

# **EXPLORING THE ROLE OF SALES TEAM USE IN THE MANAGEMENT OF INTERNATIONAL KEY ACCOUNTS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY**

## **Abstract**

This study explores the role of sales team use in the management of international key account customers. While several researchers in the previous literature have addressed the benefits of sales team use, others have noted that in the management of international key accounts the use of sales teams may result in managerial and organizational challenges that may be difficult to overcome. By using a survey data from large industrial firms in Finland, we compare the differences between suppliers that have established a team and those who do not have a team in place. The results show that the level of customer knowledge acquisition, dissemination and utilization are perceived higher in the group representing a team-based key account management compared to the non-team group. Moreover, supplier's key account performance is also perceived higher in the group representing team-based key account management.

**Keywords:** Key account management, sales team, customer knowledge

## **Introduction**

Industrial customers are increasingly rationalizing their supplier base (Harvey et al., 2003) and demanding for additional services, consistency in products, services and prices worldwide from their suppliers (Montgomery and Yip, 2000). As a consequence, suppliers are striving for a more intense coordination and integration of sales activities for serving their international key accounts in a consistent manner (Arnold et al., 2000; Montgomery and Yip, 2000, 1999; Sheth and

Sharma, 2008). One way to improve internal coordination is to establish a specific key account team which supports key account managers in the coordination of complex sales processes across products, functional units, divisions and sales regions worldwide (Homburg et al., 2000; Moon and Armstrong, 1994). Previous research suggests that key account teams increase the efficiency in key account management (KAM) for example by representing a collective base of customer knowledge (Harvey et al., 2003), improving the feeling of togetherness among the team members (Geiger and Turley, 2005), and increasing key account's commitment to the relationship with the supplier (Arnett et al., 2005). However, some researchers note that the implementation of key account teams may involve great managerial challenges and increase the complexity and fragmentation in suppliers' sales organizations for example due to overlapping authority between employees (Arnold et al., 2000; Birkinshaw et al., 2001; Harvey et al., 2003). This problem tends to occur especially in multinational corporations where the authority of local sales organizations is threatened by new key account structures that are often established alongside the local organizations (Birkinshaw et al., 2001).

Despite the managerial challenges involved in the team implementation and the management of sales teams in general (Lambe et al., 2009), assignment of sales teams to the strategically important key accounts has become a common practise (Homburg et al., 2000). The importance of key account teams has been addressed also in the literature (e.g. Arnett et al., 2005; Harvey et al., 2003; Nätti et al., 2006), but it appears however, that the use of sales teams is still under researched among academicians (Arnold et al., 2000; Kempeners and van der Hart, 1999). In particular, a little empirical research has been conducted on the use of sales team in the international context although KAM is increasingly becoming a management practice with a geographical dimension (Sheth and Sharma, 2008; Wengler et al., 2006;). Further, as most of the

existing studies have been conceptual or qualitative in nature (Homburg et al., 2002; Ivens and Pardo, 2008; Jones et al., 2005), it is still unclear how the use of sales teams is related to the intra-organizational factors, such as customer knowledge processing and KAM team esprit de corps, identified as determinants of successful KAM (e.g. Day 2000; Shi et al. 2004; Workman et al., 2003). Moreover, though the management of geographically extensive international key accounts appears above all as an organizational and managerial challenge (Birkinshaw et al., 2001; Harvey et al., 2003; Workman et al., 2003), only a few researchers have examined the performance implications of the intra-organisational KAM structures adopted by supplier firms.

Considering the above research gap, this study aims at increasing our understanding on the role of KAM teams in the management of international key account customers from the view of the industrial supplier firms. More precisely, by using a sample of large industrial firms in Finland, the aim of this paper is to examine the differences in terms of customer knowledge processing behaviors, KAM team esprit de corps and supplier's KAM performance between suppliers using a sales team and suppliers that have not established a specific sales team for managing their strategically important, international key account. By doing so, we attempt to answer to a call for more research on intra-organizational structural aspects of KAM (Arnold et al., 2000; Workman et al., 2003). The remainder of this article is organized as follows: First, main concepts are clarified and previous KAM literature reviewed. Next, the role of sales teams in the management of international key accounts is discussed and research hypotheses developed. Then, research design and results of empirical analysis are discussed. Finally, we end the article with key findings, limitations and suggestions for future research.

## **Theoretical background**

A number of different terms have been provided in the literature to designate the strategically most important customers. The term “key account” is widely adopted especially in Europe (e.g. Homburg et al., 2002; Ivens and Pardo, 2007; Ojasalo, 2001; Pardo et al., 1995) but also terms “national accounts” (e.g. Boles et al. 1999; Dishman and Nitse, 1998; Weilbaker and Weeks, 1997; Stevenson, 1981), strategic account (Storbacka et al., 1999) and “global account” (e.g. Arnold et al., 2000; Birkinshaw et al. 2001; Shi et al., 2004, 2005; Wilson and Weilbaker, 2004; Yip and Madsen, 1996) have been used. Global account management can be regarded as an extension of key account management because it widens the scope of key account management across geographical borders (Yip and Madsen, 1996) and thus, involves a higher level of both intra-organizational and inter-organizational complexity and cultural diversity compared to the traditional KAM (Gosselin and Bauwen, 2006; Shi et al., 2004; 2005). The focus of the present study is the management of international, but not necessarily truly global key accounts. Therefore, the term key account is used instead of the term global account.

Homburg et al. (2000, pp. 463) define KAM as *"the designation of special personnel and /or performance of special activities directed at an organization's most important customers"*. The aim of key account management is to enforce the principles of relationship marketing for the large business customers in order to develop closer relationships with them (Cannon and Narayandas, 2001; Homburg et al., 2000). From the traditional transactional selling key account management differs in higher sales volumes from single customers and long-term time horizon of the key account relationships (Cannon and Narayandas, 2001). In addition, the exchange between

supplier and the key account extends typically across functional (and geographical) borders in the organization, requiring thus a more broad focus and a higher number of actors involved - compared to the traditional selling (Cannon and Narayandas, 2001; Ivens and Pardo, 2007). In general, the aim of KAM is to offer 'something extra' to the strategically most important customers of the supplier.

Although KAM appears still as an under researched area of academic research in many ways, it is not a new concept in business-to-business marketing however. It has been gaining an increasing acceptance among business managers already since early 1960's (Stevenson, 1981). The main driving forces for the increasing implementation of KAM during the last decades have been the rapid pace of change in the business environment, such as the refinement of processes and increasing rate of centralized purchasing, rationalization of the supplier base, market maturity characterized with mergers and acquisitions, heightened customer power in the terms of trade, and increasing competition (Harvey et al., 2003; McDonald et al., 2003; Piercy and Lane, 2006; Wengler et al., 2006; Yip and Madsen, 1996). However, although the implementation of KAM is often seen as a strategic response by the supplier firms confronted by powerful customers, KAM should not be seen only as a defensive strategy, but instead as a proactive evolvement from traditional product-focused sales organisations towards a customer-focused organisation and customer-focused strategy (Gosselin and Bauwen, 2006).

Key account management has been studied from several different perspectives. Homburg et al. (2002) categorize previous research on KAM into three types of studies based on the unit of analysis: studies that have examined individual key account managers, their characteristics and abilities (e.g. Harvey et al., 2004; Millman, 1996; Senqupta et al., 2000; Wilson and Millman,

2003; Wotruba and Castleberry, 1991), the nature of dyadic relationships between the supplier and the key account customers (e.g. evolutionary path of key account relationship development by Millman and Wilson, 1994) and the design of key account management programs on organizational level (Homburg et al., 2002; Kempeners and van den Hart, 1999; Wengler et al., 2006; Workman et al., 2003). Despite the substantial body of key account management literature, it is widely recognized that intra-organizational processes for managing strategically important customers are still lacking empirical academic research (e.g Homburg et al., 2002; Workman et al., 2003) as only a few researchers have made empirical analysis of the antecedents and consequences of intra-organizational processes and behaviors characteristic for key account management. For example, Homburg et al. (2002) classified different organizational approaches to KAM empirically and identified eight different approaches: top-management KAM, middle-management KAM, operating-level KAM, cross-functional, dominant KAM, unstructured KAM, isolated KAM, country-club KAM and no KAM. In this study, the use of teams was most extensive in the top-management KAM which was highly formalized but also the most profitable approach to managing the key accounts (ibid). In their study Workman et al. (2003) found that KAM team esprit de corps, access to marketing and sales resources, activity intensity, activity proactiveness, and top management involvement have a positive influence on KAM effectiveness. Interestingly, according to their results the use of teams on the other hand was not associated with KAM effectiveness. Although these studies provide interesting contributions on the intra-organizational determinants of successful key account management and characteristics of key account organizations in general, much more needs to be done if we want to fully understand how to organize for and manage the strategically important key account customers especially in the international context.

### **Sales teams in international key account management**

The importance of using teams in the management of key account customers has been addressed by several researchers (e.g. Arnett et al., 2005; Jones et al., 2005; Perry et al., 1999; Rangarajan et al., 2004). Sales teams are needed because individual salespersons rarely have sufficient knowledge, authority and influence over functional borders to manage complex key account relationships (Workman et al., 2003). The functions of the sales team include for example: coordinating the activities of team members across the organization in line with its overall goals, maintaining knowledge about the customer and the customer's market and industry, and coordinating the day-to-day selling activities (Deeter-Schmeltz and Ramsey, 1995; Rangarajan et al., 2004). Key account teams are typically cross-functional teams uniting professionals with diverse backgrounds and positions (Rangarajan et al., 2004). By establishing sales teams, supplier firms are better able to respond to the key accounts' demand for consistency in services, products, prices and terms of trade worldwide (Harvey et al., 2003; Montgomery and Yip, 1999). Teams are also established to increase cooperation with the customer, protect from the competitors and improve the visibility of pricing (Birkinshaw et al., 2001).

The management of international key accounts elevates knowledge needs to a new level (Arnold et al., 2001). In order to be able to sense new opportunities in the market and create added value to the customer, key account managers need to learn to know their customers organization-wide (Campbell, 2003; Weitz and Bradford, 1999). They need knowledge about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and strategies of the customer (Weitz and Bradford, 1999), but also sophisticated knowledge about the various markets in which the customer operates (Harvey et al.,

2003; Shi et al., 2004). In practice gaining such collective knowledge is often troublesome however, as the management of a relationship with a single international key account is in fact often about management of a network or a web of relationships, which further results in the dispersion of customer knowledge within the supplier's organization (Birkinshaw et al., 2001). The information needed for the decision-making must be gathered from multiple countries and from culturally heterogeneous group members, over whom the team leader typically does not have clear authority (Harvey et al., 2003). Moreover, simply an integration of worldwide customer-specific sales records can be a great challenge for firms if the internal reporting systems are not compatible for the sales made through variety of different channels (Arnold et al., 2000). Interestingly, in their study Arnold et al. (2000) found that the internal communication inside the supplier organization was even stronger predictor of account performance than communication with the customer. This finding was explained by the tendency of key account managers to work closely with the customers and know their customers better than their own firms (ibid). Harvey et al. (2003) noted that competencies, such as abilities to "assess, leverage and integrate diverse customer knowledge bases", may well become a major source of success for the key account managers working in a constantly globalizing business environment. Given the extensive geographical scope of the international key accounts and multiple sources of customer-specific knowledge, these findings imply that the management of international key accounts requires appropriate infrastructures for acquiring, disseminating and utilization of customer-specific knowledge to create customer value and competitive advantage.

Previous research suggests that teams can be useful mechanisms in acquiring customer knowledge and enhancing the coordination of customer knowledge flows in sales organizations (e.g. Goh, 2002; Joshi and Sharma, 2004; Katzenbach and Smith, 2005; Shi et al., 2004). The use

of sales team constitutes a forum for discussing customer-specific matters (Nätti et al., 2006) and therefore enables more efficient knowledge sharing among the team members (Geiger and Turley, 2005) and integration of customer knowledge (Katzenbach and Smith, 2005). Moreover, the team constitutes a breeding-ground for new ideas and enhanced knowledge as the members have the opportunity to share dispersed knowledge, argue, challenge, and create new knowledge to be further utilized in terms of new products, processes, and services (Sapsed et al., 2002). The team therefore represents a collective base of knowledge for managing the customer relationship in a manner that is difficult for competitors to imitate (Harvey et al. 2003). The implementation of team makes customer-specific common goals more transparent for the employees and thus, easier to follow. According to Geiger and Turley (2005) the use of sales team also increases the feeling of togetherness among employees. The use of teams is thus likely to result as an increase in the level of KAM team esprit de corps which Workman et al. (2003, pp. 10) define as “*the extent to which people involved in the management of key accounts feel obligated to common goals and to each other*”.

Previous research implies that the use of teams is likely to result in higher level of supplier's KAM performance compared to the non-team KAM. Firstly, the team represents a “one face to the customer” meaning that the responsibility of taking care of the relationship is a centralized responsibility of the pointed customer team, thus facilitating coordination of sales processes and enabling consistent service worldwide (Harvey et al., 2003). As a relationship-specific investment the use of teams may also increase the supplier's strategic value to the customer (Harvey et al., 2003; Ivens and Pardo, 2008) because due to their complex needs, the key accounts tend to expect certain status and authority from their supplier to be able to perform as expected (McDonald et al., 2003). In their study Arnett et al. (2005) found that by enhancing the

development of collaborative relationships, the use of team increases relationship commitment of key accounts and thus, makes it more difficult for the key account to change the supplier. Secondly, it is assumed here that the use of teams is likely to result in higher level of supplier's KAM performance due to the above proposed enhanced capability to process customer specific knowledge. For example, Jayachandran et al. (2005) found that customer knowledge processing behaviors are positively related to customer satisfaction and customer retention. Respectively, Halonen-Rollins (2008) found that the use of customer knowledge is positively related to supplier's customer performance

Based on the above literature review we posit the following hypotheses:

*H1: Team-based KAM is associated with higher levels of key account –related knowledge acquisition, dissemination and utilization compared to the non-team KAM*

*H2: Team-based KAM is associated with a higher level of esprit de corps among the employees involved in the management of the key account customer compared to the non-team KAM*

*H3: Team-based KAM is associated with a higher level of supplier's KAM performance compared to the non-team KAM*

## **Research design**

The survey data was collected in 2007 by means of a structured print questionnaire from Finnish industrial firms that employ a minimum 200 persons. Amadeus database was used for drawing

the sample. Initially 361 firms were identified and 171 found eligible to take part in the study when contacted by phone. Two criteria were used to determine the eligibility of the respondent: firstly it was ascertained that the firm has business-to-business sales coordinated from Finland, and secondly, that the firm had identified its strategically most important key customers. Higher level managers were first contacted to elicit cooperation. They were asked to recommend between one and three knowledgeable respondents (key account managers or persons in corresponding positions) responsible for the management of different key account customers. The respondents were asked to give their responses from perspective of their most important key account relationship in terms of annual sales volume. Individual key accounts as unit of analysis were considered important because pre-interviews with sales managers indicated that intra-organizational processes for managing key account customers may differ significantly between the different key accounts. 13 firms refused to take part in the study. A total of 395 questionnaires including a pre-paid return envelope and a cover letter were sent to 158 firms that agreed to take part in the study. Finally, 169 questionnaires were received from 97 firms out of the 395 posted. Thus, satisfactory response rate was 56,7 % (97/171) on the company level, and 42,8 % (169/395) in terms of the sent and received questionnaires. For the purposes of the present study only questionnaires that had been filled in from a perspective of international key accounts (a total of 112 responses) were included in the analysis.

The non-response bias was checked following the procedure suggested by Armstrong and Overton (1977). Several variables between the early and late respondents were compared. The comparisons indicated no signs of non-response bias. As key informant technique was used in the data collection, Harman's one factor test (Podsakoff and Organ, 1986) was used to check for a

common method bias. The first factor accounted for only 21 per cent of variance and no common factor underlying the data was found.

## **Measures**

A seven-point Likert scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' was used to measure all constructs except the use of teams which was measured with a dummy variable yes/no. A principal component analysis with varimax rotation was used to obtain composite measures. Two different measures were used to measure customer knowledge acquisition. Firstly, the overall intensity of *customer knowledge acquisition* was measured with four items adapted from Jayachandran et al. (2005) and Kohli et al. (1993). The items grasped for example the degree of customer interaction for acquiring customer-specific knowledge. The reliability coefficient of the Cronbach's alpha was 0.73, which according to Nunnally (1978) indicates acceptable reliability. Secondly, a seven-point Likert scale from 'not at all' to 'very much' was used to measure the amount of customer-specific knowledge acquired in terms of 10 different type of customer knowledge concerning the key account. To name just a few, these were for example product- and/or service and production processes of the key account, planned strategic moves of the key account, competitive and technological situation in the key account's field of business and key account's customers. Summated scales for these items were not formed because that would have been resulted in a loss of information. *Customer knowledge dissemination* was measured with five items adapted from Kohli et al. (1993), Jayachandran et al. (2005) and Cadogan et al. (1999). These items assessed for example the degree to which people involved in the management of the key account relationship share key account-related matters with each others, and the extend to which key account-related knowledge was disseminated to those who need it. The reliability

coefficient of the Cronbach's alpha was 0.75. *Customer knowledge utilization* was measured with five items adapted from Kohli et al. (1993), Jayachandran et al. (2005) and Moorman (1995). These items assessed for example the degree to which own customer relationship management processes were evaluated based on new key account-related knowledge and the degree to which customer knowledge was used to develop new value-adding solutions to the customer. Cronbach's alpha for the construct was 0.83. *Esprit de corps* was measured with four items taken from Workman et al. (2003). This construct measured the extent to which people involved in the key account management 'pulled together', that is, were committed to common goals and to each others. Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.74. Finally, supplier's KAM performance was measured with a subjective measure consisting of four items that assessed annual sales to the key account, supplier's share of the key account's total purchases, degree of key account's satisfaction and profitability of the key account. Cronbach's alpha for the construct was 0.69.

## **Results**

An independent samples t-test was used to test the differences between the two groups- namely those that have established sales team for managing their strategically important international key account customer and those who do not have a team in place. As hypothesized the comparison was made in terms of customer knowledge processing behaviors, KAM team esprit de corps and supplier's KAM performance. The results are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Differences between non-team KAM and team-based KAM

	<b>Team</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Sd.</b>	<b>T.</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Duration of the key account relationship	No	51	15,71	12,85	0.890	0,376
	Yes	54	13,72	13,72		
Customer knowledge acquisition	No	53	5,25	1,03	-2,647	0,009**
	Yes	58	5,72	0,82		
Customer knowledge dissemination	No	54	4,79	0,99	-2,241	0,027*
	Yes	58	5,20	0,94		
Customer knowledge utilization	No	54	4,07	1,15	-3.706	0,000**
	Yes	58	4,80	0,92		
Esprit de corps	No	54	4,70	0,90	-1,930	0,056
	Yes	58	5,02	0,85		
Supplier's KAM performance	No	54	7,18	1,31	-2,136	0,035*
	Yes	58	7,69	1,20		

\*p<0,05, \*\*p<0,01

In order to gain a deeper understanding on the role of sales teams in terms of customer knowledge processing behaviors, also the degree of customer knowledge acquisition per each type of customer knowledge was assessed. Independent samples t-tests were used to test the differences. The results are presented in tables 2.

Table 2. Differences in customer knowledge acquisition in terms of the type of customer knowledge

Type of customer knowledge	Team	N	Mean	Sd.	T.	Sig.
Product- and/or service needs of the key account	No	53	4,79	1,28	-4,175	0,000**
	Yes	58	5,72	1,07		
Production processes of the key account	No	52	4,37	1,55	-2,646	0,009*
	Yes	57	5,1	1,37		
Planned strategic moves of the key account	No	53	4,66	1,37	-2,337	0,021*
	Yes	58	5,24	1,24		
Competitive situation in the key account's field of business	No	53	5,21	1,23	-1,903	0,060
	Yes	58	5,6	0,95		
Technological development in the key account's field of business	No	53	4,23	1,65	-2,857	0,005*
	Yes	57	5,1	1,38		
Financial position of the key account	No	53	5,23	1,22	-1,987	0,049*
	Yes	58	5,67	1,15		
Mergers and acquisitions in the key account's field of business	No	53	5,3	1,28	-1,919	0,058
	Yes	58	5,74	1,13		
Marketing strategies of the key account	No	53	4,23	1,49	-1,283	0,202
	Yes	58	4,59	1,46		
Business plans of the key account	No	53	4,26	1,57	-1,576	0,118
	Yes	58	4,71	1,39		
Key account's customers	No	53	4,04	1,69	-1,919	0,058
	Yes	58	4,64	1,61		

\*p<0,05, \*\*p<0,01

Table 1. shows the descriptive statistics of the variables and the results of the independent samples t-tests. 58 of the 112 respondents included in the analysis have a specific team for managing the relationship with their international key account customer whereas 54 of the respondents do not have a team in place. On average, in team-based KAM and non-team KAM, the relationships with the key accounts are similar in terms of duration of the key account relationships.

From the table 1 it can be seen that suppliers that have established a sales team for managing their international key account, perceive higher levels of customer-related knowledge acquisition, dissemination and utilization compared to the non-team group, thus supporting hypothesis H1. Moreover, from the table 2 it can be seen that suppliers having the sales teams are more active in

acquiring knowledge that concerns product- and/or service needs of the key account, production processes of the key account, planned strategic moves of the key account, technological development in the key account's field of business and financial position of the key account. It seems therefore, that those having the team are more concerned about the strategic future direction of the relationship for example in terms of technological development compared to the non-team group. This finding could also imply that in general teams are established more often for serving those customers that have complex needs and expect R&D-related cooperation from their suppliers. Nevertheless, the above findings give empirical support to the understanding in previous literature that the use of teams is positively related to the intra-organizational knowledge processing behaviors of supplier firms (e.g. Nätti et al., 2006; Day 2000). The groups were equally active in acquiring knowledge about competitive situation in the key account's field of business, mergers and acquisitions taking place in the key account's field of business, marketing strategies, business plans and customers of the key account.

According to the results, it appears, that the use of teams itself is not what determines the level of KAM team esprit de corps among employees. Although the level of KAM team esprit de corps was perceived higher among the group of team-based KAM, the difference between the groups was not statistically significant, thus failing to find support for the hypothesis H2. Finally, the results show that those having the team perceive higher level of KAM performance compared to the non-team group, thus supporting hypothesis H3. This finding seems contradictory to the previous study by Workman et al. (2003) where the use of teams was not related to the effectiveness of KAM.

## **Conclusions**

Previous research on the use of key account teams is mainly conceptual or case-based in nature. To the best of our knowledge the present study is one of the first studies in which the use of sales teams is examined by means of empirical quantitative data in the context of international key account management. Moreover, although the importance of team use in terms of customer knowledge processing behaviors such as acquisition, dissemination and utilization of customer knowledge is often addressed in the literature, this study increases our understanding on these relationships by providing empirical results based on a quantitative data. Further, the findings of the present study are based on a data that has been gathered from the view of specific key account customers. According to our view, this is an important contribution because key account-related management practices may vary significantly between the different key accounts. In that sense, we believe that the data gathered is more reliable and specific than it would be if the respondents were asked to assess their organization-wide key account management practices in general.

In the previous literature sales teams have been found beneficial in many ways, but also the managerial and organizational challenges associated with sales team use especially in the context of international key account management have been noted by some authors (e.g. Arnold et al., 2000; Birkinshaw et al., 2001; Harvey et al., 2003). The findings of the present study imply that the use of teams facilitates the management of international key account customers. The teams increase internal coordination and integration of sales processes by improving the level of customer knowledge acquisition, dissemination and utilization. Respectively, the findings also show that the use of sales teams is associated with higher level of supplier's KAM performance compared to the non-team KAM. Although the findings of the study give support for the sales

team use in the management of international key accounts, one should however note that the decision to implement key account team should be customer-specific because not all key accounts expect to be served by a specific team. For example, if the customer buys very standardized products, the costs gained by the relationship specific investment of team establishment may exceed the benefits gained. In that sense, more research is needed on the factors that make team use an appropriate organizational entity for managing the key account relationship.

As with any other study, also this study involves a number of limitations that provide suggestions for further research. Firstly, the data was obtained by using a key informant technique. Though our tests gave no reason to assert that common method bias would be a problem, the risk of it nevertheless always remains. Secondly, as the focus of examination in this study was a comparison between non-team KAM and team-based KAM, the configuration of the team was not taken into account. Therefore, more research is needed on the structure of teams and the impact of structure on supplier's KAM performance. From this view, also the hierarchical relationship between the team members, cultural diversity and position of the team in supplier's sales organization in terms of authority could be examined in future research. To understand these issues collection of data from multiple team members would be recommended. Finally, as key account management is a management approach that aims at developing long-term relationships with strategically most important accounts, and as such always involves two parties, the dynamics of KAM teams in inter-organisational interface could be studied by choosing specific dyads as unit of analysis.

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