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Internationalization of Talent Management: Case Speakersforum

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<p>Oy Speakersforum Finland Ab is a talent management company that mediates speakers, hosts and coaches for corporate events. Part of the Talarforum Group that was started in Sweden in 1995 and expanded since to operate in the whole Nordic region. Speakersforum has served Finnish customers from 2002 in Finland. Since that Speakersforum Finland has grown to encompass a 5.5 million-euro yearly turnover with participation in 1700 corporate events yearly domestically. The company operates with the brightest stars in Nordic business, social and corporate life. The aim is to provide insight, knowledge and feed innovations within companies as well as boost well-being and value of life. This goal is being reached through providing the right people from Finnish business life to the right audience in other companies. Speakers who are great thinkers, influencers, and innovators feed the thoughts of the crowd sparking ideas and hopefully improve their daily life and operations to boost better results also in work. Speakersforum has reached market leadership during its 14 years of operations in the Finnish market and through Talarforum Group is part of the largest single speaker management company in the Nordics. Market leaders however need constantly to reinvent itself as reaching the top is often more destructible than losing. Getting comfortable and kicking back is not the aim of Talarforum Group and its younger, innovative daughter company Speakersforum. Hence further internationalization is a logical choice.</p> <p>Talent management as a field of work is unique in the way that the “product” is a person, and hence there is only one with the same ideas, notions, methods of delivering the performance and style. Hence cooperation and deep ties into existing companies as well as channel sales might be the best method of internationalization. Although foreign direct investment into one potential market like Talarforum Group conducted with Speakersforum through local sales representatives, might be also one potential step forward. Talarforum Group has certainly made a success out of Speakersforum Finland and the time is now ripe to look forward for further internationalization once more.</p>	
Keywords	Talent, Management, Speakers, Internationalization, Nordics

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1 Introduction

Finland has been in economic stagnation since the collapse of Lehman brothers in 2008, despite the vigorous attempts made by the government to bring back growth (Tradingeconomics, 2016). The Nordic countries have intrinsically a unique system of social governance. It has led to high PISA scores in education, rise of companies like Nokia, Ikea, Spotify, Supercell that have developed within the northern countries to unrivaled prosperity. Nordic countries clearly have innovations and best practices of how companies and societies best develop to be world leaders in their respective fields. This competence is not a granted all around the world and hence the "Nordic model" is of interest to several parties around the world. Lately established Finland University Oy, has confirmed a deal to train Indonesian professors in Finnish schools and to take their knowledge to Indonesia in an attempt to improve local education (Finnfacts, 2015). This is but one example of the need and potential for Finnish companies to take advantage of high education in exporting services. Speakersforum Finland which has the unique speakers and contacts of Talarforum Group is well positioned to provide the Nordic knowledge further to multinational instances (Kontinen, 2012).

Currently there is co-operation with international partners that are similarly positioned into European and US markets as Speakersforum is in Finland, however the cooperation is limited and concentrates on a few international speaking engagements annually. The potential for a deeper cooperation is although there and it only needs to be capitalized. Finnish industrial and governmental decisions on industry standards have far reaching effects on the European common markets and these motivation drivers are of interest to multinational industries. This also provides Finland a channel of representation outside governmental influence to attend international conferences, network and possibly create new business opportunities. Often the issues with Finland is not that we wouldn't have competencies but we lack the representation or possibilities to take it global (Anne Korkiakoski, 2016). Marketing through Nordic speakers amongst influential people would give a natural and undivided attention of Nordic ideas to the right audiences.

1.1 Past

Speakersforum Finland is a subsidiary of Talarforum Group, a Nordic talent management company that expanded to Finland in 2001, on the initiative of Patrik Ekman, an entrepreneur who saw the potential need for talent management in Finland. Started in Sweden in 1995 TF-Group quickly established itself as one of the leading speaker mediating companies in Nordics through its advantages that included an own tailored CRM-system SAccess, a wide base of talent represented to client's events and motivated salespersons that made the needed customer contacts to arrange speakers to events. The speaker culture to use an outside speaker in corporate events was relatively young in the 90's Sweden and hard sales labour was required to establish a perquisite to use talented experts and public speakers to inspire and provoke thoughts in corporate crowds. The potential was however there and from 1995 TF-Group has grown to be the largest speaker and event host mediator in the Nordics. The same potential Patrik Ekman wanted to capitalize on in Finland by screening a variety of speakers and industry experts and set-up a roster of the best to the CRM's Finnish version. By negotiating a third of the Finnish subsidiary to himself and receiving existing talent management methods and crm from Sweden Patrik Ekman registered Oy Speakersforum Finland Ab in the end of 2001. On 2002 the operations officially begun and led quickly to hiring several new persons on board, expansion of activities and establishing of a side-office in Tampere, Finland. With steady growth of around 10-20% yearly Speakersforum has grown to operate in 1700 events in Finland yearly and have a turnover of over 5million euro in 2015.

1.2 Present

Presently Speakersforum is the leading speaker management company in Finland. It has an existing client base of the largest companies and public sector event organizers domestically and handles several yearly events for customers. These events include, Work Goes Happy & Life Work Passion –wellbeing seminars, Speaker Gala of the year – where the year's best domestic speaker, host and international guest speaker is chosen, LectureClub –the set of speaker performances in a club environment, and Update seminar – an international speaker event for top management of companies. Speakersforum Finland includes 20 persons who all but the accountant participates in sales and customer service.

1.3 Future

In the future Speakersforum eyes for Europe as the Finnish market is rather well satisfied and greatest opportunities already capitalized on. New markets and potential is seen as a natural way to grow beyond existing market limitations. Current FinPro co-operation opens several doors for Speakersforum and provides with ample opportunities to meet with international conference managers, event organizers, and delegates that are interested in Nordic competence to their seminars. As the part of the leading speaker talent management company in the Nordic, Speakersforum is well positioned to capitalize on the developments of European corporate event markets.

1.4 Objectives and scope

My research question will be built around the internationalization of Speakersforum and its offering to international customers of Nordic competence. Whether it is of attractiveness and potential which needs to be invested time in to bring it to international attention, or should a deeper consolidation on Nordic markets be implemented instead of further internationalization globally (Crick, 2014).

Understanding Speakersforum's strengths and offering in comparison to the competitors is key here. Combined with the method study of internationalization and a feasibility to study a conclusion can be reached whether it is possible and profitable to internationalize (Vanninen and Kuivalainen, 2015).

The scope of the study will be limited to answering the question whether it is feasible and worth to expand internationally and what method and market will be in question in that case. The concentration must be on one market at a time, as a small company Speakersforum does not have the resources to spend on several simultaneously and a failure could be fatal also for domestic operations. Hence understanding the demand and pull from the customer is of grave importance. National culture and barriers to entry will be considered in the SWOT analysis needed to reach a complete view of the possibilities and situation of Speakersforum (Goldman, 1994).

1.5 Research methods

First and foremost, taking advantage of online search engines like ABI Inform: Proquest direct, Ebrary, EBSCOhost databases and Emerald that sample a large quantity of articles and journals provide an extensive information source. Secondary of the success of previous internationalization attempt, analysis on the reasons of failures and successes behind the history and analytical evaluation of the potential success of a current internationalization attempt based on company's current status and resources. Here comes in the crucial identification of Speakersforum's SWOT that needs to be understood before the entry to another market with a different culture can be considered. Core competencies and irreplaceable best practices would have to be channeled to the internationalization and there must be an understanding whether a strength in Finland is also a strength in the target market. With this phase I will conduct interviews, create a questionnaire form, sent to the workers of Speakersforum and formulate the average answers into the SWOT study.

2 Nordic Competence

The Nordics have unique success stories. People have started companies, created them into billion dollar enterprises in matter of years and disrupted the market they operate in (Talouselämä, 2016). Speakersforum Finland's aim is to provide understanding behind the success of people, what has made them great thinkers, entrepreneurs or writers. Now day's as everything is about competition and continuous improvement shaking up people and think-patterns out of everyday routines is a competitive edge. It keeps people in touch with the latest trends and out of complacency which for companies is hugely important. Nokia for example fell to its demise due to the fact that it couldn't spot the rising trends that the new smaller mobile phone producers created. Being in touch with the "spirit of the time" is to understand the people. This means that companies that have a customer base made up from everyday consumers can anticipate and provide value on time when the trends happen. Same logic follows the social media now day's and it requires an understanding of the people from the same level to respond in kind. Several attempt are made by companies, some well-planned some not, creating brand recognition as it goes. The best understanding of trends and people have the disrupters, thinkers

and entertainers that are able to inspire and grasp the notions of hundreds of people simultaneously who are all from different or similar backgrounds. The capability to unilaterally provoke thoughts and laughter as well as sadness is a “spirit of the times” that can be brought to companies regarding a certain topic, idea or notion to bring their thinking closer to people. This well-managed allows teams to connect around same stories like their ancestors did around the campfire thousands of years ago, make changes and design new products that appeal to people with a similar interest. Most importantly speeches represent the people, their actions and ideas that are brought to inspire new crowds in their daily life. Here the Nordics which traditionally are known as a quiet, but hard working people have a chance to create their own image and brand by showcasing their key abilities through the leading innovators and thinkers.

The Nordics school’s system which is ranked as one of the leading in the world produces some special people that create leading companies and ideas which have huge impacts globally. These ideas and notions always make people question how it was done, why, and what lead to it. The answers to those hopefully revealing something on how to manage, lead and live to succeed also for others. Live speeches are still a big thing for the same reason as live concerts hasn’t disappeared, there is something special about being in the presence of a great artist/thinker. Ideas and music will live on, but there might be only one time to see the “real thing” doing his “real thing”.

2.1 Viability:

Speakersforum has established itself in the last 15 years it has operated in Finland as a profitable talent management company (figure 1). As the leading of its kind domestically Speakersforum has no immediate threats in the horizon. Domestically the competition is formed of Ohjelmakauppa T & W Oy, Speakerscorner Oy and Eventmanagers Oy which have all suffered loss of revenue in the past 5 years in comparison to Speakersforum which has grown by over 37%. Hence there is a secure customer base established within the home market that supports internationalization. Also being part of Talarforum Group, the largest talent management company in the Nordics brings and advance of monetary resources if so needed. This safety net works as an insurance if expensive projects like internationalization would fail for some reason.

Financial figure	2014/12	2013/12	2012/12	2011/12	2010/12
Net sales (teur)	3922	3376	3429	3200	2815
Change in net sales (%)	16.2	-1.5	7.2	13.7	12
Operating profit ratio (%)	2.7	5.8	5.5	7	5.3
EBIT-%	2.6	5.2	3.8	5.6	4.8
Net income (teur)	142	133	248	133	97
Quick ratio	1.9	2.2	2	1.5	1.5
Current ratio	1.1	1.2	1.4	0.9	1
Solvency ratio	21	27	40	23	16
Total shareholders' equity (teur)	161	154	271	158	115
Liabilities and shareholders' equity (teur)	1212	949	881	1032	979
Personnel			19		21
Change in personnel (%)					
Sales/person	-	-	180.5	-	134

Figure 1. source: Profinder B2B

2.1.1 Strategies

The internationalization of a talent management agency goes through its core competencies. Unique speakers and existing client base to draw from. Internationalization is as much of a necessity as it is a way to grow beyond existing limits of the domestic market (Ruzzier, 2006). To choose a strategy the options must be restricted to those that suit the needs of an SME with a turnover of 5.5 million Euros and operates in a field where the "products" cannot be copied. This in itself drops out the most of comparative cost advantage, porters diamond, and location theories as the product is self-transporting and has a global reach. Hence the most suitable will be the Uppsala model that can be utilized in expanding to nearby markets by providing already used domestic speakers, Franchising, International entrepreneurship approach and the networking model. All have their unique characteristics that provide advantages in certain levels of commitment, investment, risk and reward. With larger commitment and risk, the rewards grow, but also the time consumed is a matter to consider in a SME like Speakersforum.

3 Strategic Options

SME's that aren't born global are often tied to internationalization into nearby markets that provide a familiar culture and possibilities to export from the domestic production facilities (Johanson and Kao, 2010). In the talent management industry knowledge of the destination markets environment is essential for the clients as they hope to get the leading experts to their events of current issues in hand. This trust-relationship can be

built only by having an in depth knowledge on the trends, business culture and ways of speak the destination markets culture possesses (Bell and Cooper, 2015)

Hence the internationalization models adopted are often gradual by nature to scale and relatively low-risk to main operations. Resources are conserved and catering to the major capital source of domestic customers is a clear priority. As internationalization of SME's usually derives from success in domestic market the expansion abroad is often a project to be managed but not a necessity to succeed in. This is the case also with Speakers-forum Finland, 15 years of growth has established it in the home market as the leading speaker agency with little competition. The advantages have been being the first mover that has been able to establish methodology adapted from sales centricity and a lean corporate structure. Depending on the market these advantages can be exported as competitive competences that will determine the success of the internationalization against local competitors (Bell and Cooper 2015). Hence to determine a destination market, Speakersforum Finland, a Finnish SME must understand its advantages that have led to its success domestically and resources that can be set to internationalization.

Due to these competences a SWOT-analysis can be drawn from known capabilities: exclusive speakers, existing CRM, best practises created during 15 years of operations, and a larger parent company Talarforum that can if needed provide assistance in meeting the goals and sharing the risk.

External / Internal	Strengths: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Established best practises - Stable revenue stream - CRM with all information of speakers and clients - Nordic parent company Talarforum with additional resources - Low management structure 	Weaknesses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small domestic market - Relative small turnover of 5.5 million Euros. - Lack of training in new methods, social selling for example - Small recognition within the broader audience
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<p>Opportunities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Steady growth domestically - Marketing to expand the client base - Establishing a speaker culture in Finland. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilizing the best practises in exporting - Create full transparency between Talarforum and Speakersforum to ensure learning from each other's successes and failures. - Allow new ideas to flourish by a trial and error culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capitalize on domestic market through marketing - Provide training in new sales methods, and international cultures. - Enhance a strong brand of excellent service and quality speakers -
<p>Threats:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New rivals domestically - New resource draining ventures. - Bad PR that could damage the trust-relationship of the business. - Relying on the old proven methods and staying within the comfort zone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use relatively large size domestically to make the best domestic speakers exclusive for Speakersforum - Implement trial and error in low-scale, by gradually building presence in other markets. - Ensure all employees and speakers are aware of Speakerforums responsibility and desired image to avoid bad PR. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Create better client relations to discourage competition - Avoid risky investments -Enhance on the core structure and operations which has been proven successful. - Train personnel and speakers to clarify Speakersforums role and operations. - Use traditional marketing to slowly build a presence.

From this window and background three strategic options can be drawn; The Uppsala model, Franchising, International Entrepreneurship or the Networking model.

3.1 Uppsala model:

The Uppsala model can be considered of taking advantage of the cultural proximity of nearby markets (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). In Speakersforums case they would be Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania or Russia as Talarforum has already operations in Norway, Denmark and Sweden. The Baltic countries are still strongly developing countries and possess a combined population of 6.195 million people with 3 different official languages including 1 million ethnic Russians with strong ties to their heritage. The medium wage is still under a 1000€ in all 3 Baltic countries and Soviet infrastructure is being dismantled ahead of a new European path (Eurostat, 2014). Due to the lower wage, there is less available capital with a scarcer population that understand the same language and culture. In the Uppsala model Baltic Countries would not be a preferred option but rather

Russia that has a long history with Finland. There is existing trade relations and operations of both Finnish and Russian companies cross the border. This creates a perquisite for trade and an understanding of each other's cultures and ways of doing business. However, Russia has an even smaller medium wage of 438€, but which is drastically larger in the big cities of St. Petersburg and Moscow (Eurostat, 2014). Russia is also a country compared to oligarchy, where connections mean a great deal and getting into a network will be difficult without previous background in the country. Additionally, Russia has ranked as one of the most nationalistic countries in the world, so any Western or European company will not automatically have the easiest path to succeed in building networks. Uppsala model has although worked in the past as Talarforum expanded to Finland and Norway successfully bringing new employees and talent on-board.

3.2 Franchising:

The Franchise model would allow for Speakersforum to expand rapidly with minimal investment or risk to the existing operations. New entrepreneurs would benefit of Speakersforums and Talarforums Nordic speakers and existing CRM software, as well as some financial aid, but would be able to develop their own business into the destination market. The Franchising model requires a proven template on how to build the business to the entrepreneur which justifies the payments to the Franchisor. Through this pathway to success the foreign entrepreneur with preferable knowledge and experience of the market would be able to build their own network into a business (Eddy Goldberg, 2016). The key here would be to agree upon the delivery of a business model to the entrepreneur and assistance with marketing as well as brand usage. With a capable franchisee that possesses capabilities and sales skills in the market an operation can be built upon the support of Speakersforum. The screening of the franchisee is important as Speakersforum does not have an existing group of franchisees or an operational model, and hence the entrepreneur would have to do many things for the first time. With highly entrepreneurial persons there is always however the need to justify why use the franchising model instead of creating their own business. In this case Speakersforums CRM software, Nordic speakers and established best practises create a lure for the entrepreneur to dedicate work into Franchising. Additionally, also marketing expertise in creating promotional campaigns that have proven effectiveness in other markets can be provided for the Franchisee to aid in creating brand recognition.

However, the franchising contract cannot be too tight as Speakersforum lacks the essentials of a strong brand, clear operation management model, group purchasing power or a network of peer franchisees. Hence there is an only a small change that an independent, capable and networked entrepreneur would agree onto tight Franchising contracts. The model would need to be more open for interpretation, and individual decision-making than those of larger businesses like McDonalds, Starbucks or others. Also the varying conditions of customer service in the local market will perhaps require more personal meeting, than phone conferences and email marketing that would be standard in the Nordics. Therefore, manoeuvrability is essential for the franchisee to succeed in their ventures. The contract must importantly be binding enough to keep the entrepreneur from venturing out on their own after receiving moderate success as a franchisee. The customer relationship in an entrepreneur approach is highly dependent on the entrepreneur so there needs to be a clause that prohibits the Franchisee to starting his own business in the same field within a minimum time of 2 years after leaving.

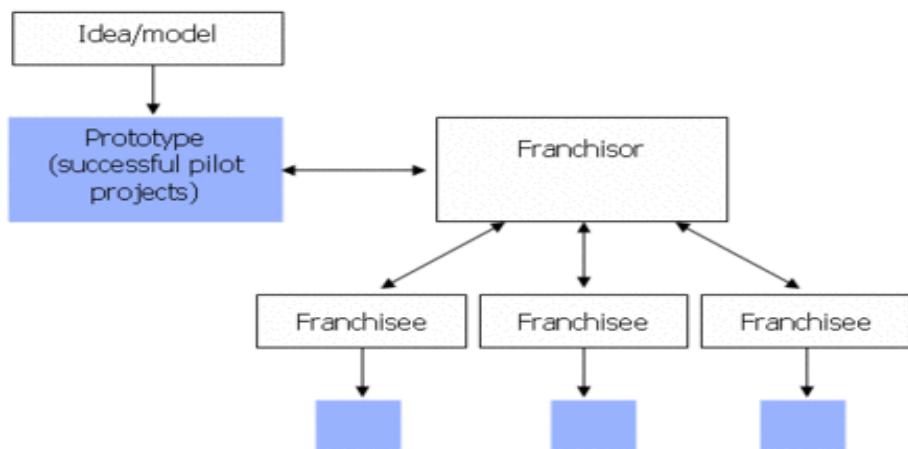


Figure 2. MyKit. 2016. Franchising in Australia | Business Models

3.3 International Entrepreneurship theory:

IET understood as "a combination of innovative, proactive and risk-seeking

behavior that crosses national borders and is intended to create value in organizations" (McDougall, Oviatt, 2000). It is an approach of highly independent capitalization of relationships, cultural understanding and risk awareness by the entrepreneur himself (Birley, Westhead, 1993). The entrepreneur is the one that understands the resource available and is opportunity seeking by nature and can thus determine the right amount of effort to be put into the International new venture (INV). The INV is determined by the capabilities of the entrepreneur and utilized accordingly to reach market penetration. As Speakersforum is an entrepreneur driven organisation. Patrik Ekman can himself be the entrepreneur in the foreign market or determine on another contact to drive the INV by himself with given resources. The aim is to create an independent entity that is a subsidiary of Speakersforum and utilizes the methods available according to its own needs. Studies conducted among SME's have showed that companies tend to follow their domestic customers into the international market regardless of physical distance (Bell, 1995). Speakersforum foreign entrepreneurial subsidiary can get traction from domestic customers that organize events internationally in the destination market.

This IET approach gives great freedom to the entrepreneur and allows him to decide the needed actions in order to succeed in the marketplace (Oviatt, 2005). The financial, technological and material support would come from Speakersforum as a shareholder in the newly formed, entrepreneur driven company. This is the same approach successfully operated by Talarforum to create Speakersforum in 2001, with the help of Patrik Ekman. Patrik who is a native Finn with knowledge and capabilities in Swedish brought the best in both by utilizing existing networks to create quick sales and bring Talarforums speakers to Finland. After a few successes the concentration was aimed to create an own speaker network, which has since flourished and brought business that rivals Talarforum in size. The same approach gives great flexibility to the entrepreneur but also requires a lot of dedication, skills and trustworthiness as they independently create and lead a company (Fletcher, 2004). The benefits in this model for Speakersforum is previous history in utilizing the model and experiences on what to avoid and what to concentrate on.

3.4 The networking model:

According to Holm et al. (1996: 1049) "While most research on foreign market entry has focused on entry mode selection, our findings indicate that the development of co-operative relationships with customers, suppliers or other business partners may be critical."

Holm describes in his book "Creating value through mutual commitment to business network relationships. Strategic Management Journal." the networking model as critical to internationalization and as with SME's the scarce resources makes this necessity even more important. The creation of international networks allows for testing the market by receiving information on which are the important pull and push factors as well as what are the barriers to entry. Understanding the market through a network of partners gives the best opportunity to advance in the future through own operations to direct investment (Vesalainen, 1999). However, with the network model additional resources do not need to be invested into expansion as channel sales through partner agencies can be utilized. These partner agencies have already established client-base, marketing budgets, existing infrastructure and personnel that can be partially used to benefit the representation of Speakersforums unique speakers. Besides the creation of partnerships and automated customer service procedures the network model will not drain additional resources that would not already be spent on customer service.

Advantage in the network model in relation with Speakersforum is the same as with high technology companies using channel sales. The people are unique, and have often formed a strong bond to Speakersforum that makes them easy to represent in other markets as there's only one with similar knowledge and background (Kenny and Fahy, 2011). This allows for unrestricted channel sales through networks. The benefits will materialize quickly and there will not be a need to additional expenditure on top of the already existing. The most important advantage in the network model is for an SME the understanding of the market. Knowledge can be later utilized in other entry methods if the network model would fail. This is an important qualifier since, in order to transfer knowledge between entities, experiential knowledge is transformed into objective knowledge (Nonaka, 1994)

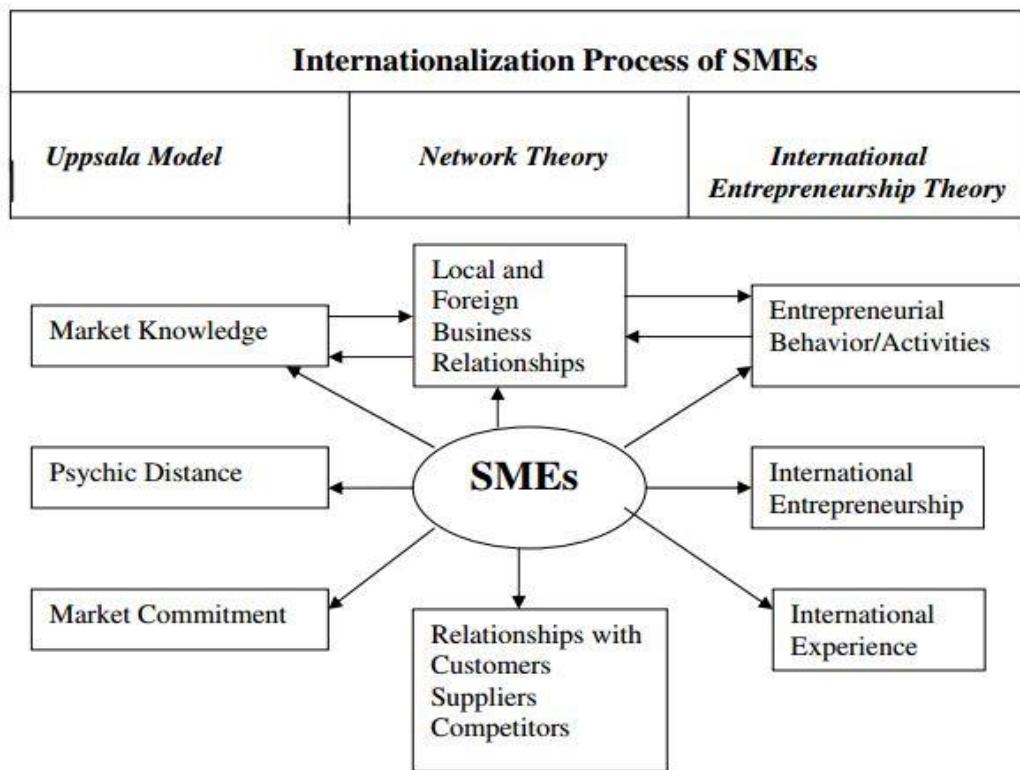


Figure 3. Conceptual framework developed by Mohibul Islam Masum and Alejandra Fernandez

4 Choice

Speakersforum Finland is exceptionally well-versed in its own field operating in the network economy as a talent management agency. Network economies are based on connections between people that bring knowledge of the markets, people and the way of life through human to human interaction. Especially in business also the ability to connect on the same level and understand the clients' needs is essential. Concerning talent management, as the majority of speakers sold into a certain market speak the local language it is desired to be able to understand the nuance of the orator to be able to sell it. This provides a challenge to the unconditioned with the local desires, lifestyles, current topics and ways of speech. Hence entering a market without in-depth knowledge of the people is a large risk. The competitors who already are established and know the local methodology and can relate, will triumph in sales situations every time.

Therefore, if engaging in foreign direct investment into a destination market, it is desirable to hire an entrepreneur who will get the model of operation like in a franchise to

grow the company. This requires though a high reliance on the entrepreneur and his abilities to keep growth going. Also this makes the domestic company highly reliable on this entrepreneur's expertise of the local market, people and management methods. Especially in talent management as the speakers make a personal connection to the sales people who represent them, an entrepreneur with a working model and insight into a business could venture out to start his own operation or join a competitor.

On behalf of an entrepreneurial strategic approach speaks that Speakersforum Finland was founded by an entrepreneur Patrick Ekman, who whilst traveling in Sweden got acquainted with Talarforum Groups business who he brought to Finland by founding a subsidiary. Hence if successful this approach is relatively low cost, but has a risk of leaking corporate secrets and losing a market with the entrepreneur.

Also direct domestic operation and people venturing into a target market is risky as previously stated, an in-depth knowledge and ability to relate to the local people on their language is the minimum requirement so succeed. This would also prove quite costly and the odds to succeed against established local competition low. On the positive side sending sales people from Finland to a destination market would keep the corporate secrets within the firm and provide salesforce with practical knowledge of the market. However, establishing connections as an outsider to the culture would take time and require significant investments on Speakersforums behalf.

The best option for Speakersforum considering its strengths and weaknesses is the network model. Finland is already part of the world's largest unified free trade zone, the European Union and has free access to different markets by having a headquarter in one central location. Finland has a national Finnish trade promoting company Finpro, that aids SME's to go international. Finpro has 300 professionals working in 36 Trade Centers in 31 countries that provide if part of the network and ability to reach governmental offices and instances globally (Finpro, 2016). It is an easy method of testing the water before jumping in with investment and as Speakersforums main product is speakers are well known a domestic representation may not be necessary in a global world where telecommunication is an established method to doing business. The network model is also an open option to creating new partners in domestic tradeshows, business meetings

and governmental instances like Team Finland that groups all national internationalization services under one roof.

The network model also suits the existing status quo as it means developing existing partners that Speakersforum has in countries like Spain, Britain, Germany, Turkey, United States, Russia and Estonia instead of creating domestic competition for them. The partners are already well networked and have decades of background in working with their clients and their events locally, so channel sales would work well here. Also this would provide an opportunity to import several important speakers to Finland for speaking engagements that have previously been out of reach due to price or unavailability. When striking a favourable deal to work together Speakersforums network of influence and reach of domestic speakers expands immediately to new markets. Naturally this will not provide as much revenue down the line but would start to show quick results in a matter of months in comparison to FDI or Uppsala models that require time to develop and study the market. As the reach of Speakersforums "products" the speakers expand they will have completely own demand curves. As they are unique and one of a kind this would mean more business for Speakersforum also if one day there would be a venture into FDI or Uppsala model approaches. The market would be set and an existing perquisite would be established that could be leveraged to gain more market share faster, than creating a brand for the speakers from zero. For the end-customer this would simply mean switching from one provider to another. However, as this would very likely mean ending of the relationship with the domestic partner it is a questionable method to be considered later when weighing the pros and cons.

Additionally, creating a partnership with a network of companies means sharing the pool of information gathered by years of labour in the different markets. The different tastes clients have in their events and the most sought after speakers in their regions. This means a huge advantage of knowledge, speakers and client needs that translates into a competitive advantage over a rival company outside the network. This knowledge can be used besides in widening the speaker offering into each other's markets but also in sharing best practices in how to handle management of the speakers, employees, and rewarding. Learning from a company in the same field with similar experiences but with a slight variation might be invaluable to avoid the same mistakes and directing efforts towards succeeding in the right choices made.

As markets are different and move on a secular development stage with new technologies like telecommunication, social media and multicultural aspects the advances with client solutions can be distributed to a market that is in the point of adopting the new method and craves for information on best practises. In practise this means that if the food carrying service WOLT that operates from Helsinki and delivers food from restaurants to customers' home reaches after 2 years Spain and takes off, the local food industry will likely need to know how to adapt to this change as service providers revolutionize the old "modus operandi". This means that Speakersforum can provide directly or through a partnering agency a Finnish restaurant owner who has gone through the change to the client in Spain or a person from WOLT itself. The different rate of adoption in new technologies allows for a waterfall approach in mediating speakers through the network and an already well renowned speaker in a certain market with a topic might be a new and innovative solution for a Spanish customer's needs.

This all translates into reduced uncertainty. More information, more speakers, and a better understanding of the client's needs in other markets can be utilized to gain advantage over the domestic competitors in the Nordics. The reduced uncertainty can be also leveraged into cutting costs incurring every time when trying to find new counterparts to co-operate with in new markets (Evers and Knight, 2008). This also means less needs to be invested in market analysis, and competitive intelligence that often has a hefty price tag on when conducted with a research company.

Added transparency will generate trust between partners but also bind the companies together with shared risks in IT-security, intellectual property and best methods that can be lost if one of the partner has for example a hack in their databases. Nevertheless, long term successful co-operation will bring indirect benefits through protecting the domestic market from new entries by rivalling companies in other markets. A shared co-operation with common speakers to represent between the markets takes away the competitive edge that another company from abroad might have when doing an initial entry into Speakersforums domestic market Finland. Finland is a quite small country where new technological developments often come behind the US, Britain and Japan that are early adopters if the technology is born domestically. Hungry for knowledge Finnish clients naturally want to learn of the benefits of new rising innovations as soon

as possible, and if a Japanese talent management agency has a Finnish representation they are better equipped to respond to this need. They have the first-mover advantage in providing new revolutionary speakers regarding a certain topic that Speakersforum as a Nordic company is still learning about. A network typed model will provide protection from this scenario as the shared representation of speakers in each respective market shares the advantage without incurring FDI costs to either of the companies. The network model provides an effective way to "lock out" foreign competition of the domestic market and should be a key aspect when considering the strategy and relationships created between partners.

Disadvantage in applying the network model:

When creating a comprehensive co-operation plan the one with the weaker position concerning speakers, resources and size can be leveraged to make bad deals in order to gain access to the knowledge of the larger partner. This exports the influence and know-how of the domestic company Speaekersforum into another company and a potential future rival. It may require giving up the potential of entering the market by Speakersforum itself as after applying the network model all the companies in the network are aware of the advantages and best practices applied by Speakersforum. This removes the chance to later enter the market through FDI with a similar success rate than would have been before the network model.

The amount of dependence created between the partners is the key determinant in deciding the risks. A deeper reliance will build in time but when that happens the reliance on the other company's success in the domestic market is great, and if not successful there may not be another opportunity to network with the foreign rival who might be in another rival network. If the foreign company fails in its domestic market to uphold a market share the access to that market may be lost once and for all. Hence there is placed a lot of trust in the capabilities of the foreign partner, which is mainly outside of Speakersforums control. This predisposes all the partners in the network to the loss of intellectual property and access to a certain market.

Choosing of the partners with whom to form a network is complicated and always contains a con as picking one from the market which may or may not be the right fit to

the culture and goals of the network excludes the other companies in the market. Giving exclusive competitive advantage of Nordic speakers into a certain company in a market may turn the other companies against you, as that distorts the local competition they are used to. It will also turn away potential foreign market customers that could have bought speakers a certain amount a year, but after binding a co-operation agreement with one company it may not be interesting for them to co-operate anymore to strengthen the network where their competitor is a part of. Therefore, a decision has to be made on how much Speakersforum wants to invest into developing the network and the relationships within it. It will be affected by the expected rate of return that will be received from participating in the network. Especially managing relationships with different cultures and with great distances will prove to be a deciding factor on how much effort shall be put into the network. Too much effort will incur large costs and leave Speakersforum vulnerable to losses if the network doesn't succeed and too little effort may wither it before the network has had a chance to grow into its full potential. The balance has to be perfect and growing on a step-by-step rate alongside the deepening of the understanding of the individual partner's goals and methods of reaching them. A massive investment of time and money of one partner and not the other may also create bad blood between the network and hence there should be a mutually agreed pace of moving forward.

Additionally, being a by-stander as the partner operates in a foreign market might mean losing precious opportunities to be capitalized personally. In its worst this will lock Speakersforum in an unproductive partnership with a company that doesn't have the will or the methods to grow its market share. Especially hurtful this will be if the company doesn't prioritize on selling the Nordic speakers but "locks out" Speakersforum of the market by creating a partnership with no intention of representing Nordic speakers. In this scenario the best method is to dissolve the partnership, but at that point the harm has already happened and the foreign partner knows what are Speakersforums key advantages and can compensate on them if there is at some point a decision to invest directly into the foreign market. However, with a network this treatment of a partner will automatically register with the other partners and most likely means that badly behaving company will be removed of the network. This would deepen the co-operation of the remaining members, and strengthen their core values, but the harm would still have been done to that specific market which might take years to repair.

In big networks there are also risks of being “a leaf in the wind” with larger companies making the key decisions (Chetty and Stangl, 2010). An example seen with European Union, a specific kind of a network where larger countries like Germany, Britain and France have historically had bigger influence than smaller countries. In this case Speakersforum as a relatively small talent management bureau in comparison to those operating in larger more mature markets couldn’t have a big influence on what is the direction and goals that would be set for the network. To avoid this there needs to be clear rules on voting, amount of investment into the network and complete transparency of the level of commitment Speakersforum would have to participate in before forming a network. Without all the key information only bad decision can be made, but with careful analysis of the issues and advantages related to a network with larger partners a favourable deal can be struck that is not related to size or turnover.

4.1 Viable options

Options to the networking model would be International entrepreneurship model as Franchise requires creation of several procedures for an international business model, marketing effort and a strong brand that Speakersforum does not have internationally. International Entrepreneurship however is relatively low cost as it only needs a well networked entrepreneur, cultural understanding and resources to start a business based on the core competencies of Speakersforum. The CRM, Nordic Speakers and best practices are easily exportable to the new entrepreneur. This model does not risk the existing operations and provides Speakersforum with manoeuvrability to provide assistance as necessary but does not legally tie down the parent company anywhere else but as a stake holder in a new enterprise.

However, the IET model would compete against the existing companies operating the foreign market as a newcomer. The advantage would be the capitalization on the Nordic Speakers that are unique and relatively new to that specific area. The competition would be tough though since the established companies with their customer base and domestic speakers locked down expansion beyond the Nordic speakers would prove difficult. Even if the entrepreneur could find new talents in the market the justification of why to stick with a newcomer against an established domestic company that shares the culture would

be hard to manage. Hence the development of the market even in the hands of a capable entrepreneur would take years to mature and bring fruit. Although in a new market not yet claimed by any speaker agency the playing field would be even and a competitive advantage could be justified by the capitalisation on foreign talent before a speaker culture can be established into that market. Establishing a speaker culture will in any case require years of work as has been seen with Speakersforum Finland, that is still growing in size when the adaptation of using foreign speakers in corporate events is getting more deeply rooted into a state of normality.

5 The Strategic Approach & Implementation

Implementation for a company like Speakersforum happens through analysing the resources available and the destination market with the greatest potential. For Speakersforum that is definitely European countries. Other similarly positioned companies in the EU have connections globally to former colonies, similar cultures and industrial hubs in Asia. A network with European speaker bureaus would open not just the local market but also provide opportunities in South America which has long cultural ties with South Europe, United States which works closely with Britain and Asia that is an industrial hub for companies headquartered in Europe. Also the background as a European country Finland doesn't have to apply Value added tax in trade between EU countries. The most advantageous areas within EU is to approach already mature market companies in Germany, Britain, Spain, and Italy. These countries have a long history with English-speaking performers and prefer to operate in English.

The most risk free implementation is by gradually building and developing a network of interconnected companies not in direct rivalry but in horizontally aligned interest in serving the specific market to the best of their capabilities. This will allow for information and innovation to be distributed according to the trust relationship between Speakersforum and the foreign company. By gradual adaptation both of the companies will have time to learn the others preferences, market needs and operating methods. This will ease the strain on a new relationship and co-operation, and provide a stable withdrawal path if the partner proves not to be trustworthy. The time needed for developing an all-encompassing relationship with transparency will require several years the further away is moved from the cultural influence of the Nordics. Southern countries of Spain and Italy

have quite different methods of operating due to their long history than Finland that has been a country for only 99 years.

Illustration of cultural regions within Europe:



Figure 4. By Grossgliederung_Europas.svg: NordNordWestderivative work: Dch (talk) – Grossgliederung_Europas.svg, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8914026>

5.1 Collaboration

A network model is only as good as the partners in the network. In a trust relationship the company first must understand its own strengths, cultural inclinations and weaknesses. With Speakersforum the cultural inclination is the Finnish nature in operating according to the set timetable, few words but always keeping promises. However, Speakersforum is part of a larger Nordic Speakers Bureau Talarforum that already has good methods suited for Sweden and its clients. By analysing the differences between the methodology of a Talarforum to Speakersforum an understanding can be developed on how differently things operate with Swedish clients in comparison with Finnish. This will be the first step to even closer integration with Talarforum. After that joint events and

"get togethers" can be organized for the clients and personnel. Both markets are unique though sharing a Nordic distinction and it is important to understand that an easily available test for the network model can be implemented by integrating Talarforum with Speakersforum even deeper. Currently established contact persons within the company assist the others and "get togethers" will cement the understanding. Also an update of most sought after speakers in Sweden and Finland would be useful to share on a constant basis, giving the others the possibility to represent English speaking performers also in their own markets. If successful with ease, it is a good sign and methodology to build with also other companies in more distant markets with a similar gradual process in the spirit of Quid pro Quo. The foreign partner sells Nordic speakers and Speakersforum sells their top speakers.

5.2 Win – Win

The important thing is to stress the possibility for both companies to Win from forming a mutually beneficial relationship. With different companies, operations and goals will be always partially crossed. The one may want to develop online service platforms and the other concentrate on personal human service for the clients. A clear method of solving issues related to operations must be set in place before moving forward, though it must not encompass all the operations as both companies still need to have the manoeuvrability to adapt to their own market's needs. Hence a one size fits all cannot be the method. By clarifying in the partnership charter on what are the common goals to strive for the clarification will be made to what does the partnership cover and what not.

First and foremost, the exchange of speakers and information of the market will be in the centre. Afterwards the development of best practises and methodology in client service, and on the outer ring cultural adaptation and broadening the co-operation outside the partnership. With the basis in check a development of larger projects can be implemented. Common events and international joint ventures into new markets by sharing resources, risks and gains is an outcome of years of successful co-operation.

6 Recommendations

As a recommendation Speakersforum needs to first and foremost understand the existing international partners better; what are their goals, driving forces, advantages, key themes and needs. After carefully aligning that information with Speakersforums own, a conclusion can be derived of the most suitable candidates for a deeper co-operation. The benefits of size, and market share will influence the decision as foreign market partners are scoured. Starting off by selecting a company per market from regions that are culturally similar to Finland in ways of handling things several misunderstandings and upcoming problems can be avoided. On the Figure 3. cultural map the most similar can be found besides the Nordics in Central and West Europe. Within these areas the size advantage lies clearly in Germany and Great Britain. By gradually building the network the possibility for fixing rising issues will be easier and developing of a business network more natural. The source of success in a network model is after all trust and relationships (Fletcher, 2004). Exchange of top speakers and ideas will need to be done as the representation of each other's best brings competitive advantages for both in domestic markets. The customers that want more international offerings and fresh ideas can be sold upon the idea of one shop for all related to domestic and international speakers.

After establishing successful business ties with exchange of top speakers a deeper contractual partnership can be created of exclusive service to the one speaker agency within the market. This provides the security to begin sharing information on customer needs, profit margins and best practises that are key to succeeding. The contract also needs to hold a clause of the other company not part-taking in any way in the entry to the specific market where the other operates. Without providing a rock-solid basis for the partners the transparency hoped to gain in the market will vanish. This also relates to trust in the relationships that need to be preserved and developed through common meetings, phone conferences and updates on the latest speakers and topics. With all this implemented common strategies and business directions can be planned, in order to reach new markets and goals in sales. Successfully implemented this will bring prosperity to both, but if the partner is not trustworthy there needs to always be an exit clause within the contracts with a transitional period included to ease ending of a partnership.

7 Summary/Conclusion

In comparison with the Uppsala model, Franchise or entrepreneurial approach the Network model clearly brings low costs and risks as an advantage. It provides almost instant access to a market and decades of knowledge on how to navigate in it. It can be leveraged to gather intelligence until a foreign direct investment to the market is prepared and sufficient resources tied to the international new venture.

Uppsala, Franchise and entrepreneurial approach carry individual risks with the people that implement the process and lack knowledge of the market environment and the certain habits that dominate business life within them. In selling, cultural knowledge is especially important as the Speakersforums services are meant to be compelling, moving and thought-provoking speakers that need to be able to stir emotions in the audience. If the client cannot be understood by the salesman who is recommending a speaker it is highly doubtful the client will trust the salesman's solution. This provides an obstacle on sending salesmen from abroad to a destination market, the other solution would be to hire from the foreign market itself, but there's always a problem of fitting different methods into one another's plans especially when the parent company is a relatively resource strained SME that cannot overstretch the implementation time of internationalization. To successfully internationalize the plan needs to bear fruit relatively quickly so that the domestic operations will not be influenced by the cutting of resources there. Hence the best solution balances the risk and the cost into an even plan for internationalization, and of the options the networking model is clearly the most advantageous.

The network model holds the fastest implementation time as it can be put forward immediately with existing partners in European markets and expanded from there onwards. British, German and Spanish partners that are familiar with Speakersforums business methods and international speakers are best positioned to be the first partners in the network. They also provide easy access speakers that have European market knowledge and are relatively cheap to bring to Finland in comparison to American that require transatlantic flights. Most importantly the implementation fee will be minimal as in the beginning only employee time is required to set-up deeper partnerships with international speaker bureaus. This means no additional resources needs to be put aside

from domestic operations, which instead can be directed to capitalizing the Nordic operations through marketing, and broadening the customer base.

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