



In this study export partner groups are in focus. The results of the empirical study reveal that the use of export partner groups as a tool to enhance SMEs' internationalisation is working. The concept is most beneficial for SMEs that can be categorised as less experienced exporters. The results show e.g. that the companies' export planning and export knowledge have improved, that new cooperation constellations have emerged and that the number of requests for offers and deals have increased during or after the project period. The concept of export partner can still be improved.

Some of the problems are dependent on the group members' activities and input and some are connected to organisation and coordination of the groups. Improvement can accordingly happen on both sides in an export partner group project.

The export manager's commitment and activity is not the only factor creating results in export partner groups. The companies' own activity and commitment is equally or even more important. Without commitment, i.e. time and allocated resources for planned activities, the results will not fulfil the expectations. The results of an export partner group are not necessarily detectable immediately. A balance between long- and short-term results is adequate. Something to work on, e.g. requests for offers must however emerge rather quickly. Tangible results keep up commitment to the group and the joint activities.

A careful scanning of the target markets is relevant. The products and the services have to meet a demand on the markets and they have to be adapted accordingly. Compatibility between the companies' products, services and interests enhance cooperation. Companies that identify mutual synergy effects benefit most from cooperation. With different points of interest, the idea of export partner groups is undermined. This is a matter of organising and reorganising the groups.

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