

**The Foreign Commercial Service, U.S. Embassy Helsinki:
How they communicate and help businesses in new markets**

A Finnish company perspective

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Bachelor's Thesis
Degree programme in Business
2012



Degree Program in Business

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<p>Title of thesis The Foreign Commercial Service, U.S. Embassy Helsinki: How they communicate and help businesses in new markets. A Finnish company perspective</p>	<p>Number of pages and appendices 34 + 1</p>
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<p>The department of the Foreign Commercial Service at the U.S. Embassy, Helsinki is a crucial participant in business relations between Finland and the United States.</p> <p>This thesis sets out to describe the functions of the U.S. Foreign Commercial Service in Helsinki and how they help businesses find new markets. The perspective is taken from that of Finnish companies. Theoretical concepts concentrate on different communication channels and methods with emphasis being placed on stakeholder communication, and one-way and two-way strategic models of communication.</p> <p>The main goal is to find out how the Foreign Commercial Service works, how they communicate to Finnish companies and whether their communication channels are effective in finding new markets.</p> <p>Research methods utilized were qualitative in the form of interviews and collected text data. The interviews were held during January – March 2012. The whole thesis process lasted from November 2011 to April 2012.</p> <p>Results of research showed that the Foreign Commercial Service offers many services to Finnish companies and their communication channels are diverse.</p> <p>Interview responses provided positive reaction to the Commercial Service and their communication methods. This was concluded due to the successful experiences and liaison between the Commercial Service and its business partners.</p> <p>Suggestions given to further improve the communications of the Commercial Service included the on-going flow of information could be made more readily available to Finnish companies and investors. A communication plan for the department could be implemented.</p>	
<p>Keywords Stakeholder communication, U.S.-Finland business relations, U.S. Foreign Commercial Service, communication channels</p>	

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1 Introduction

An Embassy is a body of persons entrusted with a mission to a sovereign or government, especially an ambassador and his or her staff. (Dictionary, 2012.) Commerce is defined as an interchange of goods or commodities, especially on a large scale between different countries (foreign commerce); trade, business. (Dictionary, 2012.) The combination or interchange of these two terms gives a vague introduction to the definition and purpose of the Department of Commerce, U.S. Commercial Service within an embassy.

The department of the Foreign Commercial Service at the U.S. Embassy Helsinki is a crucial player in business relations between Finland and the United States. The mission of the Foreign Commercial Service is to assist U.S. firms interested in exporting by providing them expert counselling and advice, information on market potential, assistance in locating international contacts, support of trade events, and advocacy services.

The importance of an embassy in an international environment is vital to business relationships today. Their network is vast. The Embassy in Helsinki has contact with subsidiaries of over 400 American companies operating in Finland today. The structure and functions of an embassy are typically not known to those not involved within the embassy environment. Many do not know the different roles of personnel, whether it be a local employee or an international diplomat, or the roles of the different departments at an embassy. Many may wonder, what is their purpose?

Through this writing, the functions and purpose of the U.S. Foreign Commercial Service, a department within the Embassy in Helsinki Finland are researched. The research problem is how does the Foreign Commercial Service communicate and help businesses in new markets?

The theoretical part of this thesis will describe in detail the role and functions of the Foreign Commercial Service. The following four research questions will be researched:

- 1) How the Foreign Commercial service works and what types of communication channels are used?
- 2) How beneficial are they to Finnish companies and the Finnish market?
- 3) How can the Foreign Commercial Service improve their communication?
- 4) What is the importance of building U.S.- Finland strategic partnerships?

The theoretical section also encompasses the communication channels of the Commercial Service. Corporate communication is discussed and compared to the department as a whole. Organizational communication is also explored on the surface, giving the reader a little insight into the organization.

The main theory of this thesis is the investigation of the different communication channels through the services offered by the Foreign Commercial Service with emphasis being placed on stakeholder communication. One-way and two-way strategy models of communication are also compared. Through these different communication channels, the author wishes to find ways of improving the communication methods of the Foreign Commercial Service.

Interviews are conducted with various contacts that the Foreign Commercial Service deals with on a regular basis. The interview questions are posed to find and ask their opinions and experiences with the Foreign Commercial Service.

The services and products offered by the Commercial Service are primarily geared towards U.S. companies wishing to invest or do business in Finland. However, the focus is from the perspective of Finland, and Finnish companies and entrepreneurs. Finnish companies do not use the services in the same way as the American companies. However the Commercial Service specialists liaise with American and Finnish companies using these same services.

This thesis study is important to both the Foreign Commercial Service and Finnish companies for various reasons. Due to the economical situation, it is important for Finnish companies to find new markets for investments, imports, and exports.

The Foreign Commercial Service at the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki is an important player in the majority of U.S. investments and interests in Finland. Finding ways in making them more available to Finnish companies and showing them how they can use the U.S. Foreign Commercial Service to their benefit in finding new business partnerships is the main objective of this thesis.

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Information about the Commercial Service is given in chapter two. Chapter three discusses the background theory about the communication channels researched. In chapter four the research methods are discussed and in chapter five the results presented. Chapter six consists of the summary of the results of the research and in chapter seven the whole thesis process is evaluated.

2 The Commercial Service

This chapter includes background information of the Commercial Service and where the department is positioned within the governmental organizations of the United States. The importance of the Commercial Service in the Nordic regions is touched upon and most important, the Foreign Commercial Service in Helsinki is explained.

The U.S. Commercial Service is a branch of the International Trade Administration, which is the trade section of the United States government. The International Trade Administration is designed to strengthen the competitiveness of U.S. industries, to promote trade and investment, and to enforce fair trade. The Administration works to improve the global business environment and to help promote American businesses to compete both in the United States and abroad. (United States Department of Commerce, 2010.) The International Trade Administration is divided into four business categories, U.S. Commercial Service, Manufacturing and Services, Market Access and Compliance, and Import Administration. Figure 1 below helps in understanding the role of the International Trade Administration in reference to the United States Department of Commerce.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

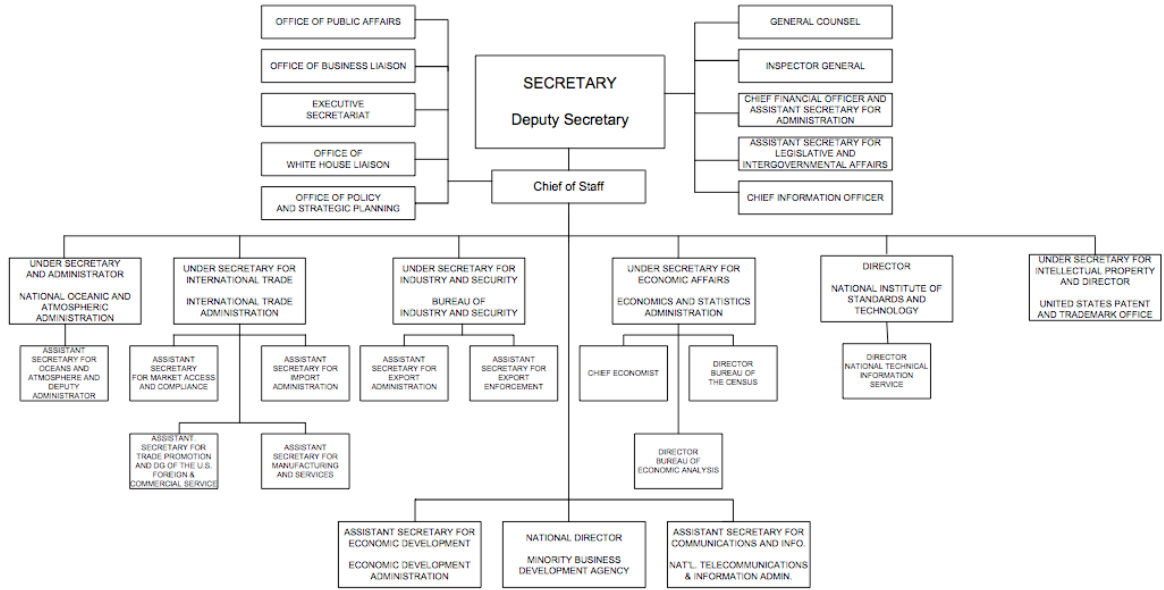


Figure 1 Organization chart of the U.S. Department of Commerce (United States Department of Commerce, 2012)

2.1 Commercial Service in the Nordic region

The Nordic Region (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) is a large, sophisticated marketplace and considered worldwide to be an excellent test market for new products and easy-to-enter market for new export companies. English is widely spoken, business agreements are reliable, and the infrastructure is incomparable. The Nordic countries have close bilateral ties to the United States culturally, politically, and historically. Excellent opportunities for American businesses exist in all of the Nordic countries, hence the importance of the U.S. Commercial Service. (Helping U.S. Companies Export, 2010.) The bilateral communication between the Nordic countries and the United States is the key function of the Commercial Service abroad.

2.2 United States Foreign Commercial Service in Helsinki

The Foreign Commercial Service is the trade promotion part of the U.S. Department of Commerce’s International Trade Association. The Foreign Commercial Service has international offices in over seventy countries. (Embassy of the United States Helsinki

Finland, 2012.) The Foreign Commercial Service is a department within the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki Finland.

The main purpose and goal of the Commercial Service is to promote United States exports and interests to Finland. Promoting in this case meaning to support and encourage U.S. interests. The Foreign Commercial Service works as a link between Finnish and American companies and professionals, hoping to make them a partner for successful business. They offer export promotion assistance through a variety of programs and services to U.S. companies wishing to enter or expand their Finnish market presence. Finland is also an excellent gateway to prospects in Northwest Russia and the Baltic states (Helping U.S. Companies Export, 2012).

The Commercial Service thus, encourages inquiries from Finnish firms interested in importing U.S. products and/or services. They are the key link for business interactions amongst American and Finnish firms. The figure below shows the structure of the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki and the placement of the Commercial Service within the Embassy.



Figure 2 Organization structure of the U.S. Embassy, Helsinki

2.2.1 Employees of the Commercial Service

The Foreign Commercial Service in Helsinki employs local individuals living in Finland, usually Finnish nationals. These are known as Commercial Specialists. Each individual specializes in many different industry sectors some examples being, travel and tourism, technology and telecommunications, or the energy sector. The head of the Foreign Commercial Service department is a Regional Senior Commercial Officer holding American citizenship. This individual is a foreign diplomat whose work term usually consists of three years. They have been positioned to support the duties of the Commercial Service abroad in the country of representation, in this case Finland.

3 Communication Channels

The Foreign Commercial Service at the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki uses many different communication channels when liaising with investors, entrepreneurs and businesses in Finland. In this chapter these communication channels can be studied through the Commercial Service as an organization. Corporate communication will be discussed in regards to the organization as a whole. Organizational communication will be re-searched and compared to the Commercial Service, in addition to, stakeholder communication and the different strategic models of communication.

3.1 Corporate Communication

It is not so much about the corporate brand for the Commercial Service though they do communicate in similar ways which corporate communication is defined. Corporate communication involves marketing communications, organizational communications, and management communications. Marketing communications are messages and related media used to communicate with a market. Management communications are communications between management and its internal and external audiences (Riel & Fombrun 2007). Jackson originally defined it in 1987 as, corporate communication is the total communication actively generated by a company to achieve its planned objectives. (Jackson, 1987.) This description can be argued to be outdated and may have changed over the years. Corporate communication involves all forms of communication encompassing the company coming also from the outside, not only the communication the company generates outward. Corporations not only communicate to stakeholders, their communication channels are vast.

The Commercial Service Helsinki is a business department within the embassy. Their main focus is on encouraging businesses from the United States to invest in Finland and also supporting these businesses. In this process communication is the focal point during most business interactions. Given that corporate communication is the set of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communications aimed at creating favourable starting points with stakeholders on which the com-

pany depends (Riel & Fombrun 2007, 25). Corporate communication consists of the dissemination of information by a variety of specialists and generalists in an organization, with the common goal of enhancing the organization's ability to retain its license to operate (Riel & Fombrun 2007, 25). This definition clearly applies to the functions of the Department of Commerce at the U.S. Embassy. Corporate communication ideas are important for private and public companies, businesses and not-for-profit organizations (Riel & Fombrun 2007, 26). The Commercial Service Helsinki operates in a competitive environment amongst other businesses. Commercial Specialists are enhancing the departments' existence through corporate communication. It is important as well, that they are aware of the value of maintaining and developing an attractive image.

The immediate set of associations of an individual in response to one or more signals or messages from or about a particular organization at a single point in time (Cornelissen 2011, 8).

Because corporate communication is more related to businesses rather than organizations, image and reputation are aspects that the Commercial Service Helsinki could consider. Reputation is important because it is an individual's collective representation of past images of an organization established over time (Cornelissen 2011, 8.)

The functions of the Commercial Service as a whole could be defined as corporate communication. They are there to enhance business prospects to Finland, find new stakeholders for American products and services and as a whole communicate amongst Finnish and American companies.

3.2 Organizational Communication

Now we can take a look further into organizational communication. Organizational communication is one form of corporate communication. It is the way of communicating with an organization and the communication within an organization. Organizational communications encompasses many different aspects including public relations, investor relations, and internal communication (Riel & Fombrun 2007). Companies

differ in the ways organizational communications are built-in within their organizations. The Commercial Service at the U.S. Embassy is a unique organization with a unique way of using organizational communications.

Cees B.M. van Riel & Charles J. Fombrun (2007, 20) defines quite adequately the role of organizational communication at the Foreign Commercial Service Helsinki. Organizational communications are aimed at corporate audiences, such as shareholders, financial journalists, investment analysts etc. Also organizational communications have a long-term perspective and do not directly aim at generating sales (Riel & Fombrun 2007, 19). The Commercial Service is focused on generating business contacts and relationships. They do not monetarily generate sales, as is the case with most public and private companies. The embassy is a government organization, building long-term relationships and investments. Organizational communications are generally initiated by external parties (Riel & Fombrun 2007, 20). However in the case of the Commercial Service, most of their communications are initiated from inside to external parties. The Commercial Service specialists go through great lengths in initiating communications and generating business prospects through many different forums, attending fairs and conventions around the world, offering their many services.

3.3 Stakeholder communication

Lets take a step further into the communication channels of the Commercial Service. The Commercial Service offers numerous products and services for companies and entrepreneurs in the United States looking for business prospects in Finland. They also offer products and services for companies and entrepreneurs in Finland seeking to liaise and build connections with American businesses.

Stakeholder communication as a whole is the most relevant form of communication used at Commercial Service when dealing with their stakeholders and building business relationships.

Stakeholders of the organization need to be identified and they must be addressed for the stake they hold. In practice, this comes down to providing stakeholders with the type of information about the company's operations in which they have an interest (Cornelissen, 2011, 44).

The Commercial Service through the products and services they offer provides this information. The main focus of their mission is to build stakeholder relations between Finnish and American companies and investors. Cornelissen (2011) discusses three different strategies of stakeholder communication originally founded by Grunig & Hunt illustrated in Figure 3.

These strategies display the differences of providing information or disseminating information with stakeholders (Cornelissen 2011, 49). The first strategy informational strategy (one-way symmetrical model) is the approach of informing someone about something. For example press releases, reports, newsletters and other forms of information available about the organization to its stakeholders. The second strategy is the persuasive strategy (also described as two-way asymmetrical model), which is an approach through campaigns, meetings and discussion. This strategy tries to change the knowledge, attitude, and behaviour of stakeholders in a way that favours the organization. The third strategy talked about is a dialogue strategy (two-way symmetrical model). This is when both parties, the organization and the stakeholders, mutually engage in an exchange of ideas and opinions. This involves active consultation of stakeholders and working towards a process of mutual understanding and mutual decisions (Cornelissen 2011, 49-50).

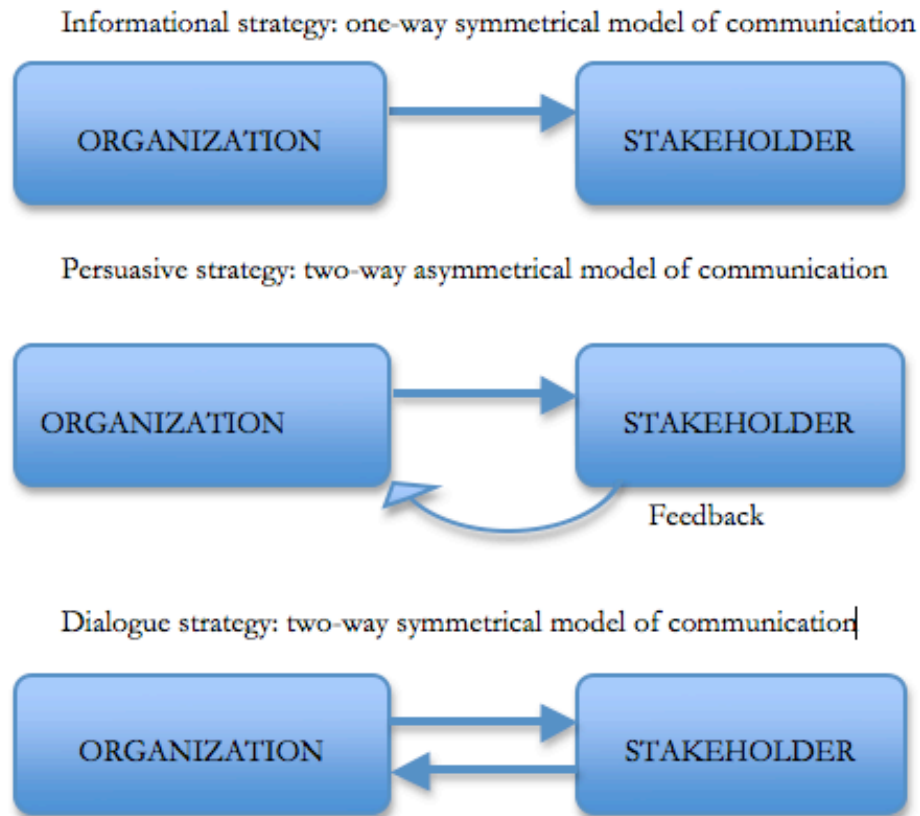


Figure 3 Models of organization- stakeholder communication (Cornelissen 2011, 50)

The use of these strategies depends on the stakeholders and the need for active engagement to build long-term relationships with companies.

Of the three strategy models the dialogue strategy portrays the Commercial Service and its role with their stakeholders. The two-way symmetrical model demonstrates that communication flows both ways between an organization and its stakeholders (Cornelissen 2011, 51.) The goal of this model is for the organization and its stakeholders to exchange views and to reach mutual understandings. Both parties recognize the other in the communication process and try to provide each other with equal opportunities for expression and for free exchange of information (Cornelissen 2011, 51.) It is imperative for stakeholders and the organization to gain mutual understanding during business interactions. Both parties are hopeful to succeed and their business interactions to benefit all involved. This builds long-term relationships with stakeholders

and organizations. The persuasive strategy or two-way asymmetrical model is used most often in companies today. Many organizations attempt to change the attitudes and behaviour of stakeholders to their favour.

4 Research methods

In the following chapter the research process and methods of this thesis will be described and analysed. The how and why of the research questions and the research process will be discussed thoroughly.

The research methods used to collect data and to answer the research questions were largely through primary data. The main advantage of primary data is that they are collected for the particular project at hand (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2010, 99.) Also if we want to know people's attitudes only primary data can help answer these (Ghauri & Gronhaug 2010, 100.)

The qualitative research approach was used in collecting the data. Text data was gathered from various forums. Books and online sources were researched to provide information on the type of research methods suitable for this particular topic and determining the types of data to collect.

Research information was gathered from internal documents gathered at the Foreign Commercial Service. These documents included reports, written highlights, meeting points, and data collected from attending events and seminars. Written documents and reports from the Embassy were used to gather information about the services they provide. The Embassy possesses archives of reports written for different industry sectors, providing stakeholders relevant information on the industries they enquire about. The Embassy also has written highlights on file, which are summaries and outcomes of the services they provided to various stakeholders. An example is they have written a short highlight about a one-day conference event organized in liaising Finnish and American companies. These data are used to detail the services and products the Commercial Service offers to stakeholders. These are detailed and compared to Cornelissen's communication models in the results chapter 5 of this thesis.

Interviews were conducted during January-March 2012 with many business partners, investors and customers of the Foreign Commercial Service. Four interviews were car-

ried out in total. From these collected data, and from the interview conducted for this thesis, the research questions are analysed.

4.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is helpful in answering the how and why of research questions. The main questions to be answered for this research paper were:

- 1) How the Foreign Commercial service works and what types of communication channels are used?
- 2) How beneficial are they to Finnish companies and the Finnish market?
- 3) How can the Foreign Commercial Service improve their communication?
- 4) What is the importance of building U.S.- Finland strategic partnerships?

The data used to answer questions 1, 2, and 4 are by the interviews conducted with stakeholders. Question number 3 is answered with the text data collected. These questions will hopefully be answered thoroughly and effectively through the collected qualitative data.

4.2 The interview

The key method of data collection for the thesis questions was in the form of an interview. Qualitative interviews let us see that which is not ordinarily on view and examine that which is often looked at but seldom seen (Rubin & Rubin 2012, 1). An interview is a great format for researching the effectiveness of the Foreign Commercial Service. The interview for this particular thesis topic is the most relevant form of qualitative data collection. Given that the Commercial Service's communication is being researched, interviews with their business partners and investors deemed most reliable.

The benefit of the interview for this research was the possibility to ask and receive information from the interviewee's about their opinions and experiences. The emphasis being on people and they're thoughts and opinions being the main subject of the research.

This would not have been possible in any other format. It gives the researcher information from those individuals interviewed on first hand experiences and opinions about the Foreign Commercial Service and their effectiveness. The great advantage of an interview as opposed to other forms of data collection is that one can regulate the collection of material in a flexible manner depending on the situation and the interviewed (Hirsijärvi, 192.) An interview provides complex answers and in many directions. It also gives the researcher an opportunity to clarify responses (Hirsijärvi, 2003.) This may however, be a disadvantage and complicate the analysis of the interviews. Regulating and clarifying responses may challenge the researcher in finding the proper answers to the research questions. Complex answers in many directions challenges the researcher in finding similar themes and solutions to analyse.

4.2.1 Interview type

The interview conducted for this thesis paper was in electronic format in the form of e-mail. The e-mail was the best and quickest way to reach the many different stakeholders of the Commercial Service. Many stakeholders are hard to reach so the e-mail was a convenient method to reach many. An assortment of interviewees was selected with no particular set-up. Some were chosen due to the familiarity of the contact and were selected due to previous collaboration. Interview persons were chosen from various contact lists found from data received at the Foreign Commercial Service. As mentioned by Rubin & Rubin (2012, 30) the Internet interview is particularly useful in communicating with people who are hard to reach.

Random contacts were chosen because the researcher wanted to conduct interviews with investors and business partners through the different industry sectors represented through the Commercial Services products. Given that their network is so large and reaching many different industry sectors in Finland, this was a factor considered in the interview process. The interview was sent out by email to twenty stakeholders. Ten replies were received however out of those ten, only four were able to answer the interview questions. This will be described later on in the analysis of results section.

4.2.2 Structure of the interview

A structured interview format was used, with some facets of an open interview. The same questions were posed to all the individuals interviewed. Given that the interview was an e-mail interview and considering time as a factor, the structured interview was most relevant. All those interviewed were asked the same questions in a structured form.

The interview had aspects of an open interview. It was open and informal in the way that those interviewed had the possibility to respond to the open-ended questions in many different ways. They could express their own opinions and experiences. Through this way, the opinions and feelings are exposed and the interviews can be interpreted accordingly.

The interview questions posed were not tested in any way prior to the e-mail being sent. They were thought out and chosen in great detail to hopefully receive responses, which would give the researcher sufficient information to respond to the main research questions.

4.2.3 Interview process

The interview questions were e-mailed to twenty individuals in early January 2012. Some are male and some are female. Twelve are male and eight are female. The sex of the person deemed irrelevant to the research questions and to the study. Interviewees were chosen at random. Seeing that the research topic is from the Finnish company perspective most of the individuals interviewed work currently in Finland. However, since the contacts were chosen at random, some of those who replied to the interview happened to be working in the United States and had once collaborated with the Commercial Service.

4.3 Analysis of results

Interview responses were analysed according to the questions answered. This was due to the relevance and relationships the stakeholders had with the Commercial Service.

Ten individuals responded to the email sent out. However, four individuals responded to the interview questions. The other six who responded to the e-mail felt that they did not have relevant experience with the Commercial Service to provide adequate information for this thesis and the interview questions asked.

Seven questions were asked and these were categorized in a separate word document. Each question was separated and the four responses were placed under each question. These responses were analysed together and similar themes; opinions and ideas were picked from the different responses. Once all four responses to each of the seven questions were evaluated they were once again categorized into themes appropriate to answering and supporting the original research questions.

5 Research results

The following chapter looks in detail at the results of the interviews and collected text data and compares them to the theories studied in earlier chapters.

The research results are divided into four parts according to the research questions. Each question will be discussed separately. Text data results are discussed in the first section answering the question how does the Foreign Commercial Service work and what types of communication channels are used? The interview results are then divided into three categories supporting the other three research questions. These three questions are; how beneficial is the Commercial Service to Finnish companies and the Finnish market? How can the Foreign Commercial Service improve their communication? And what is the importance of building U.S.- Finland strategic partnerships?

All interview responses are considered relevant to the study even though from the four interviews some questions were left unanswered. The interviews and text data are considered through wording and analysed through the different thoughts and opinions of those interviewed and compared and justified to the theories studied.

5.1 How do the Foreign Commercial Service work and what types of communication channels are used?

The major programs provided by the Commercial Service are designed to assist U.S. companies interested in entering the Finnish market, or using Finland as a gateway to prospects in Russia and the Baltic countries.

The research collected for this section was through text data. In this section there will be concrete examples provided of the services and products offered by the Commercial Service in Helsinki to both American and Finnish companies. These services and products as a whole is the persuasive strategy or two-way asymmetrical model of communication. Commercial Service Specialists duties are to assist in, and sell the following services and products chosen by the individual or company seeking their assistance. These services provided, illustrate how stakeholder communication is the large

focus for the Commercial Service on communication between potential business relationships. The aim is to connect the Finnish prospects with their American counterpart.

5.1.1 International Partner Search

The International Partner Search (IPS) is a service offered through the Commercial Service. This service identifies potential agents or distributors for U.S. products in Finland. It helps U.S. companies in finding Finnish partners and licensees. The Commercial Service provides the U.S. companies with information on potential prequalified local representatives for the company's product line, which they have found in Finland.

The information provided to the U.S. company is a report either on qualified Finnish agents, distributors, manufacturer's representatives, joint venture partners, licensees, franchisees, or strategic partners who have reviewed details on a U.S. company's products and services, and has expressed interest in these or otherwise partnering with the company. The company in question chooses and determines which type of report is beneficial for the type of company in question. It is important to gain mutual understanding between the individual providing the service and the organization for successful business and successful outcomes. These reports in question are crucial to the U.S. companies in understanding the Finnish market and also in finding relevant Finnish stakeholders.

5.1.2 Gold Key Matching Service

Another concrete example of how the Commercial Service uses stakeholder communication is through their Gold Key Matching Service. This is a service for the Finnish companies. They offer a customized program of pre-qualified business appointments, with Finnish companies that have expressed a definite interest in a certain U.S. company or product. The Commercial Service liaises and arranges business appointments with stakeholders in those companies. The Commercial Service specialist goes through a detailed communication process in fulfilling the successful liaison between the stakeholders. They contact the U.S. firm to discuss the product or service offered and clear-

clearly determines its goals and objectives in the potential market. They work with the client from the outset to develop a program custom-tailored to the customers marketing needs and goals. They attend all meetings scheduled, to act as counsellor and business adviser, as well as interpreter. After these meetings, the Commercial Specialist helps in evaluating all the companies visited and assist in finding effective ways to follow-up initial contacts. The persuasive strategy or two-way asymmetrical model of communication is used here and shown quite adequately. There is an on-going flow of information between both the Commercial Service specialist and the particular company with both parties exchanging ideas and opinions.

5.1.3 Platinum Key Service

The Platinum Key service uses the two-way persuasive strategy by providing U.S. companies customized, comprehensive and long-term (6 months to 1 year) business support on a variety of issues that require continuous assistance, such as identifying markets, launching products, developing major project opportunities, providing government support, lowering market access barriers and helping on regulatory or standard matters. The business support is provided through one-to-one communication with the Commercial Service specialist. They liaise with the stakeholder on all issues. This is done initially through e-mail or phone contact then face to face once the type of assistance required is identified.

5.1.4 International Buyer Program

Each year the U.S. Department of Commerce selects leading U.S. trade shows, fairs and conventions to be promoted worldwide. Commercial Specialists conduct intensive promotion campaigns in order to attract a group of local companies, mainly prospective representatives and distributors of American products, to travel to the International Buyer Program events. This is not so much promotion in a sense but the Commercial Specialists encourage representatives from Finland to participate in the trade shows giving them the opportunity to find and discover new business prospects and business partners. So it is more the promotion or support of helping companies net-

work. The Commercial Service specialists from Helsinki attend numerous events each year to support the Finnish market abroad.

5.1.5 Business Facilitation Service

The Business Facilitation Service is designed for single company promotion representing one to one communication. This means that U.S. companies or Finnish companies representing U.S. products can use the Embassy facilities for product launches, press conferences, meetings, or cocktail receptions to sit-down dinners for a limited number of participants. Networking is essential in this case due to the fact that many stakeholders are not aware of the resources available to them through the Commercial Service. Companies wishing to promote their products have the means to do so when networking with commercial specialists.

5.1.6 Customized Market Research

The Contact List is a service that provides U.S. companies with a product-specific list of potential agents, distributors or importers in the Finnish market. The list is compiled using post expertise and local databases and there are three options available:

- Unscreened contact list:

The unscreened contact list provides up to 20 contacts, gathered using the local databases and provided as found, including company name, address, phone, fax, website, contact name and principal activity.

- Qualified list:

The qualified list provides a contact list of up to 10 companies, including company name, address, phone, fax, website, confirmed contact name with email address and principal activity. The contacts and prospects are pre-screened, giving them an initial introduction to the American product in question.

- Nordic qualified list:

The Nordic Qualified List covers Sweden, Finland, Norway and Denmark and provides a Contact List of potential companies for each country. The list includes company name, address, phone, fax, website, confirmed contact name with email address and principal activity. The contacts and prospects are also pre-screened giving them an initial introduction to the American product in question.

For this service, the informational or one-way strategy is used. The service in question provides contact information for the U.S. stakeholder.

5.1.7 International Company Profile

The International Company Profile is designed to help U.S. companies enter international business relationships with confidence. International Company Profile provides background checks on overseas companies that provide U.S. firms with information to help assess foreign firms as business partners. This demonstrates once again the informational strategy model of communication by providing pertinent information for U.S. companies about the Finnish market and Finnish companies.

5.1.8 Commercial News USA - CNUSA

The CNUSA is a magazine that promotes American products and services. CNUSA is printed monthly and is free of charge. CNUSA can be subscribed from the Commercial Service at the U.S. Embassy.

Products and services explained above provide insight and depth of the Commercial Services' programs. Various communication channels are used in providing the most adequate support to stakeholders. Stakeholder communication is the core of all the Commercial Service communication methods. However, they utilize one to one communication through a selection of their services, providing support to stakeholders. One-way and two-way communication strategies are also clearly demonstrated by way of the majority of their services to stakeholders.

5.2 How beneficial is the Commercial Service to Finnish companies and the Finnish market?

The second research question; how beneficial is the Commercial Service to Finnish companies and the Finnish market; is discussed below from the interview results.

As stated in the theory section on stakeholder communication, stakeholders of the organization must be identified and the stakeholders should be provided with information on the company. From the interview responses we can determine the visibility of the Commercial Service in Finland. The Commercial Service at the embassy holds a wide network of contacts. These contacts are found and established through the products they offer and through the duties of the department. All four of the individuals interviewed had discovered the Commercial Service through their large network of contacts. The interviewed also discovered the Commercial Service through the use of their services and products that they offer in Finland. Interview 1 lamented, “They have known that the services exist for years.” This comment shows that their services are known to Finnish companies and have been known in recent years.

From the interview responses the collaboration with the Commercial Service has been for all those interviews for the same reasons. They are there to improve investor relations and to assist in the collaboration of bringing American and Finnish companies together. Through the four interview responses each individual has collaborated with the Commercial Service in a similar manner. Interview 1 mentioned that “The Commercial Service has been the American counterpart to a host of Finnish organizations” enhancing the importance of the relations of the Commercial Service. We can gather from the interview responses that those in close contact with the Commercial Service feel they are an integral part in economic, trade policy, and business relations between American and Finnish companies. Interview 3 mentioned that they have “discussed trade policy issues over the years” with the Commercial Service and Interview 4 mentions the collaboration on advocacy and policy issues in accordance with the Commercial Service. We can start gathering a theme and pattern to the interview responses. The importance of the Commercial Service in Finland is quite obviously stated even in

the response to the question of how the interviewed has collaborated with them. Through all the responses one can gather that the Commercial Service has been a key player in these stakeholder interactions. Though the circumstances and business dealings may have been different in each case, the outcome of the Commercial Services' position has been similar.

The collaborations have been a success and all parties satisfied. Another interesting point picked up through the question on how they have collaborated with the commercial Service; many of the interviewee's also elaborated on the successfulness of their work. Interview 1 already mentions, "Finnish counterparts have been very happy with the collaboration."

The question of how stakeholders can benefit from the services of the Foreign Commercial service was posed. All four interview responses were praising of the Commercial Service and very positive about their work. All four individuals interviewed felt the Commercial Service is very helpful and willing to collaborate on many different projects and agendas. Those interviewed also mentioned the staff to be easy to approach and open to new ideas and projects. Interview 1 state "once they have agreed to collaborate, that collaboration has always been energetic and to-the-point." Interview 4 states the criticalness of the Commercial Service in the work they do stating "Without Nick's help and guidance it would be very difficult for me to do my job." And later in the interview mentioning that the Commercial Service "are invaluable to us." These are powerful statements showing quite strongly the importance of the Commercial Service in the collaboration of Finnish and American companies wishing to do business together. All those interviewed, though having different agendas with the Commercial Service, feel the work of the Commercial Service is very successful and that they are an integral part in Finnish- U.S. business relations.

These interview analyses can be tied to the theory once again of stakeholder communication. The interview responses demonstrate suitably the dialogue strategy model of organization-stakeholder communication demonstrated in earlier chapters.

5.3 How can the Foreign Commercial Service improve their communication?

This third research question discusses the opinions of improving the communication of the Commercial Service. During the interviews two questions were asked whether they (individuals interviewed) believe the work of the Commercial Service is effective and whether the way in which they communicate is effective.

Two of the individuals interviewed didn't really know or could not answer to the question on whether they are effective or not in Finland. This was due to the nature of the work they do with the Commercial Service and due to the extent of their relationship. They had only worked with them on one prior occasion so the interviewed didn't feel justified to answer the question on their measure of effectiveness. The other two interviewed found the work of the Commercial Service to be very effective in Finland and to Finnish companies.

Interview 1 mentions, "Historically, the American Ambassadors to Finland have had a strong business background, which has been a very positive factor in giving the whole Embassy a positive, somewhat neutral ground to stand on."

Interview 1 also mentions the reputation of the Commercial Service and the U.S. Embassy as being a key factor in the effectiveness of their services. They mention "it (the Commercial Service) has a positive reputation that probably makes it easy to invite people to meetings and events." Interview 4 also believes that their work is particularly effective in Finland because of the incredible hard work of the Commercial Service team. Interview 4 concludes that the level of cooperation and the quality of the relationships, which have been built by the Commercial Service team, is the reason they are so successful in Finland.

The interview responses seem quite similar once again in the effectiveness and success of the work of the Commercial Service. All those interviewed responding to the question believe that without the Commercial Service, Finland-American business relations

would not be as they are today. Mentioned by Interview 1 “I don’t think Finnish-American business collaboration would be as effective, if the Embassy weren’t as dedicated and prone to taking initiative.” All those interviewed felt the same way about the Commercial Service, that their work in Finland is very crucial to American and Finnish business relations.

In regards to the question asked in regards to recommending the services of the Commercial Service, all those interviewed were of the same mind that they would definitely recommend their services. They all felt that without the Commercial Service the outcomes of their collaborations would not have been as great as they were. They felt that due to the relationship the Commercial Service has with key Finnish organizations, the use of their services and collaboration with them would only be beneficial.

The last question posed in the interview was whether they (the interviewee’s) had any opinions or suggestions for improving the communication of the Commercial Service. Not one of the interviewed seemed to have any suggestions as to how they could improve. However, interview 1 mentions the “ongoing flow of information that is built up in co-operation with a Finnish organization” could be beneficial in the matter that it would lessen the workload of the Commercial Service.

5.4 What is the importance of building U.S.- Finland strategic partnerships?

The last and fourth research question asks what is the importance of building U.S.- Finland strategic partnerships?

All those interviewed were asked the question of building strategic partnerships between the U.S. and Finland and its importance. As we have found from earlier question responses, one can only predict that strategic partnerships are important. The interview responses all felt that partnerships between the U.S. and Finland are vital to Finnish businesses today. Interview 4 stated “it’s important because the transatlantic relationship is the most important one in the world.” All four individuals interviewed felt that both the U.S. and Finland could learn from each other. One of the interviewed stated that for Finland, the United States is their most important export market. Strategic

partnerships help businesses in both countries. Finland and the United States can learn from each other and bring different things to the table. Finland being small yet innovative, and the United States having big corporations and global thinking they have so much to offer for each other. Interview 1 states, “teaming up Finnish innovation and American business mindedness will build a win-win situation for both parties.” Once again from these interview question responses the results from all parties were quite similar. One can summarize that strategic business relations between Finland and the U.S. build strong relationships and everyone on both ends benefit.

6 Summary of results

How does the Foreign Commercial Service communicate and help businesses in new markets? This was the main research problem posed at the beginning of this thesis process. After analysing the results from the interview responses and the collected information about the products and service, we can determine the benefits and usefulness of the Foreign Commercial Service in Finland. Also, perhaps find new ways in helping them be even more effective than they already are.

Overall the individuals interviewed had only positive things to say about the Commercial Service in Finland. Going into the research process the aim was to hopefully find loopholes and ways of improving their services and communication channels. This seemed to be irrelevant due to the successful experiences of those interviewed.

Stakeholder communication was the main theory researched and its importance to the functions of the communication of the Commercial Service. It can be summarized that the work of the Commercial Service in Finland definitely benefits Finnish companies looking to do business with the United States. The employees at the Commercial Service strive to make partnerships and contacts between Finnish and American companies and this was proven to be correct. From interview responses it can be gathered that the ease of dealing with the Commercial Service and their expertise of U.S. and Finnish markets has helped in the successful liaison and partnership between companies in both nations.

The services of the Commercial Service are the main methods offered in making partnerships possible and communicating to their stakeholders. Their stakeholders have benefited from the services and feel they are easy to access.

From all the feedback from the interviews, it can be summed up that the services of the Commercial Service had previously been known to those interviewed. The Commercial Service through their different communication channels approached those who were not aware of these services. According to research response, the communication

of the Commercial Service is superb and their services offer exceptional support in helping companies find new markets, in this case Finnish companies seeking new markets in the United States.

6.1 Suggestions for improvement

After analysing the results, it seems there is no need for improvement in the communication and services of the Foreign Commercial Service. However, some suggestions can be made in making them even more effective and helpful to Finnish companies. The on-going flow of information could be made readily available to Finnish companies and investors. The Commercial Service is a small office and due to the great deal of U.S. interest their workload can be quite considerable. By making their services, and information about their services more visible, it could ease the workload. Instead of having to search for contacts and possible business partners a database could be made with possible links.

Another aspect the Commercial Service could consider is to make up a communication plan for stakeholders, investors, and business partners. This plan could include a file of the goals and aims of the Commercial Service providing details about their services. This would tie in with the above comment of having an on-going flow of information. Information about the Commercial Service would be more readily available to those interested in doing business with them.

7 Evaluation

In this last chapter, the research process is discussed and contemplated. The reliability and validity of the research are pondered and factors influencing these are justified.

7.1 Reliability and validity of research

The interview during the research process was thought to be the most valid form of data collecting in answering the research problem. However, it was discovered during the research process that the interview questions could have been tested prior to them being presented to the interviewee's. The research questions could have been considered before hand and possibly tested. Questions could have been posed in a more objective angle as not to offer the interviewee's an already objective angle. Interviews were difficult to analyse due to the diversity of the responses as well as the similarity in responses. A problem in the interview questions was the preconceived assumption of the author, that the Commercial Service is beneficial to those being interviewed and that their work is effective in Finland. These were then reflected in the interview responses due to the subjective interview questions posed. Influence of the authors background and previous knowledge of the functions being researched could have had possible influence on the justification of the thesis questions, as well as with the interview questions.

At the beginning of the thesis process the author believed that by interviewing only a few stakeholders the results would have been easier to analyse. However, now at the completion of the thesis writing the author believes that more interviews should have been conducted in providing a more thorough and in-depth research.

Theories and emphasis of the theories considered in this thesis needed to be adjusted during the thesis writing process. Due to the vast amount of information available on different communication channels, the scope at the beginning of the research writing process was too large. Theoretical concepts were changed according to the interview responses. Instead of researching multiple communication channels it was reasoned

that the focus be on one major communication channel; in this case stakeholder communication. This gave the thesis a narrowed down perspective instead of touching upon many different concepts. It was then realized that this helped in providing a possible clearer research paper.

7.2 Thesis process

As a whole, this thesis writing was a great learning process and experience. The author's background knowledge and first hand experience of the Commercial Service was very helpful. This provided a lot of help and insight on determining the the research questions as well as considering the theories and research methods of the thesis. This also posed some difficulties in the writing. Because of this background knowledge it was a challenge to discover a way in writing so the reader would easily understand.

The staff at the Embassy were readily available to assist in anyway possible. They were very willing to help when needed and were also very supportive of this thesis writing.

Time management on the part of the author could have been fine-tuned. Some research material was gathered during the author's traineeship however at that time the thesis question was not clear. It would have helped if the thesis was written during the author's tenure at the Commercial Service. Looking back, it would have possibly provided a more accurate and thorough research paper.

The hope is that this thesis would be helpful to readers and to the commissioning party. The Commercial Service is a fascinating organization and crucial to Finland – U.S. business relations and it is important that people know that.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. E-mail interview

Dear....

I was an intern at the U.S. Embassy Department of Commerce during the autumn of 2010. For my thesis study, I am researching the communication and functions of the Commercial Service in Finland. As part of my research I would like to ask a few questions from a variety of individuals who have partnered or collaborated with the Commercial Service at the Embassy in Helsinki.

If you would have a few minutes to spare, to answer the following questions, I would greatly appreciate your time and the help in completing my research.

- How did you discover the U.S. Commercial Service?
- In what way(s) have you collaborated with the Commercial Service in Helsinki?
(How and what services did you use?)
- Do you think the Commercial Service is helpful? In what way(s)?
- Do you think their work is effective in Finland? How?
- Would you recommend their services?
- Why do you think building strategic partnerships between the U.S. and Finland is important?
- Do you have any suggestions on improving the communication of the FCS?

Thank you for your time and consideration!

With kind regards,

Katie Janhunen