technique, so that the tool can utilize the organization's own documents in its responses rather than general training data. In practice, this means that customer support can flexibly ask the AI tool, for example, what industry-specific terminology is used in a particular country or whether there is anything specific to consider in that market area. At the same time, the AI tool

takes the company's own support models and processes into account in its responses, which reduces errors and speeds up customer support work in international situations.

7.4 Collaboration with Product Development

One of the most central long-term scaling approaches relates to collaboration with product development. The research data strongly supports the view that customer support scalability is not based solely on adding resources or improving processes, but that it is equally essential to identify the root causes of recurring problems, remove them from the product, and improve usability. For this reason, the commissioning company should build a systematic practice for analyzing support requests, identifying root causes, and bringing observations into product development prioritization.

Since the volume of support requests is already large in the current state and can be expected to grow with internationalization, manual analysis of all support requests may become challenging. For this reason, the commissioning company is recommended to seek a tool that analyzes customer support platform data, identifies recurring problem themes, and where possible supports root cause identification. Furthermore, the data produced by customer support should be reported more systematically to product development, for example by tracking how the volume and content of support requests change after software releases. Regular joint reviews between customer support and product development are also recommended.

Such an operating model simultaneously supports multiple objectives. It reduces support load by addressing root causes, improves product usability, strengthens customer experience, and provides management visibility into which product problem areas generate the most load. In this way, customer support functions not only as a reactive support function but also as a strategic knowledge producer and guide for product development directions.

7.5 Preparing for Internationalization from a Customer Support Perspective

Based on the research data, challenges related to the internationalization of customer support are particularly prominent in time zones, language issues, cultural differences, and consistent implementation of service levels in different markets. For this reason, preparation of customer support for new markets should begin well in advance of the actual expansion. As the commissioning company plans growth to new European countries in 2026 and the following years, the customer support perspective should be included in go-to-market preparation at an early stage.

The first key preparation area relates to planning service hours and time zone coverage. Time zones repeatedly emerged in the research data as a significant practical challenge of internationalization. In Linear Oy's case, however, it should be noted that in European expansion, time

differences remain relatively limited. Based on this, it can be estimated that in the early stages, establishing separate new support teams is unlikely to be necessary, but service hours can also be extended by flexibly reorganizing the current organization. In practice, this could mean adjusting work shifts so that some customer support staff start their working day earlier than usual and others later.

Looking further ahead, the commissioning company should anticipate what service level requirements growing or strategically important customers may have. If the customer base comes to include large enterprise-level customers, the expectation of around-the-clock or otherwise extended service windows may grow. In this case, options may include, for example, organizing night shifts in Finland, building a distributed support model in another geographic area, or leveraging a partner network. These solutions, however, also bring new requirements related to resources, management, coordination, and organizational culture, which is why it is not appropriate to implement them before there is a real business need.

The second key preparation area relates to the language and localization strategy. The commissioning company should assess what service level it is able to offer in new markets in different languages and to what extent AI-based translation solutions can support the transition phase. Based on the research data, the language barrier is one of the practical challenges of internationalization, but at the same time technological development, particularly in AI-assisted translation, already offers favorable conditions for high-quality written communication, according to the research data. The situation becomes more challenging if customers require phone support in their native language. AI speech recognition and synthesis has developed rapidly but does not yet fully meet the requirements of high-quality customer support in complex interactions. This development should be actively monitored: if AI-based telephone customer service reaches sufficient reliability also in complex customer situations, it can offer the commissioning company a cost-effective solution for providing telephone support in target languages without local recruitment. Until then, it is likely most cost-effective to refrain from telephone support in international markets until the customer base or service level requirements under contract terms make it necessary. The commissioning company would also do well to prepare in advance for the conditions and customer segments for which telephone support can be offered.

Knowledge base localization is a central element of this preparation. Although the knowledge base is already localized into Finnish and English, as internationalization progresses it may be necessary to expand content to the native languages of target markets as well. AI can offer a cost-effective starting point for this, but ensuring translation quality also requires human evaluation. In practice, the commissioning company is recommended to adopt a model in which AI produces initial

translations and the quality of the content is then verified by individuals familiar with the target market's language and industry vocabulary. This can happen, for example, with pilot customers, local partners, or market-specific experts. Such an approach supports both the introduction of self-service and the high-quality development of customer experience in new markets.

Taken as a whole, preparing for internationalization from a customer support perspective means not merely adding resources, but above all proactive planning. For the commissioning company, it is essential to define before entering new markets: at what service level customers will be served, in what languages support will be provided, how response times will be managed, and what balance of self-service, AI, and human work is intended. The earlier these guidelines are established, the more effectively customer support can support the company's international growth.

7.6 KPI Framework in Support of Customer Support Scalability Monitoring

Implementing the development recommendations requires that their effects can be systematically monitored. Without a clear framework of metrics, it is difficult to assess whether the measures taken have led to the intended results. The commissioning company's customer support metrics should be developed so that they support both operational daily management and strategic decision-making at different stages of internationalization.

According to the theoretical section (Section 2.5), customer support KPI metrics can be divided into four categories: customer experience metrics, operational metrics, service level metrics, and resolution-focused metrics. In an internationalizing organization, these metrics take on additional significance: they can be used to identify market- or culture-specific differences in service needs and to direct development measures appropriately (AXELOS, 2019). Table 8 presents the metrics recommended for the commissioning company and their significance in the context of internationalization.

Table 8. Recommended KPI metrics and their significance in internationalization

Metric	What it measures	Significance in internationalization
CSAT	Customer satisfaction with an individual support request	Reveals market-specific service level differences: expectations vary between cultures, so CSAT comparison by market area guides development measures
FRT	Time to first response	With internationalization, FRT targets must be defined by market or customer segment; time zone coverage directly affects FRT figures
FCR	First contact resolution rate: resolved on first contact	Deteriorating FCR may indicate a language barrier or documentation gaps in a new market area; should be monitored broken down by market area
Tier 0 deflection rate	Proportion of support requests resolved via self-service without human contact	Measures the effectiveness of the knowledge base and chatbot; increasing deflection rate indicates the maturing of self-service and thus effective scaling of customer support
Escalation rate	Proportion of tickets escalated to the next support level	A high escalation rate in a new market area may indicate documentation or internal onboarding deficiencies
Ticket volume / customer	Number of support requests relative to customer count	Basic scalability metric: a declining trend indicates the combined effect of self-service, documentation, and product improvements
Ticket volume / country	Number of support requests by country relative to customer count	Indicates whether a certain country generates more tickets than other countries, in which case root causes need to be examined
Cost per ticket	The cost of a single support request. Calculated by dividing customer support costs by ticket volume	Enables assessment of which direction customer support costs are developing. An important metric for monitoring scalability and indicates how well self-service solutions have succeeded.

In applying the metrics framework, the impact of AI deployment on the interpretation of metrics must be taken into account. The research data raised the point that traditional customer support performance metrics, such as FCR and AHT, may not directly apply to assessing the performance of an AI-assisted support organization. When AI handles a growing proportion of routine tickets, the cases remaining for human agents are on average more complex, meaning that, for example, AHT may grow even if overall efficiency improves. For this reason, the metrics framework should be built so that AI-handled tickets and human agent-handled tickets are broken down into their own categories, allowing the metrics to accurately reflect reality.

In practice, the commissioning company does not need to introduce all metrics simultaneously. A recommended approach is to phase the introduction of the metrics framework in line with development measures: first introduce CSAT, FRT, ticket volume per customer, and cost per ticket, which give an immediate picture of the current state and serve as a baseline for monitoring development. Tier 0 deflection rate and escalation rate are added to the framework at the stage when the knowledge base and AI solutions have been sufficiently developed.

Monitoring metrics is not an end, but a tool for maintaining a cycle of continuous improvement. The commissioning company should report KPI data regularly to both the customer support team and management, ensuring that progress is transparent and anomalies can be addressed promptly. As internationalization progresses, it is worth examining metrics broken down by market area, so that regional differences in service needs and customer expectations become visible.

8 Evaluation and Discussion

This section assesses how well the thesis addressed the research questions, examines the relationship of the empirical results to the theoretical framework, and identifies the key limitations of the study. In addition, suggestions for further research are presented and the significance of the research process for professional development is reflected upon.

8.1 Answering the Research Questions

The data yielded clear answers to both research questions set for this thesis. The first research question asked what challenges a B2B SaaS company faces when scaling customer support for international markets. The data showed that the challenges are primarily qualitative rather than quantitative. Growing ticket complexity emerged as the dominant challenge (79 % of respondents), while volume growth alone was cited as a challenge considerably less frequently (21 %). This is explained by the increasing prevalence of AI: as AI handles an ever-larger proportion of routine tickets, the cases remaining for human agents are, on average, considerably more demanding than before. Internationalization adds its own layers to this challenge landscape: time zones, language barriers, and cultural expectations complicate the maintenance of a consistent service level.

The second research question asked what approaches support the scaling of customer support in an international B2B SaaS environment. The data produced four clear solution themes. AI and automation emerged as by far the most important single scaling approach: 93 % of respondents reported AI being in use in customer support and 79 % widely used in their organization. Alongside AI, a high-quality knowledge base and self-service channels were identified as the essential foundation for AI solutions. Standardized but locally flexible processes and collaboration with product development complemented the overall picture. These findings provide a concrete basis for the development recommendations formulated for the commissioning company Linear Oy.

8.2 Relationship of Results to the Theoretical Framework

The empirical data are largely consistent with the theoretical framework of the thesis but also yield some complementary and partly surprising observations. The hybrid model presented in the theoretical section, in which AI handles routine cases and human specialists focus on complex situations, receives strong support from the empirical data. This confirms that the direction identified in the theoretical section corresponds to practical development in international SaaS companies.

A surprising observation is that the traditional tier model is, based on the data, already gradually being superseded. Multiple respondents report having moved or moving toward skills-based routing, in which tickets are directed straight to the right specialist rather than a tier level. This is in line

with ITIL 4's swarming thinking, but the practical implementation differs from the model described in the theoretical section: virtually no one applies a full swarming model; instead, various hybrids are in use. The theoretical section treated tier and swarming models as parallel alternatives; the empirical data shows that organizations build combinations of these suited to their own needs.

Another significant addition to the theory concerns the role of the knowledge base. In the theoretical section, the knowledge base was addressed as an important element of self-service and as the foundation for AI, but the empirical data emphasizes its significance even more strongly, specifically as a prerequisite for AI functionality. Multiple respondents raised the point that incomplete or outdated documentation directly undermines the quality of AI responses.

8.3 Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Further Research

The key limitations of the study relate to the size of the data and the composition of the respondent group. Data from fourteen respondents are sufficient for identifying qualitative themes, but do not permit statistically generalizable conclusions. The companies represented by respondents are considerably larger than the commissioning company: 71 % of respondents represent organizations of more than 200 people, while the commissioning company is a company of fewer than 50 people. In larger organizations, customer support structures, resources, and technological possibilities differ significantly from the reality of a small growth company, which undermines the direct applicability of the results to the commissioning company's context.

LinkedIn-based respondent acquisition may have produced a self-selected respondent group: professionals in customer support who are active on the platform are likely to be more interested than average in developing the field and in AI, which may emphasize positive views related to these themes in the data. In addition, the data collection period of February–March 2026 falls in the middle of a rapid development phase of AI, when industry views may change quickly. For this reason, the observations concerning AI should be understood in the context of a rapidly evolving situation: some solutions may become outdated within months.

This thesis was limited to formulating development recommendations and did not include practical piloting or impact measurement of the recommendations. A natural topic for further research would be a follow-up study assessing the implementation of development recommendations and their impact on the scalability of the commissioning company's customer support after two or three years. Such a follow-up study would yield valuable insight into which recommendations proved implementable within the resource constraints of a small SaaS company.

Another interesting area for further research relates to the AI-assisted docs as code model. This study identified the model's potential for ensuring documentation currency but noted that it is still in

a development phase. A systematic assessment of the model's maturity and suitability in the context of a small or medium-sized SaaS company would be a valuable practical research topic.

8.4 Professional Reflection

The research process significantly deepened my own professional understanding of the strategic role of customer support in a growing SaaS company. Before the study, I viewed the development of customer support above all as an operational question related to improving processes and ensuring sufficient resources as customer numbers grew. Through the research process, my perspective broadened considerably. I now understand and can communicate to the organization that customer support is a strategic knowledge producer whose data should be systematically utilized in product development prioritization, improving usability, and planning for internationalization.

A particularly significant learning experience was the relationship between the knowledge base and AI solutions. Although I had already recognized the importance of documentation, the theoretical section and empirical findings deepened my understanding of how essential a high-quality knowledge base is for AI solutions to function effectively. High-quality documentation not only reduces the customer support load but directly affects how reliably AI can support customer service. This reinforced my view that AI solutions should not be deployed before the knowledge base has reached a sufficient level of quality. Otherwise, the risk is that a poor early experience undermines customer trust in AI and complicates later deployment. This observation was immediately applicable in my own work at Linear Oy, where knowledge base development has been identified as a key priority.

The research process also revealed the tension between academic knowledge and practical experiential knowledge in this field. It was challenging to find fresh peer-reviewed research literature on the development of customer support and AI, while practical insights were available in abundance in publications by field professionals. This shows that in rapidly developing technology fields; an expert cannot rely solely on academic sources but must build a connection between scientific literature and current professional sources. This is a competence whose value will grow further in my own work role going forward, where actively monitoring developments in my field is part of professional identity.

The thesis process has reinforced professional confidence in acting as a developer of customer support in an internationalizing environment. The identified priorities — knowledge base development, phasing the AI strategy, and proactive preparation for internationalization — form a clear development path that begins immediately. The value of the research is ultimately measured by how

its results are reflected in Linear Oy's international growth, customer support quality, and customer satisfaction in the coming years.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Survey Questions

Scaling Customer Support in an International B2B SaaS Environment

* Mandatory question

Cover message

The purpose of this survey is to study challenges and solutions related to scaling customer support in internationally operating B2B SaaS companies. The survey is part of a master's thesis at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences.

By responding to the survey, you are participating in research aimed at producing practically grounded knowledge of how customer support can be developed as the company grows into international markets.

Responding to the survey takes approximately 15–30 minutes. Responses are handled confidentially and anonymously, and individual respondents or organizations cannot be identified from the research results.

The survey is targeted at professionals working in customer support/customer service in B2B SaaS companies.

Scaling customer support refers to developing customer support operations so that the company can serve a growing customer base and new markets without customer support costs and response times growing proportionally, while maintaining the same customer support quality.

PART 1. Background information

Q1. What is your primary role in your company's customer support? * [Selection – choose one]

- ☐ Customer support (Tier 1)
- ☐ Customer support (Tier 2)
- ☐ Middle management
- ☐ Senior management (Head of X / Director / etc)
- ☐ Other

Q1.2. If you selected other, describe briefly: [Open – visible only if 'Other' was selected]

Q2. Company size (employees) * [Selection – choose one]

- ☐ Under 20
- ☐ 20–50
- ☐ 50–200
- ☐ Over 200

Q3. Company customer base * [Selection – choose one]

- ☐ B2B
- ☐ Mainly B2B
- ☐ B2B and B2C
- ☐ B2C

Q4. Company industry * [Selection – choose one]

- ☐ Real Estate / PropTech
- ☐ Finance / FinTech
- ☐ E-commerce / Retail
- ☐ Marketing / AdTech / MarTech
- ☐ HR / HRTech
- ☐ Healthcare / HealthTech
- ☐ Education / EdTech
- ☐ Construction / ConTech
- ☐ Industry / Manufacturing
- ☐ Logistics / Transportation
- ☐ Energy / CleanTech
- ☐ IT services / Software development
- ☐ Other

Q4.1. If you selected other, describe: [Text field – visible only if 'Other' was selected]

PART 2. Current customer support model

Q5. Our company uses a support level model (Tier 1–3 etc.) * [Selection – choose one]

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Q5.1. If your company does not have a support level model, how would you describe your customer support model? [Open]

PART 3. Scaling challenges

Q6. What are the biggest challenges in scaling customer support in your company? (select max 3) * [Multiple choice – select at most 3]

- ☐ Growth in support request volume
- ☐ Increasing complexity of support requests
- ☐ Insufficient documentation
- ☐ Unclear user interface / error messages
- ☐ Resource shortage
- ☐ Information flow with product development
- ☐ International customer base
- ☐ Other

Q7. Describe the challenges of scaling customer support in more detail * [Open]

Q8. Expanding to international markets significantly increases customer support scaling challenges * [Matrix / Likert scale 1–5]

1 = Strongly disagree 2 3 4 5 = Strongly agree

Answer: ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Q9. Which factors cause the most challenges in scaling customer support internationally? (select max 3) * [Multiple choice – select at most 3]

- ☐ Language barriers
- ☐ Time zones
- ☐ Cultural differences
- ☐ Local working practices and expectations
- ☐ Product localization
- ☐ International recruitment
- ☐ No significant additional challenges

Q10. How has the support load changed as the company has grown? * [Open]

Q11. Describe the challenges of internationalization in customer support in more detail * [Open]

Q12. What do you consider to be the single biggest challenge in scaling customer support for international markets? * [Open]

PART 4. Technology and solutions

Q13. What support channels are in use in your organization? * [Multiple choice – select all that apply]

- ☐ Email
- ☐ Chat
- ☐ Phone
- ☐ Knowledge base / self-service
- ☐ Chatbot / AI assistant
- ☐ Omnichannel customer support

Q14. What customer support platform does your organization use, e.g. Zendesk, and how satisfied are you with it? * [Open]

Q15. AI is currently utilized in customer support * [Selection – choose one]

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ On a trial basis
- ☐ In limited use
- ☐ Widely as part of customer support

Q16. What thoughts does the use of AI in customer support raise? * [Open]

Q17. What approaches or solutions do you consider most important in supporting customer support scaling in an international B2B SaaS environment? * [Open]

Q18. What do you estimate will be the next most important development step in customer support? * [Open]

Q19. Are there any other thoughts you want to share about scaling customer support with growing customer numbers? [Open – optional]