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Abstract

The increasingly fastening internationalisation 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). SMEs represent almost a hundred per cent of the overall enterprise base in Finland and this is why their impact on the Finnish employment and gross national product is significant. Internationalisation is seen especially difficult in the case of SMEs and offers thus an interesting study ground. This Master's thesis studies the success factors in internationalisation of Finnish SMEs.

The interest in the theoretical background is placed on internationalisation theories, the concept of success and on different success factors suggested by the business literature. The Uppsala process model and its evolution, the network approach, are chosen in this study as the base theories of internationalisation. The empirical research of this qualitative thesis was conducted with theme interviews in companies that have received the Internationalisation award of the President of the Republic for successful internationalisation during years 1999-2003. There are altogether seven focus companies and they represent six different areas of business and industry. The contact persons in the companies are CEOs, chairmen of the board of directors and different strategic managers who have strong understanding in internationalisation of an SME.

According to the literature used in writing the theoretical background, five different success factors were chosen. There are the manager, knowledge and learning, specialised manufacturing knowledge, network strategy and other possible factors in successful internationalisation. According to the results the role of the manager is significant in successful SME internationalisation. The manager is often also the founder and owner and thus his personal stake in internationalisation is immeasurable. In this way his personal attitude and interest towards internationalisation greatly affects the success in it. The other success factors also have their own position in this study but they are largely personified in the manager; he is the decision making unit in the company and thus the selection of strategy, product and internationalisation choice are his responsibility. To succeed internationally, the SME must represent the international top in its own business sector and because of this, the personal skills and knowledge of the manager are in important standing.

Key words	SMEs, internationalisation, success factor
Further information	

