Career Development of Global Account Managers:
The Dilemma of the Political Entrepreneur

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1.   Introduction

A recurring question emerging from our research, consultancy, and management training workshops on global account management (GAM) is: How can we best provide a career track for our global account managers?

Global account managers are normally recruited/promoted from *within* multinational selling companies, typically from the pool of national account/sales managers, on the assumption that thorough knowledge and experience of the company's organisation and products/services is an essential prerequisite. They perform a boundary-spanning role across two important organisational interfaces: first, the *internal* interface between global and national account management, which is often embedded in a headquarters/subsidiary relationship; and second, the *external* interface between the selling company and the dispersed activities of its global accounts. In recognition of the need to navigate sensitive commercial/political aspects of these interface relationships, we have dubbed the global account manager as performing the role of *political entrepreneur.*

Our paper commences with a critical review of the literature on career development and then examines three converging strands of literature on boundary-spanning roles, the psychological contract, and identification. Our recent exploratory research on GAM interface relationships is then interpreted using a conceptual model which emphasises career dilemmas and transitions at the external interface. This captures the essence of the global account manager as political entrepreneur, giving due consideration to contextual factors such as organisational complexity, cultural diversity and industrial setting. The paper culminates in a summary of key career issues in the form of an agenda for future research.

2. An Overview of the Literature
2.1 Career Development
Early approaches to career development tended to focus on matching individuals and organisations with heavy emphasis on what is often referred to as "upwards and onwards" managerial progression. Wilensky (1961, p523), for example, described a career as "… a succession of related jobs, arranged in a hierarchy of prestige, through which persons move in an ordered (more or less predictable) sequence". Similarly, Arthur et al (1989, p8) defined a career as simply "…the evolving sequence of a person's work experience over time".

Ballah et al (1985) postulated a split in role between the manager's "public" and "private" life – the former representing *utilitarian individualism* in the economic and occupational spheres, and the latter as *expressive individualism* appropriate in private life. They go on to note that, however we define work, it is very close to our sense of self: "What we *do* often translates into what we *are*". Ballah et al have the following to say about work and careers:

"In the sense of a *job* work is a way of making money and making a living. It supports a *self* defined by economic success, security, and all that money can buy. In the sense of a *career* work traces one's progress through life by achievement and advancement in an occupation. It yields a self defined by a broader sort of success, which takes in social standing and prestige, and by a sense of expanding power and competency that renders work itself a source of self-esteem…" (p66).

Later, Derr and Laurent (1989), building on the work of Schein and Van Maanen (1977), Schein (1978), and Derr (1988), made a division into *internal* and *external* aspects of career. Here internal career comprised self-definitions of career, subjective ideas about work life and a person's role within it, involving major transitions and events triggering shifts in the internal career map. External career encompassed the realities, constraints, opportunities and actual job sequences in occupations and organisations. Derr and Laurent sum up their concept of internal and external career by posing two deceptively simple questions: "What do I want from work, given my perceptions of who I am and what's possible?" and "What's possible and realistic in my organisation and occupation, given my perceptions of the world of work?".

Derr and Laurent's work is useful in the context of GAM because they introduce the mediating role of culture in career development. They conjecture, for example, that fundamental assumptions about work and life are deeply rooted in broad cultural settings, such as nations, providing a major influence on internal career orientations and dynamics. National culture, they argue, also shapes external careers through work practices and socialisation. This also raises the tricky question for GAM of whether there are different perceptions of the career construct across cultures and different selection/appraisal procedures.

2.2 Boundary–spanning Roles
The notion of "boundary-spanning" has its origins in *open systems* approaches to strategic management and marketing, typically centring on the process of internal organisational adaptation to external environmental change. People occupying the role of boundary-spanner have been variously described as "linking pins", "information brokers", "gate keepers" providing "human bridges", and the organisation's "antenna in the external business environment".

Our current focus is the boundary-spanning role performed by global account managers, though we recognise that there are many other people whose primary role involves face-to-face interaction with customers (e.g. senior marketing/sales executives, project managers, sales staff, customer service/support staff, applications development engineers, public relations officers). There are also internally-based staff who, perhaps, have less face-to-face contact, but occupy an important relationship-building role nevertheless (e.g. in sales administration, distribution, credit control). Most of the early literature, however, resides within sales management and explores the well-worn track of role conflict and ambiguity (see Belasco, 1966; Walker et al, 1995; Aldrich and Herker, 1977; Singh and Rhoads, 1991; Singh, 1993). These writers raise a number of pertinent issues which may be translated to the role of global account managers:

"…one reason why the sales person is susceptible to high levels of role conflict and ambiguity is that he occupies a boundary position in his firm and, therefore, has a large and diverse role set, i.e. people in related positions, both within and outside his company, who depend on his performance in some fashion… and are rewarded by it or require it to perform their own tasks" (Walker et al, 1975 p33).

"Boundary roles involved with maintaining or improving the political legitimacy or hegemony of the organization not only represent the organization but also mediate between it and important outside organizations" (Aldrich and Herker, 1997 p220).

"…in comparison with role conflict, role ambiguity is more amenable to managerial intervention" (Singh and Rhoades, 1991, p329).

"…whether boundary spanners can discriminate *empirically* among what researchers see as *conceptually* distinct facets of role ambiguity is unknown" (Singh and Rhoads, 1991, p329).

"Because of the nature and complexity of boundary-spanning roles it is probably futile and perhaps counterproductive to expend resources on programs that eliminate role ambiguity … managers may find it rewarding to put their efforts behind programs that reduce and/or help boundary spanners to cope with ambiguity in *specific facets of their role*", e.g. targeting boss and company-related ambiguities or designing jobs with greater autonomy (Singh, 1993 p27).

The potential for role ambiguity and conflict is increased in the boundary-spanning role performed by global account managers because of the complexity of the co-ordinating function they perform. Not only are they expected to co-ordinate the activities of their own organisation in delivering the *global promise*, but very often those of their customer and with little direct authority over those charged with the local implementation of global strategy.

2.3   The "Psychological Contract"
Most of the literature on the *psychological contract* is couched in terms of exchange relationships between employer and employee in which mutual expectations, obligations, and reciprocity feature strongly. For an excellent exposition of multiple perspectives on the psychological contract see the special issue of the *Journal of Organizational Behaviour,* Vol 19, 1998. For the purpose of this paper, we have extracted the definition offered by Rousseau and Tijoriwala (1998, p679):

"A psychological contract is an individual's belief in mutual obligations between that person and another party such as an employer (either a firm or another person). This belief is predicated on the perception that a promise has been made (e.g. of employment or career opportunities) and consideration offered in exchange for it (e.g. accepting a position, foregoing other jobs), binding the parties to some set of reciprocal obligations".

There is fair consensus around this view. Recent literature also notes the changing nature of the psychological contract given the shift from a business climate in which employers offer promotion up a career ladder and continuing employment in return for loyalty and high levels of performance, to a situation in which employees are expected to take greater responsibility for managing their own careers in flatter organisation structures (Holbeche, 1999). Other factors, such as career couples, family life, gender issues, virtual working, and so on, are also regarded as prominent issues requiring much greater attention.

While none of these issues negate the need to attract, retain and develop talented people, the idea of a more explicit "negotiated" psychological contract may be emerging in a less-stable employment environment. In these circumstances, Herriot (1995, p201) offered the following advice:

"In order to engage in the act of negotiation, organisations will first have to abandon one of the rhetorical planks of human resource ideology – the unitarist assumption that both parties share the same interests".

2.4   Organisational Identification
Consideration of the ambiguities/conflicts associated with boundary-spanning roles and psychological contracts leads naturally to a strand of literature which is currently experiencing a resurgence of interest – organisational identity.

Tajfel (1983) articulated the general construct of "identification" as part of an individual's self-concept, which should be split up into *social* identity (defining oneself in terms of membership of social groups) and *personal* identity (personality, abilities). This, and subsequent approaches, tends to emphasise the emergence of social/psychological bonds, sharing organisational values/beliefs; and rather like the early literature on careers, employee/organisation congruence or fit. Glynn (1998, p239), building on Ashforth and Mael (1989), Dutton et al (1994), and Mael and Ashforth (1995), concluded that:

"…identification can be understood as a form of collective social identity in which individuals define themselves in terms of their membership in a particular organization and describe themselves by some attributes they ascribe to the organization".

Pratt (1998, p175) offers a similar definition of organisational identification, though expressed in more complex process terms:

"… organisational identification occurs when an individual's beliefs about his/her organization become self-referential or self-defining. The act of *becoming* identified seems to involve either (a) evoking one's self concept in the recognition that one shares similar values with an organization (affinity), or (b) changing one's self-
concept so that one's values and beliefs become more similar to the organisation's (emulation)".

Transferring the construct of organisational identification to the context of account management immediately highlights the tensions and dilemmas inherent in the boundary-spanning role. On the one hand, account managers assume the roles of "representative" and "ambassador" of their employer, often showing their personal affiliation in a highly visible way by their apparent enthusiasm, indifference, apathy or inertia. On the other hand, they are expected simultaneously to switch affiliation when playing the role of customer's "friend" and "advocate" in their own employer's organisation. As Weeks and Weilbacker (1997) observed: "Account managers have almost become synonymous with an employee of the customer and are treated accordingly". The latter quasi-employee status creates conditions associated with the behavioural phenomenon popularly known as "side-changing" or "going native".

Some useful insights regarding personal affiliation are to be found in the literature on organisational identification:

- Individuals derive a large part of their own self-definition through affiliation and when things go wrong, they may feel the pain personally, making certain issues appear more important and urgent. This has implications for getting issues on the strategic agenda (i.e. how issues are identified and legitimised) and for the amount of time/effort individuals spend on them (Dutton and Penner, 1993).

- Organisational identification is more likely to occur in organisations that are attractive (and have attractive images) and when the perceived organisational identity increases a member's self-esteem (Dutton et al, 1994).

- Glynn (1998, p243) asked several (unanswered) questions regarding the need among individuals for organisational identification: How can we operationalise and measure the need? What are the life and career circumstances that encourage higher (or lower) need? Is the need fuelled more by crisis and less than by attractive organisational associations? Is the need related to demographical characteristics, i.e. do younger, less experienced employees have a higher need than older, more seasoned executives? Are the former more compliant, easily socialised, and co-operative than the latter? Or do experience and socialisation intertwine identities of self and organisation? Do organisations benefit more from hiring individuals with higher or lower need… and under what circumstances?

The situation may be further complicated in the case of global account managers by the degree of cultural affinity/dissonance perceived by them in relation to both employer and customer organisations. Account managers also find themselves in a competitive commercial setting. Sales targets have to be met, contracts negotiated, and a host of external factors impinge on how relationships develop over time.

2.5   Role of the Global Account Manager

"A Global Account is one that is of strategic importance to the achievement of the supplier's corporate objectives, pursues integrated and co-ordinated strategies on a world wide basis and demands a globally integrated product/service offering". Wilson et al (2000).

The role and competencies required of the global account manager have received our increasing attention in recent years (see Millman, 1996, 1999; Millman and Wilson, 1996, 1999; Wilson et al, 2000). While we can claim to have achieved modest success in teasing out and prioritising lists of desirable personal attributes/traits and skills/competencies, we have also been drawn irresistibly towards some of the softer, higher order *meta-skills/competencies* that separate out the few highly effective global account managers from the mediocre. As the title of our paper suggests, this has led us to those particular meta-skills/competencies that underpin the role of the global account manager as *political entrepreneur.*

The following extracts capture our earlier thoughts on what this role entails:

Millman and Wilson (1999) suggest that global account managers 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".

Millman (2000) alludes to the "… political/cultural milieu" at the buyer/seller interface and coping with the unrelenting pressures of different time zones".

Wilson, Croom, Millman and Weilbaker (2000) envisage the global account manager as "… knowing the people to speak to, the buttons to press and the strings to pull, both in their own organisation and that of the customer".

As we, and our fellow researchers, proceeded with qualitative research, a tentative typology of global account managers began to emerge which enabled us to present a clearer picture of what we mean by political entrepreneur (Croom et al, 1999). These three manager types were labelled *Analyst, Politician,* and *Entrepreneurial Strategist*. The skill sets associated with these types were seen as being both hierarchical and cumulative – hierarchical in the sense that Analysts tend to be relatively new to GAM and are primarily sales oriented, while Politicians and Entrepreneurial Strategists tend to possess broader business experience, together with higher levels of managerial/commercial know-how and sophistication. The cumulative component is important in that the Entrepreneurial Strategist must also develop analytical and political skills.

Analysts tends to be team orientated trouble shooters typically possessing outstanding knowledge of products/services, technologies, and customer industries. Many Analysts perceive themselves primarily as international sales managers focusing on global sales targets, sales from regional/national territories, share of customer spend, rather than upon opportunities for enhancing levels of value creation and customer profitability.

Politicians combine diplomatic and linguistic skills with cultural empathy and knowledge of global business trends/opportunities. They engage their senior managers in the GAM process where appropriate and are adept at achieving objectives via influence/persuasion.

Entrepreneurial Strategists operate with a fair degree of autonomy. They display high levels of business acumen and look beyond the confines of exchange relationships for business opportunities. They seek out synergistic potential through combining core competencies of their own organisation with those of their global account, even if this requires the formation of new ways of working and organisational entities.

To these three typographies we would add the function of *global co-ordinator*. At a basic level, where business/account objectives may be concerned with increasing global sales volume, the global account managers' role is concerned with coordinating the operational capabilities (manufacturing, logistics, billing, packaging etc) of the supplier organisation to ensure that the customer receives a global offering that also conforms to local demand within a uniform pricing structure.

As the complexity and strategic importance of the role develops, co-ordination encompasses the realisation of synergies among individual, team and organisational competencies. Synergistic value and leverage is created through the co-ordination of these competencies to address operational and strategic orders of problem resolution that create cost savings, innovative ways of managing the value creation process, and the realisation of entrepreneurial opportunity.

The role of the political entrepreneur in the above typology is clearly a boundary-spanning role, performed at both the *internal* interface between global and national account management (embedded in the headquarters/subsidiary relationship) and at the *external* interface between the selling company and the dispersed activities of its global account. Our concern in this paper is largely with the latter interface, where much of the global account managers' potential conflict/ambiguity depends on positive or negative perceptions of his/her mediating role. From hereon, understanding of this role will be developed using our conceptual model of the global account manager's personal identification with his/her employer and the global account organisation.
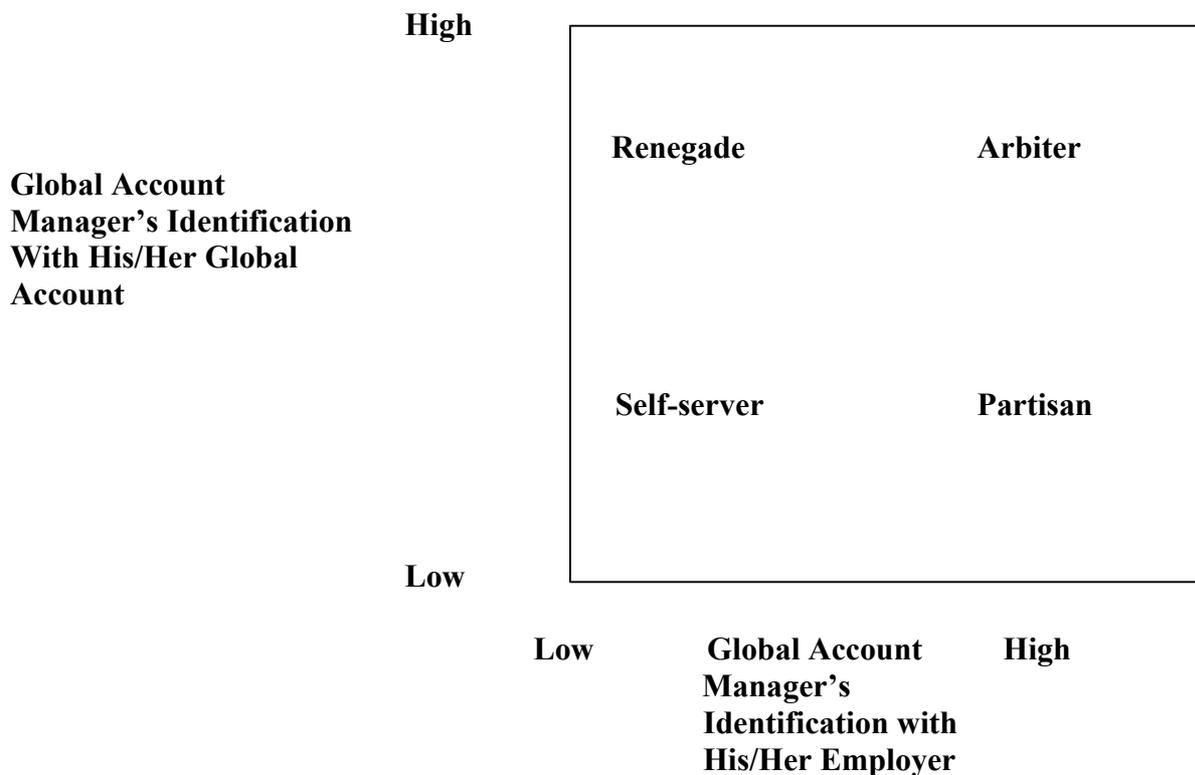
3. The Global Account Manager as "Political Entrepreneur"
3.1 A Model of Boundary-Spanning Behaviour
From our review of the literature it will come as no surprise to find that we see the career development of global account managers as firmly rooted in how well he/she is prepared for, adapts to, and performs the boundary-spinning role. This led us naturally towards a conceptual model of role behaviour which incorporates career aspects of the employer/employee relationship yet allows us to elaborate on the political/entrepreneurial aspects of performing the global account manager's role in a multicultural environment. Our model – which we term an "Identification Space" – is represented graphically in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1. A Model of Boundary-spanning Behaviour

Global Account Manager's Identification With His/Her Global Account

	High	
	Renegade	Arbiter
	Self-server	Partisan
	Low	

Low   **Global Account Manager's Identification with His/Her Employer**   **High**

Self-server (Low, Low). One of the most popular characterisations of the Self-server in the identification space is based on the observation that some global account managers may feel a closer personal affiliation with their professional career track, focusing on short-term self-interests rather than the long-term interests of both their employer *and* global account. This lack of organisational identification may, it is argued, induce some managers towards "promiscuous" behaviour and being easily weaned away by competitors.

A more charitable explanation may lie in the unattractiveness of some employers, industries and customers. There is little doubt that some global account managers, perhaps a small minority, face the inevitable combination of working for a poor employer and allocated responsibility for a "difficult" account that no one else among their colleagues wants because staff are not easy to get on with or it operates in particular industries or parts of the world where they are reluctant to go. It must be admitted from the outset that there are glamorous industries/accounts and places to live/work, and there are much less glamorous ones where career prospects for would-be high fliers are somewhat restricted. Perhaps someone has to get the short straw!

Renegades (Low/High). Here strong affinity of the global account manager towards his/her account and what it stands for may be bound up in close personal relationships and attractiveness of the account, or its national home culture, in a way that transcends the commercial relationship. Reasons for this increasingly one-sided display of loyalty are not hard to find: first, there is evidence to suggest that some Renegades are attracted to their account because it is an acknowledged leader or preferred employer; and second, many

knowledgeable and experienced global account managers are valued and respected more by staff in their account than in their own employer's organisation.

Renegade behaviour may be particularly associated with situations where the global account manager experiences cultural dissonance with the employing organisation. There are valid reasons for appointing global account managers who share the same cultural background as the customer organisation (e.g. appointing a French person to manage relationships with a global company headquartered in France, a German in Germany etc). Where the supplier is American, or British or Japanese, however, then there are dangers that the global account manager may feel culturally alienated from his/her global parent.

Over-identification with an account is normally frowned upon in the employer's organisation and seldom escapes the eye of colleagues. Typical negative comments tend to focus on instances, real or imaginary, where global account managers have "given way in price negotiations" or "pressed too hard for resources" to service what is seen as *their* highly personalised account. "Who is working for whom?" is a familiar question. The situation is exacerbated when global account managers occupy an office in the account's premises, albeit for sound commercial reasons; and also when issues such as promotions, job rotation and compensation are on the agenda during appraisal or career development interviews.

Partisans (High/Low). Strong employer orientation among global account managers manifests itself in various ways. From the employer's perspective, the global account manager can be relied upon to present the offering in a positive light and to act as a corporate "culture carrier" wherever he/she goes around the world. On the negative side, this can be seen as ethnocentric behaviour, verging on cultural arrogance, especially when structures/systems are imposed by headquarters on local account teams and there is little in the way of cultural empathy shown to customers and others on the receiving end. Partisans often see their career prospects as tied to political developments at headquarters, making every attempt to remain plugged in to the right network of managers.

Arbiter (High/High). This role represents a well balanced global/local approach which gives due respect to the benefits of meritocracy and cultural diversity. The global account manager feels comfortable occupying the mediating role, reconciling the kind of conflicts and ambiguities that arise inevitably when cultures collide.

While both *political* and *entrepreneurial* behaviours may also be observed in Self-servers, Renegades and Partisans, it is in this part of the identification space, that of the Arbiter, that we see these attributes being used to best strategic effect on behalf of both the global supplier, their customer and ultimately the career aspirations of the global account manager.

The space occupied by the global account manager impacts strongly upon the role they perform and the way in which they perform it. The Self-server is likely to focus on analytical, political, and entrepreneurial capabilities largely for personal advantage. Renegades and Partisans are unlikely to realise the full potential of the buyer/seller relationship because their actions may undermine the interests of one or other of the parties. Both may be accomplished analysts and highly political in their activities; both may be adept at recognising and seizing entrepreneurial opportunity, and realising strategic intent; but neither may be able to exploit the synergistic potentials inherent in the balanced integration of buyer and seller competencies and interests.

We observe that analytical, political, entrepreneurial, and co-ordinating skills are best employed to create synergistic value for both buyer and seller when employed by the global account manager occupying the Arbiter space. Here the role of the *political entrepreneur* has great significance for career development of the global account manager.

Occupation of any one of the four dominant rules in the space should be regarded as a fluid situation. Migration or oscillation is possible along either axis, and diagonally, mainly depending upon concerted efforts to build trust/commitment and on uncontrollable events. Unfortunately, these efforts to build relationships get progressively more difficult to sustain and there may be diminishing returns.

Increasing identification of the global account manager with his/her employer requires the latter's recognition of the manager's contribution to the account relationship, perhaps reinforced by financial reward; but often more effectively via symbolic gestures such as: gaining the ear of senior executives; inclusion in strategy development processes; promoting internally the strategic importance and successes of the account team.

Increasing identification of the global account manager with his/her account is a somewhat different matter. It is here that the personal qualities of the manager come to the fore, such as: demonstrating thorough knowledge of the account's business activities, supply chain and industry developments; building credibility as a problem-solver; becoming a sympathetic listener/confident; and being visibly proactive in joint value creation.

Many of the factors affecting identification, however, are outside the control of the global account manager, resources are limited, and access to individuals across dispersed sites varies considerably. At the individual level, changes in just a handful of key staff on both sides can dramatically alter the network of personal relationships. Indeed, one major source of anxiety among global account managers is the fear that many years of relationship building and commercial arrangements can be undone by dislocations related to mergers/acquisitions, strategic alliances, downsizing, delayering etc. Operating in the role of Arbiter in the top right hand corner of the space, therefore, demands exceptional managerial/leadership skills to navigate a way through the political/cultural milieu and to identify/exploit opportunities to create superior customer value. Exhibit 2 summarises these issues.

Exhibit 2. Political and Entrepreneurial Boundary–spanning Behaviour of Global Account Managers.

	Political Role	**Entrepreneurial Role**
Self-server	Acts to manipulate both buyer and seller for personal advantage and protection.	Seeks business opportunities to achieve personal career aspirations and objectives.
Renegade	Manipulates supplier for the customer's advantage. Identifies with the customer's corporate and/or national culture.	Identifies commercial advantage for the customer with little consideration of the strategic/operational impact upon the seller.
Partisan	Attempts to increase personal standing with the seller. Identifies with the seller's corporate and/or national culture.	Identifies commercial advantage for the seller with little consideration of the strategic/ operational impact upon the customer.
Arbiter	Facilitates achievement of relational and financial goals that benefit buyer, seller, *and* self. Builds multicultural relationships and promotes meritocracy	Seeks business opportunities and perceives synergistic potentials of value to buyer, seller, *and* self. Geocentric approach to identifying/transferring expertise and exploiting opportunities.

4. Observations on Factors Affecting Career Development

Size and Composition of the Global Account Portfolio. When starting a GAM programme, most senior executives claim to have a good feel for what constitutes a manageable portfolio of global accounts. Over time, however there is a tendency for the portfolio to grow in size, scarce resources are dissipated and there is a real danger of the GAM programme losing credibility. Recognition of a bloated portfolio of global accounts typically involves revisiting the criteria for definition, followed by the inevitable cull of accounts and account managers, particularly those responsible for accounts vulnerable to relegation. This is made even worse when the criteria are fuzzy or there are accounts known to be included in the portfolio not on commercial merit but because of a powerful senior executive has attached his/her name to them. As one disaffected global account manager observed: "Dedicating your life to some accounts may not be a smart career move." His recent experience was probably influential in placing him temporarily in the Self-server part ofthe identification space though he had previously exhibited potential to enter the Arbiter part of the space.

Responsibility for More Than One Global Account. We have not ignored in our model the possibility that global account managers may be allocated responsibility for two or more non-competing accounts. This creates the potential for further divisions of identification and may trigger dysfunctional behaviour. An example drawn from our research will illustrate what can happen in such a situation.   It concerns an account manager responsible for two accounts.   The first, a Belgian company, rated at about number 15-20 in the supplier's portfolio in terms of sales turnover and representing only 5 per cent customer share (ie with significant potential).   The second, an Italian company rated in the top 5 and representing over 50 per cent customer share.

Her Belgian account treated her at arms length "…in the style of old-fashioned Purchasing", demanding long term price agreements and the relationship began to deteriorate from day one. In contrast, she felt particularly close to the Italian account and had "earned the run of the company", ie open access to staff at all levels. Here is an extract from our interview:

> Of the Belgian account: "They spoke Belgian, or was it Flemish, I never found out which one it was. I had a really awful relationship with them…They really pissed me off. I came out of there and thought `I'm not going to stick my neck out for you`…and I didn't".

> Of the Italian account: "Yet the Italians were courteous and very straightforward with me. They weren't aggressive…I put myself out for them. I did things that I didn't have to do. Price-wise, I got the best pricing I could give them. I did favours for them. I pulled out the stops to get products. But for the other one (Belgian), I wouldn't do anything. Not happy with them at all".

The above dialogue suggests that the account manager played the Self-server and Renegade roles respectively. We would not attribute occasional oscillation into the Partisan role with the Belgian account because she later revealed her dissatisfaction with her employer, offering anecdotal evidence of "perverse hiring/promotion practices" and how her director of global accountshad "had his nose put out of joint" when a prestigious account was taken away from him".

Uncertainty surrounding Career Path. To use the term career path in GAM may be premature. GAM is in its infancy, suggesting that, while generalisations may be attempted regarding the source of recruitment/promotion for managers (eg from within the sales function), there is very little experience of where they go to afterwards.

One of the open questions, for example, is similar to the one that has been asked many times of expatriate managers and export sales representatives: "Is the role of a global account manager a phase in a person's career or a career in itself?".   This spawns many other questions about whether there is an ideal age and experience window for global account managers (often given in opinion as 35-45 years), the impact on mobility of career couples and family commitments, the sensitive issue of gender and equal career opportunities in male-dominated societiesand industries, and whether anxieties/ambiguities inherent in the role make incumbents more prone to "burnout".

Career "progression" within the account management activity could, for example, include promotion from lesser to more strategically important accounts and promotion from global

account manager to director or vice-president of global accounts as a logical move. Many executives occupying the latter positions in the hierarchy may themselves have had international experience, though not global account management experience.

Recruitment of Global Account Managers. This appears to be predominantly internal to the selling company (eg from the ranks of national account managers, sales managers, and international business development managers) and takes a rather informal approach. We have traced recruitment decisions to people being "ear marked for higher things", "succession within a team", "from a limited pool within sales", and perhaps cynically "…because he/she was available at the time". We concur with Cushner and Brislin's (1996, p8) observation that, even though organisations profess to abide by a variety of affirmative action or equal rights rulings, "it is widely known that many job vacancies are *wired* ahead of time and go to individuals known by influential people in the firm".

Training and Development. This is a major cause for concern. Appropriate training/development programmes for new and existing global account managers cannot really be devised until some of the aforementioned career facilitators/blockers are understood and built into a human resource strategy which supports a long term vision of business direction/development. Thereis evidence of a minority of global account managers thrown in at the deep end and left to define for themselves what is meant by the global dimension. The vast majority, however, have sought some form of up-front language and cross-cultural development programme to reduce culture shock, topped up with workshops and immersion courses to update on particular global/regional/national business issues. Some are trying mentoring programmes with mixed success.

Global account managers do not seem to be looking for traditional "onwards and upwards" approaches to career planning. They recognise the changed employment environment and are more pragmatic than many of their predecessors when contemplating careers in global business. They also know that political and entrepreneurial skills are in short supply. In our view, development of these meta-skills remains one of the limiting factors in rolling out effective GAM programmes.

5.   Agenda for Future Research
General Areas
- Longitudinal case studies of individual career paths in GAM.

- Human resource perspectives on career transitions to/from GAM.

- Top executive's perceptions of careers in GAM.

- A comparative study of the "career" construct in GAM in high/low context cultures.

- Cross-culture training/development programmes for global account managers.

Specific Areas
- How does compensation of the global account manager and the global account team affect their performance in the political and entrepreneurial roles?

- Does gender impact upon the effectiveness of the global account manager in the performance of their political and entrepreneurial roles?

- Are there changing trends in the catchment area from which global account managers are drawn?

- Is there life after being a global account manager?

Conclusion

In this paper we have highlighted how the career development of global account managers impacts on the effectiveness of GAM programmes.

Using a conceptual model – The Identification Space – we explored dominant managerial role behaviours at the buyer/seller interface and provided insights on the kind of political and entrepreneurial meta-skills/competencies required to perform the boundary-spanning role. This revealed how many of the tensions and ambiguities associated with various role positions in the space relate to the earlier definition of the global account portfolio and the allocationof accounts to individual managers.

Allocation of responsibilities for global accounts is one of the most visible signals of current career standing and future prospects. While timing was alluded to as a critical factor in determining who gets which account(s), we also emphasised that differing degrees of personal kudos are attached to each account depending on internal ratings of current/potential strategic importance. Many global account managers perceive that their careers can be significantly enhanced or blighted by their initial allocation and any subsequent reallocations.

We have found that our focus on political and entrepreneurial aspects of the global account manager's role has raised the level of debate on the nature of training /development interventions, succession management, and overall global account strategy. There is little doubt that we have only scratched the surface of career development in GAM, especially in such "soft" areas as organisational identification and political/entrepreneurial behaviour. Nevertheless, our agenda for future research points to some of the shortcomings and is indicative of our priorities.

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