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Abstract

The increasingly accelerating internationalization of the world sets many challenges on companies and on the other hand provides also opportunities. This reflects especially on small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). Technology based SMEs are a part of the high-technology industry and its export is a fifth of the overall exports in Finland. This is why their impact on the Finnish employment and gross national product is significant. Due to limited resources of SMEs internationalization is a challenge for them and thus offers an interesting study ground. This Master's thesis studies the internationalization and export success of technology-based Finnish SMEs.

The interest in the theoretical background is placed on internationalization theories, export, the concepts of export success and of export failure. The Uppsala process model and its evolution, the network approach, are chosen in this study as the base theories of internationalization. Export success is handled based on the key success factors and export failure through its most severe effect; de-internationalization. The empirical research of this qualitative thesis was conducted with theme interviews in case companies that were all from the same field and which had functioned in the field for several years with international success. There are three interviewed case companies altogether. The contact persons in the companies were a CEO, a Sales Manager and a Director of Solutions and Services. They all possess a strong understanding in internationalization and export success of an SME.

According to the literature, internationalization of SMEs proceeds through the stages presented in the Uppsala process model. The SMEs also gain information and resources from their networks that help them in the internationalization process. According to the results this is true to a great extent although the networks and the way they are exploited vary between SMEs. Export success literature mention key success factors which are believed to represent necessary conditions for success. Based on the results these were rather similar in the case companies, the most important being reliability, functioning sales networks, quality, unique products, flexibility and learning by doing. Also similarities in export difficulties do exist and most commonly they were related to limited resources and cultural differences. To succeed internationally in the fiercely competitive markets SMEs need to represent the international top of their business sector and because of this they need to develop and adapt all the time in order to keep their market share.

Key words	SMEs, internationalization, export success
Further information	