

**THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF CENTRAL
FINNISH FIRMS: FRAMING THE PROCESS AND
ACTORS**

**Jyväskylä University
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ABSTRACT

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Title The Internationalization of Central Finnish Firms: Framing the Process and Actors	
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<p>The aim of this master's thesis was to understand what kind of stories entrepreneurs create about their firm internationalization from Central Finland. Small and medium sized enterprises, or SME's, confront a variety of challenges to internationalization. Research has discovered networks as an important block in firm internationalization as they can support the process in a variety of ways, and a network of connections is constituted of different actors. Therefore, this research sought to deepen the understanding of the role of different actors in internationalization process.</p> <p>Previously, the emphasis on firm internationalization research has been placed on the types of procedures or entry strategies that small businesses choose, whereas process theories exclude what internationalizing is like from the entrepreneurial perspective. The theoretical understanding of frames of reference of internationalized entrepreneurs has remained rather incomplete, and it seems the research domain would benefit from a greater focus on internationalizing entrepreneurs and their experiences.</p> <p>The theoretical foundation of this study was constructed by combining theory and concepts from firm internationalization, the role of networks in internationalization, and framing theory. Nine international entrepreneurs were interviewed with a narrative approach to gain a better understanding of why and how entrepreneurs internationalize from Central Finland, and how they frame different actors in this process. Interviewees reflected on their own personal experiences of situations that occurred before, during and after internationalization. These internationalization narratives were then evaluated and analyzed using frame analysis.</p> <p>The results of this study are aligned with existing research, as networks were framed as an integral part of firm internationalization. Yet the findings of this study reveal this is much more complex. Analysing the framing of individual actors in a network, the study shows there is more variability and nuances to be discovered. The study contributes to existing literature by developing a nuanced understanding of how different actors are framed in firm internationalization process.</p>	
Key words Firm internationalization, international entrepreneurship, networks, narratives, storytelling, framing, frame analysis	
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TIIVISTELMÄ

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<p>Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli ymmärtää, millaisia tarinoita yrittäjät luovat yrityksen kansainvälistymisestä Keski-Suomesta. Pienet ja keskisuuret yritykset, tai pk-yritykset, kohtaavat erilaisia haasteita kansainvälistymiselle. Tutkimus on havainnut verkostot tärkeäksi osaksi yritysten kansainvälistymistä, sillä ne voivat tukea kansainvälistymistä monella tavalla, ja verkosto muodostuu erilaisista toimijoista. Tällä tutkimuksella pyrittiin syventämään ymmärrystä eri toimijoiden roolista kansainvälistymisprosessissa.</p> <p>Aiemmin yritysten kansainvälistymisen tutkimuksessa on painotettu pienten yritysten valitsemia toimintatapoja tai strategioita, kun taas prosessiteoriat eivät huomioi sitä, millaista kansainvälistyminen on yrittäjän näkökulmasta. Kansainvälistyneiden yrittäjien viitekehysten teoreettinen ymmärrys on jäänyt varsin vaillinaiseksi, ja kansainvälistyvien yrittäjien ja heidän kokemuksiinsa keskittyminen vaikuttaisi hyödyttävän tutkimusaluetta.</p> <p>Tutkimuksen teoreettinen perusta rakennettiin yhdistämällä teoriaa ja konsepteja yritysten kansainvälistymisestä, verkostojen roolista kansainvälistymisessä ja kehysteoriasta. Yhdeksää kansainvälistä yrittäjää haastateltiin narratiivisella lähestymistavalla, jotta saataisiin parempi käsitys siitä, miksi ja miten yrittäjät kansainvälistyvät Keski-Suomesta, ja kuinka he kehystävät eri toimijoita tässä prosessissa. Haastateltavat peilasivat omia henkilökohtaisia kokemuksiaan ennen kansainvälistymistä, sen aikana ja jälkeen tapahtuneista tilanteista. Nämä kansainvälistymisen narratiivit tutkittiin ja analysoitiin kehysanalyysin avulla.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset ovat linjassa olemassa olevan tutkimuksen kanssa, sillä verkostot kehystettiin oleellisena osana yritysten kansainvälistymistä. Kuitenkin tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että tämä on paljon monimutkaisempaa. Verkoston yksittäisten toimijoiden kehystystä analysoiva tutkimus osoittaa, että vaihtelua ja vivahteita löytyy enemmän. Tutkimus täydentää olemassa olevaa kirjallisuutta kehittämällä vivahteikkaan ymmärryksen siitä, miten eri toimijat kehystetään yrityksen kansainvälistymisprosessissa.</p>	
Asiasanat Kansainvälistyminen, kansainvälinen yrittäjyys, verkostot, narratiivit, tarinankerronta, kehystäminen, kehysanalyysi	
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1 INTRODUCTION

The broad aim of this research is to understand what stories entrepreneurs construct regarding their internationalization journeys. Accordingly, I will proceed to explore how entrepreneurs tell stories of their internationalization and how they reflect on different actors in this process. Studying the narratives of internationalized entrepreneurs stems from the need to understand the phenomenon more profoundly. Firm internationalization itself is a broadly studied field, but the focus is more on what internationalization is as a process, rather than what it is like. When planning internationalization, each firm decides which foreign market to enter, when to enter, the scale of entry, and which entry mode to choose (Hill, 2008). Traditional internationalization theories present pathways for a successful internationalization, as the process includes a series of activities and characteristics. Internationalization theories, which combine international business and entrepreneurship, have received a lot of attention (Oviatt & McDougal, 1994). However, the emphasis has been placed on the types of internationalization procedures or entry strategies that small businesses choose, whereas process theories exclude what internationalizing is like from the entrepreneurial perspective. This research seeks to complement previous literature by altering the viewpoint to internationalizing entrepreneurs and their experiences. Understanding the process from the perspective of entrepreneurs can help in improving the business field and providing adequate support and encouragement for growth-seeking firms in the future.

The background of this research is on an international business-project by Keski-Suomen Kauppakamari, The Chamber of Commerce of Central Finland. The purposes of this project, *KV-Verkostot Toimiviiksi*, are clarifying the field for regional firms, promoting accessibility and networking, activation and developing competence and developing the image of Central Finland. The aims of the project are to inspire and encourage companies considering internationalization to take the next steps towards growth. The idea of this thesis is to seek understanding on regional firms now and in the future on their growth and internationalization plans and execution. Firms in Central Finland have stories to tell about their internationalization process from the initiation to international markets. What did they do right, or what went wrong? Were there obstacles that several firms faced and most of all, what can be learned and refined from these stories so that a new start-up company has a better starting point for their upcoming internationalization?

What do Central Finnish small and medium sized enterprises have to say about their own internationalization? It is crucial to understand what internationalization is from the perspective of the people who are trying to go international. By listening to entrepreneurs' stories about their firm internationalization process from Central Finland, I can expect to discover new, interesting and valuable information about it for future internationalization endeavours of regional

firms. The Chamber of Commerce is aiming to understand how Central Finnish firms can better internationalize in the future. For example, how these firms experience Central Finland as a starting point for their aspiring internationalization – and could something be improved in the process. This research aims to support the goals of the project by focusing on the narrative elements of regional entrepreneurs. It is difficult to estimate what problems a growth-seeking firm faces when it is aiming for international markets, or what sort of support it might need for a successful internationalization. Moreover, if we want more start-ups going international, we want to know what worked for the previously internationalized firms. Some of the problems these firms are facing can be assumed, but by asking directly the firms to tell their whole stories, we can pinpoint challenges and find the quiet information these firms possess.

1.1 Research question and goals

Several central dimensions can be distinguished in the process of firm internationalization: these might refer to the early start of international activities (Zucchella, 2007), the speed of international growth (Casillas & Acedo, 2013), knowledge development (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), or networks (Johanson and Mattsson, 1988), which can all influence the internationalization process and determine the firms' international orientation. This research aims to contribute to the last dimension mentioned: networks and the role of relationships in firm internationalization. Parts of the efforts required in internationalization may be classified as networking, since connections with foreign intermediaries, consumers, partners, suppliers, government officials, and other organizations must be maintained and extended (Welch & Welch, 1996). One important internationalization theory is the Uppsala model proposed by Johanson & Vahlne (1977), which emphasizes the importance of experiential knowledge to internationalization. The theory was later expanded to recognize the impact of networks in the process (Johanson & Vahlne, 1990, 1993). Research has proven that networks play a significant role for international growth; however, this effect can be both positive and negative (Ellis, 2000; Harris & Wheeler, 2005). Evidence concerning the role of networks has been displayed in research, but further in-depth empirical investigations would disclose more about the networks businesses have and how they are used in their operations. Relationships between knowledge sources that support internationalization is something that should be looked into further (Fernhaber & Li, 2013).

The process of gathering and assessing people's tales in order to characterize their experiences and provide interpretation of their stories is known as narrative research. Narrative, or story, is the narrator's interpretation of the past. Individuals naturally arrange knowledge in a story form, and they use tales to explain themselves and their points of view to others. Some researchers have even proposed that the human mind is largely a storytelling device (McAdams,

2003). Although some researchers have argued for the use of narrative technique in cross-cultural organizational research, it has moderately been used in international business (Gertsen & Söderberg, 2011). A study by Gertsen & Söderberg (2000) investigates the cultural learning processes in a series of international acquisitions of a firm; another one by Osland (2000) examines expatriate managers' overseas experiences through heroic tales. Storytelling in internationalization has previously been examined in research to present how multinational enterprises create narratives of internationalization across space and time by Haley & Boje (2014), who propose that storytelling might enrich both discursive and metaphorical methods in understanding internationalization by adding richness and depth into research (p. 1129). Furthermore, narrative method offers a pathway to capture the complexity of meaning in sense-making, which is lost when people's unique and shared experiences are reduced to thematic, codable categories, as it is common in surveys and structured research interviews (Gertsen & Söderberg, 2011), which makes them important in a study. The researchers acknowledge that international business research is dominated by quantitative methodologies, and stories are an underutilized source of data (p. 802).

Although the role of networks and relationships are significantly important to firm internationalization, and the narrative approach has been identified as a valuable method to understand individuals' experiences, it has been infrequently utilized in studying them. This research aims to extend the previous literature by seeking to understand the topic from the perspective of framing. When discussing these internationalization stories, the entrepreneurs might tell the story with some distinct "filters". Individuals apply these filters to their story in order to make sense of it, and this process can be described as framing. Research has emphasized the significance of understanding the "frames of reference" of individuals' (March & Simon, 1958). The storytellers will present their story in a certain light, framing their own actions and the actors of Central Finland in the process. Framing has been used for explaining cognitive processes of individual sense-making (Weick, 1995), and in studying managerial cognition and individuals' decision-making in organizations (Cyert & March, 1963). Frame analysis can benefit organizational research (Creed, 2002), however, little research has been conducted in studying the frames of reference in individuals' internationalization narratives.

Previous literature in international business has investigated the narratives in cultural encounters & learning processes (i.e. Gertsen & Söderberg, 2000), in their expansion through time and space (i.e. Haley & Boje, 2014), and in networks (i.e. Galkina & Chetty, 2015), but it has not approached the topic from the angle of framing. As networks, narrative approach, and framing have not previously been studied together, the purpose of this research is to fill this gap in our knowledge. The best frame analyses are generally conducted as part of research projects that focus on specific actors, settings or issues (Creed et al, 2002, p. 49). The research problem of this thesis seeks understanding on the frames of reference of Finnish entrepreneurs about their internationalization, which are shown in their internationalization narratives. Therefore, as I aim to find out what kind

of frames Finnish SMEs present when discussing internationalization stories, and as my goal in this research is to learn how entrepreneurs develop an organized narrative through storytelling and framing, my research question is the following:

RQ: How do entrepreneurs frame different actors when telling stories of their internationalization process?

1.2 Thesis Structure

This master's thesis is structured as follows. First, I will go through the core theories of the study and present their relevance in answering the research question. The theoretical foundation of this study was constructed of firm internationalization, the role of networks in internationalization, and framing theory. Next, I will elaborate on the methodological aspect of this study. This section presents the techniques utilized for gathering data and describes the process of analysis. Third, the findings section of the study will introduce the studied firms and present the findings drawn from the data. Finally, the last section of this thesis will discuss these findings and draw conclusions based on the data. The section will clarify the theoretical value of the findings and explain how this study builds on existing theory and expands our understanding of firm internationalization.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This section will introduce the key theories and the relevant terminology to this study. The theoretical foundation of this research is built on theory and concepts from firm internationalization, the role of networks in internationalization, and framing theory. The literature review and development of the theoretical framework will clearly describe the views and standing points so this study may be clearly followed. First, the study will dive into more traditional firm internationalization theories and seek to present the core frameworks. Secondly, I will proceed to discuss the role of networks in firm internationalization. Thirdly, I will dive into the theory of framing, which will aim to staple these narratives of internationalizing entrepreneurs together.

2.1 Internationalization

The subject of firm internationalization itself has been broadly studied before. Over the years, some theories and frameworks have remained as the key concepts of the field. A definition by Welch & Luostarinen (1988) describes internationalization as “the process of increasing involvement in international operations”. Another definition provided by Calof & Beamish (1995) states internationalization being “the process of adapting firms’ operations (strategy, structure, resources) to international environments”. One conclusion drawn from the research of internationalization is that it is a complex and multidimensional process (Barrett, 1988). In general, firms target international markets in pursuit of growth opportunities and to expand operations. To begin with, internationalizing entrepreneurial firms aim to capitalize on their competitive advantages by pursuing potential profits in global markets (Li et al., 2012). Firms may develop and expand their current customer base even further by having a presence in overseas (Fernhaber, 2013).

The relevance of international trade to a country's economic wellbeing has already been extensively explored in economics literature since Adam Smith's publication “The Wealth of Nations” (1776), one of the earliest comprehensive writings explaining what contributes to a country's wealth. Smith presented *the law of absolute cost advantage*, believing that commerce happens between two nations when one has an absolute advantage in manufacturing one good and the other has an absolute advantage in producing another. Smith argued that focusing on creating and exporting items that can be produced more efficiently compared other countries. Countries with an absolute advantage can choose to specialize in producing and selling specific commodities or services, and then proceed to spend the profits to buy goods and services from other countries. He stated that focusing on products in which a country has an absolute advantage,

and then trading those products can benefit all, as long each country has at least one product in which they have an absolute advantage over others.

Expanding the concept of absolute advantage, David Ricardo proposed *the law of comparative advantage* (1817), claiming that cooperation and voluntary commerce can be beneficial to all parties at any moment. According to Ricardo, to benefit from trade it is not required to have an absolute advantage, but simply a comparative one. What matters is how easily a country can create commodities in comparison to others, not the absolute cost of production. Therefore, a country should produce the commodity that has the lowest opportunity cost and exchange it for other commodities.

Since then, the theory of comparative advantage had been a keystone of international trade (Neary, 2009). However, this took a turn after realization that not all characteristics of international trade could be fully explained by factor endowments or comparative advantage (Neary, 2009), and The New Trade Theory was then developed in the late 1970s to include several economic models in international trade, which focus on the role of networks and returns to scale. NTT is often associated with Paul Krugman, who published "Increasing Returns, Monopolistic Competition, and International Trade" (1979) and launched the discourse regarding the theory. Whereas the Ricardian model relied on productivity differences, the NTT theorists focused on the assumption of constant returns to scale, and displayed that increasing returns can drive trade flows between countries with equal productivity levels. It demonstrates that commerce does not have to be the outcome of global inequalities in technology or other factors, and the benefits of trade will occur even with similar countries and factor endowments (Krugman, 1979).

Towards the end of 20th century, internationalization theories began to take more firm centric approach. Earlier, firm internationalization was conceptualized as a dynamic process, the concept of speed was introduced to the literature in the 1990s (eg Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Zahra & George, 2002). Research has outlined three key dimensions of an internationalization strategy for entrepreneurs. First is, the proportion of overseas sales in a firms' overall sales, is referred to as *the degree of internationalization*, and it indicates how exposed the company is to global markets. Secondly, *the scope of internationalization* refers to the number of various countries or areas in which an internationalizing entrepreneurial business is active, demonstrating the firm's international variety of activities. Thirdly, *the speed of internationalization* refers to the time it takes for a firm to make its first foreign sales from inception (Zahra & George, 2002). According to research, degree, scope, and speed of internationalization are applicable dimensions for distinguishing various aspects of a firms' entrepreneurial internationalization (Hilmersson, 2014; Khavul et al, 2010).

Some internationalization theories, in contrast to the traditional views, attempt to explain the process of internationalization and the behavior of small- and medium-sized enterprises. These dynamic models, which include the Uppsala model, the International New Venture model, and the Network model, are further elaborated in the following sections.

2.1.1 The Uppsala Model

One of the key theories in firm internationalization is the Uppsala model, proposed by Johanson & Vahlne (1977), which later, expanded to recognize the importance of networks in internationalization (Johanson & Vahlne, 1990, 1993). According to the original model, internationalization takes place gradually by expanding from the domestic market to neighbouring regions, and gradually increasing that area of expansion. As a company gains experience as it expands, they commit more by investing more resources in these target markets. Expansion is done in an export style and as internationalization progresses, foreign subsidiaries will be set up in new territories. According to this view, firms start their internationalization process when they have a strong domestic market base. The selection of the target market also takes place in stages; firms start to expand to regions with smaller distance, after which they gradually expand to a market with a greater distance. Firms might choose this type of incremental approach with their internationalization, because they lack experience, and the decision to internationalize is risky for the firm.

As a number of other studies had demonstrated the role of networks in the internationalization of firms, the authors of the Uppsala Model decided to develop their model further to acknowledge the importance of business relationships in internationalization. Johanson & Vahlne (2009) argue that markets are networks in which enterprises are related to one another in a variety of patterns, and that relationships provide opportunities for learning as well as the development of trust and commitment, which are both prerequisites for internationalization. A network of commercial ties provides a company with a larger knowledge base (Hägg & Johanson, 1982). Furthermore, knowledge development in business networks provide opportunities of picking up existing knowledge from other actors, but also the interaction of a buyer's and a seller's knowledge, which can result in creation of new knowledge (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009). However, the creation of beneficial network relationships takes a lot of time and effort, and many of the attempts to build them can end up in failure (Hohenthal, 2001). Building functioning relationships is the result of significant work and investments, and they are a valuable firm resource (Dyer & Singh, 1998).

Although research has criticized the theory, it has also been described to be very general and therefore applicable to a wide range of businesses and cases (Pedersen and Petersen, 1998). Criticism towards the Uppsala model claims it to be too deterministic (Fina & Rugman, 1996), it does not consider interdependencies between different country markets (Hollensen, 2004, p. 55), firms frequently skip stages in the process (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994), and that it oversimplifies a complex internationalization process (Dicht et al, 1984). The authors have responded to the criticism by describing it being a model for rational internationalization, which is more appropriate for prescriptive intentions (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009).

2.1.2 International New Ventures & Born-globals

More recently, the discussion has moved towards international new ventures, or born-globals. A definition by Oviatt and McDougall (1994, p. 49) describes an international new venture as “a business organization that, from inception, seeks to derive significant competitive advantage from the use of resources and the sale of outputs in multiple countries.” Another definition by Knight and Cavusgil (1996, p. 11) describe born-globals as “small, technology-oriented companies that operate in international markets from the earliest days of their establishment”. A born-global model reflects on the idea that internationalization takes place directly from the birth of a company, and therefore the focus emphasis is more on the age of the firm, instead of its size. In the model, the company sees international markets as one, unified market, which provide more opportunities than barriers (Madsen and Servais, 1997) and which to aim directly from the get-go; born-globals might not even have sales in their own country (Jolly, Alahuhta, & Jeannet 1992; Knight and Cavusgil 1996; Oviatt and McDougall 1994).

The born-global model reflects on rapid internationalization, as born-global firms internationalize immediately after their inception, whereas the Uppsala model assumes that internationalization is an incremental process (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994). Born-globals’ access to international networks is a valuable and important resource for them (Håkansson 1982; Thorelli 1990). Both Uppsala and Born-global models agree that networks are a tool for internationalizing businesses. The difference is that for born-globals, networks must be vast enough to offer global reach and built rapidly to support exposure to various markets. (Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2004). A firm may lack of resources, but they aim to compensate them by utilizing knowledge and capabilities of others. Long-term networks contain market and experiential information that born-globals may benefit from, rather than having to wait for it to gather on their own (Chetty & Campbell-Hunt, 2004).

2.1.3 The Network Model

Also challenging the previous incremental approach, a network model of internationalization suggests it can better explain how knowledge-intensive SMEs (Ojala, 2009), such as management consultancies or software firms, internationalize. The network model to SMEs' internationalization is recognized as one important theoretical foundation in the field of international entrepreneurship (Bell et al, 2003). Comparing to the Uppsala model, the Network model of internationalization is not gradually progressing over time (Ojala, 2009). The network approach introduced in the 1980s describes a model in which internationalization and expansion take place via networks, as relationships evolve over

time as foreign buyers and sellers gain knowledge of one another (Fletcher, 2001). The process follows the development and maintenance of formal and informal relationships with network partners, in order to gain access to external resources in foreign markets (Johanson and Mattson, 1988). These networks can be, for example, personal, statutory, economic or technical, on which internationalization efforts are based. Firms have a similar interest in creating and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with one another (Johanson & Mattsson, 1988; Johanson & Vahlne, 2003). These links between firms in different markets act as a bridge for foreign market entry (Johanson & Vahlne, 1990).

As Uppsala model emphasizes psychic distance in foreign market entry, the network model of internationalization does not focus on the country into which the firm is expanding to. Instead, a rapid internationalization is accomplished through network partners' skills and resources (Mtigwe, 2006) and instead of operating alone, the firm relies or is even dependent on the resources of other firms or actors: customers, distributors, suppliers, competitors, non-profit organizations, and government agencies are all examples a firm may interact with in overseas markets. Thus, the relationships can be formal and informal (Ojala, 2009; Birley, 1985; Coviello and Martin, 1999; Coviello and Munro, 1995; Harris and Wheeler, 2005) or intermediary (Ojala, 2009; Chetty & Holm, 2000; Ellis and Pecotich, 2001). Research has discovered that commonly, formal relationships are connected to various business activities in a network, such as financial resources. Informal networks refer to interactions with relatives and friends (Ojala, 2009; Coviello, 2006; Coviello & Martin, 1999; Coviello & Munro, 1995). In an intermediatory relationship, there is no direct interaction between the buyer and seller; instead, a third party facilitates the relationship between them (Ojala, 2009). This can be the case for, in example, a liaison between a manufacturer and a consumer. Many firms are using a government or private agency as an intermediary in their internationalization efforts (Acs et al., 2001; Ojala, 2009).

2.2 Role of Networks in Firm Internationalization

Relationships and network building can be considered significant for an internationalizing firm. Since networks play an important role in key theories of firm internationalization, this chapter will examine them more closely. It should be noted that it is not always clear, which type of approach a firm is using for their internationalization efforts. For instance, firms in the software industry can have characteristics of both the stage theory and the network theory (Bell, 1995). Several studies acknowledge networks provide opportunities for small firm internationalization Aldrich et al. (1987), Birley (1985), Carsrud et al. (1986), Johansson (1987), Olm et al. (1988), and Shaver & Scott (1991). Especially for smaller businesses unfamiliar with foreign markets, networks can provide numerous opportunities to benefit from, and to learn from network partners' knowledge and

experience (Hadley & Wilson, 2003). Network relationships have an influence on foreign market and the mode of entry selections (Coviello & Munro, 1995, 1997). Because networks are borderless, internationalization and improving or protecting a firm's place in a network can often happen at the same time (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009). Furthermore, these networks can be used for complementing the lack of resources within the internationalizing firm. A study of high-tech firms in New Zealand emphasizes how influential networks are for internationalization (Coviello & Munro, 1995), as 64% of the sample firms said that opportunities provided by relationships in a formal or informal network prompted their initial international market selection and entry strategy. Moreover, 36% of the sample firms claimed at least one connection being critical to their present and/or future growth (p. 55). Businesses should devote time and money to establish and sustain these connections, and as businesses become more global, they must also increase the frequency with which they visit their overseas markets (S. K. Chetty, 1999). Firms with a small number of networks tend to internationalize and innovate incrementally, whereas those with vast network relationships experience radical internationalization and innovation (S. K. Chetty & Stangl, 2010). This suggests networks have an important role for internationalizing firms.

According to existing research, early internationalizers frequently rely on their networks to compensate for their lack of resources (Coviello 2006, Oviatt and McDougall, 1994). Customers, suppliers, rivals, government, and educational institutions can all be a part of the firm's network (Johanson and Mattson, 1988), which can be drivers for internationalization. These social connections offer firms, for example, knowledge, funding, connections to other networks, and a positive reputation (S. K. Chetty & Stangl, 2010). The most relevant knowledge for internationalization can be separated into three categories: market knowledge, technological knowledge, and internationalization knowledge (Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Fletcher, Harris, & Richey Jr, 2013). Market knowledge includes information about, for example, target market conditions, regulations, customers, potential partners, competitors, pricing, product quality, and business practices. Technological knowledge is the understanding of best methods of producing goods and services, that can be unique and provide competitive advantage for the firm. Internationalization knowledge refers to the capability and resources of a firm to engage in international activities (Brennan & Garvey, 2009). In addition to what the firm already has, all three sorts of the significant knowledge types for firm internationalization may be obtained via various networks.

Institutional theory recognizes organizations being influenced by a variety of external factors, such as political decisions, customer behaviours, and economic situations. A meta-analysis of 76 studies demonstrates country-level institutions having an essential influence on the relationship between family firms and their internationalization (Arregle et al, 2017). Proponents of the economics perspective can be distinguished between two types of institutions: formal constraints (laws, regulations, and constitutions) and informal constraints (behavioural norms, conventions, and codes of conduct) (Korsakienė, 2015). A study of

Finnish SME internationalization to Japan recognizes the use of non-profit consultancy organizations for those firms, which did not have existing formal or informal relationships for foreign market entry (Ojala, 2009). Cooperation with *Finpro*, a Finnish non-profit consultancy association, aided in networking with customers and connecting with local distributors. For firms that lacked prior relationships to support their internationalization, the involvement of government-based consulting organizations proved to be important. (p. 57). This emphasizes the significance of non-profit organizations and other possible actors in SMEs' market entry. Networks can provide a diversity of knowledge for the firm, which can then help to recognize new opportunities and innovations in markets overseas (Johanson and Vahlne, 2006). Furthermore, network specific factors, such as formal agreements, social relationships and knowledge sharing at the inter-organizational level, can be identified as driving force for early internationalization (Zucchella, 2007). These various networks effects on firm internationalization are further clarified in Table 1.

Firms may be interested in internationalization, but perceived external barriers deter them from it. Firms may not internationalize, due to the barriers to entry. Number of entry barriers can be distinguished for internationalizing firms: financing problems, imperfect information of the market, and entry barriers erected by government or other firms (Acs et al, 1997) can delay internationalization or even lead to refraining from it. Kahiya (2013) distinguishes internal and external barriers in firm internationalization: internal barriers include resource related barriers, managerial-barriers, marketing-related barriers, and knowledge-related barriers. External barriers refer to home-based market barriers, host-based market barriers, and industry level barriers. Furthermore, disparities in knowledge and/or national cultures between the origin country and other nations, as well as perceived financial or economic risks of the process (Arbaugh, 2008) can influence the upcoming internationalization intentions. Small-and medium sized firm internationalization may be slowed down by the lack of internationalization knowledge and networks. The major mediating forces of firm internationalization speed are knowledge and network ties (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005). As networks act as a source of information and other valuable resources (Hadley & Wilson, 2003), lack of networks or experiential knowledge can hinder the internationalization process. Compared to small businesses, multinational corporations have often created worldwide affiliate networks and marketing expertise, which may help them in their perceived obstacles (Acs et al, 1997). A highly internationalized firm is embedded in a foreign network, and has direct contacts with various foreign actors (Johanson & Mattson, 1998). The ability to recognize the roles and strengths of actors within a network provides the firm an understanding of potential limitations and prospects for its operations, and being a part of a foreign network helps the firm to form ties with others, which may lead to connections with new actors (Axelsson & Johanson, 1992).

Table 1. Network effects on firms

<i>Network effects on firms</i>	<i>Research papers</i>
<i>Opportunities to expand internationally</i>	Aldrich, 1989, Coviello & Munro, 1995; Johanson & Vahlne, 2003, 2006
<i>Learning from partner's knowledge & experience</i>	Bonaccorsi, 1992, Hadley & Wilson, 2003
<i>Access to external resources</i>	Oviatt & McDougall, 1994, Zahra et al, 2000, Pittaway et al, 2004
<i>Key information about international markets</i>	Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003
<i>Selection of foreign market and the mode of entry</i>	Axelsson & Johanson, 1992, Coviello & Munro, 1995, 1997
<i>Firms with diverse network relationships experience radical internationalization and innovation</i>	S. K. Chetty & Stangl, 2010

2.3 Framing

This final section of the theoretical background will dive into the concept of framing and explain, how they are examined in this study. Framing as a theoretical concept is intimately linked to various study domains, such as political communication, sociology, linguistics, and journalism. Framing as a construct was first created by Burke (1937) and Bateson (1955/1972), and later popularizing and defining the concept of framing in its broadest sense was Goffman (1974). As result, he presents frames assist people in organizing what they see in their daily lives. This is then referred to "schemata of interpretation," which is a framework aiding the transformation of otherwise meaningless sequences of events into something meaningful (p. 21). The core of framing theory is that an issue can be examined from several angles and interpreted as having consequences for a range of actions. People build a particular conceptualization of an issue or refocus their thinking about an issue through the process of framing (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104). Framing research at the micro level has mostly focused on the priming and activation of knowledge schemas, which subsequently drive individual perceptions, inferences, and actions (Cornelissen & Werner, 2014).

In existing research, frames and framing have been defined in a variety of ways. Entman (2007) describes framing as "the process of culling a few elements of perceived reality and assembling a narrative that highlights connections among them to promote a particular interpretation", where framing does not provide a thorough depiction of the issue; instead, it has an impact on individuals' perceptions. Hallahan (1999) also suggests frames affect perceptions, stating that "a frame limits or defines the message's meaning by shaping the inferences that individuals make about the message". He continues to depict that storytelling is the most difficult type of framing, that is, story framing. Story framing entails identifying important themes or ideas that are the message's focus, and then using a variety of storytelling or narrative strategies to reinforce that subject (p. 207).

An individual's narrative includes a chronicle, a sequence of events, and the interpretation of these events' significance (Sandercock, 2003), and a narrative can be understood as a story that has a plot and structure (Riessman, 1993). A narrative frame can be a type of frames (Borchard, 2017), and narratives can also be used for analyzing frames (Vanwynsberghe, 2001). Storytelling then acts as the bridge between narratives and framing (Aukes et al, 2020). Aukes et al (2020) argue these terms should not be used interchangeably, and it is important to recognize "narrative" and "frame" working on separate levels. If a frame is considered an actor's point of view, then a narrative, or story, would be the expression of this frame. Therefore, the foundations on which stories are expressed are called frames, and the internationalization narratives are the path to understand entrepreneurs' frame of reference.

Since framing can be defined in a variety of ways, having several framing paradigms has been identified as both detrimental and advantageous for the research. Framing can be associated with fields such as 'sociology, economics, psychology, cognitive linguistics, and communication' (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 9) and 'political science, sociology and media studies' (Hertog & McLeod, 2001, p. 139). Having a variety of perspectives allows for more creativity (Hertog & McLeod, 2001), but not clarifying the conceptualizations of framing studies has also lead to framing being grouped with distinctly different research approaches (Scheufele, 2000). Entman (1993) has advocated that, given the rising body of research on framing, the theory should be consolidated into a single clearly defined research paradigm. To this, D'Angelo (2002) has responded a single paradigm for framing research would not be possible, or even desirable, as a diverse approach has resulted to a comprehensive understanding of the research field.

2.3.1 Framing as a process

Framing can be seen as a process (Entman 1993), which consists of frame-building, frame-setting, and the impact framing has on individual and societal level (D'Angelo, 2002; Scheufele, 2000). Hallahan (1999) depicts in his model that there are seven things that can be framed: situations, attributes, choices, actions,

issues, responsibility, and news. Gitlin (1980) defines frames as "principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters". In media framing the process can be described to begin with the selection of characteristics of reality, and then emphasizing them in text (Entman, 1993). A simple example of demonstrating frames is the story of "the man on the ground". A man lying on the ground can represent various scenarios about the situation: he might have a medical issue, he could be intoxicated and therefore ignored by others, or he could simply be jokingly lying there (Karvonen, 2000). Despite the reason, this example demonstrates a situation can be framed in a variety of ways. People are accustomed to observing scenarios and looking for answers in order to make sense of the situation. These interpretations are frames, which are activated by the man lying on the ground and then constructed by the viewer.

After the creation of a frame, it may be used for describing, identifying, and evaluating an issue (Entman, 1993). Hallahan (1999) presents some frames convey information valencing in different ways, for example, putting information in either a positive or negative light, that is, *valence framing*. Other frames include just rephrasing terms in a different way, *semantic framing*. It should be noted that framing may be intentional, but it can also happen unintentionally. Individuals can use various methods, in example, stories, stereotypes, metaphors, slogans, jargon or catchphrases, in their frame of reference. Frames can appear at any point in the communication process, and they can affect the message presenter and recipient, the message, and the cultural context in which the message is delivered (Entman 1993; Zoch & Molleda 2006). In a way, the framer creates a window through a certain viewpoint is highlighted by the framer's own choices (Zoch & Molleda, 2006).

2.3.2 Framing in this study

Framing is useful for examining communication in various situations, as it is a tool for providing context (Hallahan, 1999). A frame can be expressed in a "storified" form through storytelling (Aukes et al, 2020). Over the past 20 years, the narrative viewpoint has established its grounds in organizational research. Entrepreneurs' stories, in which they share and make sense of their business experiences, have become increasingly popular in the field of entrepreneurship (Clarke & Holt, 2019). Firm internationalization and international business has been explored with a narrative approach (Gertsen & Söderberg, 2011); (Haley & Boje, 2014). Furthermore, the analysis of organizational storytelling and antenarratives have been examined in Nordic corporations during times of change (Vaara & Tienari, 2011). However, the narrative research in firm internationalization is lacking is the explanation and framing of the roles of actors in the internationalization process. As internationalization narratives from the perspective of framing has previously been overlooked in firm internationalization, I am approaching the topic from this angle. In this study, entrepreneurs' framing choices

regarding various actors within their internationalization process will be examined.

For the purposes of this study, the concepts of framing of situations and attributes are particularly useful. Hallahan (1999) depicts the framing of situations refer to relationships between individuals' in everyday life and in literature, and the framing of situations provides a framework for analyzing communication. In framing of attributes, some characteristics of objects and people are being emphasized, while others are neglected, leading to a bias in information processing in terms of focused attributes. In summary, frame analysis looks at how particular components of an issue are chosen and prioritized, by examining pictures, stereotypes, metaphors, actors, and messages (Matthes, 2009). According to Karvonen (2000), one of the most significant differences between frame analysis and discourse analysis, is that discourse analysis seeks for meaning from dissimilarities, whereas frame analysis looks for similarities within the data (p. 84).

How entrepreneurs' frame themselves, the area of Central Finland and other actors that influence their firm internationalization will reveal underlying information about the conditions for an internationalizing firm. Actors in this study refer to not only to other businesses who operate in the private sector, but also partners, government agencies, various institutions and communities operating in the public sector in society. These actors may influence the internationalization process of a firm, in example, by providing adequate support via resources, speeding up the internationalization, or promote networking. The various effects of networks on firms (Table 1), will aid in understanding the internationalizing process of Central Finnish firms and in comparing the results found from the internationalization narratives.

It is likely that certain actors will repeatedly rise from the data, as it is in their interest to support international business and export promotion. Formal institutions are relevant to firm internationalization, and they can have an impact on the process by assisting or hindering it. One is *Business Finland*, a public organization under the Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy, that aims for attracting trade, tourism and foreign investments to Finland, and to provide funding for innovations. Another one that is likely to rise from the data is *Finnvera*, a Finnish state-owned financing firm, which is providing loans, credits and guarantees to companies. Third, *The Chamber of Commerce*, a form of business network whose goal is further the interests of businesses, as it is particularly in their interest to support firms regionally.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Overall, it is important to investigate how framing characteristics may explain the internationalization of Central Finnish enterprises and understand the

entrepreneurs' frame of reference. This will help us to better understand the specific features of Central Finnish firms in the context of internationalization. The theoretical framework and key concepts of this thesis is in a concise form seen in Figure 1. First, I have examined the most familiar firm internationalization theories and the role of networks in firm internationalization, to understand what firm internationalization is like from the theoretical perspective. Then, I have elaborated the concept of framing, and how it will be utilized in this study. Storytelling will then act as a bridge between the entrepreneurs' internationalization narratives and framing, which will help to understand their frame of reference. Finally, the internationalization narratives produced by the Central Finnish entrepreneurs' display what firm internationalization from Central Finland is like in practice, which can help in improving the business field and providing adequate support and encouragement for growth-seeking firms in the future.

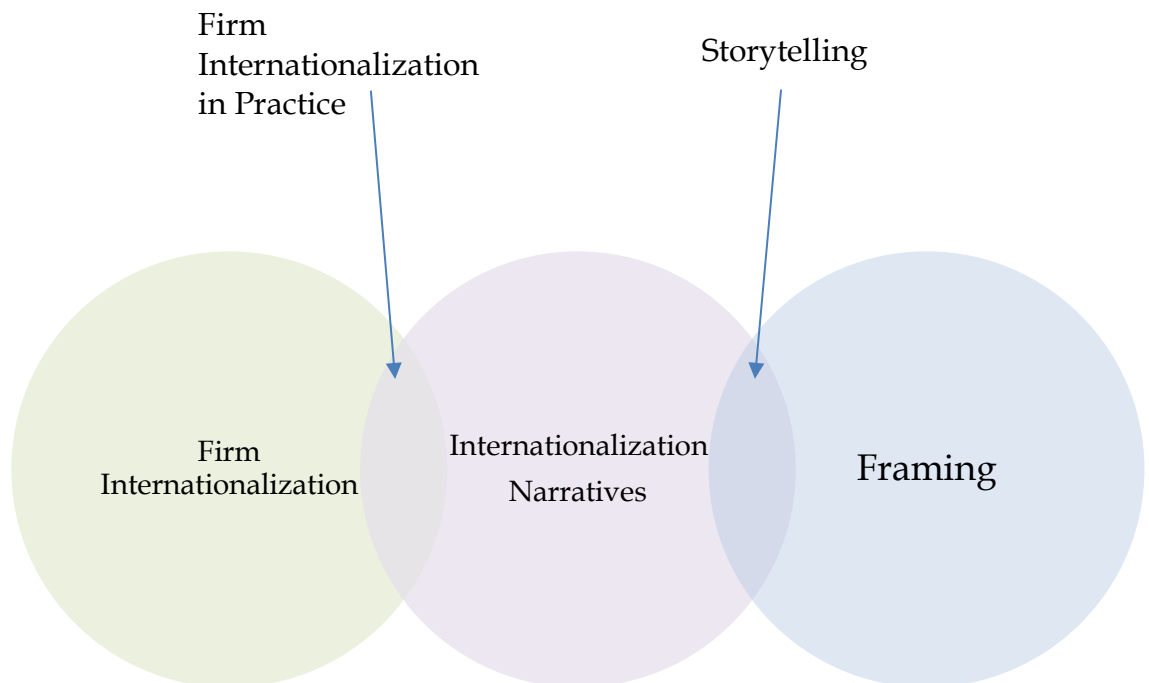


Figure 1. The Theoretical Framework

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the research methodology, and the research data and collection process are presented. The empirical part of this master's thesis was done as a qualitative interview study. For the study, I interviewed nine Central Finnish small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs), one participant from each firm. To find interviewees' who are the most suitable for this study, I intentionally searched for participants who can provide the most relevant information for answering the research question. This is further clarified in the upcoming chapter, with all participants listed in Table 2.

3.1 Qualitative Research

For answering my research question, I chose to do qualitative research by using narrative interviews for internationalized entrepreneurs. Qualitative research is a broad term referring to research methods that depict and explain people's experiences, behaviors, relationships, and social situations (Fossey, 2002). Qualitative research is explanatory in nature and allows to explore individual experiences, as it collects non-numerical data to understand the phenomenon at hand. When people's unique and shared experiences are reduced to thematic, codable categories, as it is frequent in surveys and structured research interviews, the complexity of meaning in sense-making is lost (Gertsen & Söderberg, 2011). Qualitative research can help in understanding of in-depth interviewees (Fisher, 2007). The goal of interpretive methodologies in qualitative research is to comprehend and account for the significance of human experiences and behaviors (Fossey, 2002). In social sciences, narrative is an interpretive methodology that involves the use of storytelling to understand individual experiences. Interviewees are free to speak whatever they choose, rather than answering specific questions of a survey. Narrative interviewing can provide international business scholars with new insights on organizational reality and give voice to a wider range of actors, demonstrating how their interpretations of specific acts and events may overlap and contrast (Gertsen & Söderberg, 2011).

3.2 Narrative Approach

Stories have long been a part of human history. Metaphors and stories have been tools to pass on information from one generation to the next. Stories can also be an efficient way from experience to knowledge, and knowledge sharing to others (Polkinghorne 1988; Riessman 1993; Johansson 2004). The reason for this is their enormous power; stories are fascinating, they inspire and a lot can be

learned from them. Individual narratives may reveal valuable hidden facts about reasoning and actions in a more detailed and precise way than any statistically examined quantitative data ever could (Feldman & Bruner, 1990); (Brown, Stacey & Nandhakumar, 2008). Narrative technique offers an alternative option to traditional interviews, in which the researcher asks questions and the participant answers (Johansson, 2004).

The intention was to take a narrative approach to this thesis and find stories about firm internationalization. Narratives do not mirror the past precisely how it was, and how a storyteller chooses to connect events and make them meaningful for others is influenced by their imagination and interests. Storytellers interpret the past in their own terms, rather than reproducing it exactly as it was, which makes narratives important in a study (Riessman & Quinney, 2005). These narratives are not representations of the past, but in changing contexts they form the past, present, and future. Interviewees' stories demonstrate how opportunities are identified and seized through processes of thought, reflection, exchange, and interaction (Johansson, 2004).

For scholars working on entrepreneurial theory, narratives are viewed as a reliable and important source of information (Larty & Hamilton, 2011). If interviewees are given some opportunity to speak, often responses provided in an interview are spontaneously developed into narratives (Czarniawska, 2004). As storytelling is a natural way to share experiences, a qualitative research approach was the appropriate choice for this study on the internationalization stories and experiences of internationalized entrepreneurs.

Interviews were conducted for firms in Central Finland, where the entrepreneurs could share their whole stories about the life cycle of the firm's internationalization process. Since these interviews were done with a narrative method, it meant I wasn't looking for answers to specific questions, but rather aiming to obtain the whole story from the storytellers' perspective. My role in the interview was to be more of a facilitator. Though it was challenging to decode the experiences and narratives of the entrepreneurs exactly as they were in their minds, a rigorous and transparent analytical procedure provided significant discoveries.

3.3 Data Collection Process

This section discusses the sampling and data collection phase of this study. Additionally, the primary data source of this thesis, the narrative interviews, are introduced. Purposeful sampling (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is a technique commonly used in qualitative research, with the goal of finding individuals who can provide in-depth, specific and relevant information on the topic. The sampling is defined by the researcher who creates the qualifying criteria that each participant must meet in order to be included in the study. For the purpose of this research, it was sensible to find firms that the process of internationalization is still relevant and interview executives who are still involved in the firms' operations. The aim

was to get in touch with those who are most relevant for this study. As this master's thesis aimed to make sense of what it means to internationalize as an entrepreneur from Central Finland, limiting the sample to find participants who could provide the widest possible, in-depth and detailed information on the phenomenon under study that answers the research question with the following criteria:

- o Interview the person who has been directly responsible for the internationalization process (CEO, entrepreneur, international manager etc.)
- o Firm has entered international markets during the last 10 years, and operated internationally for 5 years
- o Additionally, the firm internationalized from Central Finland

There are a variety of data collection methods available. Hox & Boeije (2005) suggest open interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, observation, and existing records are suitable for qualitative research. Interviews can be open, pre-coded, or semi-structured. An open interview refers to an interview that is conducted as a conversation, a narrative interview in this study. For the most part, the data investigated in the study rose from these unstructured interviews. Questions were not listed to participants beforehand, and the conversation was aimed to be quite informal, which allowed obtaining long answers and individual stories.

I aimed to conduct all the interviews face-to-face, as it felt more natural to have a conversational interview that way. The locations for interviews were in the participants' workplaces, with outside sounds, disruptions, and walk-ins reduced to a minimum. At the time these interviews, the global pandemic COVID-19 was still active, and for this reason one of the interviews was conducted remotely. Therefore, the interview was conducted with Teams-application. I acknowledge conducting a narrative interview remotely may have impacted the length of the story and the flow of the interview. Creating an atmosphere of trust and connection proved out to be more challenging via online platform compared to face-to-face interviews. I sought to reduce the participant's feelings of externality in this environment by having a longer conversation before starting the actual interview.

I first began preparing myself for the interviews by reading 'The Life Story Interview' by Robert Atkinson (1998), which focuses on doing an interview about an individual's whole life, or a specific time frame within it. In this research, the story refers to individual's organizational life, and the time frame is the firm internationalization. The author instructs to be clear about the purpose of the study. Even though I had explained the study to each participant before the interview took place, I started each interview in a similar way, where I once more explained what this study is about:

"I'm interested in stories related to internationalization and hearing what your firms' internationalization path has been like. From these stories, I try to understand how

internationalization from Central Finland really happens, and then a part of this study is to understand what kind of relationship you may have had with other actors during internationalization."

In addition to giving a clear start for the interview, this also aided in providing a similar beginning for every story. Atkinson encourages to think about what you want to accomplish from the interview, and suggests doing as much background preparation as possible. Therefore, I familiarized myself with participants' firm operations, read the company websites to obtain a big picture of the business and read possible online-articles, which were written about them. However, I did not reveal this to the participants beforehand, so it would not influence their storytelling. The objective was to obtain as thorough and honest depiction provided by the participants on the firm internationalization, with little influence of the interviewee. Atkinson (1998) claims as life story interviewer, it is a primary objective to be the best listener as possible, and being an active & interested listener was something I focused on carefully. The author proposes using an open-ended interview, where the participant is encouraged to a "stream of consciousness" type of approach: one is allowed to hold the floor without interruption for as long he or she can, whilst talking about a topic. This method proved out be useful, as it occasionally lead to deep and thoughtful stories, as talking about a specific event during internationalization raised other memories related to it. After clarifying the purpose of the study, I then proceeded to ask the same opening question for each participant:

"But if we start right from the beginning, would you like to tell me how your firm was born and what kind of experience you've had with internationalization, and what do you think about the role of other actors that played in it?"

The main question often generated a story about the initial stages of the firm and internationalization, after which the interviewees proceeded to a direction of their own choosing. Throughout the interviews, participants were frequently encouraged to share their stories in their own terms, and to provide concrete examples of situations. Personal experiences were highly appreciated and desired since this narrative study was based on stories. Aside from the main question posed at the start of the interview I prepared a few open questions, which provided structure and natural switch between topics related to internationalization. These questions were used, when the interview was not moving forward.

As this research was studying framing, some prompting strategies were used and clarifying questions were asked in relation to other actors, since the objective of the research was to focus on their roles in internationalization. Techniques such as "floating prompts" (McCracken, 1988) were used, simply by watching for key terms emerging from the interviewee's story, and then prompting the respondent to provide further clarification about the issue. With this technique, the participants were encouraged to continue with their storytelling, and to gather further clarifications and details to topics rising during the interview. Additionally, some "planned prompts" introduced by McCracken (1988) were used: "Category prompt" aims to clarify how the participant identifies different aspects of an activity or an event. This happens by asking the respondent to define, for

example, key actors, roles, social or cultural significance within an event. This was used multiple times, when I asked the participants to describe Central Finland as a starting point for their aspiring firms. Another planned prompt that was frequently used was the “Special-incident prompt”, which refers to exceptional incidents happening within the topic. If something surprising or extraordinary had happened within a story, I would ask for further clarification. Questions such as “Would you like to tell me more about this?” or “What do you think was the reason for that?” were added, to give the participant an opportunity to share more.

Largely, the participants were free to express their thoughts and stories freely, in a conversational form. The opening question was the same for each participant, and from there the interview proceeded where the participant wanted to carry on with their story. In addition to prompting, I introduced some open questions when needed. These were used, in case the story was not progressing and I wanted to encourage the narrators to share their thoughts and ideas related to their internationalization and continue storytelling. I interviewed nine individuals in total, all of whom were Finnish citizens. Each participant was chosen based on the criteria seen in this chapter. The participants came diverse fields of business, and they have all started their businesses in the region of Central Finland. Furthermore, the businesses had to represent both knowledge-intensive and industrial firms. This was to provide the desired diversity and difference in the participants’ background and internationalization experience. The participants are listed in the Table 2 below, along with some background information of their firm. For the sake of anonymity, the names of firms and interviewee’s name have been changed. The names seen on the table aim to improve the flow of the analysis section.

Table 2. Interviews and Interviewees

Firm	Inter- view date	Inter- view dura- tion	Tran- scribed text	Firm Industry	Title/ position	Main Interna- tional loca- tions	Interna- tionaliza- tion Type
F1 “Aaron”	27.1.2022	1h 42 min 17s	12 146 words (22 pages)	Aerial equipment manufac- turing	CEO	North- ern Eu- rope, Baltics, Asia	Uppsala
F2 “Bert”	31.1.2022	1h 18min 49s	11 113 words (18 pages)	Sport equipment manufac- turing (out- door)	CEO/Co- founder	Europe, North America	Network
F3 “Clark”	3.2.2022	48min 58s (Teams)	5578 words (12 pages)	Sport equipment	CEO/Co- founder	Europe, North Amer- ica, Asia	Born- global/ Network

				manuf- turing (in- door)			
F4 "David"	4.2.2022	1h 31min 12s	8830 words (15 pages)	Manufac- turing & mainte- nance of special ma- chinery	CEO/Co- Founder	North- ern Eu- rope, Baltics	Uppsala
F5 "Evan"	15.2.2022	1h 30min 6s	10 506 words (18 pages)	IT-Services	CEO/Co- Founder	China, South- Korea	Born- global
F6 "Frank"	21.2.2022	1h 20min 1s	9928 words (17 pages)	Engineer- ing & metal work	CEO	EU, Asia	Uppsala/ Network
F7 "Grant"	9.3.2022	1h 39min 42s	11 981 words (21 pages)	Project Manage- ment & En- gineering	Co-founder	EU, South America	Network
F8 "Henry"	15.3.2022	1h 4min 25s	6715 words (12 pages)	Industrial Insulation	Development Manager /Co- Owner	EU, Russia, South America	Network
F9 "Ian"	2.5.2022	1h 9min 1s	7552 words (14 pages)	IT-Services	CEO/Founder	Europe, North America	Born- global

3.4 Process of Analysis

There is not one best method for approaching and analyzing narrative data (Mishler, 1995; Riessman, 2005). As previously stated, frame analysis has typically been applied to disciplines such as political communication, sociology, linguistics, and journalism. In this study, the approach is adapted to the context of internationalization narratives. The reason for this is that frames work on a level where traits and the underlying nature of meanings are examined. Discourse analysis, which is common research method for studying written or spoken language in qualitative research, is often understood similar as frame analysis. Discourse analysis is a method of analyzing texts in an interpretive way, and frame analysis can be described as a type of discourse analysis (Tannen, Deborah, 11.3.2022). However, frame analysis examines at how particular components of an issue are chosen and prioritized by looking at stereotypes, metaphors, actors,

and messages (Matthes, 2009). As stated before, one significant difference between frame analysis and discourse analysis, is that discourse analysis seeks for meaning from dissimilarities, whereas frame analysis looks for similarities within the data (Karvonen, 2000. p. 84). In sum, frame analysis is a method of studying a text by paying attention to its various idea elements and asking, "What holds these elements together?" (Creed et al, 2002).

As the analysis was text-based, I began familiarizing myself with the data by transcribing all the audio recordings myself, word-to-word. As seen in Table 2, the interview durations varied from 48 to over 102 minutes, the transcribing was also a lengthy process. Nevertheless, this provided an opportunity to reflect on the data and add notes and comments for the upcoming analysis part.

Essential for this study is to understand how these various frames were recognized. Two main approaches emerge from the prior literature on frame analysis: the inductive and deductive approaches. In the inductive approach, the data is analyzed without any pre-determined frames. Rather, the frames emerge from the data itself, if they can be observed. The opposite procedure is used in the deductive approach: frames are "defined and operationalized prior to the investigation" (De Vreese, 2005. p. 53). Most studies extract frames inductively, and this approach was applied for analyzing the internationalization narratives. First, I identified different types of frames the participants presented in their statements on their overall path during internationalization. For these, I proceeded to do a "signature matrix" (Gamson & Lasch, 1983, p. 399) to sort the idea elements rising from the text into eight categories: metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions, visual images, roots, consequences, and appeals to principle (see Table 3). Purpose of the matrix was to reveal, how various elements in a statement develop a narrators' frame. The matrix highlighted unifying structures within a statement and showed, why a given paragraph was relevant to describe a frame of reference.

Creed et al (2002) suggest the first five elements, metaphors (figures of speech), exemplars (examples of situations), catchphrases (slogans or expressions), depictions (descriptions of issues), and visual images (not used in this study) in the signature matrix emphasize a particular frame, and make it memorable, vivid, and easy to communicate. They can trigger mental associations to the listener and make a situation easily interpretable. The first five elements often helped to pinpoint, when an actor was being framed. The remaining three elements, roots (underlying causes), consequences (situational outcomes) and appeals to principle (goal or objective of statement), provided a passage to understanding the bases of the statements. They served as argumentation strategies to defend or support the framers' viewpoint, providing causal attributions as well as the foundations for evaluating a circumstance, occurrence, or viewpoint (Creed et al, 2002). The analysis technique helped to discover a spectrum of different frames. As all the interviewees were Finnish nationals who spoke Finnish as their first language, the interviews were conducted in Finnish. Therefore, I have translated the relevant quotes into English for this study.

4 FINDINGS

The data analysis is presented in this section. The section includes findings, and the internationalization narratives are examined to answer the research question. The general question was why and how entrepreneurs enter international markets from Central Finland. Internationalization narratives showed the pathways of these individuals and reveal, what frames of reference are presented in their stories of internationalization. Understanding how particular idea elements are connected together into bundles of meaning is the purpose of frame analysis (Creed et al, 2002).

This section will unfold as follows. First, I will introduce the nine studied firms. Second, I will proceed to display how these entrepreneurs framed the role of networks in their internationalization narratives. Third, I will analyze nine frames regarding different actors in entrepreneurs' network drawn from these narratives. The statements made by the entrepreneurs were examined through a "signature matrix" (Gamson & Lasch, 1983), to sort out different idea elements from the text and identify how a specific actor was being framed. As this paper is explanatory in nature, it aimed to explain and understand what kind of reality entrepreneurs built based on their internationalization experiences.

4.1 The Studied Firms

The data used in this research consists of stories from real-life experiences, and where these individuals unfold them concerning their internationalization. Interviewees reflect on their own experiences of moments happened before, during and after the context of internationalization. The entrepreneurs' construct their own reality and even if the process of internationalization is similar, no two stories can be treated or comprehended exactly in the same manner or placed in a specific order of importance. The identified internationalization types are visible in Table 2, in which I have categorized the nine firms' internationalization approaches into **Uppsala** (gradually expanding from domestic market to neighboring regions), **INV & Born-global** (small, technology-driven firms which have been operating in international markets since their inception), and **Network** (internationalization and expansion took place via networks). The categorization is based on the internationalization descriptions provided by the entrepreneurs and aims to express which type reflects the firms' path most accurate. Nevertheless, one firm may have features from more than one approach, and the internationalization hardly progresses "by the book". As one would expect, each of the firm interviewed had a unique internationalization story, with some similarities and distinctions. Some surprises were also discovered, which I will examine in greater depth in the upcoming section of this thesis. The analytical approach was

inductive and driven by an interest in understanding the underlying logics behind the storytellers.

Uppsala F1 is a drone manufacturer operating in several international locations, mainly in Northern Europe and Baltics. Their internationalization has been progressing incrementally to neighbouring countries in which they have retailers, since their services are not offered remotely. Additionally, their products are being sold in specific regions in Asia, and the reason for this was an actor in their network had an interest in the business, and no export arrangements were made by the firm. Aaron described their networks being significant for their internationalization efforts and them providing various opportunities along the way.

Network F2 differs clearly from the previous firm, as their internationalization has progressed mainly through networks. The entrepreneurs had created a distinctive sports product, which differed significantly from existing ones. Operating for years in Finland and after gaining awareness and name for the firm, it piqued an interest globally. Their distinct product features lead them to be approached by various customers, athletes and companies, and it has not required them to be as active with their internationalization as some firms in this study. The entrepreneur described their internationalization:

"...like I said, we don't have actual selling that much, so I haven't progressed to international markets, but rather drifted there"-F2, Bert

Born-global /Network F3 has some similar features as the previous firm, as they are also focusing on delivering sport products to international markets. As a hobbyist for this sport, Clark started tinkering a specific product to solve a common problem in it. Soon after, he had created a product he offered to a professional player to try with. Being amazed by the product and its quality, he introduced it to his colleagues and used it in tours. Without having sales in Finland or abroad, the product went viral and gained traction soon after this, the internationalization happened within the span of few months. Clark described the firm internationalization as:

"...but going international, it happened completely via word-of-mouth. Before we tried to market it or even think about how to start marketing it, it was already there"-F3, Clark

Uppsala F4 is a manufacturer of special machinery, operating internationally mainly in Northern Europe, Baltics and Netherlands. Their internationalization had progressed incrementally over the span of many years, and David acknowledged networks being essential in their segment, as the products are big, complicated and expensive: their sales efforts would not succeed without them. Before internationalization, they had been operating in Finland for over 13 years and envisioning internationalization from a positive viewpoint:

"It was always our ambition, if you think about [our business segment]. It's a small segment, a narrow sector. You can grow to a certain point in Finland, but those growth constraints are quite big. So, when you enter international markets, it's just like, there are opportunities for anything"-F4, David

Born-global F5 is a knowledge-intensive IT-firm, mainly operating in Asia.

International approach was present right from the get-go. Eventually, networks played a key part in the successful internationalization of the firm, and the entrepreneur emphasized the importance of finding international native speakers, such as University students, for the firm. Evan described the firm's initial moments as:

"... it immediately had that international 'start-to-global' idea, right from the beginning. And we were then thinking about the idea of how to conquer the world, by participating in as many competitions as possible and in networking events, and in general to places where we can build an international network"-F5, Evan

Uppsala / Network F6 differs from other firms in the study, as it has grown from a small family business into a global machinery manufacturer. F6 operates and exports mainly to the EU-region and Asia. Within the past years, the firm has made significant investments to Estonia to expand their manufacturing. There were various reasons behind the orientation to Estonia, and attitudes and practices towards firms between Finland and Estonia turned out to be remarkable. Frank describes the expansion:

"...in terms of turnover, it is about one and a half times that of this Finnish unit. We have devoted and invested a lot there. Indeed, as I said, we've had good luck in finding the right people there for essential roles, and other employees as well"-F6, Frank

F7 is a knowledge-intensive consultancy firm, which has internationalized mainly through their business networks. The firm was founded by a team of six people combining different competences, networks and international experience, which Grant described to be the cornerstone of their success. F7 operates in various areas, and currently their main focus is in South America and EU, and according to the entrepreneur, the internationalization was not a major leap for the team. Grant acknowledged the firm utilized little support from actors in the public sector in their internationalization, as they were not aware of the programs offered.

F8 is an industrial insulation firm, which offers projects to various industries overseas and operates mainly in the EU, and more recently in South American regions. The firm itself has been operating for a longer time, but their internationalization efforts are more recent. Currently, the firm is not seeking to increase their customer portfolio and many of their projects come from existing customers. The firm has some features with internationalization through networks; however, Henry is not convinced of the influence and support of actors operating in the public sector for firm internationalization.

F9 is a born-global IT-firm, offering solutions to customers globally, and currently their main international locations are in Europe and North America. Internationalization started soon after founding the firm, as founders had an international mind-set right from the start. Ian highlighted the roles of his team and their networks, as the founders' solid business experience and extensive networks proved out to be vital for successful internationalization. Ian described the firm's early stages:

"As we founded the firm, the initial idea was that this is firm will be international, in one way or another" -F9, Ian

4.2 Framing in Firm Internationalization

This section of the thesis introduces various frames of reference, which were present in the entrepreneurs' stories of internationalization. I have selected specific fragments of stories, which I have then translated to English. These fragments represent the statements regarding different actors and issues, and I will proceed to identify the frame and its idea elements with Signature Matrix (Gamson & Lasch, 1983) and then seek to understand the underlying logics behind the statements.

I analyzed different actors and how they were framed, and the actors identified from the stories are visible in Figure 2. In a broad sense, entrepreneurs framed the role of networks in a rather similar way compared to each other. For most entrepreneurs, networks played an essential role in internationalization and its success. That is, 'networks are essential' acted as an umbrella frame for a big spectrum of divergent frames, which could be extracted by examining actors individually. Several different frames emerged from the stories, when entrepreneurs were talking about a specific actor in their network, and some actors were framed in more than just one way. First, I will examine how networks in internationalization were framed, after which I will proceed to examine the framing of individual actors in a network.

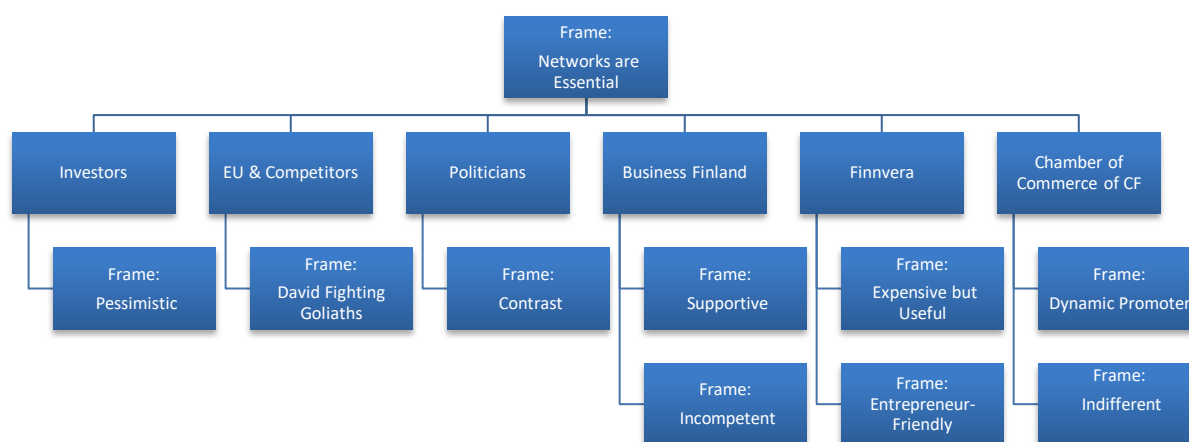


Figure 2. Framing Tree Diagram

4.2.1 Networks

Existing literature has identified networks being a key dimension in firm internationalization. The data gathered for this study supports this view: most of entrepreneurs' in the study were strongly of the opinion that networks played a significant role in their firm internationalization. When discussing the importance of networks, most entrepreneurs claimed networks were highly important for their operations and internationalization efforts, but the effects and benefits had

some variation. Even though individual actors in entrepreneurs' network were framed in different ways in the internationalization narratives, the entrepreneurs framed the role of networks in their stories in rather a similar way. It should be noted networks were influential in all stories of internationalization, but they were not always emphasized. However, most of the participants framed networks being essential for their internationalization efforts, while the effects had some differentiation.

Grant described networks being the cornerstone of their success. As he founded his firm with five colleagues, each had a network of their own, which were then merged. From this substantial network, they were able to draw field experts, employees for projects and international customers. Grant acknowledged that with this substantial network, their internationalization was not as major leap for them, as it may be for other businesses.

"It's kind of like one cornerstone of our success that we've had, like we had those networks of the six founders -- those networks were then connected so we obtained customer contact, but also a network of employees, and a network of experts, which we were then able to be utilize - It is, like internationalizing to a new country, it is huge work to build a network like that so you can operate there, you have the people there who you know and who can advice you." -F7, Grant

By examining Grant's statement through the matrix, a frame of networks being essential was discovered. This was the case for many entrepreneurs, as networks were a key factor in most stories of internationalization. A wide network supported internationalization and provided various benefits, as it was a cornerstone in successful internationalization processes:

Table 3. Networks are Essential Frame

	Networks are Essential - Frame
Metaphors	'One cornerstone of our success'
Exemplars	Connecting several networks to build a large one
Catchphrases	-
Depictions	Diverse types of networks: a network of employees, a network of experts, and a network of customers
Visual Images	None
Roots	Building a functional network is slow and takes a lot of work
Consequences	Having a wide network in various areas has smoothed the internationalization process and provided a lot of benefits
Appeals to principle	A functioning network is an ample asset, and valuable in many segments; efforts to build a functioning network is worthwhile

Grant pointed out having individuals in your network in the target country is important, who can help and advice you. A network of experts in the field was something Frank also described to be important. Having people in your network who you can ask for help directly, or who know others who could help, is necessary for operating overseas.

“Well, of course in the beginning, if you are starting a business and so on, you can find a lot of information on Google, but in practice you have to have people there you can ask for help directly, or who know [others] and can direct you to ask from another person.” -F6, Frank

Aaron shared the thought of having several networks, and depicted networks as a web, in which each participant in a network also have a network of their own. Working with different firms and actors has built their network over time, and these connections started to stack up, which had been useful in finding new connections to help them out.

“Absolutely, you easily think the firm does everything by themselves which is not the case, each one of these firms in a network have their own networks, or with whom they work and activate with, so now I'm doing this work a lot with these [firms], so you start to remember that ‘hey those guys were doing this stuff over there’ and these connections start to link up. I have found quite a few people that we’ve done something in the past, and with that we’ve managed to proceed or get a connection forward...” -F1, Aaron

Then again for David, who is manufacturing expensive and complex machinery, networks were crucial in terms of sales, as they are not able to sell their products online. He emphasized the role of customer relationships, as they must be built long-term over the years.

“Well in principle, it can be classified as a network when you go and push yourself in those international markets, through an importer or whatever route, it is always about the network, so yes, it plays a big part. If we just go and just sell these machines to Sudan, it's not going to work out. You'll need some kind of a messenger for going there, peak their interest somehow. Of course, the world is now open, as Facebook is sort of a network itself. You can push your product forward there, but in our field, if you export it anywhere, you must have maintenance service there. And preferably a local salesperson, when it comes to expensive & complex equipment like this.” -F4, David

The role of customer networks was different for Clark, who described networks being the most important thing they've had: the product he was manufacturing immediately took off, after a professional in his network started to recommend it to his colleagues. This initiated a spark, which lead to high demand and sales. Comparing to David, Clark's products are possible to sell online and after gaining reputation among the sport, the business started to grow rapidly.

“So what has clearly been the most important thing we’ve had is networking. Yes, that’s what I think is the most important thing, finding the right people in the right places. Yeah, it has been very valuable” -F3, Clark

Ian agreed about the significant value networks have provided for his firm and acknowledged his firm wouldn’t have succeeded without them. For his firm, networks have provided, for example, access to customers, employees and investors. Ian emphasizes the process of building a network constantly. In his opinion, most firms don’t see how big a value networks can provide. One should connect with people and build networks continuously and long-term over the years, even if you don’t know the reason for it.

“Well, how I see it is that most firms don’t realize how important networks are. You could say that our story would’ve been impossible if we had not had networks involved. In many ways, through networks we’ve gotten customers, we’ve gotten people, we’ve gotten investors, and we’ve gotten this and that. So yes, everyone should understand building networks, it’s like, it’s like investing. In other words, you should build networks all the time, even if you’re not aware why you are building them” -F9, Ian

Ian stated connecting with people is important, so one can find the right people to be included in the network. Not only to find the people to set up the business with but also network partners, who will be influencing it. Considering where one can find the networks which will support the firm was significant. For Evan, the networks from the Chamber of Commerce have been important, as they can help moving forward in challenging situations. He also acknowledged there’s a spiritual atmosphere, a like-mindedness among entrepreneurs and executives, and one reason he wants to be a part of it is the exchange of valuable information. Comparing these various statements to “Network effects” seen in Table 1, we can identify many similarities with prior literature. Entrepreneurs in this study acknowledged their networks had provided opportunities to expand internationally. For Bert’s and Clark’s firms, networks were in a key position in expanding with their unique products overseas. Clark acknowledged his network connections also supported a radical internationalization for his firm. For Aaron and Frank, connections with various firms and people also enabled in acquiring useful information. Particularly Evan valued highly learning from partners’ knowledge and experiences through his networks. Additionally, his business networks had influenced the selections of foreign markets and how to enter them.

4.2.2 Investors

Evan displayed a pessimistic frame in his narrative, when he was speaking about investors for internationalizing firms. According to Evan, there’s a disparity: while international firms are highly desired, the investors are not willing to

fund potential international firms with a riskier profile. The potential investments are examined through a narrow window, such as Excel calculations and competitor portfolios, and Evan feels F5 has not matched these criteria. While the business is distinctive from others, there is no other firm to compare directly to. Additionally, the unique business model is categorized into service firms, which has made receiving funding challenging. Evan also disclosed that business is about the people: as there has not been a known exit-maker involved in the business, receiving funding remains scarce. While Evan and his business associates have been actively networking and attending to international events right from the beginning, not having an exit-maker in the team has posed a difficulty in convincing the investors. These factors lead to lack of financial support for riskier global firms, which have high potential as they aim to gain a big share of the market rapidly.

“Let's say it this way, everyone wants those international companies. And support, as for operations or in the mapping of know-how, and in the building and developing the technology, that kind of support can be found easily. But when it comes to financial investment or... risk investors. It's the same either in Jyväskylä or in whole Finland, so in that sense [our firm] has been an unfortunate firm, because we are a technology firm, but our business is about the service. That's why they put us in that basket of service firms, in a way, there is no inventiveness in ICT, then we have not received funding from anywhere, because all the investors we have been negotiating with, so to speak, I've used to say that I have not found any risk investors, they are investors! They will calculate with Excel that you have this much turnover, you have that amount of profit, you'll get this much profit, and then they calculate backwards as when we invest in that, if we're funding you a million, then, sort of, in how many years by default I get an “Exit” or my money back through its productivity? And now that we are in this type business model and in orienting to China here in Jyväskylä, there is no comparison! There is no Excel, there are no competitor portfolios to compare to. It's completely a risk business. And in our [firm] team, there has not been anyone, who has already made an “Exit”, money for investors. So, we don't have Ilkka Paananen, who made his first Exits before Supercell, called his old friends saying “I trust this, would you invest in this so we'll make it a business?”. We don't have Atso Vesterinen from Samcom and a few others, who had made money for MidInvest, called Nikula and said “I have an AI-business like this, will you hop on board?”. Because business is people. Therefore, the financial, the risk-taking capacity, without taking a stand on Jyväskylä's investment companies, financiers or anything else, our business idea has not been sexy, or there hasn't been inventiveness, so that's why we have not received money.” - F5, Evan

Examining the arguments and claims through the matrix, various idea elements could be distinguished in Evan's statement. Roots for his statement can be found from his experiences of seeking funding from investors, as throughout the years it has turned out to be challenging. Although Evan is not taking a stand on any specific investor group, he frames a pessimistic viewpoint on how his firm has sought investments but have not been suitable for attracting it: he considered his firm more as a risk investment with significant potential. However, as investors seek safer investment targets, it leads to lack of financial support for riskier firms that aim to go global:

Table 4. Pessimistic Frame

Investors	Pessimistic - Frame
Metaphors	International firms are highly desired, but investors only focus on the numbers
Exemplars	'...in a way, there is no inventiveness in ICT' ; 'There is no comparison!'
Catchphrases	'Because business is people'
Depictions	'I haven't found a single risk investor, they are investors!'
Visual Images	None
Roots	Investors not willing to finance, if the business model is riskier; funding is scarce, if there is not a known exit-maker involved
Consequences	Lack of financial support for riskier global firms
Appeals to principle	Making claims that investors are only looking for 'safe' investments

4.2.3 EU & Competitors

By looking at competitors and EU, a different frame was discovered. In his narrative, Aaron framed his business as a David who is fighting goliaths: there are significant challenges in the market, such as the EU-regulation and gigantic Chinese competitors, which make operating on the playing field difficult. Aaron states even though they have made significant efforts in internationalization and the firm has been strong in many aspects, it is like "*pushing with a rope*", referring to fruitless action that does not progress. Unfinished regulation in the EU hinders their firm growth and operations, while the Chinese competitors possess extensive resources and don't have laws slowing them down. The playing field is different for others, and it is challenging to operate there. Instead of thriving in the market, it has features of surviving there, and their internationalization is not progressing forward.

"Well, for the first year or what the time I've been here for now, we've done internationalization work with the surveying system and drone. Just to realize it is still like pushing with a rope, because the product will not sell since it is blocked by law throughout Europe. It is regulation based, meaning no country can regulate it themselves, so it is inconvenient for everyone. -- This is the EU-regulation, which oddly enough, is so unfinished and was taken into effect hastily, meaning there are no answers. And it's tough to say, the law came into effect with a one-year transition period since it was so unfinished, but during the transition it was not resolved and now it is in effect, the matter is stalled and nothing's happening. At the same time the market, to which we have offered the surveying expertise, drone expertise and aviation expertise, and been strong in those, is currently at least temporarily disrupted by EU- regulation. And another one

is China. China's big manufacturers have focused so far on the consumer side of the market, but that market beginning to be in a phase where it is not growing enough. So, they have noticed that the professional market has better prices and more demand. And it's exactly the same, whether it's a cell phone or a drone, I can tell you that you can't compete technologically with the Chinese. The biggest competitor has 3 billion in turnover, and robot factories, and mobile cameras, all in use and not a law slowing them down or blocking them. And if we talk about small Finnish companies, then in a way, we have to think about strategic options. And if the law is in order, then we'll make it the next 3-4 years in the market with good service and so. No worries, but it's not growth. And internationalization will not progress." – F1, Aaron

Examining the statement through the matrix, various idea elements could be distinguished in Aaron's narrative. Roots for framing can be found from his experiences of operating in the market, as throughout the years it has turned out to be difficult: firms in other regions have different starting points and resources. Aaron provides the examples of impractical EU-regulation and Chinese competitors and describes an underdog situation:

Table 5. David Fighting Goliaths Frame

EU & Competitors	David Fighting Goliaths - Frame
Metaphors	Underdog fighting against giants
Exemplars	'I can tell you that you can't compete technologically with the Chinese'
Catchphrases	'...like pushing with a rope'
Depictions	Gigantic competitors with extensive resources; the playing field is different for others
Visual Images	None
Roots	Disparate starting points for firms in different regions; poor regulation does not support growth
Consequences	Instead of thriving and growing in the market, it resembles more of a survival
Appeals to principle	Leveling the playing field

For Aaron, these difficulties pose threats for his firm, and he had to consider strategic options for the future. These goliath-sized challenges were also present in other stories of internationalization. Bert displayed a similar frame in his firms' struggles, as the biggest firm in the market and their competitor has been setting up obstacles for a small Finnish firm and blocking their attempts to pursue the North American market. This has led to various challenges, such as legal fees, avoiding North America as their direct market by delivering there through a detour, and product alteration. The entrepreneur acknowledges it's been a challenge a colossal competitor is trying to push out his small business.

"...so, we've made this custom product and over the years, we've been hammered by [world leading competitor in the market], threatening us with legal actions, and once I've been to Canada, not for questioning but for a hearing, so far we've not entered court. But over the years, considering the past 10 years or so, I don't know probably a hundred thousand euros have been paid for a law consultancy, even if it wasn't in court. And so, they've been trying to knock us down like this in for the past 10 years and therefore we haven't really entered North American market yet. We have customers there, but we sell those products to Europe and they have taken them to North America themselves, and so it has been a tough challenge that a billion-dollar business like that is trying to [knock down] a garage-sized company like this." -F2, Bert

4.2.4 Politicians

Frank framed a significant contrast between Finland and Estonia, when he was talking about encounters with politicians. Finnish politicians suffer from lack of credibility, as in his opinion, they don't provide any valuable support and are only polishing their own careers. Frank is quite pessimistic towards Finnish politicians, as he has felt they are not helping him in his endeavours, and therefore it is better to do things by himself. As he has been operating in Estonia, Frank has very different experiences in conducting business there. He claims in business sense the attitude and the way of thinking is far different in Estonia: they are genuinely interested in improving the conditions of businesses, for example with direct contacts to local politicians, who often offer to help him. The roots behind this are perhaps cultural: Estonian society is rather young, and they have more open attitudes towards entrepreneurship, and the attitudes towards a foreign company in Estonia are friendlier and business oriented.

"...Over the years I've had quite a lot of encounters with Finnish politicians, but I have never felt like to any extent that they really are interested, mainly it is like... Maybe it's like wanting to be on display and improve one's own political career by visiting companies, but not one concrete or sensible idea I've heard coming out of their mouth when talking with them face-to-face, to put it plainly. So, for example, when comparing to this former Prime Minister of Estonia, they are so, they are really interested and so prepared to do things, as in a way, they have asked me to call if I need help with like an investment or something, so that they could help with some of their own contacts if they can, so yes, I've had a feeling that they are genuinely interested in [us]. So, both at the national level and then at the local level, for example in this city where we are now operating, the mayor calls like several times a year if we don't meet there, and asks how he could help and shares his ideas and tells what development or other projects are going on there. There is very much like, like business friendliness and like, they have a genuine desire for firms to develop and grow, compared to what it is like here [firm original location]. Of course, I may have not been a client for these local politicians, or that much in contact with them. So, let's put it this way that when I have been, I have not received any concrete answers, it has almost felt like it is better to take care of things by myself. So, from my own perspective, there's a really big difference in their attitudes and their way of thinking. -- ...the culture is kind of like, it's like they're really want to boost it, of course it's a small country and a young society, so perhaps it is more understandable they perceive it important, the entrepreneurship. And nowadays also, they really want to, like raise the level of competence, and to shift from this kind of subcontracting

industry into making end-products, and into a country of new products and innovations. There is clearly, this state of mind that they want to improve the profile of the industry coming from there, and the profile of firms as well.” –F6, Frank

By examining the statement through the matrix, the idea elements in Frank’s narrative draw a contrast between the Finnish and Estonian politicians. Frank framed politicians in Finland as counterproductive, whereas Estonian ones as entrepreneur-friendly and more business oriented. Some statements about the Finnish politicians were aggravating, but still very descriptive: he didn't think he'd heard a single concrete or a rational suggestion come from them. This inclined some frustration towards Finnish politicians:

Table 6. Contrast Frame

Politicians	Contrast - Frame
Metaphors	The way of thinking in business sense is different in Estonia compared to Finland
Exemplars	Meeting up with the Prime Minister; Direct requests to contact if any help is needed, so they could help with their own networks if possible
Catchphrases	‘Not one concrete or sensible idea I’ve heard coming out of their mouth...’
Depictions	Atmosphere and attitudes towards a foreign company in Estonia are more friendly and business oriented
Visual Images	None
Roots	Estonian society is young, and the culture is more entrepreneurial friendly
Consequences	Estonia encourages to innovation, and is boosting firms operating there and lifting their profile
Appeals to principle	Estonia is shifting from doing subcontracting into making end-products, and improving the conditions for current and future firms

The frame displayed a clear contrast between politicians in Finland and Estonia. Encouragement from politicians towards innovation, and boosting local firms was something he desired to have in Finland as well. Estonia is focusing on increasing innovations in the country and supporting the shift from subcontracting into making more end-products. Frank’s image of Estonian as hard-working and positive attitude towards entrepreneurship lead him to believe in terms of productivity and GDP, Estonia will pass Finland in the upcoming years. Political decisions and attitudes support doing business there are turning Estonia into a competitive society. Whereas the political actors in Finland have not boosted

Frank's firm, he was impressed about the attitudes of Estonian politicians towards firms, as their actions were not only statements but also provided concrete benefits for his firm.

4.2.5 Business Finland

Business Finland is a public organization under the Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy, with the aims for attracting trade, tourism and foreign investments to Finland, and to provide funding for innovations. As their goal is to support international business, the institution was present in several internationalization narratives. Aaron frames Business Finland as a supportive institution for his internationalization efforts. His firm applied for Tempo-funding, which is designed for SMEs and mid-cap firms aiming for international growth. With Tempo, the firms are able to, for example, do market research and acquire knowledge, and to invest in production methods. Aaron views the funding as an encouragement from Business Finland, which supported their internationalization activities and provided an initial boost. Without the funding a firm could easily evade doing important research and groundwork for their upcoming internationalization efforts.

"...for that we have applied for Business Finland's Tempo, the purpose of which is when firms start to establish themselves to a market with some new potential, it can provide like a jump-start, it reminds me a bit of starting up an engine. -- But these projects are fundings of tens of thousands, there are not millions in discussions yet, but I consider them as encouragement. It is seed money, and it can be used to do the kind of work, for example, strategy or a study of the target country, of which the organization would easily slip from doing, in a sense like 'so let's just go and export, and it'll be fine'. These can be used to turn assumptions into knowledge, before setting up export firms or such in certain countries." -F1, Aaron

Examining the statement through the matrix, a supportive frame of Business Finland was discovered. Aaron saw significant value in the institution's actions, and Tempo-funding had supported him in internationalization. From the statement it could be understood the funding supports businesses to start establishing themselves to a market with new potential, and Business Finland is important by encouraging towards future internationalization efforts:

Table 7. Supportive Frame

Business Finland	Supportive - Frame
Metaphors	Provide a jump start for the firm: 'Starting up an engine'
Exemplars	Using the funding for strategy or a study of the target country
Catchphrases	'so let's just go and export, and it'll be fine'

Depictions	Purpose of the funding is to support businesses to start establishing themselves to a market with new potential
Visual Images	None
Roots	These fundings are not financially significant in size, but more of an incentive for aspiring businesses
Consequences	Turning assumptions into knowledge, as in doing background research before setting up export firms or such in certain countries
Appeals to principle	Funding from Business Finland is important, as it is seed money and encouragement for future internationalization efforts

The Supportive Frame about Business Finland was distinguishable in other stories of internationalization. Clark had applied for the funding as well, and it supported their investments to production methods, which then eased up their internationalization path in the beginning phase. Bert, on the other hand, had not applied for the funding, but had used Business Finland's services on his business trips to Russia and China, and felt it had supported his efforts.

"Well, we received Tempo, Tempo funding in the beginning. It was what was recommended to us, which is worth applying for, and so we applied and obtained it. Right then, in the very early stages, when we started to do full-time here. And it was good. A very good start like, because with it, we we're able to get a pretty good pace on with production methods, so it would have been a difficult, or a more difficult path just to act on our own in the beginning." -F3, Clark

"...was it Business Finland, there was this [employee name]. She has been a great help. With her I was, we were in China, and then it was good when we were in Russia, basically she speaks excellent Russian and can help if it's needed" -F2, Bert

Commonly, Business Finland was framed as a supportive organization, but this was not always the case. In contrary to this view, Henry framed Business Finland as an incompetent institution. He saw Business Finland as a bureaucratic institution, which does not know how to properly support local firms. No adequate support was provided for his endeavors with Japan, and his experiences with Business Finland has convinced him there's a lack of competence. He also depicts he is not fully aware of the programs or what Business Finland could possibly do for local businesses.

"Is there a complete understanding of these things, that I am not quite sure of. Like the private sector and then the public side, maybe there would be a bit of... How should I put it? They don't... Sometimes it feels like they don't really understand anything, and then they bounce us around, and one time we tried to get help so we could go to Japan, we had a deal and everything there, but no [help] was given... It was like telling us to call there, call there, call there, but in that case, there wasn't any benefit of them. It only took time when I was calling different people. I don't know why it is, that maybe there's a lack of know-how, like enough or something [sighs]. At least in our case it didn't help us. And then, in some cases, we don't really even know what

we can gain from them. I don't know if other companies have received [help] from them, but so far they haven't been of use to us" -F8, Henry

Examining Henry's statement about Business Finland, an incompetent frame was discovered. Henry posed some feelings of frustration as he was framing Business Finland and the collaboration with them, as it turned out to be a waste of time for his firm. Unclear guidance and poor experiences of collaboration lead Henry to depict Business Finland as an incompetent institution:

Table 8. Incompetent Frame

Business Finland	Incompetent - Frame
Metaphors	The guidance turned out as a waste of time for the firm
Exemplars	Poor experiences collaborating with the institution, as no adequate support was provided in international endeavors
Catchphrases	'Sometimes it feels like they don't really understand anything'
Depictions	Unclear guidance by only instructing to call different people
Visual Images	None
Roots	Poor past experiences with collaboration; not being aware of the activities or benefits the institution could provide, or what to gain from them
Consequences	Not using the services of the institution or including themselves in the network
Appeals to principle	An incompetent institution lacking know-how on how to support and benefit local firms

From Henry's statement, it can also be understood he was not aware of possible opportunities a cooperation with the institution can offer. Similarly, Ian framed Business Finland inadequate to the needs of his firm. Financial support had been provided and Ian was pleased with the financial services. Additionally, some other collaboration with Business Finland had been done before, as the institution did a market research to a foreign country. Ian was not convinced of the service, and afterwards the research turned out to be irrelevant and was not utilized for any pursuits. Ian depicted the professionals at the institution are more of generalists, and he was not sure how they could support the internationalization of firms.

"About the public institutions, we haven't really received any kind of expert help. Funding yes, and that has been important for us. --Yeah, they did a market research on our behalf and went through some customers, and the conversation was like so... on the general level that it

didn't really help us understand what the situation of the customers is really like, so it was difficult to go there. And then they're more like generalists over there, not even like marketing professionals, so I don't really know what the thing is"-F9, Ian

Not all firms had utilized the assistance provided by these institutions, and there was another firm, which wasn't aware of possible support from Business Finland. For example, with F7 Grant described they did not even realize to ask for any help from a public institution, because at the time the firm internationalization seemed to be progressing well on its own. Currently, they are working on a project with Business Finland and other institutions, and the cooperation regarding it is positive. While visualizing future, Grant saw opportunities with Business Finland and South America:

"Business Finland directly says that now the money turns to South America. So, to the eastern border, we won't even look at that direction. So now, the whole Europe is turning to a completely different direction. And I think South America, for example, as an investment destination, may well start to rise even further."-F7, Grant

4.2.6 Finnvera

Finnvera is a Finnish state-owned financing firm, which is providing loans, credits and guarantees to companies. As Finnvera's aims are to finance new business, business growth and firm internationalization, most firms in this study had some encounters with them. Nevertheless, their role in firm internationalization was not expressed as essential and it was often stated briefly, as they may have had provided some loans for activities. However, some distinctive frames were presented. Henry sees the institution as useful, as his firm has used their services and the cooperation has been working well. This was often congruent with experiences of other entrepreneurs of this study, who have been using Finnvera's services: collaboration with the institution was viewed as satisfactory and beneficial. However, Henry continues to frame Finnvera's services as expensive. The commissions are high, and therefore for a new firm accepting the funding is not always possible and it could also be risky for the firm.

"In terms of financing, there have been good options and those we have used. Of course, the fact is that there are such services there which are so expensive that you should have such huge returns immediately, so that you can pay their commissions. If you think about, especially a new firm or like that, then it may not always be possible for take the funding, as in addition to the loan you'll pay guarantee commissions for a finance company, then it is quite... But that is not necessarily in their hands. It is so that they have good services, but sometimes they are just too expensive, roughly or generally speaking. But we have used them, and the cooperation has worked well." -F8, Henry

Examining the statement through the matrix, an Expensive but Useful frame was discovered. Henry framed Finnvera-institution itself in a positive

viewpoint, but the services as expensive. Encounters and their services were beneficial, but his understanding was that sometimes it is not sensible to use them:

Table 9. Expensive but Useful Frame

Finnvera	Expensive but Useful - Frame
Metaphors	'Not necessarily in their hands'
Exemplars	Firm should gain huge returns quickly, in order to pay commissions on the financing.
Catchphrases	'Good services, but sometimes they are just too expensive'
Depictions	Not sensible to accept funding as a new firm, as the costs are too high
Visual Images	None
Roots	Doubts as to whether it is always profitable to utilize the institution's support
Consequences	For a new firm accepting funding is not always possible and it could also be risky choice for the firm.
Appeals to principle	Collaboration is working fine, but lowering the cost structure is desirable

Even though the costs are high, Henry was mainly pleased with the services provided and he states some of the costs are not necessarily up to Finnvera. Consensus among the entrepreneurs was that the institution has financed their operations and the collaboration has been professional. Statements from Evan also support this view, as his firm has utilized several services from Finnvera in their internationalization efforts.

"...then we've had funding from Nordea and Finnvera, so in reality there is nothing bad to say about them. -- Finnvera's loan instruments, loan guarantee instruments and also the bank financing, so these all have been in use and they have worked really well."-F5, Evan

Frank, on the other hand, described his long collaboration with Finnvera in more detail and is the only one framing the institution as entrepreneur-friendly, compared to other institutions he has cooperated with. His experiences with Finnvera are highly positive and in his opinion, they have a genuine desire in helping firms to succeed. Frank's firm is operating in a field, which requires ample capital, and fundings from Finnvera have supported their internationalization activities.

"...in Finland we have been working with Finnvera for a very long time and it is like, at least my personal experience is that it is perhaps the most entrepreneur-friendly of these institutions, or at least for us there has always been a good negotiation link, and it is like, there's always

been a genuine desire to help firms succeed. And to that I was really pleased with it how it went.”
 –F6, Frank

Examining the statement through the matrix, entrepreneur-friendly frame was discovered. Frank’s depictions of long collaboration with the institution had created a positive image of them. Compared to other actors, Frank felt Finnvera had succeeded in posing an image of a genuinely firm-caring institution:

Table 10. Entrepreneur-Friendly Frame

Finnvera	Entrepreneur-Friendly - Frame
Metaphors	‘Entrepreneur-friendly’
Exemplars	Always had good connection to the institution for negotiations
Catchphrases	‘perhaps the most entrepreneur-friendly of these institutions’
Depictions	Long-term experience of cooperation with the institution
Visual Images	None
Roots	The institution has clearly shown their genuine desire to support businesses to succeed
Consequences	Positive conception of the institution and their actions regarding firm internationalization
Appeals to principle	Compared to others, Finnvera has succeeded in posing an image of a genuinely firm-caring institution

4.2.7 Chamber of Commerce of Central Finland

The Chamber of Commerce of Central Finland is a business organization promoting the success and growth of local businesses in the region. As the participants of this study have initiated their operations from Central Finland, some of the firms were members of the institution or had few encounters with them before. Evan valued the Chamber of Commerce’s networks high, because they could assist him move forward in difficult situations. He also recognized that there is a spiritual environment among entrepreneurs and executives, and that the flow of vital information is one of the reasons he wants to be a part of this community.

“...I’m a member of The Chamber of Commerce, and the greatest value of it is that there are networks, and depending on the firm they can utilize the chambers’ international networks, which can help you move forward. It’s one part of it, but the other one is like this, as for the firm executives or especially the entrepreneurs, it’s like this spiritual atmosphere where you have business leaders or entrepreneurs in it, in the committee work and in the Chamber of Commerce, it’s like the intellectual well-being and exchange of information. So, for that it’s insanely good. Or

that is the reason why I am there. You hear how it is going with in other firms, in other industries.”
 -F5, Evan

Examining the statement through the matrix, the Chamber of Commerce of Central Finland was framed as a dynamic promoter for local firms. Evan had a positive image of the institution, as it had important ties and relationships, which brings together regional firms and actors, and promotes regional matters:

Table 11. Dynamic Promoter Frame

Chamber of Commerce of Central Finland	Dynamic Promoter - Frame
Metaphors	‘This spiritual atmosphere’; an exceptional environment for firms and entrepreneurs
Exemplars	Utilizing the international networks of the Chamber of Commerce to solve problems and progress forward
Catchphrases	‘for that it’s insanely good’
Depictions	‘like the intellectual well-being and exchange of information’
Visual Images	None
Roots	A functioning institution with important ties and relationships, which brings together firms and actors and promotes regional matters
Consequences	Wanting to be a part of the network and community, as it provides valuable information regarding other firms and industries
Appeals to principle	Being a member of the institution and network produces significant value for local firms, in terms of information sharing and support

Evan framed the Chamber of Commerce of Central Finland as a dynamic promoter, which supports local firms in various ways and provides a community of intellectual well-being. Moreover, Evan emphasized the connections acquired through the institution and the value of information sharing with executives and other entrepreneurs. This was something Aaron also acknowledged, as through their networks the institution provided a business angel to mentor and consult him with firm internationalization. The cost-free consultant turned out to be an essential connection for Aaron, and it supported his firm endeavors with a six-month program.

“The first partner was the Chamber of Commerce of Central Finland, from their own networks they acquired this kind of a business angel, an expert in the field of exports, who is a

cost-free consultant who mentors and who you can call. An extremely important block for us. It's great that it existed, and it worked really well and there was also a six-month program, where you had to get certain steps done." -F1, Aaron

Frank framed the institution as a positive driver and identified the value of good contacts from there. Before, he had not utilized the institution in his endeavors to internationalize and did not know how to benefit from them. Over the years, his understanding of how the institution works had increased, and he was convinced it would surely support the efforts of internationalizing to new regions. For Frank, the creation of networks and valuable connections for discussions in decision-making were the most important factors of the institution.

"Before, relatively little like, as if in fact we probably weren't even members of the Chamber of Commerce back then, now that I have worked there, worked in one committee for a few years, for sure one would gain support for implementing to new regions. And especially for creating those networks, I think that organizations like the Chamber of Commerce are certainly very useful. -- As I said before, if I were now to go international, I'm pretty sure it would benefit from the Chamber of Commerce. I would know how utilize it. I see it as a positive, positive driver in those things, that you can get good, good contacts from there. Which are of course important, these sort of discussions in decision-making and supporting it." -F6, Frank

Grant pointed out the active work the institution had been doing in support for the local firms and promoting the interests of the region of Central Finland. Newspaper articles they have written about what's happening in local firms is supporting their interests as well. He acknowledged his firm does not have much time to be actively involved with the institution, but his view on how they handle regional matters was positive.

"But that they are very active in their operations, and doing this kind of newspaper articles and other things. That's just good, good support for our activities as well. No one from our firm has much time to be actively involved with them, but I think they have a good angle in how they promote the interests of this region" -F7, Grant

For Ian, the role of the institution is more divided. Throughout the years as an entrepreneur, he has collaborated with various Chambers of Commerce. Experiences with services such as coaching and training have mainly been positive. For Ian, the institution has not directly increased his network, but he recognizes its value for other entrepreneurs. Especially for individuals and firms possibly targeting to Central Finland, the Chamber of Commerce would be an applicable place to start creating a network. Even though Ian has not experienced direct benefits from the institution to firm internationalization, he recognizes the institution as an influencer for local firms.

"Difficult to say. Chambers of Commerce differ so much [from each other] and maybe what they are best at doing is... Well, for example, the Helsinki Chamber of Commerce does a great job with coaching and training sets, so we're in those, and then literature.... Some type of an educative role they could have. And probably for some it's like the network. I would say for

firms that are establishing themselves to Central Finland, the Chamber of Commerce is probably a good place to start building a network. Well, I myself know quite a lot of people there anyway. As such an actor itself, it does not add much value to it. Some type of an influencer it certainly is and doing different things. But at least so far, I haven't seen what they could've done as for the internationalization side, probably they have doing something but it's not familiar to me" -F9, Ian

For some entrepreneurs, the Chamber of Commerce of Central Finland posed as a dynamic promoter, as the institution has supported their interests, operations and internationalization in a variety of ways. However, others had a distinctive way of framing the institution, since they have had little to no experience of collaboration with them. The institution posed as an indifferent actor in their firms' endeavors. Henry described there had been some contacts with them, but he was not aware of what's going on in the institution. He had an image of a non-active institution, and he was not aware what type of support he could ask from them. His thoughts were the institution could be more active and understanding better what firms need would improve conditions for local firm internationalization. It remained unclear, which procedures would answer to these needs best. However, few entrepreneurs posed the institution as an indifferent actor in the field for local firms, as for some it wasn't an institution they have had collaboration with.

"No, no, there hasn't been anything. And we don't really know what's going on there. But yeah, sometime there was someone contacting us, but it's pretty much like... The image of them is like maybe... I don't know, somehow it feels like you don't always find the kind of help that you really need, it's just like that. And then, if you ask for it, or maybe you don't even know how to ask for it. If there is this sort of actor, I would have it be more active, finding the state of affairs as in understanding what firms really need. I'm sure it would support the internationalization of firms. Because few companies have the time to find a person to figure out these things. Meaning there are no resources to use for it." -F8, Henry

By examining Henry's statement through the matrix, the institution was framed as an indifferent one. The institution was posed as a non-active and indifferent actor in the field, which does not provide much value for regional firms:

Table 12. Indifferent Frame

Chamber of Commerce of Central Finland	Indifferent - Frame
Metaphors	'state of affairs'
Exemplars	Having an image of non-active institution
Catchphrases	'as in understanding what firms really need'

Depictions	Depiction of the feeling like not always finding the kind of help one needs
Visual Images	None
Roots	Not finding the help needed, or don't know what support could be requested from the institution.
Consequences	The institution poses as an indifferent actor in the field
Appeals to principle	Being more active and understanding better what firms need would improve conditions for local firm internationalization

Lack of collaboration with the institution lead entrepreneurs to be unclear about the functions of the institution and unaware of its possible advantages. Similar to this, Clark described their contacts with the institution by telling they haven't done much collaboration, besides a few export documents and certifications. David proceeded to depict the institution had not played any role in their internationalization. Neither Clark nor David indicated they would had hopes for possible future cooperation with the institution, and for them the Chamber of Commerce was not influential with their operations.

"Well, with them we haven't really [done collaboration], some export documents we've done with them, and a few times I've been in contact with them about some certifications, but otherwise not really at all."-F3, Clark

"No, it hasn't played any role in our efforts yet, the only thing I've talked to is this guy sitting in Moscow, in the Great Chamber of Commerce of Russia, with him I've discussed. That's about it. So, no, nothing else yet."-F4, David

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Theoretical conclusions are presented in this chapter, bringing the theoretical and empirical parts together. This research has presented the most important theories concerning firm internationalization, as well as shed light on framing theory. The three most common theories of internationalization process have been presented, and the interviewed SMEs have traits and characteristics from all three models. As a unifying factor in their firm internationalization stories, the role of networks was discovered to be significant in the process. However, a deeper examination of internationalization narratives revealed more distinctions and similarities of framing individual actors within a network. In this final section, the findings of this study are reflected into existing firm internationalization and framing literature.

The role of networks in internationalization processes has received a lot of attention in the academic literature. As stated in the beginning of this research, networks and relationships are distinguished as a significant factor in firm internationalization by granting opportunities (i.e. Aldrich, 1989, Coviello & Munro, 1995), enabling learning from partner's knowledge & experience (Bonaccorsi, 1992), giving access to external resources (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994) and providing key information about international markets (Sharma & Blomstermo, 2003). The findings of the study are in line with existing research, which has discovered networks important to firm internationalization. Entrepreneurs agreed networks were essential to firm internationalization: firms recognized network interactions being fundamental, and formal and informal relationships must be established and maintained. Relationships provided many benefits and support, in terms of knowledge, external resources, opportunities and speeding up the process. In some cases, it was described that internationalization would not have been possible without the support of networks. This is reasonable, as networks can be described as a crucial part of the process and internationalization is difficult without connections. A network of connections is constituted of different actors, and even though networks were considered an integral part of internationalization, by taking a closer look at individual actors there's much more variability and nuances to be discovered in framing.

After examining the relevance of networks in firm internationalization, I provided a more detailed perspective on framing of actors in an entrepreneurs' network impacting their firm internationalization. The research was not attempting to explain why certain phrases were chosen, but rather to demonstrate with examples what meanings were concealed behind the narratives and what these messages revealed about different actors and firm internationalization from Central Finland. This research aimed to contribute to existing literature by examining the topic with a narrative approach and frame analysis. Although the narrative approach has been identified as a valuable method to understand individuals' experiences, it has still been infrequently utilized in studying networks in firm

internationalization interviews (Gertsen & Söderberg, 2011). For organizational research, frame analysis can be beneficial (Creed, 2002), but little research has been conducted in studying the frames of reference in individuals' internationalization narratives. This research aimed to extend the previous literature by understanding the topic from the perspective of framing.

This research has developed a nuanced understanding of how different actors are framed in firm internationalization process. The study revealed how entrepreneurs framed different actors in their network influencing the internationalization process and elaborated, which frames are present in entrepreneurs' stories of internationalization. Utilizing the inductive approach (DeVreese, 2005), I discovered networks were framed important, just as existing research had suggested, but what was interesting and new was that behind the emphasis on overall importance of networks lied a rich understanding of the roles of different actors. By going a level deeper and examining individual actors in a network, a spectrum of different frames emerged from the stories, and actors were not always framed positively. Valence framing involves putting information in a positive or a negative light (Hallahan, 1999). Levin et al (1998) suggest the positive frame concentrates attention on the goal of getting a positive outcome, and the negative frame concentrates attention on avoiding a negative outcome. Whether an actor in this study was framed positively or negatively, depended on whether it was perceived to be helpful in the internationalization process or not. An institution with the function of aiding in firm internationalization could be framed both as a supportive organization and as an incompetent one, depending on the framer's own experiences and interpretations. A firm which had used and benefited from an institution's services, also framed it in a positive light. The significance and impact of an individual actor on internationalization varied depending on the storyteller, and some actors were framed in more than just one way. Another institution can be portrayed as a dynamic promoter for regional firms and their interests, but also as an institution which actions are indifferent to others. Lack of collaboration with the institution lead entrepreneurs being unclear about the functions of the institution and unaware of its possible advantages and frame the actor as an indifferent one. This is further elaborated in The Framing Tree Diagram (Figure 2). Nevertheless, it should be noted some frames were more prevalent than others, as the role of various institutions and actors in firm internationalization was often framed supportive and beneficial. Resources, such as funding, information and connections from these actors supported and provided valuable assistance for many during firm internationalization efforts.

Cornelissen & Werner (2014) suggest further empirical research on framing and frames at the organizational level could benefit the research field on framing. The findings of this study contribute to existing framing literature by exploring framing in the context of firm internationalization. Additionally, the findings supported in drawing a clearer distinction between valence frames, that is, casting information in a positive or a negative light. When comparing different ways of framing, some actors were framed negatively, but this was relatively rare. In-

vestors occasionally popped into discussion, but often they were merely mentioned in the stories with a neutral tone. Competitors were not often a topic of discussion but were at times framed as a threat for firm survival. These were framed as an underdog situation, in which a smaller and weaker firm competed against a larger and stronger opponent. Surprisingly, EU was compounded in this frame for their new regulation, which was challenging for firm operations. Politics and politicians were not often associated with internationalization stories, but one clear contrast between Finnish and Estonian politicians was drawn. Politicians in Finland were framed counterproductive, whereas Estonian ones as entrepreneur-friendly and business oriented. Encouragement from politicians towards innovation, and boosting local firms was something the storyteller desired to have in Finland as well.

The way of framing different actors did not seem to be strongly related with firms' internationalization type. Frames manifested in a variety of ways, and an individual entrepreneur could, for example, provide a supportive frame of one actor and then an indifferent frame of another. In the Network-model, market exchange is seen as the outcome of interactions between trade links among market actors (Tikkanen, 1998) and internationalization follows the development and maintenance of formal and informal relationships with network partners (Johansson & Mattson, 1988). Nevertheless, same internationalization type firms, such as Network-firms, could display both supportive and incompetent frames of the same actor. Then again, a born-global firm, to which access to international networks is a valuable and important resource (Håkansson 1982), could still praise one actor and frame another in a pessimistic manner. Therefore, the data suggests framing of an actor was based more on individual experiences rather than mode of internationalization itself, and a clear conclusion about the type of internationalization and the type of framing couldn't be drawn.

Sometimes, the role of an actor in firm internationalization was merely recognized in a story, as its impact and value were not significant to the storyteller and the role of an actor related to firm internationalization was small. A statement regarding an actor was missing a unifying central concept held by idea elements (Gamson & Lasch, 1983), which resulted in an absence of a frame. The reason for this there may not have been collaboration, and at times it was not known that help with internationalization would even be available. Most entrepreneurs were aware of several sources, which can provide financial support for internationalization, but other support for internationalization, such as consultancy, was not necessarily known or understood what value it would provide.

As most entrepreneurs agreed networks were vital to firm internationalization, the findings of this study revealed there are numerous ways to interpret this. The process of building networks long-term was identified as essential, and networks were utilized for many different purposes in internationalization, such as acquiring information, employees, experts and customers, and for some, networks allowed a radical expansion to international markets. Overall, the study displayed entrepreneurs have different ways of framing actors. Findings of the study revealed these actors are important in firm internationalization, but they

can still be framed in numerous of ways. These different kinds of frames provide insights to what these actors mean for the entrepreneurs, how they are perceived and what their role is in Finnish firm internationalization.

5.1 Managerial Implications

The findings of this study have implications for practice as well. Emphasizing the significance of networks in SMEs' internationalization efforts, the findings of the study suggest firms have significantly benefitted from networks in their internationalization by speeding up the process, leveraging internationalization knowledge and building valuable relationships. When it comes to planning and implementing internationalization, founders and managers must consider the structure of their networks.

Support for firm internationalization has been provided in various forms for years, and recently it has progressed to better promote the interests of SMEs and their internationalization. Financial services, internationalization events, internationalization consultations and training programs are all useful tools for many firms. Most entrepreneurs in this study were aware of financial tools in support of internationalization, whereas other sources of external help weren't as well known. SMEs should be more encouraged to utilize various services as they are taking steps towards internationalization. Furthermore, governmental decision-makers are urged to continue creating services for SMEs looking to expand internationally.

This study has demonstrated individuals frame actors in different ways, and how an actor was framed may reveal a general perception of what internationalizing entrepreneurs have of them. How an individual actor was framed depended on whether it was perceived to be helpful in the process of internationalization. Positive views affirm support in internationalization, such as Business Finland's Tempo-funding program, has produced positive effects. The findings also reveal the actors who were framed differently could improve some of their operations for internationalizing firms. Actors such as government-based institutions are encouraged to better express local firms what they can do to support their internationalization. Moreover, building links between different actors and increasing networking between firms and institutions would help to increase the knowledge of services and activities provided by different actors, which can increase internationalization.

5.2 Limitations and Implications for Future Research

There were some limitations in this study. Conducting nine narrative interviews for firms operating in various industries produced a large sample of

data, and different frames could be extracted from it. However, a larger sample of firms would likely produce additional frames, explain more and confirm the findings of this study. Firms operating in important industries such as energy, finance or healthcare, were not represented in the sample, and examining the topic thoroughly with more firms could produce further variation in frames, which would be valuable for future research.

Furthermore, all the participants were male, and no female entrepreneurs were interviewed for this study. Interviewing female entrepreneurs could provide a wider understanding of firm internationalization experiences and produce alternative frames, as they are shaped by individuals' experiences. Not including female entrepreneurs was unintentional. I pursued to find suitable female entrepreneurs matching the study's criteria, which then turned out be challenging. Contacts with The Women Entrepreneurs of Central Finland-organization lead me to believe there are only a handful of female entrepreneurs conducting international business in the region of Central Finland. To include female entrepreneurs, the study should be conducted with a wider region in Finland. A third of Finnish entrepreneurs are females, and female entrepreneurship is often characterized by a lack of growth and internationalization, and not employing other people (Härkin, 2018). Another important avenue for future research would be to explore how to encourage female entrepreneurship in Finland and foster their internationalization.

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