

**HUMAN CAPITAL IN EXPORT-BASED INTERNATIONALISATION**

**“MANAGERIAL DETERMINANTS AND THEIR INFLUENCE UPON**

**THE EXPORT BEHAVIOUR OF THE FIRM:**

**FOUR CASE-STUDIES OF CATALAN EXPORTING SMES”**

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## ABSTRACT

Export activities are a major source of economic growth and are considered important both at the national level and for individual businesses. Moreover, in the case of SMEs, they gain particular relevance, exporting being the most common foreign market entry mode for these firms. The decision maker's role in the export activity is crucial, particularly in the case of SMEs. However, the extant literature on internationalization is characterized by a lack of consensus among scholars as to what constitutes the managerial factor in determining exporting. Therefore, this study focuses on the following issue: Which are the decision maker's characteristics and perceptions that may influence the export behaviour of Catalan SMEs? To address this question a multiple case study method is applied across four Catalan exporting SMEs. The methodology chosen for analysing the empirical data is relying on the proposition testing approach while the investigation is conducted including both within and cross-case analysis. The findings show that high educational level, language skills, high risk tolerance, innovativeness as well as strongly perceived export stimuli as compared to low and easy to overcome export barriers positively influence the export involvement and development of SMEs. The study provides further insights into the research topic by jointly studying managerial characteristics and perceptions. Additionally, the majority of research on exporting topics has been carried out in the USA, so there is a clear need of investigation in the field in other countries, moreover in Spain where the exporting activities have not been as widely studied.

*Keywords:* managerial characteristics and perceptions, export behaviour, SMEs

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ON SMES INTERNATIONALISATION PROCESS.</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>THE STAGE MODELS OF INTERNATIONALISATION: THE “GRADUALIST” APPROACH.....</i>	9
<i>NETWORK APPROACH TO INTERNATIONALISATION.....</i>	12
<i>RESOURCE BASED VIEW (RBV) APPROACH TO INTERNATIONALISATION.....</i>	15
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW ON MANAGERIAL INFLUENCES AS DETERMINANT OF EXPORT BEHAVIOUR.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<i>MANAGERIAL CHARACTERISTICS.....</i>	21
Age.....	21
Educational Level.....	21
Industry Specific Know-How (Previous Work Experience in the Same Industry).....	22
Management Know-How (Management Quality).....	23
International Experience.....	24
Foreign Language Skills.....	25
Risk Tolerance.....	26
Innovativeness (Resistance to Change).....	27
<i>MANAGERIAL PERCEPTIONS.....</i>	28
Organisational and Environmental Factors as Antecedents to Export Behaviour.....	29
Managerial Perceptions about Firm’s Growth and/or Profit and Exporting Expectations.....	33
Managerial Perceptions about Export Stimuli and Barriers.....	34
<b>EMPIRICAL METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>RESULTS AND DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>38</b>
<i>GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMPANIES.....</i>	38
Case A.....	38
Case B.....	39
Case C.....	40
Case D.....	41
<i>WITHIN AND CROSS CASE ANALYSIS.....</i>	42
<b>CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH.</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>APPENDIX.....</b>	<b>67</b>

## INTRODUCTION

As a result of the intensifying globalization of the world's economies (Morgan and Katsikeas 1997) as well as the focus on improving national deficits (Katsikeas et al. 1996) international business involvement is becoming particularly relevant both in terms of national prosperity and for individual organizations.

According to Gylfason (1999) exports are the mainstay of around a fifth or more of the world's population. Moreover, they might be a major source of economic growth, both directly because exports are part of production and indirectly as exports facilitate imports of goods, services and capital, hence new ideas, knowledge and technology become available. At the macro level, the engagement of more companies in export activities is considered as being an effective way for coping with trade deficit problems (Morgan and Katsikeas 1997) as well as a mean of enhancing the accumulation of foreign exchange, of improving the level of employment, of increasing national productivity and of driving economic growth (Czinkota 1994) whereas at the micro level exporting can provide individual businesses with opportunities to grow, increase profits and stabilise demand (Ramaseshan and Soutar 1996) and to improve the utilization of production capacity, to develop superior management capabilities, to enhance innovation in product and process, and to strengthen financial performance (Terpstra and Sarathy 1997).

Morgan and Katsikeas (1997) assert that in the case of SMEs exporting activities gain particular importance for their survival, growth and long-term viability, since exporting represents a less resource-laden approach as compared with alternative foreign market entry and expansion modes, such as joint ventures arrangements or manufacturing operations overseas. Exporting is considered the most common foreign market entry mode, especially

among SMEs, given the minimal business risk involved, low resource commitment and high flexibility of action (Young et al. 1989).

Much of the literature on internationalisation of the firm has focused on multinational enterprises (MNEs) (Andersson et al. 2004) or large, well-established firms (McDougall and Oviatt 1996). In addition, from a geographical focus the majority of research on exporting related topics has been carried out mainly in the USA (Leonidou and Katsikeas 1996; Bloodgood et al. 1996; Calantone et al. 2006).

This research is focused on small and medium enterprises (SMEs) due to their recognized importance to economic activity, employment, innovation and wealth creation in many countries (Acs et al. 1997; Katsikeas et al. 1998). The promotion and development of small and medium-sized enterprises has been emphasized by numerous researchers and by multi-lateral agency reports due to its relevance for achieving diverse social and economic objectives (Birch 1988; Flannery and Shapiro 1992; Heshmati 2001; Weaver et al. 1998; World Bank 1991). For instance, Zou and Stan (1998) state that SMEs play an important role in many economies. Accordingly, Cassell et al. (2002: 671), narrowing their focus span to the European context, assert that: *“Increasingly, SMEs are seen to have an important role in the European economy, indeed it would seem that both national and local economies are largely constituted of smaller enterprises, with the addition of a minority of large enterprises”*.

Indeed, small and medium sized enterprises dominate European economy and employ a substantial part of the private workforce (The Observatory of the European SMEs 2002)<sup>1</sup>.

More than 99% of the enterprises established within these countries are SMEs and provide

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance with the Publisher report in 2002, in the framework of The Observatory of the European SMEs, which covers 19 European countries: EU 15, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland ([http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/enterprise\\_policy/analysis/observatory\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/enterprise_policy/analysis/observatory_en.htm))

two thirds of all jobs whereas only one third of the jobs are in large firms. Spain and Catalonia comply to the general rule, in other words, enterprises accounting for 200 or more employees are an exception, 99,5% of the firms having less than 200 workers (National Statistical Institute of Spain [INE] 2004) <sup>2</sup>.

Moreover, improving the international contributions of the small business sector is widely considered as an increasingly important policy priority and the focus of public policy support in many countries (Crick 1997; Tesar and Moini 1998; McNaughton and Bell 2001; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OCDE] 1997).

In addition, the European Union is the world's largest exporter of goods (Lages and Montgomery 2004). However, there is a certain need in research to pay attention to European SMEs, considering that most research has been carried out with firms based outside the European Union (EU); especially North America companies (Walters and Samiee 1990; Winer 1998).

The Catalan geographical context was chosen for this research due to its economic importance at both the national and international level. Within the Spanish economy, Catalonia one of 17 autonomous communities, is the country's most industrially developed region and has been in the forefront of Spain's modernization. Not only at the Spanish level, but also at the European one, Catalonia stands among the leading industrialized regions of Europe. Along with the regions of Baden-Wurttemberg (Germany), Lombardia (Italy) and Rhone-Alpes (France) they are thought to be the "four motors of Europe" (Bazan and Gavino 2004). Regarding exporting, the Catalan economy presents a 66% degree of international openness, measured as

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<sup>2</sup> In accordance with the National Statistical Institute of Spain (INE), 2004, ([www.ine.es](http://www.ine.es))

the ratio between the volume of the most important exports and the GDP of the region, as compared to 54% Baden-Wurttemberg, 62% Lombardia, or 40% Rhone-Alpes. This figure is surpassed at the European level only by Benelux (163% Belgium, 115% Luxemburg, 109% Holland), Ireland 97% and Austria 77% (Generalitat de Catalunya 2004).

Although it comprises only a 6% of Spain's area and 15.6% of its population, in 2002, Catalonia's GDP accounted for about 20% of Spain's total GDP, 25% of its industrial GAV, 30% of all Spanish exports, 28% of all Spanish imports, and received 13% of all foreign investments in Spain (Bazan and Gavino 2004). From an international perspective, while Catalonia represents only a 0.1% world's population, its PIB represents a 0.46% of the global one, and its exports stand for 0.52% of the world's imports. The Catalan exports have followed, in general, a positive evolution during the last years. In 1988, Catalan total exports represented a 0.32% of the world's imports, rising to 0.55% in 1992. Experiencing a slight decreasing trend (0.39% in 1993), the Catalan exports increased again reaching a quota of 0.52% of the world's imports in 2004 (Generalitat de Catalunya 2005).

According to Miesenböck (1988) and Crick and Chaudhry (1997) decision maker' role in export activity is crucial. This gains even more relevance in the context of SMEs (Lee and Brasch 1978) given the fact that the organisation due to its small size may be confounded with its manager whose characteristics, beliefs and perceptions might be crucial for the export behaviour of the firm. He/she is the one that decides the company's strategy, including the export strategy, and also manages firm's skills and resources. Furthermore, Lloyd-Reason and Mughan (2002) assert that "*Decision making within the typical SME ... is likely to be determined by one individual, often the owner-manager*". Numerous scholars have emphasized that decision maker's characteristics - personal demographics, international

orientation, management style, management and industry know-how, managerial competences and managerial expectations - or perceptions are crucial in determining the export behaviour of the firm (Simmonds and Smith 1968; Simpson and Kujawa 1974; McConnel 1979; Cavusgil et al. 1979; Cavusgil 1982; Dichtl et al. 1983; Cavusgil 1984 a,b ; Barrett and Wilkinson 1986; Axinn 1988; Aaby and Slater 1989; Dichtl et al. 1990; Holzmuller and Kasper 1990; Chetty and Hamilton 1993; Axinn et al. (1995); Leonidou et al. 1998; Westhead et al. 2001; Manolova et al. 2002; Lloyd-Reason and Mughan 2002; Halikias and Panayotopoulou 2003; Ibeh 2003; Manolova and Manev 2004; Williams and Chaston 2004; Fernández-Ortiz and Castresana Ruiz-Carrillo 2005; Suárez-Ortega and Aloma-Vera 2005; Knowles et al. 2006; Hutchinson et al. 2006).

More precisely, when referring to perceptions, Weick (1969) underlines that the attribute to be considered in the decision making process is not the objective situation per se but rather the perceptions of the external and internal settings. Accordingly, Anderson and Paine (1975) argue that the existence of different decision frameworks and strategies given the same objective settings is explained by differences in managerial perceptions.

However, Leonidou et al. (1998) underline the lack of consensus among scholars as to what constitutes the managerial factor in determining exporting and what specific dimensions are influenced by management.

Summing up, given on one hand, the importance of the export activities both at the national level and at the firm level (SME level) along with the concentration of most research on the Anglo-Saxon context and on the other hand, the bearing that managerial factors have on the export behaviour of the company, more research should be dedicated to identifying the

exporting firms' decision maker's<sup>3</sup> characteristics and perceptions/beliefs in other countries. The present work, therefore, tries to enrich our knowledge on the influence of the decision maker's personality, within a SME, on the export behaviour of the firm. To this purpose, the study addresses the following broad research questions: Which are the managerial characteristics that may influence the export behaviour of the Catalan SMEs? Which are the managerial perceptions that may influence the export behaviour of Catalan SMEs?

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ON SMEs INTERNATIONALISATION PROCESS**

### *The Stage Models of Internationalisation: The "Gradualist" Approach*

The internationalisation process, subject of widespread theoretical and empirical research, is described as a gradual development taking place in distinct stages (Melin 1992). Based on a purely behaviourist view of the organisation (Cyert and March 1963), it makes reference to the lack of complete information and the relevance of risk or uncertainty in managerial decision making. This approach, more directly related to SMEs, is deemed the "incrementalist/gradualist approach" due to its conceptualisation of the internationalisation of the firm as a learning process based on the gradual accumulation of experiential (foreign) market knowledge (Rialp and Rialp 2001). The gradualist process or stage theory of internationalisation has been widely used in empirical research, many studies confirming the validity of the findings. Moreover, in the case of many small firms, the empirical results show that the process of internationalisation is very lengthy and incremental (Boter and Holmquist 1996). Nevertheless, the stage models have been criticised by several scholars such as: Buckley et al. 1979, Reid 1983b, Hedlund and Kverneland 1985, Turnbull and Valla 1986, Turnbull 1987, Ford and Leonidou 1991, Melin 1992, Strandskov 1994, McDougall et al. 1994, Oviatt and McDougall 1994 and Kutschker and Baurle 1997.

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<sup>3</sup> Note that given the focus of the study the words decision maker, owner, entrepreneur, manager and director are used as synonyms, referring to the person in charge of the export activity in the firm.

Given the pronounced innovative nature which characterizes the initial steps of the internationalising process, especially those that constitute the adoption of the export activity, allows one to assume a more incremental logic in the decision making process as well as a more gradual pattern in the firm's behaviour through time (Rialp and Rialp 2001). Hence, the scant initial knowledge about foreign markets specific to most SMEs along with the uncertainties associated with the decision of going international, influence the process (Cavusgil and Godiwalla 1982; Andersen 1993).

Andersen (1993), Barkema et al. (1996), Gankema et al. (2000) and Chetty and Campbell-Hunt (2004) argue that there are two traditional (gradual behaviour-based) approaches to internationalisation: the Uppsala internationalisation model (U-Model) and the Innovation-related models (I-Models), both of them referred to as the "stage models". All these models consist of a number of identifiable and distinct stages, where higher level stages indicate greater involvement in foreign markets.

The U-Model initiated by Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1975) and reformulated by Johanson and Vahlne (1977; 1990) posits that as firms learn more about a certain market, they become more committed to it by investing more resources into that market. Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul's (1975) study identifies the lack of knowledge and/or resources, and the resulting uncertainty to the firm, as the principle obstacle to internationalisation. With time, the firm gradually progresses through a series of learning and commitment stages, also deemed as "establishment chain", as it follows: no regular export, export through agents, founding of an overseas sales subsidiary, and overseas production. Firms improve their foreign market knowledge through initial expansion characterised by low risk, indirect

exporting approaches targeting “psychically close” markets. Over time and with the accumulation of experience the firm gradually extends its foreign activities to markets that have increasingly greater physical distance. Johanson and Vahlne (1977; 1990) proposed a more dynamic conception of the firm’s internationalisation process, stressing the continuous interaction between both the development of knowledge about markets and foreign participation and an increasing commitment of resources regarding international markets. Moreover, Johanson and Vahlne (1990) developed an additional conceptualisation, examining the phenomenon of international industrial networks and the impact of relation building on internationalisation behaviour.

The interest paid by the U-Model to the “establishment chain” makes this approach particularly adequate for explaining the export behaviour of SMEs, in the initial stages of their internationalisation process. This is supported by Forsgren (1989), Johanson and Vahlne (1990) and Alonso (1993), thus, stressing the relevance of gradual and/or incremental experience accumulation for explaining the export behaviour of SMEs.

Other behaviourist models also suggest that SMEs’ internationalisation process is incremental, based on different stages which determine changes in the attitudinal and behavioural commitment of managers which, at their turn, are reflected in the firms increasing international orientation (Bilkey and Tesar 1977; Cavusgil 1980; Reid 1981; Cavusgil and Godiwalla 1982; Czinkota 1982). Due to the fact that movement from one stage to another resembles Rogers’ (1962) diffusion of innovation and because the models present various similarities, they have been collectively deemed innovation models on internationalisation (I-Models). These models conceive the internationalisation process as a number of fixed and sequential stages, although the number of identified stages varies in-between the models,

ranging from three to six. Leonidou and Katsikeas (1996), in a complex review of these models summarize the identified stages in three broad, generic ones: the pre-export stage, the initial export stage, the advanced export stage.

A few scholars verified the applicability of the I-Models for SMEs. Bell (1995) found that the I-models were true for their sample of small software companies in Finland, Ireland and Norway. Moreover, Gankema et al. (2000) using a sample of SMEs from six European countries showed that in the majority of cases Cavusgil's (1980) stage theory is still valid.

#### *Network Approach to Internationalisation*

Networks are strongly relied upon by SMEs at the beginning of a firm's internationalisation, especially to select and expand into foreign markets as they facilitate the acquisition of experiential knowledge about these markets (Lindqvist, 1997). Network research emphasizes the crucial role of the inter-firm ties in accumulating and using knowledge (Burt 1982). Sharma and Johanson (1987) highlight the influence of network ties on learning and internationalisation behaviour of the firm while Sharma and Blomstermo (2003) suggest that firm's ties provide channels for sharing knowledge as well as the motivation to do so.

Small firms are likely to grow, at least at the beginning of their existence, through the establishment of links with the external environment (Jones 2001). The "external links" are defined by Jones (2001) as points of contact with the external environment; they form the basis for the establishment of business relationships and networks, hence allowing such behavioural approaches to internationalisation. In contrast with large firms, which often have the resources to easily enter foreign networks, the establishments of network relationships gains even more importance for SMEs, especially for those which do not yet have clearly defined internationalisation goals (Mockaitis et al. 2006). Coviello and Munro (1997) argue

that internationalisation activity appears to be largely driven by existing network relationships, often presenting major patterns guiding foreign market selection and providing the mechanism for market entry. Dana et al. (1999) and Jones (1999) suggest that networks also speed internationalisation providing synergistic relationships with other firms which may complement each other with resources at various stages in the value chain.

Researchers have highlighted how relationships originate both from business and social contexts (Harris and Wheeler 2005) and they have emphasized the importance they bear for the initiation and further development of export activities.

Johanson and Mattson (1988) argue that the internationalisation of the firm takes place in a business network setting. They define business networks as long-term business relationships that a firm has with its customers, distributors, suppliers, competitors and government. Similarly, the Uppsala Model (Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul 1975) and later extension (Johanson and Vahlne 1990) argue that firms use intermediaries during the early stages of the internationalisation process due to the fact that the required resource commitment and knowledge base is smaller than if the firm were to establish its own subsidiary. Numerous researchers have observed that market exchanges frequently take place within the context of long-term relationships between business partners (Turnbull and Valla 1986; Ford 1990; Eriksson et al. 1998). For instance, Bell (1995) found that export activities were initiated due to the contact with suppliers while Ibeh (2003) observed that decision makers who had regular contacts with friends/relatives/associates abroad were more likely to be involved in export activities.

The importance of social networks for SME managers in pursuing business activities and dealing with external resources has been emphasized by authors such as Johannisson (1988) and Perrow (1992). According to Holmlund and Kock (1998) personal network resources are crucial in the case of SMEs, given the fact that international market activities often rely on knowledge and experience of a single person. Similarly, Aldrich and Zimmer (1986) state that personal contact network of founder, manager, and employees are the basis for a young firm developing its exchange relationship. In the same sense, McDougall et al. (1994) assert that direct personal contacts of key individuals in foreign markets could be used to identify new opportunities, obtain business advice, assistance in foreign negotiations, and open doors in markets where the internationalizing firm may have no previous presence. Moreover, Denis and Depelteau (1985) argue that export information is often obtained through personal contacts. Andersen (2006) further building up on the work of Mintzberg (1973) on the importance of personal contacts for carrying out managerial work emphasizes that personal contacts by export managers are typically found in a wide rather than narrow range of social circles of export managers. Both friends and acquaintances are included and they involve social bonds formed in various social contacts, including those formed in social clubs, present and former employees, education, family, etc. Also, a subset of these contacts may have been developed as business acquaintances but have been transformed, over time, into personal contacts, as relationship frequently evolve from more to less formal relationships as the actors deepen their involvement and may form emotional bonds such as friendship.

According to Andersen (2006) export managers often find themselves in situations where the lack of relevant export information constitutes an important barrier to initiating or further developing export activities. This is even more relevant at the SMEs level, given their comparatively fewer resources available for data processing (Calof 1993). Reid (1984) argues

that as compared to large firms, the managers' possibilities to acquire information are more limited and, therefore, the use of personal contacts becomes particularly important.

The U-Model Johanson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1975) and Johanson and Vahlne (1977) focus rather on the autonomy of the firm in the internationalisation process seeing the company as isolated from other actors. According to Madsen and Servais (1997) for understanding the internationalisation process of a firm it is necessary to take into account the context in which it operates, such as, environmental conditions and the firm's relationships. Coviello and Munro (1997) argue that integrating the models of internationalisation with the network approach would enhance the understanding of the internationalisation process for small firms.

#### *Resource Based View (RBV) Approach to Internationalisation*

According to the RBV, firm resources are sources of competitive advantage. Competitive advantage is defined by Barney (1991:102), as occurring when a firm "*is implementing a value creating strategy not simultaneously being implemented by any current or potential competitors*". This author also emphasizes that an important implication of the RBV is that a broad range of individual, social and organisational phenomena within the firms that are analyzed by organizational theory and organizational behaviour might be sources of sustained competitive advantage. Firms can be conceptualized under the RBV as "*unique bundles of accumulated tangible and intangible resources stocks*" (Roth 1995: 200). Bloodgood et al. (1996) further build on this idea arguing that those firms which present unique bundles and combinations of resources stocks might have a higher proclivity towards internationalisation.

While one of the dominant perspectives in the strategy literature, the RBV has received relatively little attention in the context of international business, though it is gaining momentum (Fahy 2002). According to Peng (2001), the RBV in international business has

lately become a burgeoning perspective, with contributions from a wide variety of authors and institutions around the world.

While many kinds of firm resources and capabilities have been identified as sources of competitive advantage, Westhead et al. (2001: 337), emphasizing that previous theoretical approaches do not take into consideration the aspirations of entrepreneurs and the resource needs of smaller and newer firms, put forward the following idea: “...*the resources and capabilities mobilized by the entrepreneur have an important impact on the ability to enter export markets*”.

Thus, it is made clear that the export behaviour is contingent upon the entrepreneur's characteristic, abilities and perceptions. Drawing on the RBV insight, top managers may represent some of the most valuable, unique, and hard to imitate resources (Peng, 2001). A similar idea is underlined by Chandler and Hanks (1994) who state that firm performance is a function not only of accessibility to resources, but also of entrepreneur's managerial competence. In a small firm, there is a variety of reasons for paying special attention to the role of individuals. Boter and Holmquist (1996) assert that in small firms, the organization is thinner both vertically and horizontally, hence usually one person, the owner-manager along with a small leadership team, will have strong influences over the firm's activities. Similarly, Crick and Chaudhry (1997) point out that the entrepreneur (owner/manager) or senior management team might be the most important factor for SMEs behaviour, since they are the decision-makers within a company and, therefore, determine the firm's commitment to exporting whereas Manolova et al. (2002) assert that human capital or personal factors may overcome inadequacies in other resources stocks, and therefore, provide a potential source of “differential advantage” for the internationalized small firm.

In addition, the role of the decision maker in an SME is even more emphasized by Piercy et al. (1998) who suggest that in appraising identified export market opportunities managers should give particular attention to the appropriateness of the resources and skills base needed to achieve competitive advantage. According to these authors, opportunities should not be evaluated only in conventional terms of market attractiveness. Attention should be paid to the fit that exists, or which can be engineered, between a specific export market opportunity and the firm's profile of skills and resources for exporting, these being predictors of likely performance; opportunities demanding skills and resources which are not available are likely to lead to low export performance. Moreover, Piercy et al. (1998) stress the importance of the informational skills as well as that of skills in product development and supply chain management for achieving export performance.

Abdel-Malek (1978) argue that given the fact that smaller firms may have limited resources, experienced personnel may not be prepared to work for them for reasons such as prestige, salary and other similar factors which makes recruitment of staff likely to lack managers with experience in export matters. Therefore, the way in which the decision maker in a SME is handling human resource practices is crucial for the firm's export behaviour. For instance, Cadogan et al. (2001) state that top managers in a firm will reinforce in their staff the importance of being export market-oriented. The same authors, building up on Jaworski and Kohli (1993) and Anderson and Chambers (1985), suggest that if individuals are rewarded on export market-based criteria, such as export customer satisfaction indexes, market shares, and export customer retention rates, they are more likely to behave in an export market-oriented fashion. Moreover, Cadogan et al. (2001), taking as a starting point Mohr-Jackson's (1991) ideas, infer that training programs are likely to play a key role in developing effective export

market oriented behaviour. Also, Czinkota and Ronkainen (1995) state that the ability to increase the firm's sensitivity to export customers' needs and to conduct business abroad requires the employees to possess a capacity to deal with cultural, political and economic differences, which frequently requires formal education and employee development programs. According to Cadogan et al. (2001), training can also provide employees with the skills necessary to carry out export market-oriented tasks, such as the development of an export marketing strategy, and the ability to recognize the importance and to interpret the export market orientation. Similarly, Beamish (1986) advises that international business training is positively related to exporting performance.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW ON MANAGERIAL INFLUENCES AS DETERMINANT OF EXPORT BEHAVIOUR**

Since the very beginning, the analysis of export-centred decision-making processes has focused on the idea that a company's decision to extend its marketing activities to markets abroad is ultimately taken by the individual decision-maker (Miesenböck 1988; Crick and Chaudhry 1997). The crucial role the manager plays in influencing export behaviour has been largely acknowledged and emphasized in the export marketing literature (see reviews by Aaby and Slater 1989; Chetty and Hamilton 1993; Leonidou et al. 1998). This becomes even more important in the context of SMEs (Lee and Brasch 1978). Accordingly, Cavusgil (1984b) and Katsikeas (1996) suggest that since in smaller sized enterprises, the entrepreneur's or team's characteristics drive organisational strategy, their desire for or enthusiasm towards overseas expansion mostly results in higher international involvement. In the same way, Lloyd-Reason and Mughan (2002) argue that the behavioural characteristics of the SME in terms of their international activities are determined primarily by the key decision-maker, often the owner-manager, and that in turn, these behavioural characteristics

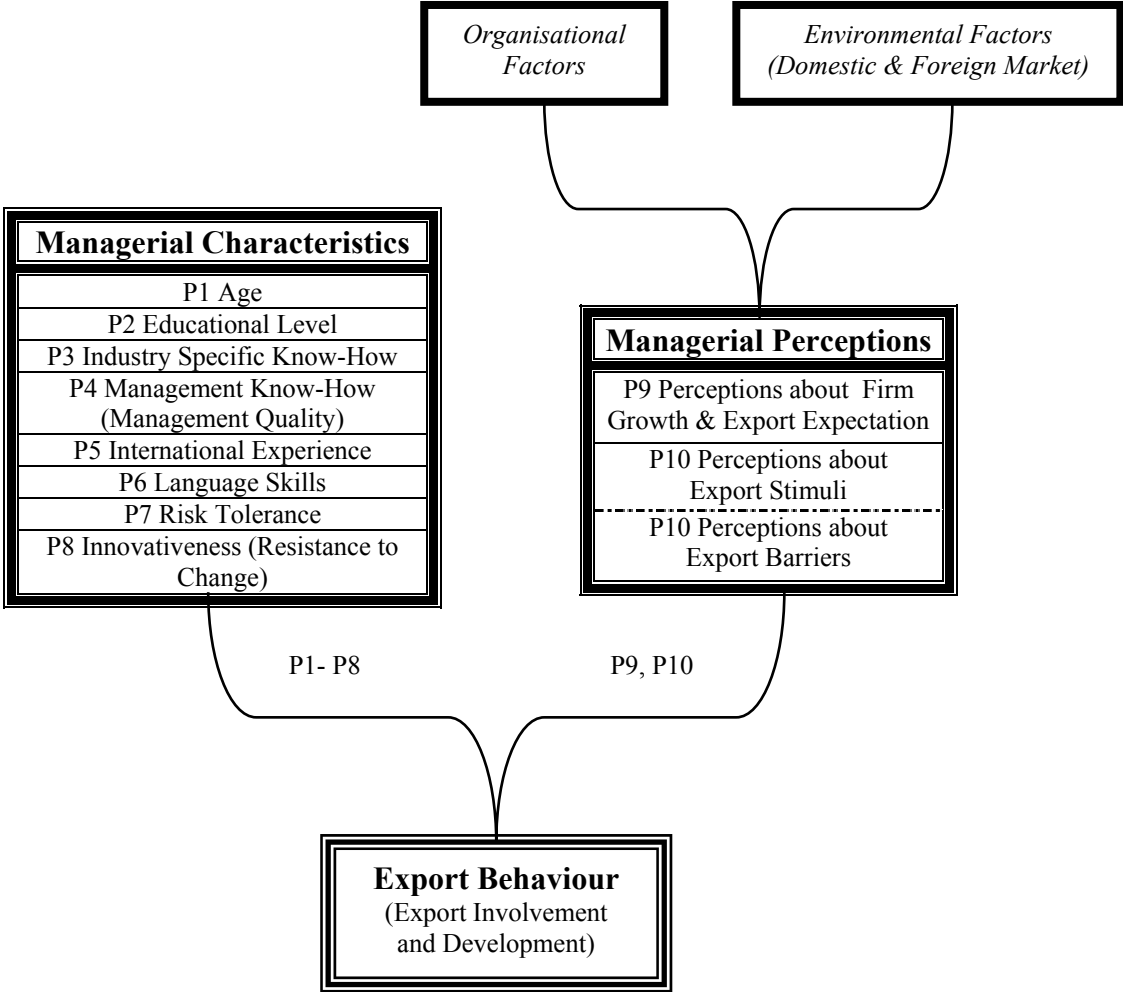
are influenced by the so called “cultural orientation” of the decision maker. The “cultural orientation”, according to the authors, is also influenced by a number of factors, such as linguistic skills, exposure to foreign culture, network of friends/colleagues overseas, educational background, etc.

Fernández Ortiz and Castresana Ruiz-Carrillo (2005) distinguished three main factors, linked with the firm’s management, that were investigated by the literature in the field in order to explain the export behaviour of the company: management’s characteristics, management’s perceptions and the importance attributed to certain organizational objectives. Similarly, Suárez Ortega and Alamo-Vera (2005), divided the managerial influences on export intention, propensity and intensity in two groups: managerial characteristics (age, educational level, experience abroad, foreign language proficiency) and management attitude (perception about export advantage and perceptions about export barriers). Leonidou et al. (1998) in a comprehensive review on the influence of the managerial factor on export propensity, aggressiveness, development and performance divided the managerial influences in four categories: general-objective (age group, educational background, professional experience); specific-objective (ethnic origin, language proficiency, time spent abroad, foreign travel); general-subjective (risk tolerance, innovativeness, flexibility, commitment, quality and dynamism) and specific-subjective (risk perceptions, cost perceptions, profit perceptions, growth perceptions, complexity perceptions). The most studied factors were: age, educational background, professional experience, management quality and dynamism, time spent abroad, language proficiency, risk tolerance, innovativeness, profit and growth perceptions.

Considering the classifications provided by Fernández Ortiz and Castresana Ruiz-Carrillo (2005) and Suárez Ortega and Alamo-Vera (2005) as well as the most studied factors from the

review presented by Leonidou et al. (1998), along with other arguments from the existing literature on export-based internationalisation (see Appendix, Table 1 for a review of some of the most relevant contemporary research works on managerial determinants of export behaviour related issues) in order to present the decision maker’s profile in exporting firms, we chose the following managerial determinants as influencing the export behaviour of the SMEs, as presented in the Conceptual Model (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1 CONCEPTUAL MODEL:  
MANAGERIAL DETERMINANTS OF EXPORT BEHAVIOUR**



## *Managerial Characteristics*

### **Age**

Researchers have turned their attention towards the age of the entrepreneur in order to shed light on the export behaviour of the SMEs. However, the results obtained by the studies provide contradictory information. Numerous scholars observed that younger managers seem to be more export oriented than their older counterparts. Cavusgil and Naor (1987), Oviatt et al. (1993), argue that younger managers are more open to extending their company's activities abroad whereas Ursic and Czinkota (1989) state that the younger the manager the greater the potential to make use of export possibilities. Jaffe et al. (1988) and Moon and Lee (1990) consider manager's age as a predictor for export behaviour, due to the fact that younger managers are generally more internationally minded and cosmopolitan than their older peers. On the other hand, other scholars show that older age levels of the owner/founder are related to internationalisation (Welch and Weidersheim-Paul 1980).

***P1: SMEs involved in export activities are run by young decision makers.***

### **Educational Level**

Cooper et al. (1994) argues that the principal entrepreneur can provide a firm with general human capital or resources, which can be in the form of the entrepreneur's own life experience or education. The education has to do with the knowledge, skills, problem-solving ability, discipline, motivation and self-confidence. Hence, more highly educated decision makers have better problem solving skills. Moreover, Simpson and Kujawa (1974) state that the amount of knowledge the decision maker has about internationalisation is contingent upon the decision-maker's level of education while Garnier (1982) suggests that better educated decision makers are considered to be more open-minded and interested in foreign affairs,

therefore, being more willing to evaluate the benefits and disadvantages of exporting from an objective point of view. Previous literature in the export marketing field acknowledges that: there is a positive link between the educational level of the manager and the degree of export involvement (Axinn 1988) or export behaviour of the firm (Mayer and Flynn 1973; Reid 1983a); high educational level is associated with internationalisation (Cavusgil and Naor 1987; Oviatt et al. 1993).

***P2: SMEs involved in export activities are run by highly educated decision makers.***

### **Industry Specific Know-How (Previous Work Experience in the Same Industry)**

The professional experience of the manager, including previous occupations, technical experience, or product knowledge, has always been associated with exporting (Leonidou et al. 1998). Decision makers with previous experience in the same industry as the one they are currently operating in, are obviously more acquainted with the possible business opportunities and the environmental factors. Additionally, they may benefit from contacts made during their previous employment which may facilitate the identification of foreign market opportunities. Westhead et al. (2001) emphasize that previous experience and beneficial close relationships may accumulate a principal founder's industry-specific know-how with specific customers, suppliers, or stakeholders. Also, according to the same authors, entrepreneurs with pre-ownership experience in the same industry as the present firm provide them with detailed knowledge of the task environment. Chandler (1996) argues that industry-specific experience allowed entrepreneurs to become acquainted with customers both on local and national markets as well as on the international one and to be able to develop more appropriate market niches. Also, Bell et al. (2004) observed that decision maker's general knowledge and understanding of the industries in which they frequently operated leads to a high level of international awareness.

*P3: SMEs involved in export activities are run by decision makers having previously worked in the same industry.*

### **Management Know-How (Management Quality)**

Management know-how, as distinct from industry-specific know-how, is a form of social capital representing the non-economic knowledge that has a direct impact on individual economic behaviour (Greene and Brown 1997).

Carter et al. (1997) state that the principal founder of a firm can obtain resources using management know-how and his/her capacity to identify appropriate partners, investors and advisors who can supply the firm with necessary resources. Hence, it can be inferred that he/she can also spot profitable market opportunities, on domestic and foreign markets. Similarly, Cunningham and Spigel (1971) considered managerial quality and dynamism as potential correlates with export aggressiveness and success: competent managers are more likely to be capable of coping with export-related problems, as well as designing and implementing effective international business strategies while Manalova et al. (2002) observed that one of the most important human capital dimensions for export development were the managerial skills. According to Cooper (1981) the most relevant influence upon the ability of an individual is the previous work experience of a founder. Birley and Westhead (1993) observed that habitual founders were markedly more likely to own businesses involved in the international market. However, management know-how does not necessarily have to be based on the previous owner status of the actual decision maker, but on his/her having held a managerial position before. This idea receives support from the literature in the field. Westhead (1995) and Ibeh (2003) argue that entrepreneurs, who have held managerial or

professional positions prior to start-up, may be more aware of the possibilities and practices of exporting part of their sales.

***P4: SMEs involved in export activities are run by decision makers who previously owned a business or worked in a managerial or professional position.***

### **International Experience**

This concept refers to the exposure the decision maker had to foreign cultures and business practices during the time spent abroad while studying, working or travelling in business interest or tourism. Leonidou et al. (1998) argue that the time managers spend abroad has been regarded as an important factor that could explain export intention, propensity and intensity, given the fact that it implies managers' exposure to other cultures which leads to greater experiential knowledge about international markets. Barrett and Wilkinson (1986) found a strong association between the time the manager spent abroad and export development whereas Czinkota and Ursic (1991) observed that decision maker's exposure to foreign cultures affected export performance. Moreover, da Rocha et al. (1990) state that by travelling abroad managers are more likely to get acquainted to foreign business practices, meet future customers, and spot market opportunities. A recent study, Hutchinson et al. (2006), also provides findings which confirm that by travelling abroad, management have learned about foreign business practices, met prospective business partners and identified market opportunities. Similarly, Tookey (1964) and Cunningham and Spigel (1971) observed that in the case of current exporters, frequent travels to export markets positively influenced success in exporting. In addition, research indicates that when a firm has managers who are immigrants or who have lived or worked overseas, the firms are more export oriented (Simmonds and Smith 1968; Mayer and Flynn 1973). We can therefore suggest, that a manager draws upon his or her personal contacts established during the time he/she had

studied, worked or travelled abroad to facilitate the export development. This idea finds support in the works of Simmonds and Smith (1968) and Dichtl et al. (1984b).

***P5: SMEs involved in export activities are run by decision makers with international experience.***

### **Foreign Language Skills**

It is very often asserted, either explicitly or implicitly, that success in international trade is dependent on foreign language skills (Knowles et al. 2006). Indeed, numerous researchers have studied the link between the foreign language skills of the decision maker and the firm's export behaviour, emphasizing its crucial importance for the initiation and development of marketing activities abroad. Czinkota and Johnston (1983) argue that communication difficulties ranked first in terms of problems encountered by SMEs when exporting. According to Clarke (1999) foreign language skills have credited to contributing to international success in several ways such as the enhanced availability of market information, improved negotiation skills, and an improved understanding of trade partners' business culture. Similarly, Davis (1995) states that, in addition to facilitating communication, foreign language proficiency eases the understanding of the foreign culture. This increases the proximity between the manager and the other country. Studies such as Cunningham and Spigel (1971) and Schlegelmilch and Ross (1987) also show that foreign language proficiency has been positively associated with export development as it might help to establish social and business contacts in foreign markets, to improve communication and interaction with foreign customers, to better understand foreign business practices and to facilitate effective planning and control in international markets. Moreover, a recent study Knowles et al. (2006) points out that decision makers of successful exporting firms were much more likely to have foreign language skills and these skills were often at a higher level than those of less successful

exporters, at the same time presenting an international mindset that is conducive to successful internationalisation. On the other hand, Turnbull and Welhalm (1985) assert that the lack of foreign language knowledge may increase the manager's perception of psychological distance between the domestic market and the international one, therefore, negatively affecting the export behaviour of the firm.

***P6: SMEs involved in export activities are run by decision makers who possess foreign language skills.***

### **Risk Tolerance**

According to Gupta and Govindarajan (1984) the positive attitude of managers towards risk favours strategies of expansion through new products and markets. Hence, it could be inferred that manager's risk tolerance may influence the export behaviour of the SME. This idea is supported by McConnel's (1979) study as well as by Wiedersheim-Paul et al. (1978) who suggest that the fact that exporting implies greater risk than selling in the domestic market may constrain managers from initiating, developing and sustaining export operations. Similarly, Dichtl et al. (1983) argue that the risk aversion of managers influences the degree of export involvement while Bauerschmidt et al. (1985) and Axinn (1988) determine that negative perceptions about risk and potential for export were substantial barriers to export. On the other hand, Cavusgil (1984a) observed that management's attitudes toward risk taking were positively related to export performance. Fernández Ortiz and Castresana Ruiz-Carrillo (2005) assert that low levels of perceived risk together with high levels of risk tolerance lead to a positive attitude towards export, and vice versa.

***P7: SMEs involved in export activities are run by decision makers characterized by high risk tolerance (low perceived risk).***

## **Innovativeness (Resistance to Change)**

Various researchers considered the initiation of the export activity as an innovation, similar to innovativeness in other enterprise functions, such as adoption of new production processes or the introduction of new products (Simmonds and Smith 1968). Accordingly, Lee and Brasch (1978) also suggest that export behaviour is an innovation adoption process. Similarly, Reid (1981) considers the export decision making as an innovation-adoption process, the firm moving through the export process from export awareness, export intention, trial evaluation and acceptance of exporting. This model focuses on the characteristics and behaviour of the decision maker and the requirements of the firm in terms of allocated resources at each stage of the adoption process showing their importance for the export development activity of the firm. Holzmuller and Kasper (1991) as well as Katsikeas et al. (2000) assert that innovation is a crucial factor for the export performance of the firm. If firms are open to innovative ideas, they are also likely to perform well in exporting (Leonidou 1998). McCartt and Rohrbaugh (1985) observed that managerial openness to change has a positive relation to the adoption of innovative practices in some types of firms. Dichtl et al. (1983) state that rigidity and resistance to change as managerial personality characteristics, lead to negative effects on their foreign market orientation. Other researchers such as Rogers (1962, 1983) or Tornatzky and Klein (1982) point to a link between the positive (and negative) perceptions of innovations and the adoption, rejection and continued use of those innovations.

***P8: SMEs involved in export activities are run by managers characterized by innovativeness and low resistance to change.***

### *Managerial Perceptions*

Cavusgil and Godiwalla (1982) state that the internationalisation decision is characterised by the absence of deliberate logical steps and it is constrained by the subjective view and perceptions of the decision maker. Axinn et al. (1995) observed that among small business industrial firms, a positive perception of exporting strongly influenced their export intention and behaviour. On the other hand, negative perceptions of export perspectives were often a stronger inhibition to export behaviour than a firm's actual export capacity (Simpson and Kujawa 1974; Pavord and Bogart 1975).

Anderson and Paine (1975) assert that the differences in the managerial perceptions about a certain situation are the key factors that can explain the existence of different decision frameworks and strategies in the same objective setting. Weick (1969) investigating the role played by perceptions in the strategic decision process observed that the attributes to be considered in the decision making process are the perceptions of the external and internal setting, rather than the objective situation itself. For instance, Staw and Ross (1978) and Leviton and Hughes (1981) state that decision-makers are frequently influenced more strongly by the programs, policies and strategies of their organisations than by objective data. On the other hand, Raven et al. (1994) observed that perceived greater levels of environmental and decision making uncertainty regarding the export channels as compared with domestic channels negatively influenced managers' satisfaction with the performance of their firms in exporting. Also Daft and Weick (1984:287) suggest that "*the interpretation process may shape the environment more than the environment shapes the interpretation*".

## **Organisational and Environmental Factors as Antecedents to Export Behaviour**

As we have previously seen the firm's involvement in export activities is decided by the decision maker whose view about exporting may be influenced by the way he/she perceives different organisational and environmental factors.

**Organisational Factors** Among the organisational factors that may influence the decision makers' perceptions regarding exporting activities we can identify: differential firm advantage and the production capacity as well as the stock one. Numerous scholars have studied the way in which the perceived differential firm advantages may affect the export behaviour of the firm (Bilkey 1978; Wiedersheim-Paul et al. 1978; Cavusgil et al. 1979; Cavusgil and Nevin 1981; Cooper and Kleinschmidt 1985; Cavusgil and Naor 1987; Katsikeas 1994). Wiedersheim-Paul et al. (1978) state that a firm's perceived competitive advantages directly influence management's attitudes toward global expansion. Bharadwaj et al. (1993) distinguish between two categories of competitive advantage: distinctive skills (capabilities) and unique resources (assets). According to Dunning (1980), possessing advantages over competitors in terms of distinctive skills and unique resources allows firms to exploit these advantages in the open market and realize greater profits than would otherwise be attainable. For instance, following Day and Wensley (1988), superior skills are considered distinctive capabilities of a firm's personnel that differentiate them from the personnel of competing firms and superior resources as more tangible requirements for advantage that enable a firm to exercise its capabilities. The possession of other competitive advantages may also influence the decision makers' perception about export involvement and development: advantages in R&D (Wiedersheim-Paul et al. 1978; Sullivan and Bauerschmidt 1990), marketing (Johnston and Czinkota 1982), knowledge (Oviatt and McDougall 1994), product strength in terms of quality and uniqueness (Styles and Amber 1994). On the other hand, the perceived

inadequacy of certain distinctive skills or resources may inhibit the export development of the firm. For instance, various researchers found that the perceived inadequacy of trained staff may act as a barrier to internationalisation (Pavord and Bogart 1975; Vosikis and Palmour 1980). Accordingly Leonidou (1995), in a review of export barriers, identifies that the perceived inadequacy/lack of training of the personnel was considered an important impediment of the export development. He also encountered among the perceived export barriers the existence of different product standards abroad. Other authors have paid attention to the influence of the production capacity as well as the stock inventory on the export behaviour. Various authors have analysed the impact that the actual production capacity as well as the one already stocked in the warehouses of the firm influence the decision maker's perception about export: available production capacity (Diamantopoulos et al. 1990; Johnston and Czinkota 1982; Wiedersheim-Paul et al. 1978) accumulated unsold inventory (Johnston and Czinkota 1982; Sullivan and Bauerschmidt 1988), economies resulting from additional orders (Kaynak and Kothari 1984; Sullivan and Bauerschmidt 1988). Leonidou (1995), also, identified in his comprehensive review on export stimuli and barriers, the availability of unutilized production capacity and the accumulation of unsold inventory/overproduction as perceived export stimuli as well as the insufficient production capacity as an important barrier to internationalisation. In the same way, authors such as Alexandrides (1971) and Yaprak (1985) also emphasize that the insufficient production capabilities act as a barrier to internationalisation.

**Environmental Factors** On the other hand, perceived environmental factors from both the domestic and foreign market may act as either stimuli or barriers to the firm's export development. Manalova's et al. (2002) identified the environmental perceptions as one of the most important dimensions of human capital (as referred to managers). According to Reid

(1984) foreign expansion takes place when the decision maker considers it an alternative for satisfying their requirements, in opposition to the continued pursuit of domestic expansion using the same resources. The perceived environmental factors that may influence the decision maker's attitude towards exporting may appear on the domestic market as well as on the foreign one.

- In relation to the domestic market factors, the economic climate and trading conditions in the domestic market, the internal market size as well as the location and proximity of the firm to export markets, identified by Johanson and Vahlne (1977), may influence the behaviour the decision maker in the firm has regarding exporting. Other researchers argue that high competition on the domestic market is a relevant determinant for the manager's decision to enter or expand (to) foreign market activities (Reid 1984; Dichtl et al. 1984b; Kaymak and Kothari 1984; Sullivan and Bauerschmidt 1988; Seyoum 2004). Moreover, Reid (1984) considers that the saturation of the domestic market may act as an incentive influencing the decision maker's export behaviour. Similarly, Pavord and Bogart (1975) observed that the strongest motivation of exporters was finding an alternative to saturated domestic markets and declining profits by selling on foreign markets. In addition, Morgan (1999) identified other factors that may be perceived as stimuli to export development, such as: technological turbulence and product-market turbulence. According to Jaworski and Kohli (1993) the concept of technological turbulence is synonymous with the rate of technological change, whereas regarding the product-market turbulence they argue that organisations that operate in turbulent markets may have to adapt their products and services continually to meet the changing preferences of their customers. Also, the perceived attitude of public and private organisms on the

domestic market may influence the decision maker's attitude towards exporting. National, state and local government agencies and various other public and private organisations pursue different export promotion, stimulation, and development programs in order to encourage non-exporting SMEs to export and exporting SMEs to increase their exports. SMEs situated in different geographical regions around the world tend to respond differently to export promotion, stimulation, and development programs initiated by their governments (United States General Accounting Office 1992). For example, in the Spanish context, the Foreign Trade Institute (Instituto Español de Comercio Exterior [ICEX]) is also providing help for international development and editing numerous brochures and catalogues to make Spanish firms known abroad. Also, at a local level, Catalan organisms (such as the Consorci de Promoció Comercial de Catalunya [COPCA]) offer support to enterprises in order to promote their international activities.

- When looking at the foreign market factors, authors such as Simmonds and Smith (1968), Simpson and Kujawa (1974), Bilkey and Tesar (1977), Cavusgil (1980) or Crick and Chaudhry (1997) found that an unsolicited order from abroad acted as an important stimuli for the development of the export activity influencing the decision maker's perceptions. Similarly, Olson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1978) suggest that the receipt of fortuitous orders, the effect of host government policy as well as the consequences of economic integration may have a positive effect on the export behaviour of the firm. Also the external contacts of the decision maker appear to play an important role for the development of export activities, determined according to Simmonds and Smith (1968) and Dichtl et al. (1984b) by the foreign travel or life abroad. Reid (1984) points out that the most important export incentives appear to be

overseas demand factors such as competitiveness as well as enquiries via industry bodies or government representatives overseas along with information in publications. Other factors that may influence the managerial perceptions of export behaviour may be the attitude of different public or private organisms such as chambers of commerce, industrial associations, banks, government agencies and other firms (Pinney 1970). Similar market characteristics of concern to managers include host government regulations and/or restraints on market entry, prohibition or limitations of foreign ownership, local content requirements, and financial and fiscal controls (Czinkota and Ronkainen 1990; Robock and Simmonds 1989). In addition, other factors have been identified that if perceived by the decision makers may act as barriers to export development: exchange-rate movements (Cavusgil 1982), marketing activities by competitors in overseas markets and perception of higher risk in overseas markets including lack of continuity in overseas orders, tariff and non-tariff barriers (Bilkey 1978). Additionally, both Leonidou (1995) and Morgan (1997) identified a number of common factors that may be interpreted as barriers to export behaviour: different consumers' habits/attitudes, unfamiliar business protocols and practices, imposition of tariff/non-tariff barriers, restriction by overseas governments, competitive intensity abroad, and unfavourable fluctuations of foreign exchange rate.

### **Managerial Perceptions about Firm's Growth and/or Profit and Exporting Expectations**

The concept refers to the way in which the manager pictures the future of the firm and his/her general perception about export. As mentioned above, these may be influenced by the way in which the decision maker perceives the organisational and environmental factors. According to Cavusgil (1984a) the development of export activities is related to the goals of the firm. Reid (1981) defined the export intention of the firm as the motivation, attitude, beliefs, and

expectancies about export contribution to the firm's growth. Similarly, Alonso and Donoso (1994) assert that the firms run by manager(s) with high as well as realistic expectations from the export activity, are expected to be less unwilling to allocate resources for this type of operation. Moreover, the empirical results obtained by Ellis and Pecotich (2001) show that important reasons for starting the export activity were foreign growth prospects and pursuit of scale economies. Also, Axinn (1988) observed that managerial perceptions about a relative advantage of exporting are the single most significant indicator of firm export performance. In her study, the significant items in the perceived relative advantage index, suggest that exporting offers better growth opportunities for the firm than the domestic market and that exporting can provide greater financial returns to firm owners. Accordingly, Hunt et al. (1967) found that managers were motivated by long-term profitability secured through market diversification and long-term growth. Simpson and Kujawa (1974) observed that exporters perceived involvement in foreign operations as more profitable than selling in the home market. Other studies show the existence of a positive relationship between profit perceptions and export development (Jaffe et al. 1988; Moon and Lee 1990) or between successful export performance and management's positive expectations concerning the effects of exporting on the business profitability (Cavusgil and Nevin 1981; Cavusgil et al. 1979).

***P9: Decision maker's perception about export as a means of company growth and/or profit is a key determinant of the export behaviour of the SME.***

### **Managerial Perceptions about Export Stimuli and Barriers**

Various researchers, investigating the export stimuli and barriers, have suggested that the export behaviour of the firm is determined, moreover, by the way in which these are perceived by the decision maker of the firm, rather than by the objective situation itself. As we have previously seen, export stimuli and barriers can appear at the organisational level as

well as both on the domestic and foreign market. Wiedersheim-Paul et al. (1978) argue that both export stimuli and barriers become active only to the extent that they are brought to the attention of management within the company. However, the awareness of the existence of certain export stimuli and barriers is not enough for determining the export behaviour of the firm. This is rather dependent on how the decision maker perceives them, at its turn being contingent upon his/her feelings and predispositions regarding exporting (Simpson and Kujawa 1974; Wiedersheim-Paul et al. 1978). Simpson and Kujawa (1974), arguing that managerial perceptions help explaining firms' export development, suggest that the decision to export from the firm's point of view is a combination of the appropriate stimulus and the appropriate perception of the factors implicated in the export process. Their study takes into account both the perceptions of the advantages of the export activity and the perceptions of the export barriers (obstacles). Moreover, Fernández-Ortiz and Castresana Ruiz-Carrillo (2005) assert that as higher the decision maker's perception about the export obstacles/barriers as negative the effect on the export activity and vice versa.

***P10: The dominance of perceived export stimuli over perceived export barriers is a key determinant of the export behaviour of the SME.***

## **EMPIRICAL METHODOLOGY**

The purposeful sample of this study was selected from the Spanish Data Base SABI<sup>4</sup>. The companies included in the sample are SMEs located in Catalonia, Spain. The definition used for SMEs is following the one proposed by the European Commission which considers the SMEs sector as composed of enterprises with less than 250 employees and disaggregates them into micro-, small-, and medium-sized companies with fewer than 10, 50 and 250 employees respectively (European Commission, Department of Trade and Industry 2000).

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<sup>4</sup> Sistemas de Análisis de Balances Ibéricos

More precisely, this study focuses on small and medium enterprises, rather than micro ones, due to its investigation purpose. In order to build sufficient replication opportunity into the study four high specialised innovative firms were chosen (A, B, C, D). The number of case studies selected is supported by Eisenhardt's (1989) point of view. She stated that in a multiple-case approach there is no ideal number of cases, but she recommends a number between four and ten. The author motivates her choice arguing that with fewer than four cases theory is difficult to generate, whereas with more than ten, the volume of data is difficult to cope with. The four enterprises included in the sample were chosen according to the following basic selection criteria:

- be current exporters,
- based in Catalonia (Spain),
- employ less than 250 staff (in line with the European Union's criteria for defining SMEs) and,
- belong to the manufacturing sector, as manufactured exports account for the bulk of total world export trade (World Bank 1998), all of the producers being highly specialised innovative firms.

In order to establish contact with the four enterprises more than one hundred letters were sent to manufacturing SMEs located in Catalonia (Spain) during a time period of three months: March-May 2006. Once the key informants in the companies agreed to participate in the study telephone contact was established.

The research methodology is based on a qualitative approach, following Yin (1989), leading to multiple case study reporting with in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The approach selected is consistent with a growing trend towards qualitative methods in empirical enquiries

in the marketing/entrepreneurship/internationalisation fields of research (Carson and Coviello 1996; Coviello and Murno 1997; Julien et al. 1997). Aiming to provide the study with construct validity, multiple sources of evidence were used in the data collecting process, such as: direct observation, product and firm brochures, internal documentation made available by the firms and the internet websites of the SMEs. The interviews held with the decision makers (the person in charge of the export activity in the company: owners, export manager or director) of the firms and lasting 90 to 120 minutes, on average, were recorded and detailed notes were taken as well. They were conducted in each location, using a pre-established interview schedule which contained a number of structured questions as well as open-ended questions (see Appendix, Modelo de entrevista). The same study protocol was used for each specific enterprise, thus giving reliability to the research.

The methodology chosen in order to analyse the empirical data is relying on the propositions testing approach and the analysis is conducted including both within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. The within-case analysis is conducted, within each case, at each unit of analysis level. The identified similarities and dissimilarities with the frame of reference provide findings for each case. Also, cross-case analysis is conducted meaning a comparison among the findings from the cases. The comparative analysis is implemented at each unit of analysis level.

Additionally, the three steps proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) for qualitative data analysis are followed when analysing the data collected: 1) data reduction: to select, simplify, focus, abstract and transform the data in order to organize it in a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified; 2) data display: to take the reduced data and display it in an organized, compressed way in order to facilitate concise conclusions; 3) conclusions

drawing/verification: to decide what things actually mean – to note regularities, explanations, patterns, causal flows and propositions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this section the results obtained from the empirical data collection are presented and discussed. Firstly, the general information about the four companies included in the sample is presented (see Appendix, Table 2). Secondly, following the within-case analysis, the findings related to the managerial determinants identified in the literature review, are presented for each of the four enterprises (see Appendix, Table 3), thus the empirical data is used in order to test the research propositions (see Appendix, Table 4). Simultaneously, a cross-case analysis is provided, comparing the empirical data obtained from the four case studies in between them, for each of the managerial determinants researched.

### *General Information about the Companies*

#### **Case A**

The company started its commercial activity in 1959 as a producer of armoured heating elements for domestic and professional use. Initially the production was mainly destined to manufacture electrical appliances of private band, especially washing applications (heating elements for automatic washing-machines and dishwashers). Its products also included professional applications such as industrial coffee machines, industrial heaters and fryers. Nowadays, the firm can offer a wide range of products, having the necessary knowledge and capacity to respond to demands for any kind of application. The firm's management is permanently engaging to progress and improve their productive means. The products offered at present are: liquid heating, air heating, radiant heating, defrosting, heating tools, thermostats, temperature limiters, connection boxes, welded tubes and foil. One part of the

manufacturing process is a large series production for the OEM market (Original Equipment Manufacturing), where the element is used as a component in the customer products. Another part is a small series production, mostly for the industry, where the customer uses the element in his own production.

The firm, currently employing 70 employees, started exporting in 1972 (thirteen years after inception). The company followed a gradual internationalisation process, entering at the beginning markets such as Costa Rica and Argentina, due to the language and cultural similarities, and only after the owner gained enough knowledge and experience, did he extend its activities to other countries. At present a 66% of its total production is exported in countries all over the world, such as: Costa Rica, Argentina, Chile, France, Italy, the UK, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Tunisia, Israel and Libya.

## **Case B**

The enterprise was founded in 1985 as a producer of CB transceivers (AM, AM/FM and AM/FM/SSB transceivers), minicomms (Minicom range-LPD: transceivers which are in conformity with the European standards and are aimed at all users who want economical free and reassuring means of communication and Minicom Pro range-PMR: transceivers which are in conformity with the European standards and are especially aimed at professionals but can also suit all users, offering free and safe communications), different types of aerials (by boring: mobile aerials to be installed on vehicles for long lasting use, magnetic: mobile aerials for vehicles, with a magnetic support for instantaneous installation or base aerials: conceived to be installed on the roof of buildings), marine VHF (are waterproof and programmable) accessories and also a complete range of alarms and video surveillance systems.

The personnel working for the company is composed out of an efficient team of 30 employees ready to meet the demands of the constantly evolving field. It started selling its products abroad in 1988 (three years after inception), after three years of being focused only on the domestic market. The only export market entered was France; the owner of the enterprise, also in charge of export activities, knew well the French market, due to a friendship relationship which led to the initiation of activities abroad. Nowadays, 32% of the total production is sold to the French client, represented by a fairly big centre in charge of collecting aerials and other similar devices from providers across the world and afterwards commercialising and distributing them to most of the European markets.

### **Case C**

The company started its activity in 1982 as a designer and producer of systems for fighting intrusion with the aim of protecting people, homes and businesses. The company is forward looking and innovative characterised by experience and knowledge in the field and dedicated above all to being able to adapt their products according to their customer's preferences and needs. At present the firm offers a wide span of products such as: central serie centrums (wire and wireless), compact central accessories, keypads for centrals, converter modulus of cable centrals to mixed, wireless sirens, kit RX/TX transformer from wire sirens to wireless sirens, boosters, BI – directional software, communication accessories, centrals series domovox (security + home automation wire/wireless), series centrum domini, domini system's aerials, series cotel carmen, series cotel bravo, accessories, soft receivers centrals, transition by mobile phone GSM, lights and sirens, supply sources/filters and contacts/sensors/banking/locks.

The personnel working for the firm during its first year of activity amounted to 16 employees slowly diminishing to 12 employees at present, due to the introduction of technological advances in production. Starting the export activity in 1997 (fifteen years after inception), the firm first entered geographical close markets such as Algeria, Greece, France and Portugal and afterwards the export manager extended its companies activities to further located markets. However, the choice and order of market entry is partially influenced, in this case, by unexpected demands from abroad. The enterprise increased its sales abroad over the years, currently exporting a 25% of its total production to countries such as: Algeria, Greece, France, Portugal, Finland, Turkey, Germany, Sweden, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and Saudi Arabia.

#### **Case D**

Firm D was founded in 2003, as a manufacturer of machinery for the textile industry, acquiring the brand, technology and patents from another firm in the same sector, active until the year 2002. The products manufactured in the firm are circular knitting machines such as: single jersey machines (four needle tracks, single jersey electronic, single jersey with stripers and terry machines), double jersey machines (eight-lock, double jersey electronic, double jersey with stripers and double jersey with separating thread) and sweater machines (links-links machines and full electronic machines).

The employee base of 40 personnel collectively boasts a combination of professionalism, youth, experience and enthusiasm. Implementing a strategy based on continuous product innovation, the quality of its machines and providing personalised service for its customers, the firm started exporting the same year it was founded, in 2003. According to the director of the firm, this was slightly influenced by maintaining the same brand name and a few clients

from the previous firm. A 90% of the total production is exported to countries such as India, Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, New Zealand, Russia, Czech Republic, Germany, France, Italy, Canada, USA, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia and Argentina. The high export intensity in this case is given by the certain situation on the domestic market characterized by a severe demand shrinkage and the well know phenomenon of production decentralisation from the highly developed countries to the less developed ones.

#### *Within and Cross Case Analysis*

For all the four cases included in the study the importance of managerial characteristics and perceptions was carefully analysed in order to be able to test the ten research propositions as well as to compare the findings provided by the four individual cases.

P1 was confirmed in the case of firm A and C who, as previously stated by authors such as Cavusgil and Naor (1987), Jaffe et al. (1988), Ursic and Czinkota (1989), Moon and Lee (1990) and Oviatt et al. (1993) were run at the moment of starting the export activities by young decision makers (28 and 26 years old respectively). The same proposition was partially confirmed for enterprise D whose director was 37 years old when the company initiated its export activities while in the case of firm B it was not confirmed, its owner being middle age (47) when selling for the first time abroad. This case confirms Welch and Weidersheim-Paul's (1980) findings who argue that older age levels of the owner/founder are associated with internationalisation.

P2 was confirmed for all the four cases studied. As previously suggested by Mayer and Flynn (1973), Simpson and Kujawa (1974), Garnier (1982), Reid (1983a), Cavusgil and Naor

(1987), Axinn (1988) or Oviatt et al. (1993) the international behaviour of the firm is influenced by the educational level of the decision makers. Three of them had a university degree, and the owner of firm B had a master degree. Moreover, all four of them acknowledged the bearing that the educational level has on the export intention, intensity and performance of the firm, emphasizing that the international openness is partially contingent upon it.

In relation to P3, which refers to the industry know-how of the decision maker, two of the cases (B and D) confirmed the findings put forward in the literature review. Both of the decision makers have previously worked in the same industrial sector: the aeriels producing sector and the textile machinery sector respectively. They argue that the previously achieved experience, by working in the same industrial sector, helped them to commercialise the product on overseas markets, thus giving support to the findings of Leonidou et al. (1998) Westhead et al. (2001) and Bell et al. (2004). The proposition could be considered partially confirmed in the case of firm A and C whose decision makers, being successors of family business, have always been working in their parents company. However, all four decision makers stressed that knowledge about the product and the outlook of the industrial sector on both national and foreign market are relevant for the export behaviour of the firm.

P4 received support from cases B and D. Decision maker in firm B had previously held a managerial position as well as owned two other different companies in the same industrial sector, while the director of firm D worked in a managerial position for a period of four years in a Mexican enterprise. Both of them considered that the experience gained by either managing or owning other companies positively influence their export propensity and general export behaviour. However, P4 is not confirmed in the case of firm A and C whose decision

makers have not held a managerial position or owned other companies. Therefore, the idea proposed by Westhead (1995) and Ibeh (2003), stating that entrepreneurs who have held a managerial or professional position prior to start up, might be more aware of the possibilities and practice of exporting part of their sales only receives partial support.

When looking at P5, the international orientation of the decision maker, measured objectively in this study as the time spent abroad while studying, working or travelling, cases C and D fully support the findings put forward by authors such as Tookey (1964), Simmonds and Smith (1968), Cunningham and Spigel (1971), Mayer and Flynn (1973), Barrett and Willkinson (1986), da Rocha et al. (1990), Czinkota and Ursic (1991), Leonidou et al. (1998) or Hutchinson et al. (2006). The export manager in firm C has not only travelled but also both studied and worked abroad for a period of three (USA) and respectively one year (Greece), whereas the director of firm D travelled across the world and worked for a period of four years overseas (Mexico). They both consider that the exposure to different cultures and ways of doing business broadened their horizons and positively influenced their subsequent export behaviour. The results provided by cases A and B only partially support P5, the decision makers in these firms, although acknowledging the importance that the time spent abroad had for the export involvement and development of the firm, have only travelled or lived for short periods of time outside the country.

Referring to P6, all the decision makers confirmed the importance that the foreign language proficiency has for developing exporting activities as previously suggested by scholars such as Cunningham and Spigel (1971), Schlegelmilch and Ross (1987), Davis (1995) and Clarke (1999). The person in charge of selling abroad in the four companies spoke at least one foreign language, and considered that without the language skills the initiation and further

development of export activities may not have been possible. They also agreed that, nowadays, a fairly good command of at least English, if not of other foreign languages such as French, Italian or Portuguese, is a necessity for trading abroad, facilitating the understanding of different cultures and the communication with their clients. More precisely, in firm A and B, besides English the decision maker, along with the personnel, needed to speak French and Italian (firm A) and French (firm B) given the fact that, in various occasions the clients from those markets preferred to do business in their native tongue. Particularly the owner of firm A stated that *“it is highly important to speak foreign languages such as English, French and Italian in order to market our products abroad”*. The export manager in firm C emphasized that without the foreign language skills (English, French, Italian and Portuguese) the export activity would not have been started in their firm whereas the director of firm D clearly stated that English is a necessity in their industrial sector not only for managers but also for professionals. He also mentioned that the poor English command of some of their employees lead to different misunderstandings with the foreign clients, so therefore, at present they are hiring only individuals with a good English level.

P7 was confirmed by all four decision makers. As stated by Fernández Ortiz and Castresana Ruiz-Carrillo (2005) high risk tolerance and low perceived risk characterized the decision makers in the analysed cases. However, in opposition with the idea put forward by McConnel (1979) and Wiedersheim-Paul et al. (1978), who argued that the fact that exporting implies greater risk than selling on the domestic market, the decision makers interviewed for this study considered export activities not too risky, and they generally thought that, at present, selling overseas is the same as selling on the domestic market. For instance, the decision maker in firms A thought that exporting is a necessity and does not present a high risk nowadays. In addition to considering exporting a necessity and not bearing a high risk, the

director of firm D also asserts that at present exporting is for him *“like the air he breathes”*. The owner of firm B specified that exporting on the French market is similar to selling within the domestic one while firm C’s export manager argued that she enjoys taking risk, even if exporting is not regarded as a risk by her company. According to all of them, although sometimes exporting activities may be accompanied by a certain risk level, the company has to be prepared to successfully deal with it.

When looking at P8, the decision makers saw the international involvement as an innovation as previously stated by Lee and Brasch (1978) or Reid (1981) and they manifested no resistance to change, fully supporting the proposition. They believe that in order to further develop the company, one should necessarily enter foreign markets and be always open to adapt, change and innovate. For example, the export manager of firm C emphasized that nowadays in order to remain competitive and to increase your performance on both the foreign and domestic markets you have to be able to adapt and innovate the products in order to keep the pace with the changes in technology and with the customers’ needs and preferences. Moreover, the owner of firm B asserted that *“they are prepared to innovate and change their product as much as it takes in order to sell it abroad”*. This is confirming the findings of authors such as Holzmuller and Kasper (1991), Leonidou (1998) and Katsikeas et al. (2000) who observed that innovation adoption is a crucial factor influencing the export performance of the firm. Regarding the resistance to change, all the decision makers argue that nowadays in order for their business to survive and grow the firm should not present any resistance to change, thus giving support to McCartt and Rohrbaugh’s (1985) study.

P9 is fully supported by cases A, B and C whose decision makers saw the export development as a mean of growth and profit for their firms, thus confirming the previous findings by

Cavusgil et al. (1979), Cavusgil and Nevin (1981), Reid (1981), Axinn (1988), Jaffa et al. (1988), Moon and Lee (1990) or Ellis and Pecotich (2001). The owner of firm A realized that due to the fact the domestic market was already saturated, in order to be able to grow and increase their profits they had to extend the company's activities overseas. The export manager of firm C was always in search of means for the company's growth and higher profits through export. Moreover, she stated "*that after covering the whole world, which other markets are left to explore, the Moon?*". Additionally, the owner of firm B perceived higher profits on the French market than on the domestic one, giving support to Simpson and Kujawa's (1974) findings. In the case of firm D, P9 is only partially confirmed, the director emphasizing that they developed export activities first of all in order to survive, due to the collapse of demand on the domestic market, and secondly in order to grow and consequently achieve higher profits.

All four decision makers perceived that export stimuli were rather strong while export barriers were less powerful and worthwhile to overcome, thus confirming P10. Firm A's owner pushed by the saturation of the domestic demand, and the excessive (available) production capacity realized that in order to grow they had to export. This gives support to the findings of other authors such as Pavord and Bogart (1975) and Reid (1984) or Wiedersheim-Paul et al. (1978), Johnston and Czinkota (1982) and Diamantopoulos et al. (1990). The owner's social and business network played a crucial role in the export development as previously suggested by the literature in the field: Aldrich and Zimmer (1986), Turnbull and Valla (1986), Johanson and Mattson (1988), Ford (1990), Mc Dougall et al. (1994), Bell (1995), Holmlund and Kock (1998), Eriksson et al. (1998) and Ibeh (2003). Strong barriers were only encountered on the German and USA market due to the different quality standards as earlier argued by Leonidiou (1995) and Morgan (1997). Given the owner's commitment to export,

after repeated attempts, they entered the German market. The saturation of the domestic market was one of the major stimuli that determined the owner of firm B to start and pursue export activities. However, in this case, the most important export stimulus was, according to the owner, the identification of the opportunity due to a friendship relationship with a French person. This confirms once more the importance of the social network of the decision maker inside the firm for the export behaviour of the firm, as previously stated by authors such as Aldrich and Zimmer (1986), Mc Dougall et al. (1994) Holmlund and Kock (1998). The perceived problems, related to the fluctuation of the exchange rate, also mentioned by Cavusgil (1982), were easily overcome. The unexpected demands from abroad was the stimulus that determined firm C's export manager to firstly get engaged into export activities. This gives support to the results of numerous other studies that emphasized the bearing the unexpected demand from abroad may have on the firms strategic orientation: Simmonds and Smith (1968), Simpson and Kujawa (1974), Bilkey and Tesar (1977) Olson and Wiedersheim-Paul (1978), Cavusgil (1980) and Crick and Chaudhry (1997). Also the support received from Spanish and Catalan organism (participation in the programme Plan de Iniciación a la Promoción Exterior – PIPE 2000 provided by the Instituto de Comercio Exterior - ICEX and financial support for travelling in business interest and for trade fairs made available by Consorci de Promoció Comercial de Catalunya - COPCA) together with the powerful competition on the domestic market stimulated the export manager in firm C to develop export activities. The latter provides support to the extant findings by Reid (1984), Dichtl et al. (1984b), Kaymak and Kothari (1984), Sullivan and Bauerschmidt (1988) and Seyoum (2004) which assert that intense competition on the domestic market influences the export behaviour of the firm. The export manager in firm C also argues that the perceived advantage in R&D (and technology) crucially influenced her attitudes towards exporting, as stated by Wiedersheim-Paul et al. (1978) and Sullivan and Bauerschmidt (1990). She perceived very

low export barriers which according to her were very easily overcome (delays of payment from an Algerian client and high expenditures for homologating the product in order to enter the market of Benelux). The director of firm D was also pushed to start and pursue export activities by the situation on the domestic market, as suggested by Johanson and Vahlne (1977). However, in this case, we are looking at the saturation of the market determined by severe demand shrinkage rather than by the entrance of foreign competitors on the market. He considers that, in their sector, firms export more from inertia, being dragged into internationalisation. Similar to the export manager in firm C, the director points to the importance of the support received from the Spanish and Catalan organisms (ICEX and COPCA) which provide supporting programmes aimed at enhancing the export activities among SMEs. He perceived very low barriers to export such as: fluctuation of the exchange rate, also mentioned by the owner of firm B thus, giving once again support to Cavusgil (1982); cultural differences materialized in unfamiliar business practices and lack of experience of the new customer, especially on the Indian market, which confirmed the ideas put forward by Leonidou (1995) and Morgan (1997); and changes of fashion. However, the export manager emphasized that in their case the export barriers encountered were not too significant and were easy to overcome; nevertheless, he believes that no matter how high the export barriers may be, they have to be overcome for the enterprise to survive.

All four decision makers emphasized the influence that certain perceived differential advantages have on the decision maker, and consequently on the firm's export behaviour. The most important observed stimuli is the perceived fit existing between the human resources and the resources as previously stated by Peircy et al. (1998) or more precisely the human capital advantage which occasionally can make up for certain shortcomings in the resources area, as suggested by Manolova et al. (2002). The decision makers specified that not only the

CEO of the enterprise should possess marketing and export knowledge and capabilities but also the employees. The latter stated applies to all the personnel in the enterprise, but of course with different strength, according to the hierarchical position in the firm and to the functional department. They also agreed that is down to the decision maker's capabilities and export knowledge to select the most appropriate employees and to make them aware of the importance exporting has for the economical activity, thus confirming the idea put forward by Westhead et al. (2001). Firm A's owner asserted that, given the relatively limited size of the firm (70 employees) they had to pay specific attention when recruiting, selecting and hiring the personnel. Moreover, he added that there was a crucial moment for their firm when they had to head hunt for a number of individuals with marketing skills and export knowledge. Fortunately, a similar firm, from Madrid, went bankrupt so they hired the management personnel from that firm. Firm B's owner was also concerned with having in the firm the most appropriate employees both for the production and for the export activity. He mentioned that in case it is necessary and beneficial for the exporting activity the managers and other employees are sent to training courses or language classes. This gives support to Cadogan et al. (2001) argument regarding the fact that training can provide employees with the skills to carry out export market-oriented tasks. The export manager in firm C specifies that export development is down to the marketing and exporting skills of the entire team in the company. She mentions that the employees have to be continuously motivated so the export and total productivity of the firm increases. She recalls that when trying to enter a few European markets, due to the lack of specially qualified personnel, they had to hire a specialist in export related topics, to help them out and also give some advice and training classes to the managerial team in the enterprise. Firm D's director considers that, when engaging in the export activity, the firm's personnel has to be prepared for such an event. Among the most important requirements he mentions a fairly good English command, the availability to travel

in business interest, marketing skills, and know-how about the industry. He also recalls certain misunderstandings which occurred due to the poor English skills that lead to introducing a new company internal law according to which all the future employees have to be English proficient.

All in all, and apart from the relative advantage in human resources mentioned by all decision makers, we summarize the most relevant managerial determinants for the export behaviour for each firm as mentioned by the four decision makers themselves. In firm A's case the managerial determinants that most influenced the export behaviour were: knowledge about the product and industry, foreign language skills and personal and business contacts on the foreign markets. Managerial personal contacts abroad were of paramount importance for firm B's export behaviour; the overseas activity was started on the base of a friendship relationship of the owner. From the managerial characteristic that shed light on the firm export development he distinguishes: the experience both in creating firms and in the sector and his desire to change and advance. The export manager in firm C considers that experience on foreign markets, language proficiency, education and knowledge about the product along with the commercial skills made export development possible. Firm D's manager stated that experience on foreign markets and in managing firms together with being well informed, well educated and open to new things, are the necessary characteristics for the person in charge of export activities.

## **CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH**

The analysis of the empirical results revealed the importance played by both the managerial characteristics and perceptions for the export behaviour (involvement and development) of the SME.

Managerial characteristics such as high educational level, language proficiency, high risk tolerance, innovativeness as well as strongly perceived export stimuli as compared to low and easy to overcome export barriers were identified for all the four individuals analysed. These managerial factors also played an important bearing on the firm's export behaviour, confirming the previous findings in the internationalisation literature. Age wise, we observe that three of our studied enterprises were run at the moment when they initiated the export activities by rather young decision makers, only the fourth one being middle aged. However, the 47 years old decision maker is an entrepreneurial person that started and owned a couple of other exporting businesses. Only two of the decision makers previously worked in the same industrial sector or owned/had a managerial position in other firms. The other two, being the successors of family businesses, have always worked along with their parents. In the latter case, we can observe that even if the two decision makers have not worked in the same industrial sector or held a managerial position or owned another company beforehand, being raised very close to the business, they were well familiarized with the enterprise's activity and possessed managerial know-how. In this sense, all four of them emphasize the importance of knowing the product, the industry sector and being a good salesman have for the firm's export behaviour. Also, the four decision makers have international experience, although in different degrees and consider the exposure to different cultures as a unique experience that broadens one's horizon and crucially affects the manager's international orientation and the export behaviour of the SME. The different degrees of international experience may be explained by

the fact that the two decision makers that, besides travelling abroad, have worked and/or studied overseas, are nowadays in their late '30s while the others two, who had only travelled abroad, are at present in their '60s. Hence, it could be suggested that these differences are due to the increased cosmopolitan influence on education and business over time. Manager's growth and profit expectations obtained through export were emphasized by three of the decision makers while only one of them mentioned the growth and profit as a second reason for the export development, surpassed by the survival needs given the specific situation in the sector. Generally, the decision makers considered the export stimuli stronger than the few export barriers perceived. Among the export stimuli, perceived by at least one decision maker, we identify: the available production capacity, the unsolicited orders from abroad, the specific conditions on the domestic market such as saturation or demand shrinkage or powerful competition, support received from Spanish and Catalan organisms, competitive advantage in R&D (and technology). Another important factor that determined the export behaviour of the firm were the social and/or business networks of the decision maker. However, the one factor that stands out and was, in different ways, perceived by the four interviewed individuals is the relative differential advantage in human capital (marketing and knowledge) that the firm possesses as compared to the other ones. Hence, they argued that special attention should be paid to managing human resources, because the export behaviour of the firm can be crucially influenced by them.

The results also show that in two of the cases studied the development of export activities took place through a gradualist process (cases A and C). These two companies first focused on the domestic market, then entered physically close or cultural and language similar markets, and over time and experience accumulation extended their activities to countries all over the world. However, in the other two firms, the internationalisation process did not

follow a gradualist trend: one of them only entered one foreign market, three years after start-up (case B), while the other one started exporting in countries across the world from the inception year (case D).

From an academic point of view, given the further need of research on internationalisation related matters at the level of SMEs in Europe, this study provides an insight into decision maker's characteristics and perceptions on a firm's growth and profit perspectives as well as on the export stimuli and barriers in these type of firms. Based on the literature review, the study proposed and tested ten propositions, thus confirming various findings from the previous research on similar topics.

The research reveals relevant policy implications. More export promotion programmes should be developed at both the local and national level in order to provide useful help for exporters, aiming to intensify their activity abroad, and to get non-exporters to become interested in entering foreign markets by increasing decision maker's awareness of the growth and profit advantage achieved through export activities. Moreover, the policy initiatives should aim to develop the international orientation of the decision maker in the firm as a precursor of the formulation and afterwards implementation of internationalisation strategies. Therefore, the promotion of foreign languages as well as of international exchange programmes should be pursued, in both schools/universities and working places, in order to get the future decision makers in firms familiarised with different languages and cultures, thus, increasing their international propensity.

The study also provides a contribution to practitioners. As the empirical findings show the export behaviour of the firm is not so strongly influenced by the objective situation but by the

managerial characteristic and perceptions such as: language (and international skills), risk tolerance and resistance to change as well as his/her perception about export stimuli and barriers. Decision makers should be aware that, nowadays, due to the high pace technology development along with the removal of an increasing number of trade barriers, entering overseas markets is not bearing as much risk as it used to and represents a viable alternative for firm's growth and pursuit of higher profits.

Regarding the limitations of the study, given its qualitative nature, we can not statistically generalize the results, therefore, we can not extrapolate the empirical results and conclusion to a bigger population than the one included in the sample. Further studies should be carried out in a variety of industrial and national contexts, utilising both qualitative as well as quantitative methodologies, in order to identify the managerial characteristics and perceptions in exporting firms as well as their influence on firm' export behaviour. Moreover, given the fact that this study analysed the influence of the managerial characteristics and perceptions on export involvement and development, rather than export performance, future research should focus on investigating the direct incidence the organisational and environmental factors, together with the managerial factors examined here, have on export marketing strategy and this in turn of firm's export performance. Alternatively, other managerial determinants such as personality traits (need for achievement, self confidence, dogmatism, locus of control) should also be researched in relation with the export behaviour of the firm. Also, it would be interesting to further examine the influence of decision maker's characteristics and perceptions on other aspects of a firm's behaviour such as innovativeness or economic performance. Additionally, future research should also investigate the influence of the human resource management on the export behaviour of the small and medium enterprises.

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## APPENDIX

**TABLE 1 CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH ON MANAGERIAL DETERMINANTS OF EXPORT BEHAVIOUR 1988-2005**

Number/ Author(s)/Year	Objective/Type of Research	Theoretical Approach(es)	Empirical Methodology	Research Findings
<b>1.Axinn (1988)</b>	To examine the relationship between the perceptions managers have of exporting and the export performance of the firm. Combined an assessment of the influences of: managers' perceptions of the characteristics of exporting, manager-related adopter characteristics and firm-related adopter characteristics on exporting. Empirical study.	Made use of the traditional definitions (Rogers 1983) of the five perceived characteristics of innovation (relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, triability, observability) for providing the basis for defining the perceived characteristics of exporting.	Managers of machine tool manufacturing firms in Michigan and Ontario (USA) were the object of study. Mail survey conducted resulted in 105 valid questionnaires, 60% of them filled in by the general manager, the remainder by other senior executives. Regression analysis.	Four independent variables were found to be significantly related to export performance: two perceived characteristics of exporting (relative advantage and complexity), one manager-related adopter characteristic (the percentage of managers with overseas work experience) and one firm-related adopter characteristic (market area).
<b>2.Aaby &amp; Slater (1989)</b>	To provide a comprehensive review of the studies elaborated between 1978-1988 on export behaviour, which directly relate managerial factors to export performance. Literature review.	They argue that export knowledge should be synthesised on two broad levels: the external environment and the firm business strategy and functional level. They propose a general model for assessing export performance and variables (involving firm characteristics, competencies, strategy and export performance).	Not Applicable	Regarding firm characteristics: company size by itself was not an important factor unless is linked to aspects such as financial strength or variables related to scale economies. Management commitment to export along with good management systems, planning of export activities and export experience influenced export performance. Competencies seemed to be more important than firm characteristics. A successfully exporting firm needed a management with an international view, consistent export goals, favourable perceptions and attitudes towards exporting, risk tolerance and capable of engaging positively in export activities.

<p><b>3.Dichtl, Koeglmayr &amp; Muller (1990)</b></p>	<p>To identify the means of enhancing export activities, exploiting all export opportunities, by using a measurement concept based on the foreign market orientation of the decision makers within the firms (Dichtl et al. 1984a,b) seen as a critical factor influencing the company's success in export activities. Empirical, hypothesis-testing study, followed by a qualitative approach based on exploratory interviews.</p>	<p>General description of existing research in exporting and international marketing. Emphasis placed on the on the studies dedicated to the foreign market orientation of the manager. Used the model proposed by Dichtl et al (1984a,b) to determine the foreign market orientation of the manager.</p>	<p>Managers from five countries (Federal Germany, Finland, Japan, South Africa, South Korea) were included in the sample. Mail surveys including 104 Federal German firms, 65 Finnish firms, 66 Japanese firms, 55 South African firms and 63 South Korean firms. Also exploratory interviews were conducted. Regression analysis and exploratory interviews.</p>	<p>Identification of the firms with export potential, based on the classification of exporters and non-exporters in five categories in function of the personality factors and the firm's conditions: 1,2).exporters (small and large firms), 3).occasional exporters (weakness in firm conditions), 4).occasional exporters (weakness in management), 5).domestic oriented firms. The study also revealed the export barriers as perceived by the managers of these companies and indicated the adequate measures to improve the efficiency of existing export promotion programmes.</p>
<p><b>4.Holzmuller &amp; Kasper (1990)</b></p>	<p>Used the operational concept of measurement for determining the foreign orientation of managers (Dichtl et al. 1984a,b) and the follow up study Dichtl et al. (1990) along with other measurements to uncover the determinants of successful export performance in order to recheck the stability of the results gained in five countries and to analyse the specific situation prevailing in Austria as compared to those countries where the measurement concept had been applied. Empirical, hypotheses testing, study.</p>	<p>Made reference to the model focused on managers' propensity to export by Olsen and Wiedersheim-Paul (1978). Focus on the model aimed at determining the foreign orientation of managers, elaborated by Dichtl et al. (1984a,b).</p>	<p>Managers of 110 random, mostly manufacturing Austrian private sector firms were included in the sample. Drop-in-questionnaire technique was applied, this procedure leading to a certain degree of standardization of the survey situation. Profile, stepwise regression, discriminant and cluster analysis.</p>	<p>The classification of Austrian exporters and non-exporters in five categories reveals that as compared to the German sample, the average export ratios observed in Austria are higher. However, nearly identical results were gained from profile analysis and by the identification of export potentials. Hence, the results obtained provide confirmation of the suitability of the measuring concept with regard to the foreign orientation of managers. Provide evidence that some indicators of the construct of foreign orientation are unsatisfactory in terms of the measurement theory. Emphasize the importance of an extension and test-theoretical review of the indicators operationalized through multi-item scales.</p>

<p><b>5.Chetty &amp; Hamilton (1993)</b></p>	<p>To assess the knowledge of influences on export performance. With the view of further continuing Aaby and Slater's (1989) review, this study aimed to provide a comprehensive review of the papers on firm level determinants of export performance published between 1978-1991. Literature review.</p>	<p>Used the Aaby and Slater's (1989) model for assessing export performance as a frame of reference.</p>	<p>Not Applicable</p>	<p>All but one of the firm characteristics (firm size, management commitment, perceptions on: financial incentives, competition, domestic market potential, distribution, delivery service, pricing, risk aversion, profit likelihood and promotion with the exception of management perceptions on government incentives) showed some positive influence on export performance. Consistent with Aaby and Slater's (1989) result, they also observed that competencies were more important than firm characteristics. Also, from the strategy characteristics, market selection and pricing appear to be the most important in influencing the export performance. Their findings provide general support for Aaby and Slater's model of export performance.</p>
<p><b>6.Axinn, Savitt, Sinkula &amp; Thach (1995)</b></p>	<p>To examine the relationship between manager's beliefs about exporting, their export intentions, subsequent export behaviour and further future exporting intentions among exporting firms. Empirical study.</p>	<p>Made use of a Rogerian-type of framework (Rogers 1962, 1983).</p>	<p>Individuals in charge of the export activity in SMEs from 25 different industrial sectors in New England, USA formed the sample. Mail survey was conducted in 1988 and in 1991, being preceded by previous telephone contact with the most adequate person for answering the research questions. Factor analysis and reliability estimates, univariate and multivariate analysis.</p>	<p>While observability, returns to investment and product advantage have a positive relationship to export intention, compatibility is negatively related to export intention. Profitability, complexity and trialability are not significantly related to export intention. In general, the findings show a relationship between export intentions and manager's beliefs about the value of exporting to their own firms, between export intentions and current performance, between export intentions and subsequent export intentions, between subsequent export intentions and performance in the previous period, and between export intentions and firm size. All in all, data supported the thesis that learning affected results, whereas results, in turn, spurred further learning.</p>

<p><b>7. Leonidou, Katsikeas &amp; Peircy (1998)</b></p>	<p>To provide a specialized, detailed, and integrated review of the studies related to the managerial determinants of exporting during the period from 1960 to 1995. All studies are analysed for their conceptual, methodological and empirical content. Literature review.</p>	<p>Proposed a comprehensive organisational framework of managerial influences on export (propensity, aggressiveness, development and performance). The framework divided the managerial influences in four broad categories: general-objective, specific-objective, general-subjective, specific-subjective.</p>	<p>Not Applicable</p>	<p>Conceptually, the stream of research was found still in its exploratory phase of development, lacking a well-defined theoretical framework aimed to link managerial characteristics to firm's export behaviour and success. Methodologically, the research stream was characterized by a great diversity in the investigation methods employed particularly with respect to sampling designs, fieldwork procedures, and analytical techniques. Empirically, only certain managerial characteristics were identified as important in influencing exporting, while other parameters were found to be not significant. Overall, the conceptual, methodological and empirical assessment undertaken revealed that this is one of the most studied, but least conclusive areas of export research.</p>
<p><b>8. Westhead, Wright &amp; Ucbasaran (2001)</b></p>	<p>To enhance the understanding of the internationalisation of SMEs. To determine if the characteristics of the principal founders, businesses and the external environment can explain the export involvement of the firm. To verify whether exporting firms are larger in size than non-exporting firms and whether exporting firms are more likely to survive than non-exporting firms. Empirical, hypotheses testing, study.</p>	<p>Resource based view</p>	<p>Principal founders of independent businesses in the UK in service, manufacturing and construction sectors composed the sample. Mail surveys were conducted first in 1990/1991 (621 valid responses) and then in 1997 (116 valid responses). To achieve a high response rate, telephone interviews were also conducted. The sample obtained in 1997 was compared against the one from</p>	<p>The study shows that businesses with older principal founders, with more resources, denser information, contact networks and considerable management know-how were significantly more likely to be exporters. Businesses with principal founders that had considerable industry-specific knowledge were markedly more likely to be exporters. Previous experience of selling abroad is also a key influence encouraging firms to export. Variables related to general human capital, the ability to acquire financial capital, and competition for resources in the external environment did not significantly predict the subsequent export propensity. Also, the resources-based variables significantly associated with both the propensity and intensity of exporting sales abroad were not exactly the</p>

			1990/1991. Logistic regression and forced-entry multiple regression analysis.	same as those associated with subsequently larger business, enhanced business financial performance, employment change, or business survival.
<b>9. Manolova, Brush, Edelman &amp; Green (2002)</b>	To examine the differences in personal factors between internationalised and non-internationalised small firms by comparing the relative importance of four dimensions of human capital: international business skills, international orientation, perceptions about the environment, and demographic characteristics. Empirical, hypotheses testing, study.	Provided a review of the attention paid by different research streams to the importance of personal factors in small firm internationalisation: internationalisation: process theories (stage models), export development models, international entrepreneurship, resource based view.	Key informants in firms with less than 250 employees, in the USA were included in the sample. May surveys were conducted in two phases, in 1995 and 1996, preceded by telephone interviews, yielding 76 and 208 valid answers. Univariate tests, multivariate analysis of variance, factor analysis and chi-square tests.	The findings indicated that personal factors matter with respect to small firm internationalisation. Particularly, managerial skills and environmental perceptions appeared to be the most important dimensions of human capital. Owners/founders or managers who have more positive perceptions of the international environment were more likely to internationalise their business. Owners/founders were likely to draw on their international experience, skills or overall competences when internationalising their firms. International orientation and demographics did not vary between internationalised and non-internationalised firms.
<b>10. Fernández-Ortiz &amp; Castresana Ruiz-Carillo (2005)</b>	To verify the extent to which managerial perceptions of export affect the decision to export. To study the managerial perceptions that can help to consolidate the commitment to export (in the case of the SMEs that are already exporting). Empirical, hypotheses testing, study.	Not explicitly grounded on any specific theory. Indicated three explicative factors for the exporting behaviour of the firm related to the manager of the company and chose managerial perceptions to further on analyse. Also, indicated several barriers to the export activity.	The sample is formed out managers of SMEs from La Rioja (Spain). Mail survey conducted in 2003, yielded 330 valid answers supplemented by additional information provided by secondary sources. Frequencies analysis, contingency tables, ANOVA tests, chi-square tests, factor analysis and structural equations.	Their results show that management's perception about export barriers and advantages is a crucial factor which determines the export involvement of the SME. The most important barriers/obstacles to export activity perceived by the management of the SMEs were related to the lack of information regarding export activity or to the lack of resources and they were identified as higher in non-exporting SMEs than in exporting ones. As soon as the firm got involved in exporting the perceived barriers started to decrease. The most relevant advantages to export, perceived by the management, were related to rentability, cost and risk diversification reasons. The export advantages were perceived as higher

				<p>by managers of already exporting business than by those that were not exporting yet.</p> <p>The perception of export barriers was inversely related to the size of the firm.</p> <p>The analysis regarding the differences in management perceptions on export barriers and advantages between family and non family owned business did not yield conclusive results.</p>
<p><b>11. Suárez-Ortega &amp; Alamo-Vera (2005)</b></p>	<p>To examine the particular organisational and managerial determinants of the different aspects of the firm's export development process: intention, propensity and intensity.</p> <p>Empirical, hypotheses testing, study</p>	<p>Not specifically grounded in any particular theory.</p> <p>They elaborated a framework on the internal determinants of export involvement including firm specific factors, management characteristics and management attitude as determinants for the export intention, propensity and intensity of the company.</p>	<p>The sample was composed of general managers of Spanish firms in the wine industry.</p> <p>Mail survey yielded 286 valid responses.</p> <p>Student t test, factor and reliability analysis, one-way ANOVA, contingency tables, chi-square test.</p>	<p>Export intention was positively related to: a firm's competitive position in new product development and managerial perceptions that export is advantageous for their firm, as it might improve global competitiveness and corporate performance.</p> <p>Export propensity was positively influenced by: a firm's experience in geographic market development and manager's foreign language proficiency.</p> <p>Export intensity was positively associated with a firm's experience in geographic market development, manager's foreign language proficiency and experience abroad whereas negatively affected by the importance given by managers to the lack of internal resources acting as a barrier to export.</p>

**TABLE 2 GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMPANIES**

<b>General information about the companies</b>	<b>Case A</b>	<b>Case B</b>	<b>Case C</b>	<b>Case D</b>
<b>Foundation year</b>	1959	1985	1982	2003
<b>Activity</b>	Producer of electric components (e.g. liquid, air and radiant heating, thermostats).	Producer of antennas.	Designer and producer of systems for fighting intrusion.	Producer of machinery for textile industry.
<b>Number of employees</b>	70	30	12	40
<b>Initiation of export</b>	1972	1988	1997	2003
<b>Countries of export</b>	Costa Rica, Argentina, Chile, France, Italy, UK, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Tunisia, Israel, Libya.	France	Algeria, Greece, France, Portugal, Finland, Turkey, Germany, Sweden, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, Saudi Arabia	India, Turkey, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia, New Zealand, Russia, Czech Republic, Germany, France, Italy, Canada, USA, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Brasil, Venezuela, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina
<b>Export (%)</b>	66% of the production is exported.	32% of the production is exported.	25% of the production is exported.	90% of the production is exported.
<b>Person in charge of export related activities</b>	Owner	Owner	Export manager	Director

**TABLE 3 MANAGERIAL CHARACTERISTICS AND PERCEPTIONS**

<b>Managerial factors</b>	<b>Case A</b>	<b>Case B</b>	<b>Case C</b>	<b>Case D</b>
<b>Age (exp. initiation)</b>	28	47	26	37
<b>Educational level</b>	University studies (Lawyer)	Master studies (MBA)	University studies (Lawyer)	University studies (Industrial. Engineer)
<b>Industry know-how</b>	Always worked in the same sector being the heir of his father's business.	Previously worked in the aeriels producing sub-sector.	Worked part-time in the firm since the age of 18, helping her father, owner of the firm.	Worked in The Spanish Association of Textile Machinery for 8 years.
<b>Management know-how (management quality)</b>	Always worked in the same company.	Previously owned two other firms and was the director of another one, all antenna producers.	Has not owned or held a managerial job in another firm. Has worked part-time in the firm, since the age of 18.	Was the director of The Spanish Association of Textile Machinery, and the director of a firm in Mexico for 4 years.
<b>International experience</b>	Has not studied or worked abroad. Only travelled in both business and visiting purposes.	Has not studied or worked abroad. Only travelled in both business and visiting purposes. Lived for short periods of time in Italy.	Has studied 3 years in the USA, worked for 1 year in Greece and travelled in both business and visiting purposes.	Has worked for 4 years in Mexico, and travelled in both business and visiting purposes.
<b>Foreign language skills</b>	Learned English, Italian and French in order to be able to communicate with the firm's clients.	The language skills ( French, English Italian) helped in the export development.	The firm would not have been exporting without the language skills. (English, French, Italian, Portuguese)	Only English is a requirement for export development, in order to be able to communicate with the clients, in their sector.
<b>Risk tolerance</b>	High risk tolerance; he considers risk in the exporting activities not too high.	High risk tolerance; he is an entrepreneurial person and he enjoys taking risks.	High risk tolerance; does not see exporting as risky; she sees no difference in terms of risk between selling on the domestic or on the foreign market.	High risk tolerance; he does not consider exporting risky. Nowadays it is a necessity, not really a challenge anymore.
<b>Innovativeness (resistance to change)</b>	He did not present any resistance to change. They had to export in order to grow (and survive).	He wanted to innovate, to evolve, to change, to grow.	She considers that nowadays you have to innovate and adapt 100% in order to be competitive.	"Exporting is like the air you breathe" - a necessity. He never felt any resistance to change or felt scared regarding exporting.
<b>Perceptions about firm's growth and/or profit and exporting expectations</b>	The firm could not grow anymore on the domestic market; the owner saw the export as the only viable means of growth. He wanted to export at whatever cost.	He saw export as a possibility for the firm to grow. Also, the profit obtained from selling in France was higher than the profit obtained on the domestic market.	She wanted the firm to grow and therefore, they started exporting. The export manager also wanted their company's products to be known all over the world.	He saw exporting as a necessity for surviving given the specific conditions faced by the sector of machinery for the textile industry, in Spain nowadays.

<b>Perceptions about export stimuli and barriers</b>	<p><i>Perceived export stimuli:</i> The excessive capacity of production, the saturation of the domestic demand, the high skilled human resources, as well as the possession of information due to the contacts in the foreign markets.</p>	<p><i>Perceived export stimuli:</i> The existence of a contact (social network) in France and of a business opportunity on that market, the saturation of the domestic demand, the know-how and price low price of the product, the cheap and capable labour force and the innovation capacity.</p>	<p><i>Perceived export stimuli:</i> The unexpected orders from abroad, the human resources and R&amp;D advantage, the innovation, adaptation and production capacity, the capacity of lowering the price, the information possession, the support from Spanish and Catalan organisms, the entrance of foreign competitors on the domestic market.</p>	<p><i>Perceived export stimuli:</i> The demand shrinkage (almost disappearance) on the domestic market, the support received from Spanish and Catalan organisms, the skilled human resources team and prepared for starting the export activities.</p>
	<p><i>Perceived export barriers:</i> Were not too important; on the EU market, only in Germany, they had difficulties in being accepted due to the different product standards; the same on the USA market.</p>	<p><i>Perceived export barriers:</i> He considered that the possible barriers to exporting can be overcome. For example, the perceived difficulties related to the monetary exchange rate fluctuations were easily overcome.</p>	<p><i>Perceived export barriers:</i> The export manager perceived very few export barriers, only due to some specific situations on the foreign markets of Algeria (delays in payment) and Benelux (high expenditures for homologations).</p>	<p><i>Perceived export barriers:</i> He perceived low export barriers that were easy to solve: the exchange rate euro-dollar, cultural differences, lack of experience of the new customers, change of fashion.</p>

**TABLE 4 PROPOSITION TESTING**

<b>Cases</b>	<b>P1</b>	<b>P2</b>	<b>P3</b>	<b>P4</b>	<b>P5</b>	<b>P6</b>	<b>P7</b>	<b>P8</b>	<b>P9</b>	<b>P10</b>
<b>Case A</b>	Confirmed	Confirmed	Partially Confirmed	Not Confirmed	Partially Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed
<b>Case B</b>	Not Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Partially Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed
<b>Case C</b>	Confirmed	Confirmed	Partially Confirmed	Not Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed
<b>Case D</b>	Partially Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Confirmed	Partially Confirmed	Confirmed

## Modelo de entrevista

### I Preguntas sobre el empresario<sup>5</sup>:

1. ¿Quién fundó la empresa?
2. Edad del empresario(s):
3. Nivel de educación del empresario(s):
  1. Escuela primaria
  2. Diploma de colegio
  3. Diploma universitaria
  4. Diploma de master o doctorado
4. ¿Trabajó usted en el mismo sector industrial antes de iniciar esta empresa? Si la respuesta es afirmativa, ¿por cuánto tiempo?
5. ¿Fue usted propietario de otra empresa, o tuvo usted un puesto de dirección en otra empresa? Si la respuesta es afirmativa, ¿por cuánto tiempo y (en) cuántas de empresas?
6. ¿Trabajo/estudio/viaje usted en el extranjero? Si la respuesta es afirmativa, ¿en qué países y por cuánto tiempo?, ¿los contactos establecidos al extranjero durante ese periodo influenciaron de alguna manera la decisión de exportar?
7. ¿Habla usted idiomas extranjeros? Si la respuesta es afirmativa, indique, por favor, cuáles idiomas y si les ayudaron en iniciar y desarrollar la actividad exportadora.
8. ¿Cómo evaluaría usted su tolerancia a riesgo? Percibió usted la actividad exportadora como caracterizada por un alto grado de riesgo?
9. ¿Cómo evaluaría usted su resistencia a cambio?

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<sup>5</sup> Empresario o persona encargada de tomar decisiones acerca de la actividad exportadora.

10. ¿Cómo evaluaría usted su capacidad de innovar y su flexibilidad? ¿Considera usted la exportación una actividad innovadora?

11. ¿Por qué decidió usted iniciar y desarrollar la actividad exportadora?

12. ¿Desea/deseo usted que su empresa crezca/creciera o que consiga un mayor beneficio? Si la respuesta es afirmativa, considera usted el exporte una modalidad adecuada para asegurar el crecimiento/el mayor beneficio de su empresa?, ¿Por qué?

13. ¿Cómo percibió usted los estímulos acerca de la actividad exportadora? ¿Y las barreras?

14. ¿Encontró dificultades en establecer contactos en los mercados extranjeros? Si la respuesta es afirmativa, ¿cómo y por qué?

15. ¿Cuál (y de que manera) de las siguientes características le ayudaron iniciar y desarrollar la actividad exportadora: 1) experiencia previa en conducir empresas, 2) experiencia en el sector industrial, 3) experiencia en el mercado extranjero, 4) el conocimiento de idiomas extranjeros? Si considera usted que fueron otras características las que más le ayudaron en iniciar y desarrollar la actividad exportadora por favor indique cuales:

**II ¿Cuál es el papel del empresario o persona que toma decisiones en iniciar y desarrollar la actividad exportadora?**

**III ¿Cuáles son las características de los recursos humanos (o equipo directivo) que ayudan en iniciar y desarrollar la actividad exportadora?**

1 ¿Cómo influenciaron las características de los recursos humanos en la toma de decisión de empezar la actividad exportadora?

2 ¿Los contactos para empezar la actividad exportadora fueron de alguna manera conseguidos a través de los recursos humanos?

3 ¿Contrató la empresa especialistas para poder empezar y ayudar en la actividad exportadora?

#### **IV Preguntas sobre la empresa:**

1. Año de fundación:

2. Numero actual de empleados:

3. Actividad de la empresa:

4. ¿La empresa se enfocó primero en el mercado doméstico y después extendió sus actividades al extranjero?

5. Año cuando se inició la actividad exportadora:

6. Producto(s) de exportación:

7. Primer mercado de exportación y países de exportación en actualidad (en orden):

8. ¿Considera usted que su empresa tiene/tuvo una ventaja competitiva (ventaja en recursos, recursos humanos, tecnología, I & D, marketing, conocimiento, etc.) al momento de tomar la decisión de exportar? Si la respuesta es afirmativa, ¿qué tipo de ventaja competitiva?

9. ¿Considera usted que su empresa fabrica un producto(s) con características únicas?

10. Considera usted que su empresa tiene capacidad de innovar y adaptar el/los producto(s)?

11. ¿Cómo evaluaría usted la capacidad de producción de su empresa (ej: insuficiencia de capacidad productiva, acumulaciones de producción):

**V Preguntas sobre el entorno:**

**a) Entorno domestico**

1. ¿Recibió usted ayuda por parte de algún organismo público (ej: gobierno) o privado nacional que no esta directamente involucrado en la actividad exportadora? Si la respuesta es afirmativa, ¿Qué tipo de ayuda y por parte de que tipo de organismo?

2. ¿Cómo percibe/percibió usted la situación en el mercado domestico?

3. ¿Cómo percibe/percibió usted la intensidad de la competitividad en el mercado domestico?

4. ¿Considera usted que el mercado domestico es caracterizado por una turbulencia tecnológica, más concretamente si la tasa de cambio tecnológico es demasiado alta?

5. ¿Considera usted que el mercado domestico es caracterizado por una turbulencia producto-mercado, más concretamente si su producto(s) necesita ser constantemente adaptado y modificado para venderlo en el mercado domestico?

**b) Entorno extranjero:**

1. ¿Cómo percibe/percibió usted la actitud de los organismos gubernamentales y la legislación acerca de la participación extranjera de los países donde exporta?

2. ¿Recibió usted una demanda inesperada del mercado exterior? ¿De parte de quien?

3. ¿Planteadose la posibilidad de exportar percibió usted problemas en cuanto a la fluctuación de tasas de cambio monetario (antes del cambio al EURO si se trata de países que forman parte de la Unión Europea y han hecho el cambio a la moneda comunitaria)?

4. ¿Cómo percibe/percibió usted la intensidad de la competitividad en los mercados extranjeros donde exporta?

5. ¿Percibió dificultades en cuanto a la actividad exportadora debido a las diferencias culturales entre el país de origen y el país de exportación?

6. ¿Cómo evaluaría usted su posesión de información sobre el mercado extranjero en el cual se planteo la exportación? ¿Cómo se ha conseguido la información? ¿A través de las redes?

7. ¿Identificó usted una oportunidad de negocios en los mercados extranjeros? Si la respuesta es afirmativa, ¿que tipo de oportunidad y cómo la encontró?