Marketing and Entrepreneurial Orientation in Exporting SMEs

Jasmine Williams  
University of Plymouth

Ian Chaston  
University of Plymouth

Phil Megicks  
University of Plymouth

Katharine Clarke  
University of Plymouth

Abstract: This paper is based on the first, qualitative, phase of a study aimed at enhancing understanding of SME growth through exporting. It investigates the reasons for the export success of twelve SMEs in the South West of England, exploring export market and entrepreneurial orientation in these companies, within the context of organisational culture. The second, quantitative stage of the research will model the relationship between each of these constructs and export performance. The research programme builds on the work of Matsuno et al (2002). Hence the cultural model used is that of Deshpandé et al (1993). It also draws on research by Diamantopoulos and Cadogan (1996) and Cadogan et al (1999), thus extending the field of investigation into exporting. Results indicate that the most useful export intelligence is deemed to emanate from close, direct contact with customers. Innovations, on the other hand, are developed internally, and one of the key factors encouraging these is a flexible structure, with incentives for staff creativity. There is therefore early evidence that, at least in the context of exporting SMEs, the notion of entrepreneurial companies as 'adhocracies' may need to be extended to include some of the attributes of Deshpandé et al's 'clan' (1993). Speedy responsiveness to market information is perceived as the most important dimension of market orientation; therefore, aggressiveness in terms of identifying and seizing market opportunities, rather than competitive aggressiveness, is considered critical. Respondents consider that successful exporters spread risks rather than take them. They also opined that departmentalising the export function separates it from the mainstream of company activities, thus creating an undesirable company aloofness from export markets. However, formalisation and departmentalisation are viewed as inevitable consequences of company growth. Ironically, therefore, the very attributes that encourage exports in the first instance may be seen as inhibiting success in the longer term.