1. Introduction

Global Account Management (GAM) is emerging as one of the major strategic issues currently being addressed by multinational companies operating in globalising industries. The challenge facing multinationals is twofold: first, how to extend their national account management processes/systems to the regional and global level in a way that facilitates centralised co-ordination/integration; and second, how to accommodate and capitalise upon local knowledge and responsiveness. Rolling out a GAM programme, therefore, has far-reaching implications for developing the kind of managerial competencies appropriate in a dynamic and complex multi-cultural business environment.

In common with our earlier work on account management presented at IMP conferences, our approach to GAM competencies in this paper is both holistic and processual. We conceptualise GAM competencies as: (a) embedded in an overall framework of global general management competencies; (b) operationalised at three main levels - organisational, group and individual - nested together to achieve a coherent set; and (c) aligned with strategies and underpinning processes for developing each global account within a broader portfolio of global accounts and congruent with business objectives. The impact of cultural diversity, organisational complexity, and industrial context/setting pervades all three of the aforementioned areas of research interest.

Our paper commences with a short review of the literature on core organisational competencies, and then turns to the specific areas of global management and global account management competencies. Observations are offered on competency-related aspects of GAM emerging from our recent survey questionnaire and round of personal interviews, culminating in a list of priorities for future research.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 Core Organisational Competence

The intellectual origins of the competence movement may be traced to early allusions to distinctive competence (Selznick, 1957) and managerial competence (Penrose, 1959), which were soon incorporated into notions of corporate/business strategy by Andrews (1965), Ansoff (1965), and Learned et al (1969).
Throughout the 1970s, managerial/organisational competence acquired a predominantly static perspective until it was greatly stimulated by more dynamic approaches along three parallel tracks: first, the industrial economics framework for competitive strategy/advantage developed by Porter (1980, 1985); second, resource-based economics/business approaches (e.g. Wernerfelt, 1982; Rumelt, 1984); and third, a somewhat fragmented approach to define occupational, workplace and professional aspects of competence/skills (e.g. Klemp, 1980; Boyatzis, 1982; Constable and McCormack, 1987). By the early 1990s, there were signs that these three strands of thinking about competence were converging and the concept was given a massive boost by the publication of Prahalad and Hamel's (1990) seminal work on "Core Competence". Since then, a number of volumes of collected papers/articles have been published on this topic (see Hamel and Heene, 1994; Sanchez et al., 1996; Campbell and Luchs, 1997).

Prahalad and Hamel (1990) envisaged core competence as "the collective learning in the organisation" and the "organisation of work and the delivery of value", proposing three tests:

- provision of potential access to a wide variety of markets
- making a significant contribution to the perceived customer benefits of the end product
- should be difficult for competitors to imitate

Later observations from Hamel (1994) are relevant to the unfolding concept of core competence as:

"...a bundle of constituent skills and technologies, rather than a single, discrete skill or technology"

"...unlikely to reside, in its entirety, in a single individual or small team... a messy accumulation of learning".

"...transcend any particular product or service. and indeed, may transcend any single business unit within the corporation"

Market access competencies are: "...all those skills which help put a firm in close proximity to its customers"

"Our starting proposition is that competition between firms is as much a race for competence mastery as it is for market position and market power".

"When we have observed companies attempting to define their core competencies, the process tends to be haphazard and political. The first attempt typically produces a lengthy 'laundry list' of skills, technologies and capabilities - some core, but most not. A substantial amount of effort is required to disentangle competencies from products and services in which they are embedded, to distinguish core from non-core, to cluster and aggregate the skills and technologies in some meaningful way, and to arrive at 'labels' that are truly descriptive and promote shared understanding".

Prahalad and Hamel's approach to core competence can be seen to emphasise collective organisational learning and the consolidation of corporate-wide technologies and skills.
Subsequently, various writers have expanded on constituent skills and aspects of sustainability. Klein et al (1991), for example, identify four corporate metu-skills they regard as important in developing/deploying core competencies: learning, innovating, skill categorization, and embedding. Turner and Crawford (1994) outline operational and re-shaping competencies; and in similar vein, Bogner and Thomas (1992), and Teece et al (1997) focus on capacity for updating/renewal of competencies in response to technological change and market conditions. In many ways, recent writing on competencies marks a welcome return to holistic "open systems" perspectives of organisations and competition, coupled with a dynamic approach to leveraging existing competencies and building new competencies.

Despite widespread support for the overall concept of core competence, there are dissenting voices regarding its operationalisation. Prominent among these is a group of McKinsey consultants (Coyne et al, 1997) who challenged the efficacy of core competence under the provocative title: “Is your core competence a mirage?”, i.e. something that from a distance appears to offer hope in a hostile environment, but turns to sand when approached. They offered an appealing redefinition of core competence which has some resonance with account management:

“... a combination of complementary skills/knowledge bases embedded in a group or team that results in the ability to execute one or more critical processes to a world-class standard”.

Coyne et al proposed two categories of core competence: first, insight/foresight -rooted in proprietary technical or commercial know-how, creative flair, superior analysis/inference, etc; and second, frontline execution - arising in cases when the quality of an end product/service can vary appreciably according to the activities of frontline staff. Evaluation should be based on four questions:

- Are our skills truly superior? i.e. demonstrably better than all or most of our actual and potential competitors.
- How sustainable is the superiority? i.e. based on rareness, time taken to develop it, and its source.
- How much value can the competence generate in comparison to other economic levers i.e. contribution to cumulative value in the supply chain above/beyond the contribution from scale advantages and input cost differentials.
- Is the competence integral to our value proposition? i.e ties investment in superior skills to action that will be rewarded in the market place.

According to Coyle et al, world class competence must “steer the power structure” in a company and the strategy must be “chosen by the CEO” Developing and sustaining the two types of core competence they identified is regarded as largely a process of continuous improvement to avoid degradation over time by taking: an evolutionary approach (attempting to build at the same time as individuals perform their usual job); via incubation (a separate group focusing on a chosen competence); or by acquisition (purchasing the skills sought). Coyle et al note that frontline execution competences may be best suited to the first approach because success depends on the efforts of many people across the organisation; whereas insight/foresight competences may be more relevant to the second approach, so that the advantages of smaller groups and less formal processes can be exploited.

2.2. Management Competencies

From the review of the literature so far, it will be apparent that writers and practitioners tend to mix organisational, group and individual competencies. This is to be expected given the sheer difficulty of separating them out into discrete elements and by level of aggregation. Competencies such as coordination and negotiation, for example, are highly contextual and may require individual/team inputs at the global, regional, and national levels.

A subtle point made by Turner and Crawford (1994) is that corporate organisational competencies are “owned” by the company and are embedded in its systems/processes; whereas personal competencies are possessed by one or more individuals and may be lost to the organisation should they leave, i.e. personal competencies ought to be considered as “hired, rather than owned”. Moreover, they further point out that while corporate competencies often develop through conscious effort as a by-product of running the current business, some arise through processes in which personal competencies are transformed into corporate ones.

It is not intended here to give a detailed exposition of the various approaches to managerial competency. It is perhaps sufficient to note that these range from comprehensive reviews of competency assessment methods (Spencer et al. 1994) to competency-related reward systems (Brown, 1998); and attempts to identify, correlate, and replicate high performance competencies with organisational performance (Schroder, 1989; Cockerill et al. 1995). There is also a growing body of literature pertaining to the main functional areas of business, e.g. purchasing (Frewe et al, 1997), marketing (Pickton, 1994), and especially human resource management (Meger, 1996; Knight, 1997). The last area was recently given a boost by the initiation of a study of global competencies sponsored by the World Federation of Personnel Management Associations.

A pause for definitions...

The tendency to use the terms managerial competency and competence interchangeably is confusing and deserves clarification. We have adopted the term competency and its plural competencies – an approach based on inputs/processes, underlying characteristics and behaviour patterns of managers, and the congruency of an individual’s competencies with the demands of the job and the organisational environment (Klemp, 1980; Boyatzis, 1982; Woodruffe, 1992). In contrast, competence and competences are typically associated with the functional analysis of tasks and defining occupational standards of competence (i.e. observable performance outcomes). The controversial UK system of National Vocational Qualifications, (NVQs) for example, is based on the assessment of an individual manager's knowledge, skills and experience in work-related activities, leading to a “statement of competence”.

The latter is an interesting development, not least because there is a Sales NVQ Level 4 in Key Account Management offered in the UK, which has been roundly criticised for serious flaws in its content/positioning and assessment (Millman and Wilson, 1996). Much of the problem lies at the level of so-called meta-competency (i.e. softer, higher order competencies associated with learning, adaptation, anticipation, creativity) and
what constitutes professional judgement. As Belbin (1996) succinctly put it in a letter restating his particular stance on generic management competence:

"... to transfer the competence concept to higher managerial functions is to misunderstand what is crucially important at this level. I refer to excellence that, as a complex blend of aptitude, experience and learning, is far more resistant to formal representation in terms of courses and certificates. I think the root of the problem is that competence has been pursued beyond its proper semantic boundaries"

Management competence, as defined in terms of outputs, and its claims to reliability, validity and objectivity, is clearly a contentious issue that will rumble on for some time yet. For a useful discussion see: Meger (1996), Knight (1997), Frewer et al (1997), and the whole issue of Personnel Review, Vol 22, No 2, 1993.

2.3 Global Management Competencies

In the early 1990s, Bartlett and Ghoshal (1992) asked the simple question: What is a global manager? Their answer was that there is no such thing as a universal global manager; rather, there are three groups of specialists: business managers (who serve as strategists, architects of worldwide asset/resource configuration, and coordinators of transactions across national borders); country managers (sensors/interpreters of local opportunities/threats, builders of local resources/capabilities, and contributors to and active participants in global strategy); functional managers (scanners of specialised information worldwide, “cross-pollinators” of leading-edge knowledge and best-practice, and champions of innovations that may offer transnational opportunities/applications). Nevertheless, they saw a vital role for corporate level managers – the leaders who manage complex interactions among the three groups of specialists and who identify develop “those individuals showing ability to translate company strategy into effective operations around the world”. Although Bartlett and Ghoshal did not provide a list of skills/competencies in these roles, it is clear that their vision of a transnational company rated highly the managerial competencies of:

- developing the global pool of managerial talent residing within the company.
- facilitating learning and problem resolution via teams, and cross-border coordination/integration.

At about the same time, Adler and Bartholomew (1992) focused on the skills required by individual managers to be globally competent, highlighting those skills which transcend historic competencies required of international expatriate managers; and advocating the need for a framework for assessing human resource systems which recruit develop, retain and utilise managers who are competent transnationally. Two themes pervade Adler and Bartholomew’s work that are of relevance to GAM competencies:

- The primary skill of exercising discretion in choosing “when to be locally responsive and when to emphasise global integration”.
- The need to recognise cultural diversity and use it to build cultural synergistic processes, rather than to merely “integrate foreigners into the dominant culture of headquarter’s nationality”
Notable among many attempts to draw up profiles of global managerial competencies are those of Rhinesmith (1993), and Moran and Riesenberger (1994), reproduced in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

**Global Mindset**
- Bigger, broader picture
- Balance of contradictions
- Process
- Diverse teamwork and play
- Change as opportunity
- Openness to surprises

**Personal Competency**
- Knowledge
- Conceptualization
- Flexibility
- Sensitivity
- Judgement
- Reflection

**Competency**
- Managing competition
- Managing complexity
- Managing adaptability
- Managing teams
- Managing uncertainty
- Managing learning

### Table 1. Six Global Management Competencies.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Possesses a global mindset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Works as an equal with persons of diverse backgrounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Has a long-term orientation</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Facilitates organizational change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creates learning systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Motivates employees to excellence</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Interaction</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Negotiates and approaches conflicts in a collaborative mode</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Manages skillfully the foreign deployment cycle</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Leads and participates effectively in multicultural teams</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Understands their own cultural values and assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accurately profiles the organizational and national culture of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avoids culture mistakes and behaves in an appropriate manner in other countries</td>
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</table>

### Table 2. Twelve Organizational and Individual Competencies to Make Globalization Work.


Among Rhinesmith’s global competencies, “managing complexity” is of special relevance to our work on global account management. He defines this as: “Ability to identify, analyze, and intuitively manage complex global relationships that affect personal and organizational effectiveness”. He goes on to describe these relationships as simultaneously cooperative and competitive, and loaded with contradictions paradoxes:

requiring managers to “use initiative as well as analytical skills to assess the ‘feel’ for the information gathered and the direction of things” and to “look for balance and inclusion in problem-solving activities.” For Rhinesmith, global organisations are “constantly scanning, organizing, and reorganizing their resources and capabilities so that national or regional boundaries are not barriers to potential products, markets, or new technologies.”

Moran and Riesenberger’s list of competencies are clustered under attitudes, leadership, interaction, and culture. These draw heavily on the earlier work of Harris and Moran (1987) which explored cross-cultural aspects of management development. In particular, Harris and Moran refer to “the authority of competence” as a criterion for team selection, whereby the individual has some knowledge, information, or expertise that can help the group achieve its mission. Their competencies to facilitate team success include: tolerance of ambiguity, uncertainty and seeming lack of structure; and fostering trust, confidence, and commitment within the group. Cultural sensitivity/empathy and the skills to manage cultural diversity also feature prominently in their writing.

Much of the running in recent years has been taken up by consultants and practitioners in the field of human resource management, mainly because of growing interest in strategic aspects of human resourcing and also due to the traditional role of devising management training/development programmes. Hay McBer (1995), for example, based a study of global leadership competencies among chief executives on the premise that they are in a much stronger position to respond proactively to international business challenges when they align business strategies, policies and behaviours with cultural requirements. They proposed two dimensions of global leadership: International Adaptability, comprising six elements clustered under the headings of Building Business Relationships; under the headings of Building Business Relationships, Choosing a Basis for Action, Exercising Authority and Leadership joint Universal Competencies covering 12 elements under the headings Sharpening the Focus, Building Commitment, and Driving for success. Together with a supplementary paper by Dalziel (1996) on leadership styles/patterns and competency development, the Hay McBer study provides a useful framework for understanding the impact of cultural factors on the effectiveness of global leadership.

The search for consistent ways of identifying and appraising global managers continues unabated:

“We’ve been developing a set of 11 management competencies we can use world wide... the aim is to have a clear objective measure of potential. We measure such things as entrepreneurial drive, the ability to lead and develop others, and integrity. That makes up a common core of behaviours We’ve tested it, and so far it seems to be culturally transferable”


2.4 Global Team Competencies

There is now an extensive literature on the role of teams in facilitating internal integration and external adaptation, yet is only recently that the use of multicultural

teams in exploiting cultural diversity has received serious attention. Schneider and Barsoux (1997), for example, while identifying some of the wider strategic reasons for creating such teams (e.g. organisational integration, organisational learning, and management development); also outline task/process strategies for managing multicultural teams. O’Hara-Devereaux and Johansen (1994) list the personal, work-related and intellectual/social characteristics of successful global team leaders, and many other authors (e.g. Ferraro, 1990; Hoecklin, 1995; Berger, 1996; Cushner and Brislin, 1996) develop ideas on cross-cultural team building and training. These approaches to team development, including composition and rewards, provide useful insights to the formation and management of account teams, though much more research is necessary in the GAM context.

2.5 Global Account Management Competencies

There is very little in the way of literature on global account management competencies. Millman and Wilson (1996) identified four broad organisational level key account management competencies relating to strategy formulation and implementation, systems and process design, communications, and building trust/commitment. And Millman (1996), presented a tentative list of GAM roles/responsibilities as follows:

- Coordination
- Key Account Planning
- External Relationship Management
- Internal Relationship management
- Sales and profit Responsibility
- Negotiation
- Multi-cultural Teamwork

The purpose of this IMP paper from hereon is to build on our earlier research on competencies and to report on findings from two sources: first, a list of competencies compiled from a questionnaire distributed to senior managers in 1998; and secondly, to provide a discussion on issues emerging from an ongoing round of research interviews conducted during 1998/99. These findings will be set against the literature review and culminate in an agenda for future research.

3. Research on Global Account Management Competencies

From the early spring of 1998 a major study of GAM practices has been carried out, sponsored by the Strategic Account Management Association (SAMA) of Chicago, USA. Our study is a collaborative effort involving researchers from the Southampton Business School, Warwick Business School, the University of Buckingham School of Business, and The Sales Research Trust, in the UK.

Over 180 companies have been involved in the study as respondents to a postal questionnaire and as participants in in-depth face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and focus group discussions. Additional data were gathered through researcher participation at several practitioner conferences where the presentations made by leading exponents of GAM practices were tape recorded and later analysed. These events also afforded the opportunity of further informal interviews being carried out with speakers and fellow delegates. All respondents were senior sales and marketing executives and most carried the term global in their title. It is intended that later
research will also include interviews with representatives from global customers in order to explore these issues from a dyadic perspective.

The initial stages of the research, which is ongoing, have focused upon exploring a wide range of issues related to the nature and process of GAM. This paper is concerned only with those findings that relate to the question of GAM competencies at the level of the organisation, account team and the individual. While some direct questions relating to these issues were expected to offer valuable insights into respondent’s perceptions of required competencies, we were well aware that they may not provide a full picture. Rackham (1987), for example, warns against trusting the perception of practitioners about their own skills and capabilities. We have, therefore, investigated the nature of GAM processes, the roles/tasks expected of the global account manager and his/her team, together with observations on the difficulties experienced during implementation, as a precursor to assessing competencies. Specifically, we examined:

- Perceptions about the nature of adaptations required by suppliers in order to deliver a global offering to global customers.
- Ways in which respondents perceived that they delivered value to global customers.
- Perceived organisational competencies required in order to develop effective GAM practices.
- Blocks to effective GAM.
- Role of the global account manager.
- Perceptions of global account manager competencies.

### 3.1 Organisational Competencies

In general, respondents recognised that serving customers globally requires fundamental adaptations to systems and processes. Table 3 below lists those adaptations that were most often mentioned by respondents to the survey.

Firms make the following adaptations in order to serve their global customers better:

- Systems adaptations
- Extra-net access
- Local support
- On-site employees
- Dedicated budgets for special projects
- Closer corporate relationships
- Joint strategic planning

Table 3. The Global Offering

These adaptations demand high levels of flexibility from suppliers and customers. Systems adaptations reflect the need for infra-structural (logistical) competencies as well as the ability to offer a global product or service. Extra-net provision underlines the importance of communication, information access and management. The provision of local support and on-site personnel in some industries presupposes that there are high levels of co-ordination within the supply organisation that have overcome the problems of global/local conflict and partly to ensure strategic/operational congruence at both corporate and local levels. High levels of commitment on both sides are reflected in...
willingness to devote specific budgets to developing global relationships and most significantly to align strategies.

- New ways of interacting: 62%
- Evolve new organisational forms: 57%
- Investment in strategic programmes: 53%
- Develop cross-functional teams: 52%
- Manage through sales and marketing: 42%
- Evolve different methods and systems: 35%

Table 4. How the Selling Company Delivers “Value”

Table 4 draws upon qualitative data from the survey questionnaire. The ways in which suppliers feel that they deliver value to their global customers appear to be largely through organisational adaptations rather than through product adaptations. Observations from the in-depth interviews also suggest that the provision of a global product offering is almost a given: and that the way in which the interaction takes place and the organisational configuration of the supplier to meet customer needs, has the greatest potential for differentiating the overall value offering from competitor offerings.

A number of broad organisational competencies were identified directly by respondents during the in-depth interviews as being of major importance to the effective operation of GAM processes:

- Visionary leadership and commitment from senior management to the achievement of global objectives
- Ability to provide a global product or service offering
- Global logistics competencies
- Communications and information management competencies
- Ability to co-ordinate operations globally so as to serve global customers at a local level

Some respondent comments illuminate these points:

"It comes right from the top of our management, from the chairman to the president and everyone's aware of it."

"The core (global) competencies are first, a global offering, the infrastructure to support that, then communications. Underpinning this is the need for a commitment throughout the organisation to deliver globally, and that has to come from the top."

"There is a tremendous need for global co-ordination...right now it doesn't happen. Our V-P Manufacturing is only responsible for the five plants we have in the US. We've got another nine plants that he has nothing to do with."

"Providing a world class product of world class quality at world class prices, that's a list of understoods. Where we add value at a global level is in our ability to manage the supply base on behalf of customers."
"There are three issues: Firstly, it becomes incredibly difficult to communicate globally both within your own company and with your customer. Secondly, there is a need to supply consistently from multiple locations. And thirdly, pricing is also key."

"Logistics is very important, international monetary capabilities, and information technology. At the moment, I would say that our global communications capabilities exceed what our customers can do and in a way that knowledge is part of what we 'give away' as part of the value we create for customers."

"Our core competence is that we offer a global brand and we have the logistics capability to move products around the world to serve our global customers locally."

3.2 Blocks to GAM Implementation

Further insights into organisational competencies may be gained by considering the blocks to implementing effective GAM programmes. The main difficulties experienced by respondents to our survey are outlined in Table 5:

- Conflicts between national and global interests: 68%
- Implementation of global strategies at local level: 61%
- Lack of integrated IT systems: 50%
- Managing multi-national teams: 44%

Table 5. Main Difficulties Experienced by Global Account Managers When Attempting to Implement GAM Processes/Systems:

Difficulties in reconciling global/local factional interests figured large in the minds of our respondents. Local political interests were seen as a substantial barrier to the effective implementation of global strategies. Half the respondent companies also perceived their IT systems to be inadequately integrated; and this in turn was seen as hampering global communications, strategy implementation and team management. These data, drawn from our questionnaire, are also supported by the findings from the in-depth interviews. Figure 1 summarises three categories of barriers to effective GAM that emerged when the survey data was considered together with the data from the in-depth interviews.

The three categories of barrier relate to: conflicts between global and local interests within the supply organisation; deficiencies in supplier internal systems; and blocks that emanate from the customer (global account) organisation. Within each of these

in McLoughlin, Damien, and C. Horan (eds.), Proceedings of The 15th Annual IMP Conference, University College, Dublin 1999
categories, organisational competencies may be identified as being of strategic, operational and cultural significance.

3.3 Global/Local Barriers

Our qualitative data supports responses from the questionnaire in that difficulties were found to exist for many companies in reconciling global local differences. Inconsistencies between the strategic focus of different parts of the supply organisation tends to impede effective implementation of GAM processes. Many respondents cited the difficulties associated with rolling out a global programme. When asked whether local managers recognised the significance of adopting global approaches to certain customers, one respondent said:

"It's not just that they don't see the impact, they don't care! We're talking about changing 50 years of culture in order to get people to think differently."

In addition to the inherent conservatism present in some organisations, there is also a tendency to resist change that threatens entrenched power bases and conflicts with existing reward structures. Organisational complexity and cultural diversity also play their part in erecting barriers to change:

"It's very difficult, it takes a tremendous amount of time and effort - not dealing with the external customer - but dealing with the internal customer. When I first started, we made three hundred internal presentations in the first year. As you go global the complexity increases. You must first get your own organisation in order...you may go high or low on an individual's priority list because they haven't been mandated, as it were, yet, to get involved."

"The first road block is the organisation itself its structure. We're set up as a matrix organisation and that causes more problems than traditional reporting mechanisms. Second, by going global you're going to take (part of someone's) turf. You're entering their area, their domain, their expertise... Then there's the choice of global customer. Everyone has a different opinion. And then the area of profit and loss responsibility is allocated. If you've got a country manager responsible for the business, then they're bound to be a bit parochial."

3.4 Systems Barriers

The importance of integrated global information and logistics systems was widely recognised by respondents. A lack of integration was seen by some as a barrier to GAM:

"Globalisation is bringing together your systems, key resources, and your financial systems, as a global entity. And then, for example, when you work with Citibank, you talk to Citibank in terms of... 'Do you have plans? I understand you're going to Latin America, we're very active in Latin America Mr Citibank; and in Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Mexico'. Then you put together a global strategy, not an international package."

"The global programme is designed, developed and put in place to manage relationships; to assist our customers with their business problems and migrate..."
successful solutions around the world; to co-ordinate our relationships and to provide them with information about what's happening with their account on a world-wide basis."

"We lack a sales force automation tool that would allow us to share information around the world. So that's one of the challenges...and if you don't have an information system to capture the revenue, its very hard to compensate. You get conflicting measurement systems that magnify the same problem globally many times what you get nationally."

"The key issue is that if you don't have co-ordination, you don't have a global customer, you're just a bunch of different entities all on a one-to-one kind of basis. The key element is to co-ordinate activities and that requires a means to share information."

3.5 Customer Blocks

In the same way that there are seemingly intractable global local conflicts, lack of co-ordinated systems, and an adversarial culture within the supplier organisation which provides barriers to effective GAM programmes, the same elements will erect barriers from the customer side:

"Now take x (a major customer). They are a big spend but they're not a global account because they do not believe in partnership. They believe in a bid every year, low price. Nobody is a global account that bids every year."

From these observations it may be concluded that the main organisational competencies for effective global account management include: coordination; ability to resolve global/local factionalism through a realignment of organisational structures and reporting/reward systems; and the development of competencies in information handling.

3.6 Global Account Manager Competencies

Global account managers are charged primarily with managing the relationship between their own company and the customer organisation. Few enjoy line authority over the people whose activities they are expected to manage. They are also expected to interact with people in widely different cultural environments, very often at long distances and across time zones. They perform their role against a background of existing organisational structures, factional interests, and reporting structures, and are attempting to co-ordinate the activities of people from different functions and levels within their own organisation in order to implement global strategies that may well conflict with the interests of local players. Their task is, to say the least, complex:

"It's like if you ever look at an equalizer on a stereo system, where you have ten different lights showing you base treble and all the other stuff... The music's playing, it sounds wonderful and you look down and all the lights are at different levels. And that's exactly what it's like. We're all playing a CD, but everybody's volume is at a different level, Everybody's base is on a different level, and I'm trying to conduct the orchestra."
From questionnaire responses, a list of the top ten GAM competencies was compiled. These were further explored in the qualitative research. The key competencies for global account managers are listed in Table 6. Many of the managerial competencies cited by respondents as being important to effective performance reflect the competencies demanded of their organisations.

Not surprisingly, a key managerial competency is the ability to communicate effectively, both with customer personnel, and perhaps more importantly, with people within their own organisation. This ability to communicate facilitates the effective management of global teams of people drawn from different cultures, different functional departments and different business units. Within this context, the right to lead must be earned - it is rarely conferred by dint of position and line authority. In addition, the global account manager must be a rounded business person with strategic vision and planning capabilities, together with a genuine display of cultural empathy and advanced problem-solving capabilities.

Interestingly, the competencies that are often highly valued at national account manager level: selling/negotiation skills, industry/customer knowledge, and product/service knowledge; were mentioned less often - perhaps perceived as given at this level. More surprisingly, and not shown in the table, language skills were listed as twelfth in importance.

1. Communication skills
2. Global team leadership and management skills
3. Business and financial acumen
4. Relationship management skills
5. Strategic vision and planning capabilities
6. Problem-solving capabilities
7. Cultural empathy
8. Selling skills (internal and external)
9. Industry and market knowledge (self and customer)
10. Product service knowledge

**Table 6. Respondent-identified GAM Competencies:**

Several competencies identified by respondents during in-depth interviews stressed the importance of cultural competencies:

"First you have to be educated in the fact that you understand the global economy and that dealing overseas is not like dealing in the local market. You need to be able to understand the country's way of doing things. And you need to be able to adjust to the different ways of doing things."

"The most significant thing (in terms of skill sets required to perform the job) is the ability to cope with cultural ambiguity. If you're not comfortable with that stuff you'll have a hard time as a global account manager. (Within that context) you also need to be able to figure out how you can be inclusive if you're in a meeting with people from different backgrounds and countries, all speaking English... and you've got to let them go back and say 'No, that's not what I mean.' If you don't do that, they'll soon not want to be on your team."

Competencies relating to communication, leadership and planning also emerged strongly:

"You can't just be a super sales rep. You must transition to being a better communicator, a better planner, a better strategist, more relationship and long term orientated."

"Global account managers need to have vision first and foremost; they need to be a little bit loony, they've got to want to change the world. They must be happy to take risks, they've got to have courage. I think you've got to be a diplomat and be tolerant of others and understand different cultures and nationalities."

"Leadership, communication, positive persuasive skills and the ability to create an immediate understanding of what you're trying to achieve, and make it immediately relevant to the smallest entity of the team. But you must also have the ability to get the customer to bear with you, because we're still learning and occasionally you step on your partner's toes. That's a significant relationship skill."

4. Discussion

Throughout the data, elements of earlier findings could be discerned. The trans-national skills and management competencies identified by Adler and Bartholemew (1992), and the global mindset and competencies identified by Rhinesmith (1993) were seen in the adoption of a broader perspective, i.e. tolerance of ambiguity, reliance upon teamwork and willingness to seize change as an opportunity. Many of the twelve organisational and individual competencies identified by Moran and Riesenberger (1994), in terms of attitudes, leadership, interaction and cultural qualities, were also strongly in evidence.

Global strategies make heavy demands on organisations. The primary demand is that they develop co-ordinated and customer-facing internal systems and processes that deliver value to customers operating globally (see also Millman, 1999a, 1999b). This broad organisational competence must be underpinned by specific capabilities in terms of planning, information management, reward/compensation systems, and a global capability that has been built upon previous experience of strong national account management capabilities.

While Turner and Crawford (1994) distinguish between organisational competencies being "owned" by the company, embedded in its systems and processes, and personal competencies possessed by one or more individuals, (i.e. "hired" rather than "owned"), these separate orders of competence are nevertheless intertwined. Organisational and team competencies require operationalisation through the agency of individuals.

In the GAM context these organisational competencies are often applied in conditions where long standing factional interests are threatened. The drive, therefore, both to develop global organisational competencies and to apply them, is dependent upon strong senior executive support, vision and leadership, and upon the quality of the global account manager's capabilities.

Figure 2 illustrates how organisational, team and individual competencies combine to implement and sustain GAM processes. Development of the necessary organisational...
competencies (an integrated capability for delivering global product services to global accounts; focused planning and reporting systems; appropriate reward and compensation systems; and a globally integrated information management system), all depend upon the political will of the organisation. This, in turn, is largely seen as being driven by senior executives with the vision and leadership to roll out global programmes.

Global account managers depend for their effectiveness upon the ability to marshal the efforts of others both within the selling organisation and the customer organisation. Strong leadership and communications competencies are essential, but they also require finely tuned political instincts that enable them to navigate the corridors of power to reconcile conflicting interests, and to enlist the support of people at all levels. At one level, when considering global account manager competencies, we are dealing with what Belbin (1996) terms higher order managerial functions, which have enormous political and strategic significance. Very often these will result in quite fundamental changes within the organisation, affecting not only the way in which customers are served, but in some cases transform the very businesses that the firm operates. At yet another level, the global account manager is an administrative or functional manager, concerned with the minutiae of day-to-day operational issues. Here again, there is a need to exercise political skills in order to implement global strategies which accommodate local sensitivities.

A further higher level function performed by global account managers is in the identification of business opportunities and in the resolution of problems for customers. In many instances, our respondents perceived that they were not only discovering new ways in which to serve customers; but often creating new business opportunities through developing their own core competencies to meet new customer service and
product needs, or through partnering and achieving synergistic benefits from marrying competencies with those of their customers.

These two elements of GAM competency: political skills and business skills; prompt us to coin the term Political Entrepreneur to encapsulate the essence of global account management competency.

4. An Agenda for Future Research

- Survey of GAM job descriptions/specifications.
- Examination of the nature of GAM "coordination" competencies at the global, regional and national level.
- Cross-cultural study of differing perceptions of the construct of "competency".
- In-depth analysis of multicultural team competencies.
- Longitudinal study of competency development within a GAM relationship (i.e. from initial concept to partnership).
- Matched profiles of global account manager's and senior purchasing manager's perceptions of GAM competencies.
- In-depth study of the role of global account managers as political entrepreneurs.

5. Conclusions

This paper has explored the emerging concept of GAM competency and how it is perceived by practising managers. Our findings to-date should be regarded as tentative, for three main reasons: first, we need to extend and cluster our sample to allow deeper analysis of the stage of GAM relational development and the influence of industry-specific factors; second, we require a more balanced view of GAM, which is believed to lie in researching customer perceptions; and third, we have a healthy scepticism for what is meant by GAM "competency" and "best-practice" across different cultures. These reservations are reflected to some extent in our agenda for future research.

We are also well aware that GAM competencies, at whatever level, do not exist in isolation – they must be integrated with other competency/skill sets to ensure internal consistency and an external customer-centric approach. This will almost certainly involve greater attention to some of the softer investments in management development/training than is currently to be found in most multinational companies rolling out GAM programmes.

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