

Developing Growth Strategies for a Company's Expansion
A Case Study on an Irish SME

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Abstract

Title: Developing Growth strategies for a company's expansion. A Case study on an Irish SME.

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This paper considers the growth strategies that an Irish SME can use to expand into new markets. The research will include the growth strategies that a business within the hospitality industry uses, the challenges that they may face and possible growth strategies they can use in the future.

The literature emphasises key areas that a business should consider when expanding into new markets. A qualitative approach was taken when researching the topic of growth strategies. The research was completed in the form of a case study. The data collected for the case study was gathered through interviews with a number of employees from each department involved in the growth and development of the organisation. An analysis of the literature and findings offers a comprehensive insight into the growth strategies within the case study organisation.

The study highlights the challenges that the organisation has to overcome in order to expand. It is important for the organisation to plan for the future and look at the possible challenges that they may face. This will allow them to then adapt new growth strategies. The case study identifies the strategies for development involving key themes such as mergers and acquisitions and customer satisfaction. The methodology discusses the limitation of the research and data collection method.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Research Problem

Growth strategies are important as they allow a business to adapt their development opportunities in a fast-growing environment. The growth of a business is no longer an aim the business should strive for it is a necessity for the survival of an organisation to operate (Durmaz and Iihan, 2015). The hospitality industry is one of the most competitive markets as it continues to grow and expand. It can be difficult for organisations within this industry to maintain a high market share. This is as a result of the various competitors emerging and the industry gaining more business in recent years as a result of customers traveling and dining out (Ana-Mihaela and Tuclea, 2008). There is a sense of danger, when an organisation attempts to expand into new markets, as they place a number of their resources into their expansion process. Some businesses do not use specific strategies such as the Uppsala Model. This causes a number of uncertainties as they have no designated plan on the expansion (Rulinawaty et al., 2021). This shows the importance for any business to identify the growth strategies that they will use in order to expand.

1.2 Background and Need

The topic of growth strategies is of particular interest to researchers, especially if they have a management background. Growth strategies are important for the success of any organisation's expansion process (Kuntonbutr and Kulken, 2017). Using a growth strategy allows the organisation to plan their future, whether it is into a new market or into new products. This will subsequently develop a loyal customer market and customer satisfaction. It is important for an organisation to continue to grow and expand, to maintain a good competitive advantage, this will benefit them long-term. (Chen, Zou and Wang, 2009).

1.3 Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to explore the growth strategies that are available for an Irish medium sized company, as they try to grow and develop their market position post Brexit. This will result in recommendations being made based on the strategies in place. Based on these aims, the main research question is, what are the most appropriate growth strategies for an Irish based SME post Brexit? The key outcome of the research is separated into three main objectives that will assist in answering the research question. These objectives are to:

- 1) Analyse the current challenges faced by an Irish company within the hospitality sector.
- 2) Assess the existing development growth strategies currently used by the chosen case study.
- 3) Identify the most appropriate growth strategies to allow the company to develop in the medium to long term.

The importance of growth strategies is to implement cost saving strategies and incorporate investment plans when looking to expand. According to Proctor (2000) restructuring may have to take place to help with a cost-effective goal that a company may have. An Irish small to medium enterprise (SME) will have to look at the appropriate investment opportunities, which may lead to a multinational company. Some of the innovation and growth strategies can be external or internal which is more traditional (Ausloos et al., 2018).

The qualitative research has been conducted for a case study design. This method of research is expected to help a researcher to understand growth strategies within an organisation. A qualitative approach is justified by previous research similar to this one (Shang & Lin, 2010). The researchers' findings will be analysed, then interpreted in order to discuss the findings in relation to the literature on various growth strategies. The thesis length and time restrictions limit the research discussion within some aspects of this study.

1.4 Scope of the study

The scope of this study is to help the investigation and outcomes in relevance to the case study. The case study focuses on an Irish SME within the hospitality industry. Seven employees participated in the interviews about the organisation's growth. The small sample size allowed for an in-depth analysis which allows the researcher to evaluate the responses and value the insights into the organisation.

1.5 Organisation of the study

In order to elaborate on the importance of growth strategies, the following review of previous literature will help the researcher to analyse the academic theories and studies that lead to outline and answer the research questions and objectives. The methodology will be discussed and an answer to the main research question and objectives will be investigated. The data and findings will be analysed to offer insights into the case study. A discussion will be completed based on the findings along with a conclusion. An acknowledgement of the limitations has been carried out to justify the intentions and the scope of the research. There is also an area indicating the recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

There are many different trends that can help an Irish SME to grow nationally and internationally. These trends include global sourcing, worldwide relocation for production, increased complexity in the supply chain and logistic solutions (Konig and Caldwell, 2016). Growth strategies are essential for a business to operate and expand into new markets (Durmaz and Iihan, 2015). This Chapter will include the various growth strategies that organisations use to grow into new markets. These include the three R's, Uppsala model and organic and inorganic growth. The three R's are the rational, radical, and robust strategy.

They all signify the different aspects of the business from short term or long-term strategies. Some focus on the competitive market while others focus on the customer value (Doyle, 1999). The Uppsala model signifies a four-stage process of how a business can expand globally. It is an important growth strategy as it does a risk assessment and outlines a clear step-by-step method to incorporate all resources to grow internationally (Hollenson, 2012). The final strategy mentioned will be organic growth and inorganic growth. Organic growth is when the company continues to focus on customer satisfaction to gain more market share while inorganic growth is when businesses rapidly grow through mergers and acquisitions (Hyland,2013).

2.2 The Three R's

According to Doyle (1999) companies who are showing higher growth follow one of the three paths. These include rational, radical, and robust strategies. However, a robust strategy is the only one of the three that gives an organisation some competitive advantage. This is the main long-term value (Kippenberger, 1997).

2.2.1 Radical growth

The Radical growth strategy is focused on the marketing and public relations section of a company. According to Firfeild (2012) this strategy is when a company adapts their growth strategy, it is an explosive method where an organisation does not add much to the customer value or sustainable advantage. The radical approach is more beneficial for businesses looking for a short-term option. Management will need to appreciate the privileges of the short-term method for the long-term cost effectiveness. If a company uses the radical approach their achievements will be temporary. This method has become very popular among managers, as it

has less risks than investing in long-term within the company, as all markets change rapidly. This strategy can often lead to strong performance if only for a short time. This strategy does not focus on developing customer value however, the focus is on operations and maintaining low costs. This results in a lack of customer loyalty, which causes instability when calculating for future cashflows (Doyle, 1999).

Radical growth also can have three subsections of growth such as Acquisition led strategy, Marketing Department strategy and PR led strategy. As this has explosive growth with little recognition for customer value or sustainability, it needs to focus on the main departments which allow a business to grow quickly. Acquisition led strategy, is the most popular among managers as it is quick and easy to control with little financial issues (Neill and York, 2012). Companies do not need to focus on the culture of the acquired organisations stake holders, including employees, suppliers, and customers. However, this method tends to be short lived, as there is little value for the stakeholders and the managers experiences (Herrmann and Frangakis, 2014).

The Marketing Department strategy emphasizes advertising and rebranding that are operational to assist the company with growth and allow for the organisation to be recognisable to their consumers. However, there is normally a lack of control over the internal and external relationships with the stakeholders. Similarly, the PR led strategy looks at the marketing of the company. This growth is required for them to succeed in a more globalised market. It is the only factor that cares about customer loyalty and the performance on the market as it ensures that the company focuses on their image (Kippenberger, 1997).

2.2.2 Rational Growth

The Rational growth strategy often exploits the new technology and segments within the market. It will utilise all aspects of the organisation to gain a greater market segment and grow. This is a very effective method for an organisation to use for expansion however, like the radical strategy, it is difficult to maintain customer value over a long period of time. Fifield (2012) has said that this strategy is defined as insufficient in order for a company to grow. This means that a company who uses this strategy will succeed effectively for a short period of time, but as the business grows, they will have to adapt into another growth strategy to survive more long-term. This strategy is targeted towards the more price sensitive consumer. However, this relationship can be very hard to form. Once they have built a loyal clientele for their products

or services, it makes it a lot easier for them to copy products or bring out new innovations that customers will appreciate. This makes it a more effective growth strategy than the radical strategy (Kippenberger, 1997). Within an organisation where they use a rational growth strategy, they will continue to look for a more long-term effective method, however, once they use this strategy it may lead the company into a robust growth strategy (Doyle, 1999).

2.2.3 Robust growth

The robust growth strategy helps to maximise the growth rate within an organisation. However, it may have a value risk for the organisation. It is the only growth strategy that focuses on the long-term plan that will affect the company. It is also known as the '*safety first principle*.' This brings the investors more into the business and helps to maximise the capital of the company over time. This helps the company to plan for future developments and investment opportunities while keeping track of the financial risk assessment. This principle is based on the management over years rather than letting the company grow more organically (Rujeerapaiboon, Kuhn and Wiesemann, 2016).

Sharifi, Ismail, Qiu and Najafi (2013) state that the supply chain and the support from the suppliers help a company have a more robust growth. The organisation are heavily supported and have little implications on the supply chain for the SMEs, as they try to grow and develop as a company and especially if they plan to grow internationally. The robust strategy is the only one out of the three R's that can have explosive growth that focuses on the customer values and that is sustainable for a long period of time. The innovation within a business will come from the knowledge from the managers within the organisation and their co-operation as they progress through a growth period.

Depending on the industry there may be a higher growth rate due to the low barriers of entry, competitors and customers having power within the market. There may also be a strong sense of brand strength that will lead to brand investment that is counted as a valuable asset. They use a range of competencies that will help grow and develop. These resources can come from knowledge and employees' abilities that may be used in a long-term manner (Kippenberger, 1997).

If a business pursues a robust growth strategy, they need to use the four principles. The first principle is using the customers and resources that are already present within the organisation which will encourage more customer loyalty. They will then need to recognise the challenges and the environment that the company operates within. For example, within a market that is changing rapidly they need to monitor and ensure that they have a competitive advantage in order to survive within the industry for a longer period of time. Afterwards they will then need to implement the findings from their research and use the abilities within the organisation to become innovative to allow for sustainable growth. Finally, the organisation will continuously observe the market and adapt to the various changes that are needed over time (Doyle, 1999).

2.3 The Uppsala Model

The internationalisation of a small to medium enterprise is a great opportunity for them to strategize for their development. It is a learning process for any organisation. Johanson and Wiedersheim (1975) explain four stages of expansion. They call this the '*Development operations of the firms in individual countries as an establishment chain.*' It is known for being called the Uppsala model. This staged process expanding model relies more on the resource's involvement. By doing this it allows the company to have more market knowledge and incorporate individuals with various experiences.

The Uppsala model is a staged method to help a company to grow internationally. It is important to note that this model is a vital risk management tool that helps to drive change within the organisation. It was developed in the mid-1970s in Sweden. This method describes the different stages of an organisation's development towards a more international involvement (Igwe, Rugara and Rahman, 2022). However, even with this model being older, it is relevant within today's environment. It is applicable to the businesses that wish to perform within foreign market (Kraemer, Ritz, and de Cardenas Lopez, 2018). Hult, Gonzalez-Perez and Lagerstrom (2020) indicate that the Model has been updated by their original authors in recent years. This helps to ensure that that the Uppsala model is relevant in today's business environment. It puts emphasis on the managers involvement within the organisation. They have to adapt to the changes even though there may be a number of uncertainties, ambiguity, and complexity. There is no equilibrium within the Uppsala method. A number of different businesses have used this model as a process to adapt the operations within the company, such as the resources and the structure of the strategy. Then they used these in an international market.

According to Ruzzier, Mitja, Robert and Bostjan (2006) it is a slow method for a company to take. The business focuses on the fundamentals such as licencing, opening sales, and exporting in the new foreign markets. It is a model that describes the behavioural theories and the market strategy of an independent business. It is important to note that as an organisation expands, they will slowly start to abate the traditions from their home countries, as they grow into a different market. This is as a result of them having to cater to a new culture through their products and services (Zhou and Guillen, 2015). This is vital as it assists the company with their exports. Businesses often begin with non-regular exports towards the various geographics. Then they adapt more as they grow their business and bring in external bodies such as agents to help with the investment opportunities. It is important for a business to expand externally to ensure they gain control over the resources that have become available and gain more knowledge about the new exploration (Igwe, Rugara and Rahman, 2022).

In an individual market such as the catering supply and hospitality sector, the entry mode can have little investment. It may be more challenging for a company to expand into a new market due to the barriers involved. These barriers cause a business's expansion to be challenging. This results in less organisations choosing certain markets to be a part of (Karakaya and Stahl, 1989). Normally investors within this model would prefer a business to choose a more lucrative industry to operate within, such as the domestic market. However, recently the domestic and hospitality industry offer a more diverse market segmentation that will benefit businesses to find their niche (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009). It is vital that a company who wishes to pursue a new market invests in an internal research and development sector and allocates individuals to do the bid and proposal.

According to Frey (2012) if an organisation does this, there is more of a margin for profits to increase due to the planning that they have completed. This will help the small business grow as they have maximised their output for their new venture. They also state that a small to medium sized company need to navigate through narrow channels with very limited resources. These resources include expansion funds, lack of human knowledge and a small market presence. Support from external bodies is vital to help acquire the new market. They can help with the forming of ideas and becoming active in the planning. They can assist with the marketing and help create a proposal to expand into a more global market (Hollensen, 2012). The Uppsala often uses risk management to help analyse the strategy for expansion. As stated before, there may be an issue with resource allocation. Normally this burden often falls on the

senior managers. Majority of the time the middle managers are included in the resources that need to be allocated. They are the most important resource as they have the most experience within the organisation. Their input and work history should be at the forefront as they lead sub sections of the team. This method outlines two ways for a company to change and develop. These are (1) changing using intermittent methods for the decision process that relate to committing or withholding resources. (2) Change using constant knowledge development methods. These can be done through learning, employee development and building trust between all stakeholders. This is part of the two-step change process where they both affect each other. However, if they are done indirectly, it can incur more changes. Trade-offs have to happen within the resource allocations to create the benefits and negatives that cause the possible outcomes of a new venture (Schweizer and Vahlne, 2021).

Arvidsson and Aridsson (2019) explain that the Uppsala model helps businesses to distinguish between four key steps to assist a company in entering a new geographical market. These steps cannot be used independently of a business's market. The first step is no regular exports activity. This happens when an organisation does not have any committed resources for their exports. It makes it impossible to gain market insights about the foreign markets they are attempting to grow into. This then leads to the second stage in a business, which is using an independent agent to export products. As the company grows and develops, they need to start outsourcing some of their exports to independent bodies. This allows a business to focus more on the growth in sales within the new market and analyse the customer interaction with the products or services. It would need more involvement within the market but, helps a business grow organically (Wach, 2021).

The third stage is for foreign sales where the subsidiaries get involved. This allows for more control over the information from the various channels. This gives the company even more access to the data from the customers and suppliers. It also offers the organisation a direct link with the resources and gives them experiences that will be beneficial in the whole internationalisation process.

The final stage is when the manufacturing subsidiaries and foreign production companies are incorporated. This is when an organisation has the most resources involved in the overall operations. Then after this an organisation should have an effective operational system and have a good market share that attract consumers. (Wach, 2021). Johanson and Vahlne (2009)

have created this model to be more detailed. They do this by dividing the factors and changing different aspects such as the dynamic variables and the constant variables.

From Arvidsson and Arvidsson's (2019) observation of smaller businesses who are expanding internationally, they discovered that most businesses move into a nearby country to start with their growth. This is due to the knowledge they have about the neighbouring countries. Their cultures are also normally very similar to their own. This allows for the company to gain more experience in expanding globally, while still being cautious. Companies then expand into more distant markets as they gain more confidence that there will be little risks involved. This is a good model for smaller businesses to follow as they expand as it clearly lays out the steps that a business can follow to have a successful expansion. It also allows for a risk assessment of the overall business and their plans for the future. This model allows for them to grow slowly and evaluate their growth as they progress into nearby markets.

2.4 Organic VS Inorganic Growth

Hyland (2013) has outlined the main method for growth for a SME in Ireland. They state that the growth of a business is measured by the increase in profits, revenue and all their assets, including fixed and current assets. There are two types of growth within an organisation - these are organic and inorganic. The business will need to either form internal competencies, differentiate their products and be innovative in their marketing methods or invest in a competitive advantage plan in order to be a market leader. These are the organic method for business growth. A business can also expand with the assistance from the core competencies along with the sales, while the inorganic approach is when the objectives are done through mergers and acquisitions during the expansion. The inorganic method is using their marginal revenue as leverage on the market and use the external competencies to grow and develop.

2.4.1 Organic Growth

Sudharshan (2019) states that the key fundamentals of the organic growth disciplines follow the standard business resources that an organisation uses in order to develop further in various markets. These resources include inventory and the company's adaption to externalities. Even though most businesses measure their success using the financial rewards such as profits, revenue, and their assets. They can also measure them by other metrics such as customer satisfaction, logistics, the supply chain metrics, and the product quality (Hyland, 2013). It might be quicker for a business to use acquisitions to grow, however, it is more profitable for

an organisation to grow at a steady pace naturally. This can be done by commandeering competitors market shares or by marketing to their loyal customers to purchase more products. These are the first step for an organisation to grow organically. There are conventional approaches to gaining more market share which include creating a profile focused on the attitudes of the consumers while attempting to change their behaviour, spreading the marketing to more outlets to reach some new clientele, and focusing on the investment in the market share and the resources within the company (Jaworski and Lurie, 2020).

According to Agnihotri (2014) an organic growth strategy offers a maximum sense of control over the business operations. If there are multiple companies involved, they share the control for expansion. It has been discovered that the organic method was associated with mass media marketing in a negative way. This has destroyed the reputation for organic growth as customers dislike heavy and repetitive advertisements. This stereotype has implied that smaller businesses that are less reputable will use this strategy (Konig and Caldwell, 2016). However, studies have shown that larger companies and their CEOs are making a mistake in disregarding the organic growth strategy. If they ignore this method, they may lose focus on the overall business strategy and where they have come from. They will lose their grounding and find it challenging to grow beyond a certain point. They tend not to put time and effort into the planning stage and use quick methods that are inorganic which may result in ineffective change that will increase the company's complexity (Favaro, Meer and Sharma, 2012).

If an organisation wants to increase their organic growth method, they need to increase the amount of sale opportunities they have. However, there are some barriers internally that restrict a business from growing organically. These include slower development of new products, large rate of customer turnover and poor allocations of the resources within the organisation, especially when trying to invest in expanding into a new market (The Washington Post, 2022). Within organic growth it can be very challenging to grow clientele especially with customers who are not loyal to the brand. However, it is easier if they put less pressure on cross selling and extreme marketing. This has been proven to be effective as it creates more foot traffic as the organisation is seen as more inclusive of customer needs (Favaro, 2011).

2.4.2 Inorganic Growth

The inorganic strategy is more external for the organisation. This method normally results in an increased output to help the business reach new highs especially by using mergers and

acquisitions. One benefit of using a merger or an acquisition is that the competition is reduced within the market (Hammer et al., 2017). When a company merges with another to join a market, it reduces the barriers of entry as they are already established on the market. By a business doing this, it offers access to an entirely new customer base with many geographical locations and demographics. This results in the organisation using economies of scale to buy more products at a cheaper rate (Business Wire, 2022). This method also offers new perspectives within the business, especially from managers who worked in the company that has been taken over. These resources are a strength for the organisation as the experience they have gained is unmatched.

The inorganic growth method uses the industry and the economic situation as a key part in the development process. They use the slow growth rate within the industry and look at the competition who are fighting for the same market share (Greenberg, Hirt and Smit, 2017). This will allow them to gain competitive advantage over the others as they grow externally. There may also be an economic slump within the market that will affect smaller companies who struggle with the competitive advantage. This helps the organisation as it allows them to merge or take over the struggling companies at a cheaper rate, helps them to expand in a cost-effective manner. This will also make the market look unattractive to competitors as a monopoly begins to emerge (Hyland, 2013).

If a company is struggling to grow organically, they will often use an inorganic method of expansion. According to Agnihotri (2014) this is as a result of poor performance within the market and the management will need to analyse their situation. This may lead to them acquiring investment opportunities, such as buying a new capability or partnering with another business. By using this method, it also opens up the organisation to a more diverse market. This will allow them to benefit financially from the new market as well as gain insights into the industry without starting from the beginning.

2.4.3 Mergers

A merger is when a business joins with another company, however, there is a possibility that an organisation can buy the majority of interest in a different company, thus becoming the new owners. This is an acquisition. Majority of the time the new owner will continue to run the business with little changes to the operation. This ensures that consumers will continue to buy from the company. However, internally they will make gradual changes to make the operation

run smoothly and cohesively with their original business operations. However, on the negative end there may be hostile takeover that can also be classified under the inorganic growth strategies. Having a merger or acquisition often helps with the strategic alliance and financial gain. The key objective for a company to do this is to increase the shareholders capital and to look at the financial synergies that may have risen through this activity. There are many different motives that a business has for a takeover. The three key ones are agency, synergy, and hubris. They may also seek diversification, management incentives, and tax reliefs (Jacob, 2006).

It can be challenging to measure the growth levels between organic and inorganic methods. Organic growth is a little more straightforward to gauge the success of an organisation. By calculating the sales throughout the first year of expansion it allows them to look at the revenue to calculate their success. They may have had to employ new employees to help with the growth and improve their infrastructure. These will have to be taken into account when calculating the organisations overall capital and success. It outlines how the organisation can add value to the customers experience by growing organically. This can normally be identified in the sales figure. However, with an inorganic method it is not as straight forward as calculating the overall revenue from the sales. This is because mergers and acquisitions interfere heavily with the cashflows. These large changes can be sudden but not sustainable in the calculation of growth. The generated sales amount may grow rapidly and lead to the overall profit margins being unpredictable. Organisations will find it difficult to forecast their future margins resulting in less accurate plans (Chandha, 2022).

2.5 Conclusion

Researchers agree that growth strategies are vital for a business's expansion. There are various growth strategies that an organisation can choose from depending on the type of growth they want (Durmaz and Iihan, 2015). Based on the research, the literature emphasises the need for growth strategies especially within the hospitality industry. The strategies mentioned are most relevant to the case study, these are the three R's, Uppsala model and Organic and Inorganic growth. The current study will continue to explore the growth strategies that are suitable for an Irish SME and their goals.

Chapter 3. Research Question & Objectives

3.1 Research Question

After a review of the literature a number of common themes became evident. This highlights the necessity for a business to use strategies within an Irish SME to grow and expand nationally and internationally. The literature assists with the aim of the study. The study's aim is to explore the growth strategies that are available for an Irish medium sized company as they try to grow and develop their market position post Brexit and make recommendations based on the strategies in place or other options available. The main research question in this study asks:

What are the most appropriate growth strategies for an Irish based SME post Brexit?

3.2 Research Objectives

Within the research question there are three sub-objectives that will support the investigation and assist with the research question. These are outlined below.

1) Analyse the current challenges faced by an Irish company within the hospitality sector.

The literature is focused on the growth strategies. It is important for a company to know the challenges before they begin to expand and plan their strategies. There may be many complex challenges that a company may face. The hospitality industry is a highly competitive market especially within Ireland. It is important for the managers and owners to understand the challenges involved within the industry, as well as understanding the possible challenges in expanding into new markets. Analysing the challenges is a crucial step for any organisation to prepare solutions to improve their growth and minimise the long-term effect of any relevant challenges.

2) Assess the existing development growth strategies currently used by the chosen case study.

There are various growth strategies that an organisation can use to grow into new markets such as geographical locations and new product lines. It is important for a business to keep growing and develop their operations. It is also vital for a company to explore various growth strategies that will help them to reach their target customers. There are various strategies that a company can use. Planning is the most important part of the expansion. This study will examine the plans

that the company have produced and the growth strategies they are using to expand into the various markets.

3) Identify the most appropriate growth strategies to allow the company to develop in the medium to long term.

After identifying the growth strategies in place by the company and the challenges that may occur throughout the expansion. It is important to explore why a company should engage in the growth and development. After reviewing literature on growth strategies and investigating what the company has in place, it revealed a strategy that the company can use in order to expand even more then they have in the last five years.

The following chapter indicates the methods of research used in order to analyse these objectives.

Chapter 4. Research Methodology

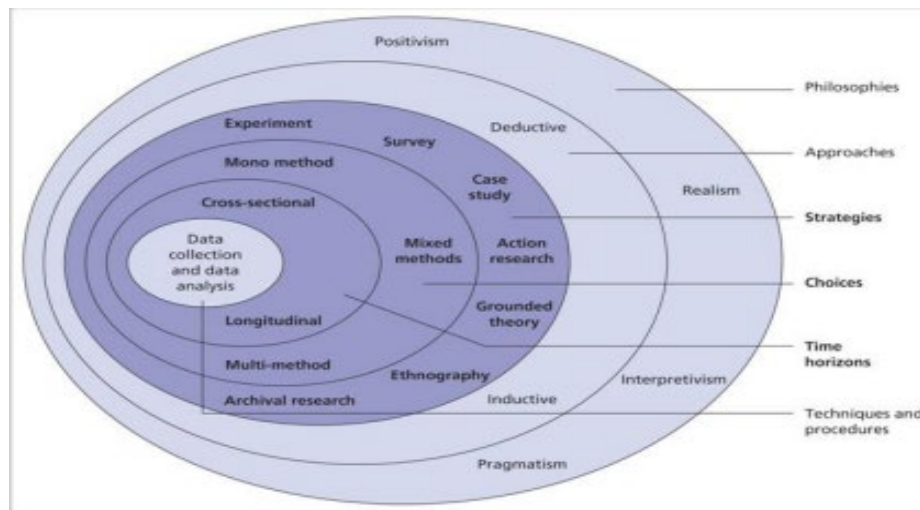
4.1 Introduction

After reviewing the literature that is relevant to the research question. This chapter will outline the primary research that will be conducted. According to Saunders et al. (2015) this chapter is to justify the theories behind the research topic. The design of the research is the planning element within a thesis, however, a strategy for a research paper provides a logical enquiry. This then leads to the methods behind the research and the execution of the findings. To execute the methods researchers use the research onion to help illustrate the elements use in the methodology. This chapter will explore the process behind the methodology, while looking at the data collection, ethics, and limitations.

4.2 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy is used to describe systems that involve the beliefs and assumptions that are developed through the use of knowledge. It outlines the research that needs to be done in order to analyse the knowledge about the chosen area (Saunders, 2019). According to Melnikovas (2018) the research onion is a great demonstration for creating a development program for a research methodology. It is a systematic model that offers a step-by-step system to help organise the data collection. It is widely used in all research areas. The Research onion offers an important description of the key stages that a researcher will need to form an effective methodology. The research onion begins on the outer layer and moves in towards the centre. It normally starts with the main techniques and then ends with data collection and an analysis. Qualitative research will be carried out. Keenan (2020) stated that qualitative data is collected by observing operations and individuals within an organisation. This can be done through interviewing and analysing already existing data. It is more focused on the structure behind an organisation and the patterns that they show. A more qualitative approach focuses more on the qualities instead of the quantities of the data. It looks deeper into the development of an organisation and the growth. An n-depth analysis needs to be completed when dealing with qualitative research as it is more descriptive and relies on human interpretation.

Figure 1. The research Onion



Source: Saunders, 2019.

4.3 Research approach

The second layer of the Research onion is the approach to the theory development. This includes two different theories deduction and induction. According to Blagden (2016) deduction is known as ‘top down’ reasoning that allows for a logical conclusion. This involves testing and analysing many different theories that exist. A deduction is synonymous with a quantitative data collection. Large sample sizes are used to form a generalised conclusion to back up or contradict an original theory. In comparison, induction is known for its bottom-up reasoning. This normally happens when the conclusion is over generalised and comes from an initial analysis rather than being in depth. Induction is the method that initiates the start of a new theory, this is the main data collection approach that leads to a description of an analysis. With regards to the research question the inductive approach is more widely used. This is due to the research that needs to be carried out on the chosen company. The research question does not search for a hypothesis, this is more along the style of deduction. While induction gives the researcher an opportunity to draw their own conclusions based on the research through designated themes (Bryman, 2011).

Table 1. Fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research strategies

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Principle orientation to the role of theory in relation to research	Deductive: Testing of theory	Induction: Testing of theory
Epistemological Orientation	Natural Science model: in particular positivism	Interpretivism
Ontological Orientation	Objectivism	Constructionism/Subjectivism

Source: Bryman,2011

4.4 Research strategy – Case study

Wahyuni (2012) has indicated that a case study using a qualitative method of data collection as their primary research, allows for more interpretation into an organisation’s structure and operations than a more statistical collection. It gives the researcher a deeper understanding of some of the processes in an organisation along with the challenges they face. Within a case study analysis, it is important to look at all variables and perceptions on the chosen study. A case study research needs to be more sensitive to the study as it investigates the operations of a company within a real-life context. Boundaries need to be set between the researcher and their chosen study as some areas may be sensitive to the study. It is important that the researcher also focuses on describing the operations effectively, understanding the processes within an organisation and predicting or offering recommendations on their findings. The data collected is through a more hands-on approach. There is a certain level of engagement from all parties and the interviewee should be observed using body language and conversation by the researcher. As a result, the data can be abstract, normative, and ideological as they deal with a wider image if they went down a more quantitative route (Woodside, 2017).

Hyde, Ryan, and Woodside (2012) look more at the rationales involved with a case-based research project. They focus on the factors that look beyond the advantages and disadvantages using a generalised method. The case study method searches for the flaws within a more variable based research. This offers the researcher an opportunity to look at the behaviours of the individuals and the overall corporate culture. A case study analysis is extremely relevant to the tourism, leisure, and hospitality sector. It has been argued that a more statistical approach

is less effective as it does not offer an opportunity to evaluate the findings unlike qualitative research (Scriven, Cook, Coryn and Evergreen, 2010). This study's aim is to explore and understand the operations and growth of a business and develop an advisory piece based on the data collected. This goal would not be feasible with a quantitative approach. The data needs to be interpreted and compiled together. This is only possible through a qualitative approach. There are challenges with this method, however this is natural. There may be a risk of the sources being unreliable or bias towards the overall company's operations. However, by targeting many different sections such as sales, marketing, and supply chain, it offers a more targeted and realistic overview of the overall running of the business.

4.5 Research design

A case study is defined as an in-depth analysis of a certain individual unit such as a business and their developmental factors and operations. A case study focuses on the functioning of an individual unit. A case study is an investigation into a business in a real-world context through many different sources within the organisation (Flyvbjerg, 2011). The main goal of this study is to develop the themes that are available through a case study analysis. A case study analysis is gaining a larger acceptance from researchers in a diverse domain. It is normally viewed as a soft research method; however, it is difficult to execute effectively. There are certain guidelines that a researcher has to follow to make sure that the case study analysis is a success (Baskarada, 2014).

According to Stake (2000) the research method for a case study is normally done through field research. Each case is unique in their own way as a result, it is important to be sensitive with the data collected and be very understanding of the operations and the plans that the business has in place for their growth and development. Yin (2014) has investigated the triangulation of the research behind a case study analysis to make the research valid and provide evidence behind the data collected. It is vital that the information is cross checked as sources regularly overlap with each other. This will help to verify the accuracy of the sources and ensure the information is correct. It has been suggested that a case study strategy should favour a researcher's research question. It is important that the findings explore and answer the 'who,' 'what,' 'why' and 'how' in an organisation. This can be seen in the three research questions to help understand the chosen organisation.

- 1) What are the current challenges faced by the Irish SME as they expand and develop?
- 2) Why is it important for the company to expand into foreign markets?
- 3) How has the Irish SME attempted to grow into foreign markets?

These questions are important to gain an insight into how an Irish SME uses growth strategies to expand into new markets nationally and internationally. This research project will involve a single organisational case study about a company in the hospitality sector. This is due to a lack of research that involves this area and their growth. There is a good opportunity for a researcher to analyse the possible growth strategies and opportunities to grow in a more globalised market.

4.5.1 Case study Protocol

According to Yin (2003) there are different protocols for the various philosophical approaches that have been developed by researchers to form a methodology for a case study. Planning is a large part of a research program. The case study protocol is a basic plan that helps the researcher to develop a case study methodology and offers guidance and structure in how one should be constructed. There are a number of levels that will need to be completed in order to have a working case study protocol (Brereton, Kitchenham, Budgen and Li, 2008).

- 1) Getting started – define the research question and questions for the hypothesis.
- 2) Selecting cases – consider the population that you will use to collect data on. This can be individuals that need to be interviewed or a business that the study should focus on.
- 3) Defining the techniques used for data collection and defining the role of the researcher - Assessing the source evidence and use the many data collection methodologies and deciding whether to use a qualitative or quantitative data collection. Identify the responsibilities of the research in the data collection process
- 4) Entering the field – The interview guide should be developed in order to create an effective structure for investigation. This is when the investigation is completed, and interviews can begin. Field notes should be incorporated at this stage. This will help with the data analysis while using a flexible opportunity for data collection method. Ethical concerns need to be addressed when interviewing individuals within an organisation. These may include personal details such as names and ages, as well as sensitive topics such as wages and holidays.
- 5) Analysing the Data – The data collected from the interviews and secondary research methods will be combined for an analysis.

- 6) Forming a hypothesis- Form an analysis based on the data collected from all aspects of research and create a hypothesis that can be answered that uses these. A researcher should look for a replication of knowledge across all research completed and explain the relationships that have been created on a professional level, such as business to business or business to consumers. This will also help to provide the validation for the case study.
- 7) Enfolded the literature – A comparison should be completed between the similarities and conflicts. The challenges should also be incorporated as the literature develops.
- 8) Reaching for closure – The concept of ‘Theoretical saturation’ gives the researcher an opportunity to complete the research without looking further when they believe there is more data to improve the results. The case study will be written with the report based on the literature that has been discussed whether it was through primary or secondary research (Brereton, Kitchenham, Budgen and Li, 2008).

4.6 Data collection

Data Collection is defined as the process that scholars and researchers use to gather information to assist with their arguments and test their hypotheses. There are various ways to collect data such as through visual observation, interviews, surveys, and textual interpretation. The researcher will need to be sensitive with the data and be ethical in their methods of collection. These points will help them to prove or argue a hypothesis (Hahn, 2020). Byman (2014) indicates that certain factors influence a researcher’s choice within their data collection. These factors include the commitment to the expectations of the reader and certain methods used. Within this study there is a multi-method approach that is a qualitative method of data collection. These include interviews, observations, and document review. By combining these methods, a robust investigation can be carried out.

4.6.1 Interviews

Interviewing is a form of primary research for a case study. In depth interviews are a lot more intimate than a questionnaire or survey. The questions are tailored to the individuals about their specific roles within the organisation. The participant has a greater opportunity to answer the questions and has more freedom with their responses. There needs to be order in the way questions are asked. This is down to the strategic planning that should be done before the interview happens. It should also be noted that the researcher should withhold from interrupting the participant as the questions are open ended and it allows them to not lose their train of thought. The sample size is normally kept quite small in order for the informants to be selected

for a purpose. The interview questions and finding can both be quantitative and qualitative depending on the nature and objective of the question (Walle, 2015). According to Bechky (2016) interviews are used as an external source of research. This can have a number of purposes such as having a wider range of subjects to interview, have no influence on the question being asked or having large history and experiences within the industry that they can draw upon to form a useful answer that will help with the analysis.

There are certain skills that ensure that the interview is successful. These include language and social skills. All parties who take part in an interview need to be able to communicate effectively and have the experiences to back it up. The comprehension of the interview is the most important part as it leads to the analysis for the case study and has the foundation of the research (Dilley, 2004). Ensuring that the researcher is prepared for an interview is the most important thing. If they are not prepared the opportunity to get the answers that are vital for the research paper may not be translated through the informant's response. When they are organising the interview, the researcher must look at the question in order to ensure that the valuable questions are asked rather than the basic unnecessary questions. It is important to note the order of the questions.

The researchers should wait to ask questions involving sensitive topics till a rapport is built. This will ensure a positive relationship that the informant has trust and confidence in the person they share sensitive data with. There are a number of different phases during the interview process. The first is the preliminary phase. During this phase, goals should be shared with the participant and the topic should be discussed. For example, wanting answers strictly on the company's progression over the last five years or in relation to the growth within the organisation. This will use the various experiences of the informant as they need to use their own knowledge of the company during their employment in the designated business. The background should be taken into account when choosing a subject to interview and their job description should be known, for example if they were the head of the Marketing Department (Bechky, 2016).

With regards to this study, the interview questions were created based on the literature review and the objectives of the research. It was organised in a way that a rapport would be created at the beginning of the interview and the informant would give a brief background about their role within the organisation. The questions that were asked would be phrased to ensure that there were no leading questions. This ensured that answers were elaborated on and there were

no short answers. One of the benefits of the interviews that were being conducted, is that there is a sense of engagement in real time.

Being prepared for the interview allows for more observation and listening time. Each interview lasted 40 minutes to ensure sufficient time for answers behind the company's growth and development into various markets. The informants were given a brief rationale behind the study and it was explained why their participation was of value. This also provided an opportunity to explain the answers that were required and the direction in which the interview would follow. The participants were reassured of the ethical obligations that were in place and that their confidentiality would be kept within their responses. Handwritten notes were taken throughout the interview alongside a recording. This allowed for an analysis of the transcription of the audio post interview.

4.6.2 Observations

According to Plonski (2003), the observations of the participants are one of the original methods for qualitative research. It is important to do this in a particular setting rather than in an external setting. By observing an informant, it helps to overcome barriers such as language and cultures that will make interviews difficult. Through observation a rapport can be created and as the meeting continues it can be important to note the body language of the participants to ensure that they are comfortable with the subject title. A direct observation was completed within the chosen case study business over a week. This included observing the operations of supplies coming through goods inwards and the engagement from the sales representative in how they contact customers and organise shipments to the customer in a timely manner. It also gave a good insight into the quick paced working environment that is growing even though they have had a number of issues with supply chain as a result of Brexit. The key aspects were observed in order to get an insight into the day-to-day operations and listen to the key issues they face in real time. These include the action and attitudes of the employees and the engagement from the management team.

4.6.3 Document review

Stake (1995) states that the documents that are used during a research activity cannot be directly observed. This is a secondary source of research. The researcher will use documents from the past and evaluate whether they are relevant to the case study. A number of documents were accessed in order to get a better understanding of the market and the strategies that businesses

use in today's environment. Surveys relating to the topic of growth have been created by a number of different researchers about the topic of growth. These allowed for a greater insight into the current market environment. The data collected for documentation allows for an evaluation and provides value and insight into how different companies have grown and what methods have been successful.

4.7 Research Sample

According to the reference & Research Book News (2009) the purposive sampling technique is one of the most popular methods for research. It employs a non- probability sample for convenience. It has been argued that the sampling approaches do not need to be driven by the trends and theories as they need to evolve throughout the process of research. It is important when a researcher is searching for a sampling method, they look at the macro selection such as the societies and the countries, as well as the micro selection (Adebayo and Ackers, 2021). Saunders et al (2015) explains that sampling is carried out in stages. There are two separate stages that require the recruitment within the case study company as well as the participants who partake in the interviews. The two key factors that led the choice within the company of choice for the case study include the access to the relevant participants within the interview. This helps for the business to be well represented and offer the most information about their operations and growth to the researcher. This also allows them to claim the strategic focus that they use for the growth and development through expansion. It is believed that variety is vital for research sampling to take place as it helps the researcher to maximise the learning opportunities from the data that collected from the sample size.

4.7.1 Sample Size

Researchers can find it challenging to collect enough data to help prove their hypothesis. This is normally due to the sample size of the group. In regard to the research being done it can be challenging to find the suitable candidates to interview and the sample size may be too small. However, if the researcher narrows the number of participants in the interviews, they may find it difficult to answer the research question and hypothesis (Van de Schoot and Miocevic, 2020). By doing research on a smaller sample size, it offered more opportunities to pay more attention to the individual and the data that is being collected. This helped to collect more accurate results (Hogan, Dolan, and Donnelly, 2009). The sample size used in this research project were chosen based on their status within the organisation and the experience they had with the expansion

process. As it is a small to medium sized enterprise all participants are at a supervisory level to ensure a vast amount of knowledge.

Table 2. Interview participants

Participant	Role	Relation to topic
1	Warehouse manager	They deliver to the areas and have insight knowledge
2	Supply chain manager	Knows the supply chain management
3	Sales manager	Have hands on experience with the customers and the areas they operate within
4	Accounts manager	Has the figures for the growth
5	Marketing manager	Has to target the new managers
6	Representative from company in Belfast	Is a representative of the company that was taken over
7	Financial controller	Has insight into further plans

4.8 Data Analysis

According to Saunders et al. (2012) The data analysis is how the researcher makes sense of the data that is collected and analyse the findings to help answer the research question. This will look at the objectives and relevance the data has. The qualitative data is often known to have more complexity as it is not standardised. Therefore, it requires more time to analyse the data. It is a lot more intense as the researcher needs to interview, transcribe, categorise, codify reoccurring themes, and summarise the insights into the organisation (Gibbs, 2018).

4.8.1 Case study analysis

Range (2021) explains that a case study as a methodology analyses the data over a certain period of time. With the data collected from a case study analysis, the researcher will obtain knowledge on the company and present a clear observation in a report based on their findings. The researcher’s goal is to investigate in a real-life context and form a report on the operations or in the case of this paper, the growth strategies used for expansion. It is important for the data collector to use a level of amiability in order to build a rapport with the subject. This will then lead to discretion when completing a case study analysis as it will add a sense of meaningfulness to the report.

Yin (2003) explains the relevant tools that are needed to complete a data analysis. These tools include pattern matching, they look at and compare the trends and themes that appear during the research. According to Corbin and Strauss (2007) this method evaluated the development of ideas that are relevant for further development for the case study analysis. Another tool for completing a data analysis is identifying the themes and referring to the findings with relevance to the literature. This provides a clearance between the theory and the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). According to Namey et al. (2016) A thematic analysis is extremely common while a researcher forms a data analysis for qualitative research. The data collected from this study will be analysed by using the thematic approach. The patterns and trends will be identified for an accurate interpretation of the data collected. The literature review will be analysed against the observations and data from the interviews. This will help to explore the commonalities and the discrepancies within the organisation.

The research onion also uses the cross-sectional analysis, it allows the researcher to investigate the various department within the organisation (Melnikovas, 2018). Each interview was recorded on a phone and the recording was transferred to Dropbox. They were later transcribed and analysed. This allowed for a comparison on the recurring themes that were evident. The case study business is kept anonymous; thus, the interviewees names are kept anonymised while the roles are being used. An observation was also completed over a 2-day period. The researcher completed these findings. A document analysis has also been completed in relation to the literature and the documentation within the business. This has helped to analyse the validity of the case.

4.9 Ethical Considerations

The ethical consideration is vital for any research methodology. It is especially important within a qualitative study as it uses human subjects. As the research is more in depth the ethics around how the data is collected a more sensitive approach needs to be taken (Arifin, 2018). According to Newman, Guta and Black (2021) consent is one of the most important methods a researcher can use as a recognised ethical consideration. Consent is an opportunity for the researcher to interact with the participant and advise them on the relevant topics for the research paper.

Collis and Hussey (2008) state that data privacy is a vital principle that helps to protect the identity of the participants. In this research the business used for the case study and the individuals interviewed within the organisation is anonymised. Job titles will be used instead of names as there was no ethical concerns. This method still allows for openness and offers valuable insights into the organisation and the operations. The participants volunteered for the interviews and there were no incentives. This helps to reduce the risk of the participants being biased.

Participants were made aware of the confidentiality of their identity during the data collection. This involved offering them an option to access and withdraw their statements from the study. They can also request a copy of the interview and approve their statements. The participant was required to give consent to be audio recorded and for this data to be used within the study. A written consent form was given to each participants explaining the data storage and their rights to have the data removed from the study prior to the interviewing happening. The interview questions were sent to the participants before the interview and there was no issue answering the questions. Prior to the interview the study was explained to the participants, and they were fully briefed on the topic of growth and expansion that they needed to cover in their answers. The interviewer then practiced interview techniques such as active listening and note taking in order to make sure the interview was comfortable for both the researcher and the participant.

All the data retrieved in this study was kept in a password protected folder on Dropbox. This also required a login to access the files. All the interviews were transferred to this secure folder once they were completed. They were also permanently removed from the recording device after a transcription of the data was completed. If the participants requested a copy of the recording or transcription, they were sent via email. All GDPR regulations were followed throughout the study and with the data collection. This is relevant to the processing of the data that was received and the storage of the information about the interviewee (Amaral et al., 2021).

4.10 Research limitations

Yin (2014) states that a case study restricts the systematic procedures and lacks the subjective nature and the value of the opinions with regards to the factual information. This then raises the question about how credible the study is. The study also may lack a sense of generalisation. The data is only relevant to the case study that is being analysed (Holloway and Galvin, 2017).

However, some researchers like Crouch and McKenzie (2006) have stated that due to the nature of a case study analysis, the above statements do not apply. A case study analysis interprets a more explorative approach to a research paper. This offers a more positive outlook on a qualitative data collection and a case study analysis (Flyvberg, 2006). The research completed on the Irish SME is considered a possible representation on how successful the company is at expanding into new markets such as offering new products and expanding into other countries. With regards to the data collection for this analysis, ethical considerations were in place to ensure a successful single case study approach. Even though the sample size was small, the in-depth interviews targeted the correct people within the organisation, who can explain the recent growth they have experienced, and the future outlook anticipated for the company. The interviews that were conducted were lengthy. Then these interviews were transcribed in order for an effective analysis to be carried out even if it was a long process (Bryman and Bell, 2017).

4.10.1 Research quality

The research quality is an ongoing challenge for researchers as there are no pre-defined measures on how to complete a qualitative methodology (Stewart et al., 2021). Lindgreen, Di Benedetto and Brodie (2021) indicate that there is a traditional way in which a researcher can value the quality of the data collected throughout the study. This is through the concepts of reliability and validity. These help to enhance the overall quality of the research and the value of the data.

According to Neuman (2014) reliability is the consistency and or dependability of a variable that is measured based on research. This means that the research procedures are replicated throughout the study using similar conditions in order to produce the same result. Within this study, controls were used in order to have reliability within the research and the data collected. A control is when there are two subjects who are similar however, they test whether the information is valid from each other. There should be similarities to ensure effective data collection (Malay and Chung, 2013). This data collection reliability includes the important Case study Protocol as well as a guide for interviewing. This includes the questions that were created, they were sectioned into groups based on the key objectives of the research being completed.

According to Pervan and Maimbo (2005) validity is the concept that ensure confidence in the research carried out. It represents the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation of the data collected against the reality of the study. The Validity is when an evaluation is based on an accumulation of the evidence gathers throughout the research. It provides reassurance that the data collected is measured effectively and will be able to draw realistic conclusions based on the growth and expansion of the organisation (Reliability and Validity of International Large-Scale Assessment, 2020). The various data collection methods form a triangulation of how research should be gathered and the information in a case study analysis. The findings support the researcher's accurate interpretation of the information. There is internal validity where the research is done primary such as with interviews or there is external validity. This is where the data is found as a secondary form of research (Wagemaker, 2020).

It is important for a researcher to be aware of the various limitations involved with a case study analysis and the possible issues with the reliability and validity of the data that is collected. This will then help to reduce the possibility of false or inessential information in the research paper. The stated limitation offers an opportunity to further research and discuss the topic to ensure valid and accurate information is used as the results of a research paper.

4.11 Conclusions

The aim of the methodology chapter has been to set out the research being completed and justify the rationale for a case study analysis. It assisted with the design and sources with the data. Semi- structured in-depth interviews, observations and documentation review are the three forms in how the data was collected. Qualitative research has been completed in order to collect and interpretate the data for the case study research. This primary source of research is subjective as it draws conclusions based on an inductive approach. The data collected is stored in a secure environment and the participants can have access or ask for information to be removed at any time. This correlates with the GDPR regulations. The main method for data collection was done through interviews, there were 7 participants who offered insight into the expansion of the company. The limitations of this case study were also explored and discussed. The data collected based on the methodology will be analysed and discussed in the following two chapters findings and discussion.

Chapter 5. Findings

5.1 Introduction

Included in this chapter is the data collected and summarised for the case study. The sources included are interview quotes, documentations from the organisation, and observations made within the organisation. This has allowed for themes that are recurring to be identified. These themes allowed for an investigation into the research objectives, thus helping to illustrate the key findings. The individuals who participated in the interviews will be referred to by their job titles in order to protect their identities. The key theme within the expansion process for the business include mergers and acquisitions.

The case study company is Irelands largest catering supply organisation that trade within the Irish and UK market. They mainly operate within the hospitality industry. They are a SME who have been in operation since the 1940's. They focus on their customer value and offering high quality products to their customers. They are competitive within the industry especially when it comes to pricing. They offer next day delivery to all customers as they maintain a high presence on the competitive market.

5.2 Objective 1

Analyse the current challenges faced by an Irish company within the hospitality sector.

In each interview the participants were asked about the challenges that face the organisation as they develop and progress into new markets. Some themes emerged from the participants' responses that identified the challenges that the organisation faces. The themes are rising costs, external factors, and supply chain.

5.2.1 Theme 1 – rising costs

Due to externalities the prices have risen drastically over recent years. This has led to an increase in the cost price of the products and has presented challenges for the financial situation as their expenses have had to increase. A business regularly looks to regulate their expenses by sourcing from other suppliers however, this large increase is affecting all businesses and suppliers. It is challenging to source products for a cheaper price.

The sales manager of the company has said that:

“Our ceramic manufacturers have put up their prices between 20 to 30%, our paper cost has put up prices by nearly 50% and then we have to pass that cost onto the customer. It is a massive challenge for us at the moment, but we are actually dealing with it ok at the moment. The actual purchasing of the goods is a bigger challenge. The cost of transport has trebled. A cost of a container from China pre Covid would cost 3-4 thousand US dollar its now nearly costing twenty thousand dollars. Fortunately, that cost is now included in our cost price which we now have to offload onto the customer.”

These are large increases on the business that have resulted in inflation on the price of the products that the customer will need to pay. Especially with the paper prices that have gone up by nearly 50%. The company has to endure this price as their supply chain manager stated that *“the top sellers would be our disposables due to the pandemic.”* This would impact heavily on the economic prices as this company’s sales are from business to business. As a result, in this their customers will have to offset the price increase, as they have to increase the prices of the products they sell to the general public. For example, the Case study business sells disposable coffee cups to a coffee shop who will increase their prices to balance the increase in the product cost onto the customer who buys their coffee.

According to the financial controller the working capital is a big challenge as there is a small margin of profits as a result of the higher cost prices. *“The biggest challenge within the business is the working capital. This business is working capital intensive which means when you grow you do not generate a huge amount of free cash flow.”*

The Finance manager agreed that the rising cost have been a challenge for the company. The materials and supplies have been one of the big expenses, however, she also says that the overheads such as wages and buildings are a large rising cost, as they need to pay more employees that they have taken on due to the expansion, as well as the premises cost for the new business expansions, such as the new shop in Dublin city Centre and the buildings in Northern Ireland and in Hull. So not only are the product prices increasing, there are other expenses that have grown as a result of the expansion.

“Well obviously wages would be a big cost for the company along with materials such as the items you want to sell along with the overheads and buildings that have all increased in prices”

5.2.2 Theme 2 – external factors

There are many external factors that have posed a challenge for the organisation. These can be caused by large economic changes and factors that have affected other companies, thus making the supply chain or the expansion into that country difficult. The main factor that affected this company has been Brexit, Covid and the war in Ukraine.

Brexit has presented a large challenge as the company use the UK as their main suppliers. There is a longer delay on the products as they had to go through customs. This has also become a more costly method due to the taxes involved with the UK leaving the EU.

The warehouse manager explained the challenges that Brexit customs have caused with delays and the holdings that cause a disturbance in their operations.

“Well, the restrictions we face at the moment are obviously because of Brexit and tax customs and stuff like that. In general, before Brexit, we used to get pallets from UK, the pallets would normally have come in and maybe gone to a hollered nearby and it would have hit us basically next day. The problem now is with paperwork and everything else that it could hit one of the depots on Monday. With paperwork customs clearance and all may not clear till Thursday so that affects us. If customs do not clear it that creates its own challenges, because you never really know what is going to happen until you see the stuff coming into good inwards. You get hit with a lot of stuff and you have to work on that basis that you are going to get like one hundred orders very shortly.”

The supply chain manager agreed that Brexit is causing an issue with the supply chain saying that *“it takes longer it's more expensive to get containers the container prices have like tripled or quadrupled in the last 18 months from the UK again with Brexit, we bring majority of our stuff in through Northern Ireland because we have a base up there”*. This shows the added costs as a result of Brexit effecting the supply chain.

Covid 19 was also an unprecedented issue that the business found challenging. The supply chain manager talked about how busy the organization has been. During the pandemic, their sales declined slowly, however, since the hospitality sector opened back up after lockdown., they have been really busy.

“We're back to pre-covid sales with the amount of goods we have coming in, the goods that we have going out. We have twice as much coming in and we have twice or three times what is going out.”

This statement indicates that the sales declined quite a bit as the hospitality sector was closed and now it can be challenging to keep up with the progression. This is one of the main reasons why they will need to expand further. The Sales manager also commented on the pandemic affects saying *“covid was the biggest challenge this company has ever experienced.”* He explained the major effect on the output that Covid effected. *“We dropped from 100 percent of activity down to about 20% during Covid. It was a wipe out we were all not made redundant but not far off it was horrific.”* This is a major decrease that cause a number of uncertainties within the company. However, they have been able to come back from this large challenge and grow exponentially.

The final external factor that poses a challenge for the company is the war on Ukraine. Ukraine has the largest paper dispensary within Europe, however, with the war, it is not in operation. This results in an issue with the supplies needed. According to the sales representative *“The supply chain is knackered for variety of new reason for example Ukraine. The largest paper mills in Europe are in Ukraine and then we have the whole energy crisis our ceramic manufacturers have put up their prices between 20 to 30%, our paper have put up prices nearly 50%”*. This results in the in a large supply chain issue and the large cost increases on the business as they need to source products from another supplier.

5.3 Objective 2

Assess the existing development growth strategies currently used by the chosen case study.

The participants were asked about the growth and expansion within the company. They have discussed the various methods that the company has used to grow. There have been three main themes. These include mergers and acquisitions, customer first, and system updates.

5.3.1 Theme 1 – Merger and acquisitions

The largest way the company has grown is by acquiring two more companies, these sell similar products. They also took over a refrigeration company. This has given them new markets to operate within. They adapted to the challenges that the company faced with the external factors,

such as Brexit. They took over two companies that combat the custom taxes issues and the long delays for supplies.

The warehouse manager explained how the company has acquired a place in Hull in the UK. This helped them to combat ongoing customs issues as a result of Brexit. They used to use a delivery company to supply customers in the UK. However, now they send it to the premises in the UK. This takeover has vastly helped the company combat the Brexit crisis as they have a link into the UK.

“They acquired a place in Hull as they wanted to grow the business over there before the pandemic, I think one guy over there runs that. That is given us an opportunity if we need to send stock over to the UK. With the way Brexit is with paperwork, customs, tax and exercise we can send it to him and then he then disperses it around the UK.”

The supply chain manager agreed that taking over the company in Hull has helped to source stock and make the supply chain more effective. She said that *“Hull are looking after our UK customers. We used to do that from here. We can also ship to Hull so if any of our suppliers will take three weeks to get to us or allow us to collect, we can ship to Hull, and Hull can ship them direct to us. That makes it a bit quicker and a bit cheaper for us as well.”* She also explained that the company has taken over a place in Northern Ireland and a shop in Dublin city center. *“We have a huge network of customers up in Northern Ireland even prior to taking on the company in Northern Ireland, so when they bought that company they had extra customers, it was handy to have a base up there too, we also have a shop in Dublin city Centre that we can sell to.”*

According to the Sales manager the refrigeration company offered a new area for the company to branch into.

“The most recent takeover was the refrigeration company; they are a small business. How we buy our stock, we buy the name and we then entered up to our business. They run independent of our business, but we use their experience and their knowledge, and the two guys will help our sales team to sell more equipment.”

He also spoke about the reasons behind taking over the company in Northern Ireland. It offered them a way to grow into a nearby market and expand their customer base. He explained that

“prior to the Belfast company, an acquisition that we made and that basically gave us a footprint in Northern Ireland, we already had three salespeople there this now gave us the showroom distribution area, growing business so we go off the back of that. The Belfast company sell what they were not selling before such as crockery, chemicals guests supplies and that type of stuff.”

These interviews gave great in-depth knowledge about the mergers and acquisitions over the past five years. The case study business in total, acquired two catering supply companies, one refrigeration company and a shop in Dublin to sell to the general public. When asked all the participants said that these projects had been *“in the pipeline for a few years”* signaling that these mergers and takeovers were planned

5.3.2 Theme 2 – customers first

The company put the customer first and attempt to overcome the challenges to get the products out to the customer on time. As the financial controller explained, they mainly operate as a business-to-business company. They have branched out to selling to the general public through a shop in Dublin, however, this is a very minimal part of the business.

According to the Warehouse manager, they try to give the best service that they possibly can. He gave the example that *“you might have a customer that wants something in the late afternoon, so the challenge is can you get a driver back from the city Centre, if this is not possible, we use Courier service. so, you always have to have a backup plan”* By having a plan and a backup plan it allows for the organization to get the products to the customer within a timely manner. This is how the business ensures customer retention. They plan as much as they can for last minute orders while also having cut off points for orders as they know they cannot deliver to the customer on time. To offer a good customer service he says that some areas have *“put in restrictions as times for deliveries so your knowledge in Dublin is the main thing the volume of stuff is the owner and then people's perception.”* The pedestrian streets in Dublin close at eleven am. They need to ensure that the product gets to the customer before this. This causes a challenge, the company know their limitations for deliveries, they also know what resources they can count on to get the products out on time and to the customer before the streets close.

Along with focusing on the customer, the supply chain manager explains that the acquired company in Belfast *“look after their own kind of, they have their own customer network and then obviously if they have stuff that we don't that we have to wait for a week while they can send orders from their premises.”* Due to the large customer base up in Northern Ireland having the company run separately allows for the products to get delivered faster, they do not have to wait on the products to come from the parent company. This speeds up the process and puts the customers' needs first as they can provide a better service.

The financial controller talked about the buying habits of the customers and shared that *“say customer wants this and said that you deal with their buying patterns, there are no big shifts in the market in terms of like and the type of product range. We have seen no fundamental change in customers buying habits, so we do not need to worry about things that for now.”* The buying patterns have not changed massively over the past few years. This allows for the company to keep the same product line and continue their operations and the dispersion of products as they customers are returning and remaining loyal towards their company. This can be seen across all the acquired companies as the organization has acquired their customers as well. They have become one of the market leading organization due to their size as well as their large customer base due to their focus on putting the consumer first.

5.3.3 Theme 3 – system updates

The systems that the company uses have been evolving over time. Technology is always changing and after the company acquired the various organisations, they needed to have an effective system in to help with the growth and expansion that they are using. This helps to ensure that the operation across at the companies are similar in case stock or employees need to be transferred.

The warehouse manager talked about the systems that are in place to help manage the products going in and out. This helps manage the success and the growth as the productivity increases as a result of the growth and expansion. *“Stock controlling, we use basically two systems here and one is called GP and then what happens is we basically check it on and go too much force, so we have a building system for pallets as well as cartons”* This shows that the organization controls the stock and the product turn over levels using two systems one is a technological method and the other is a manual method.

The second method *“when we're doing stock take we can generally close for 2-3 days which is very hard in an environment where you're trying to keep open, but in general at the moment we are in the middle of the sub count where we are actually functioning, I'm trying to stay very customers focused and at the moment we literally put 2-3 lads onto it when we have time to do it and if we don't we just pull them off to do orders and check in stock at the same time”*. This shows that they have had to adapt the stock taking method and system as they have grown. They used to close the business for a few days however, due to the fast pace and the rate of stock turn over they need to do it a lot more frequently. This results in the employees' picking orders as well as managing the stock levels of the products that they select. This is the first substantial change to help manage with the growing success of the business.

According to the financial controller, to value the expansion and plan for the growth they do not use external systems. It is all done internally. *“It would be very much internal with the systems that we use. We never really source that stuff external because, whenever you try to send it to consultants, they charge a lot of money and for you to basically answer the question.”* They have enough resources within the company to manage the systems and alter them without any guidance. They would source the programs or operations themselves instead of going through an external party. This cuts the cost the system and operations development. He also spoke about the systems in place and the possibility of expanding the packs to use different languages instead of English. Even though at the moment they are still expanding into other English-speaking countries such as the UK they know that they can alter the software to expand even more into for example the German or the French market.

“Obviously we're focused on our plans folks in the UK market because we think you know we could be the same size there again, switching to a non-English speaking language market would take a lot more planning, it would probably take about three years to plan even just stand for the fact that most of the systems that we have are like in English language, it does have a Spanish language pack up pack options and also French and all that stuff.”

5.4 Objective 3

Identify the most appropriate growth strategies to allow the company to develop in the medium to long term.

It is always important for a business to plan for the future. This will ensure that the company maintains the cashflow and is successful. It is also vital for the company to expand through

various methods. During the interviews, three themes emerged for the future of the business. The themes include mergers and acquisitions, systems and operations, and expand product and customer base.

5.4.1 Theme 1 – Mergers and Acquisitions

All participants (100%) stated that the company has had a number of successful mergers and acquisitions over the past five years. The warehouse manager believes that the company would acquire a premises on the west coast of Ireland in the future, in order to combat the large increase in sales. It will also make the product distribution more effective. This will combat the challenges that the organisation faces in shipping to their customers in the west of Ireland, especially with the delays that the supply chain is suffering with. By having stock in a new premises, they can increase their stock levels to ensure that the customer receives the product in a timely manner with less transport costs. *“I can see maybe an expansion dealt out that you open up the place down there to supply all the West Coast it made sense to do that both challenges with that as well.”*

The Stock controller agreed that the company will need a new warehouse with how the productivity within the business exploded recently. She said, *“to be fair we need a bigger warehouse if we do, we definitely need a bigger warehouse for some more stuff.”* This will help to supply more customers within the operation areas. If they also buy more warehouse there is an option for more storage, thus they can buy more products and use the economy of scale method. By doing this they will have the stock on hand allowing them to reduce the timing issues in the supply chain as they have the space to maintain healthy stock.

The financial controller explained how the company may acquire a few more companies within the next few years to help them grow in the UK market though this will involve growing the sales team to reach the customers. He says, *“you would hope that we had made you know a couple of acquisitions regionally.”* The acquisitions that will be made are likely to be within Ireland to combat the growing supply demand. They may open more places in the UK as they grow and break into the market. As they continue to grow, they will be more likely to grow further. This shows that one of the main focuses on the growth is expanding within the UK market and exploring options on how to grow a larger base to transport and disperse the products.

5.4.2 Theme 2 - Expand the system and operations

The supply chain Manager says the company will expand internally within the next few years. This will be done through new employees who will bring a whole new skill set that will drive the company forward. *“This year we've got more stuff and especially in the warehouse there will be probably I say an extra 6 to 8 people, this will grow even more as the company grows in the future”.*

According to the sales Manager the company has grown vastly since they changed ownership back in 2006. They were a small Irish based company who are now turning over substantial amounts. As they continue to expand into the UK market it could almost double the turnover. *“I think this year we are targeted to sell about 24 million, to give you a little idea when we were brought over in 2006 the concrete turnover about six and a half seven, so we trebled the size of the business as you grow, I expect it to be doing between 30 to 33 million in the year, if we break the UK it could be doing 50 million”.* This shows the power behind the UK market and how successful the business can be by growing and expand in the relatively new market. The stock controller agreed with this. The overall estimation of the business's turnover within the next five years an increase of fifty percent of the current turnover. He said, *“like you would hope that in five years' time and the company would have risen by probably 50%, at the moment this year the company's probably going to turn over 23 million you would hope that it would be 31- 32”* These two comments show how the company will grow over the five years through the turn over. This is down to the productivity increase and expanding their operations.

The representative from the company in Belfast explained that the IT systems will be updated in the future to help combat the growing demand and pressure on the already existing systems. This will then help to gain more insight into the market and allow the company to offer a better service to the customer, especially with their stock control systems and computer software's to assist the employees such as the accounts department and the purchasing department. This will ensure that the workload is not magnified as they grow. As the world is growing more technologically, they can avail of the many different software's to ensure that the operations and production are running effectively. *“They are also looking at a new website, I know there is a few other projects in the pipeline in terms of IT and operation as the company try to improve systems.”*

5.4.3 Theme 3 – expand the products supplied and the customer base

According to the supply chain Manager, the company would need to purchase more premises in order to expand the product range and geographical areas in order to reach more customers. *“we've already two bases at Dublin and one in the UK yeah the premises they definitely would need another warehouse another premises that we were to get much bigger than what we already are.”* This will allow for a greater product range and expansion of the customer base and operating closer to their target market. For example, their acquisition in Northern Ireland allowed them to be closer to their customer base who have become a large part of the business. The supply chain manager also said that *“the products we get are very good quality, we are gaining more new customers as we go along. I do say we will definitely grow and get bigger as a company.”* This is important as the company grow into new markets. As mentioned previously they have taken over a refrigeration company so that provides access to a whole new market of customers. As they grow even more into the UK market, they will gain a larger customer base. The company has gotten busier in the past year and have noticed that they have gained new loyal customers. They will continue with this growth.

According to the financial controller the *“UK will hopefully have a sales team of like maybe six or seven people over there and that Ireland is basically doing sort of like more of the same.”* This shows the company may acquire more premises however, their main strategy will be to gain a strong sales team in order to grow their customer base. This will also help to expand the product line as the sales team interact with the customers. Thus, bringing back the information and help implement the product production based on the customer interaction.

According to the ecommerce and marketing manager within the next five years the main focus of the business will be on the UK market and their customers. *“I would say the majority of our growth in the next five years will probably be in the UK as we break into the market because we have that warehouse in Hull and we're now able to service the UK in a more efficient and effective manner and because the industry is so big over there and there's so much room for opportunity over there than there is here”.* It is less likely that they will expand into other countries for the time being as they put all their resources into developing their market presence on the UK market as they continue to expand and develop.

These have been the three main themes that became evident throughout the interviews. It is clear that the company could acquire more premises to manage their ongoing growth particularly in Ireland, they will also be focusing on the customer base within the UK market as they try to break through the barriers as well as developing the systems and operations to assist with their thriving success.

5.5 Summary

The participants provided a valuable insight into the expansion process within the organization. There were many different sources between interviews, and document review. Each source of data offers a perspective on growth strategies. A number of themes emerge after collecting the data. These were then analyzed to fulfill the main three objectives. The importance of the company's growth strategies are highlighted using the data collected. There are a number of challenges involved within the hospitality industry that will hinder the company's growth such as rising costs and external factors. Some themes that emerged to back up some of the strategies mentioned in the literature. These themes include mergers and acquisitions, updated systems, and the business focusing on their customer satisfaction. The following discussion determines the relationship between the existing literature and the data collected from the findings.

Chapter 6. Discussion

After analyzing the various aspects of this study, the results allow for an enriched debate and allow for the company to look at the various growth strategies they can use. The literature debates the various strategies that are in place in the business world, by using the Uppsala method, growing organically or inorganically, and using the three R's growth strategies. The literature and the findings will be compared. The current strategy the company uses for the growth expansion includes mergers and acquisitions as well as expanding their customer base. The case study company has expanded geographically in order to reach a wider target market. There is no single strategy that the business will use in order to grow and expand, they would use points from various growth strategies in order to expand their business and customer base. The interviews completed have been useful in analyzing the findings in regard to the company's expansion in recent years. The overall research question is 'What are the most appropriate growth strategies for an Irish based SME post Brexit'? There have been three main objectives used to answer this question. The following section allows for the research within the literature review and the findings to be related to each other in order to discover the company's use of growth strategies. The first objective within the project was an analysis of the current challenges the company faces. The two main themes include the rising costs and external factors.

6.1 Rising costs

Two main challenges have emerged when discussing the company's operations during the interviews. The first one is the rising costs that the business has incurred. As the world has changed, the supply chain has caused a large increase in expenses for the business. According to Caden (2022) businesses are suffering with the high inflation rates on various expenses such as labour, fuel, and transport. These rising costs have been unprecedented and are heavily affecting SMEs within Ireland. This can be seen in the findings from the case study organisation. The Sales Manager and the Supply Chain Manager discuss the prices of transport that have increased, the supply chain is also struggling with delays. They outlined that the ceramic production costs have increased by 20% and the paper manufacturer has increased by 50%. These large increases have been put on to the businesses, resulting in the cost of supplies rising.

The company needs to combat the rising costs that they are subjected to, as a result the business has had to increase the product prices for their customers. The company has been subjected to expenses such as wages and overheads. These increases are the result of the economic factors that occur outside of the business, for example, the cost of living globally has drastically increased, this has caused the businesses to increase their employees' wages in order to provide a better standard of living (Lufkin, 2022). Nueman (1975) discusses how inflation and economic issues such as recessions cause an increase in overhead costs. It is discussed that most large overheads are the first ones to be cut, however, the reductions are normally restored after the economic state returns to normal.

The large overhead prices can be seen within the business. The Finance Manager states that the wages and overheads are the largest expense for the business. There have been even more increases in the wages and overheads as the organisation has had to employ more staff to combat the large increase in production and the overheads are increased due to the acquisitions of the premises thus increasing the electricity and relevant overheads from having additional spaces. Within the business world there is a larger increase in the rising costs as a result of inflation. Some companies have seen increases of 20% on all costs including wages, overheads or supplies. This can be clearly seen within the case study organisation (Fox, 2022).

6.2 External factors

As discussed, inflation is one of the biggest challenges faced by companies. However, there are many external factors that have caused an issue for business such as the pandemic and the war within Ukraine (RTE, 2022).

Sibley (2020) discusses the impact Covid-19 had on the Irish SMES. Many have endured financial hardship due to the severe uncertainties. Even though the lockdowns have ended, companies are still dealing with the aftermath such as supply chain issues and stronger demands. This can be seen clearly within the organisation as the sales manager discusses the impact Covid-19 had on the operations. Productivity dropped by about 80% during the pandemic. The workforce struggled during the lockdowns as they operated on a rotation basis to ensure they did not make their employees redundant. It was an unforeseen factor that the organisation could not organise for. It happened very quickly with the company having to adapt hastily in order to maintain operations. However, even though Covid was one big challenge, the operations have been able to return to full capacity. The supply chain Manager shared that

the sales are back to what they were pre Covid. The company has even developed their operations as they have been able to double their production after the lockdowns stopped. People began to socialise and travel. This has resulted in the hospitality sector growing, resulting in more production from the chosen case study company.

Another external factor that has impacted SMEs has been the affect Brexit has had on the supply chain. According to Howell (2021) there has been an issue for SMEs as they attempt to combat the impact that Brexit has had. The first is that 62% of Irish SMES believe that they will not preform to the same levels as they did pre-Brexit. Trading is set to reduce; however, some businesses are using it as an opportunity to expand. The CSO (2021) office has published a report stating the 20% decline in the sales to business customers, 38% difficulty for SMES using the UK for supplies and just over 40% for an increase in prices as a result of Brexit. This can be seen within the case study as they have struggled to source items from the UK due to the delays. The Warehouse Manager has explained how Brexit has created a large delay in the supplies. They could be waiting over a week for the shipments while pre-Brexit it would be about two days. This delay has caused a number of issues as they try to maintain customer satisfaction. The supply chain manager also explains how the price for a container has tripled in the past 18 months. This has caused an extra cost for the business, and they may need to source their items from other areas to reduce the cost and the delays that Brexit has created.

The final external factor that causes a challenge is the war in Ukraine. The war has created a number of challenges for Irish SMEs including petrol prices for deliveries, barriers to markets and supply chain disruptions. Ukraine used to be one of the countries that would have many manufacturing plants that would supply Irish companies. However, due to the war many manufacturers have fled therefore, there are a small amounts of supplies coming from Ukraine (Noble, 2022). This is evident within this case study, according to the Sales Manager, Ukraine manufactured the paper used for the disposables they sell. However, with the war they have had to source the products from another supplier. This has posed a massive challenge for the company as they battle to ongoing price increase and supply chain issues.

The second objective is an assessment of the existing development of growth strategies currently used by the chosen case study. The three main themes include mergers and acquisitions, customer first and system updates.

6.3 Mergers and acquisitions

One of the largest growth strategies involve take overs and mergers. Katz and Simanek (1997) describes a merger and acquisitions as the primary method of external rapid growth. According to Hyland (2013) this is a form of inorganic growth. By using this rapid form of expansion, a company can benefit by having reduced barriers to entry and offering a new perspective due to the experience and knowledge from the resources of the companies that have been acquired (Business Wire, 2022). However, with the inorganic method it is challenging for a business to calculate the overall success and revenue. As a result, mergers and acquisitions heavily interfere with the businesses cashflows (Chandha, 2022).

The merger and acquisitions can be seen within the chosen case study. In the past 5 years the company has acquired a number of various businesses including premises up in Northern Ireland, in the UK and a shop in Dublin City centre. They also acquired a refrigeration company. This offered a wider product line as they have never worked with the products before. They needed to maintain the staff in the refrigeration company as they had a skill set that the case study company does not have, such as the maintenance and repairs of the products and the installation process. This benefits the operations of the business as they try to navigate the new industry that they expanded within.

They expanded into a more international market as they acquired companies in Northern Ireland and the UK. This has allowed them to combat the challenges that Brexit has imposed on the company as well as expand their market base. This has benefited the company. A number of the employees stated that the acquisitions were planned over a few years as they wanted to grow into a more international market. The various departments within the organisation have been able to measure the success of the mergers and acquisitions. They have been able to calculate the growth and cashflows involved. They have calculated that the growth over the next five years will help improve the cashflows as they expect a growth of 20-50 percent over the next few years.

This shows that the organisation uses the inorganic growth method however, they do not struggle to calculate the cashflows due to the mergers and acquisitions. They have been able to forecast a large growth margin over the past few years. However, they use the inorganic growth method in order to grow vastly and quickly. They have expanded their resources in order to reach a larger customer base and offer various products and services.

6.4 Customers first

A number of growth strategies are used in order to ensure customer satisfaction. When a company focuses on the customer satisfaction and the customer service, they often grow organically as they expand. This is very relevant within this case study as they have a clear plan on the expansion methods that they will use. The supply chain metrics and product quality are also important while growing organically (Hyland, 2013). This can be seen within the case study as they try to ensure a quick supply chain in order to deliver a good service to their customers. They also focus on the supplies that they offer. They provide good quality products even though it may be more expensive however, they ensure that the customers are satisfied with quality. The Warehouse Manager also states that the customer comes first especially when it comes to delivery times and ensuring the supply chain is in full operations.

Another growth strategy that was discussed in the literature that focused on the customers satisfaction is the Robust growth strategy. It is the only one of the three R's strategy that considers that their customers are important in the expansion process. It is a long-term plan that ensures that the investors and owners are heavily involved in the planning process. This ensures that a risk assessment is completed, and the customers focus is at the forefront of it (Rujeerapaiboon, Kuhn and Wiesemann, 2016). The supply chain is heavily considered when using a robust strategy. This will help to ensure that the products are delivered on time and in good condition to the consumer. It has been challenging in recent years as a result of the external factors that are impacting the supply chain and the suppliers. This growth strategy puts a strong emphasis on the customer values and gives them the power within the market (Kippenberger, 1997). This can be seen in the case study organisation as the Supply Chain Manager explains how they acquired a company in Northern Ireland in order to satisfy the customer base they had. They operate separately to allow for the products to be provided the customer in a timely manner thus ensuring customer satisfaction.

The Financial Controller also discusses the buying habits of the customer saying that there have been no big shifts, however, they continue to monitor the industry to ensure that the customers have the products and services that they need. In recent years, the company began to sell more disposable products as that was desired by the customer as well as eco-friendly products. This demonstrates the robust growth strategy as the company continue to provide the correct products and services while monitoring the buying habits to ensure they offer the best products at the right time.

6.5 System update

As a company expands it is important for the systems to correlate with the growth. The hospitality industry operates within the domestic market. This market often offers a more diverse market segmentation. This can be very helpful for the business (Johanson and Vahlne, 2009). Investors prefer businesses who operate within the domestic market as it is a more lucrative industry. The Uppsala model indicates that the organisation operates with limited resources such as systems and experience. This also indicates that the business may have a lack of funds and market presence. However, this does not correspond with the case study as they have many resources that will help them operate within new markets. They do not need to use any external parties to help them expand. In fact the Finance Manager says that the wages are the only external areas that the business uses (Hollensen, 2012).

The case study business is already well established in the market and customers base that they use. They have expanded into the UK market; they already had a number of customers within this new market. They have not had to adapt the systems and operations much to expand. The financial controller explains that they already have the English system in place that will work in the new UK market. This system is also internalised. This indicates that they do not use the Uppsala model.

However, there are many different parts to the Uppsala model. There is a four-step model to help guide an organisation in their expansion (Arvidsson and Aridsson, 2019). Normally an organisation will start with step number one however, the company already had a customer base and systems in place to help with the expansion. They skipped the first three stages as they do not use the external bodies and have the systems in place for customers in the new market to help with the expansion. The company begins to use the final stage which allows for the company to incorporate the subsidiaries and foreign production companies. This allows for

the company to have greater resources that will benefit the overall operations. According to the Warehouse Manager there are systems in place that help the company to expand. This allows the company to advance quickly and have good operations within the new markets. Overall, within this organisation the Uppsala is not used as they only use one stage and have a good market share even though they have recently expanded.

The final objective is to identify the most appropriate growth strategies to allow the company to develop in the medium to long term. The three themes that emerged during this study was mergers and acquisitions, systems and operations, expand product and customer base.

6.6 Mergers and Acquisitions.

If the company continues to grow at the levels that they have been over the past five years, they will need to buy more premises. The operations have doubled, and the warehouse will need more storage. Currently they operate out of the premises in Dublin. There is an opportunity for them to acquire a company either in the south or west of Ireland to serve more products to the customer on the island of Ireland. According to the literature this is a form of inorganic growth. They have done this previously and it has been a successful form of expansion for the company as they acquired a total of 4 businesses. By continuing to grow organically they can continue to acquire business to expand their product line. They could merge with a supplier to develop their own products in the future such as a disposables supplier. This could give them a whole new sector to operate within and expand the knowledge of the organisations. A merger would allow them to continue with their operations while learning about the supplier's industry. The organic model would also benefit them as they can have a maximum sense of control over the business operations; however, this is a slower process. As they have been successful in the past, they should continue with the inorganic methods such as acquiring and merging with other companies.

6.7 Systems and operations

The company had already been trading within the UK market making the expansion accessible to the organisation. However, with the challenges that the business has had to face, particularly with the issues around Brexit the operations will need to change in order to supply products to various areas. In order for the business to do this they will need to acquire more premises. This can fall under inorganic growth. This will then improve the overall operations of the company as they will have more warehouses to store products and reduce the bombardment on their main

premises within Dublin. This will help reduce the stress on the main premises as well as the premises that they acquired in Hull. They could purchase a business in the UK to expand even further (Jaworski and Lurie, 2020).

Another growth strategy that the business could use would be the Uppsala model. As they have a structured operations within the UK market, they may be able to look at expanding into further markets such as non-English speaking countries. In order to do this, they will need to alter their systems to support the different languages such as French, Spanish or German. In order for a further expansion into a more challenging market, the company could use the four-step method from the Uppsala model. This will allow for a long-term plan for expansion where the organisation understands the various levels they can use and allows them to adapt external bodies, such as IT personnel to set up the system that will be used and maintain the operations within the organisation (Arvidsson and Aridsson (2019). The various steps involve progression as they grow in the new market. They will outsource a number of their exports and operations in order to have the knowledge about the new market.

6.8 Expand product and customer base.

It is important that an organisation continues to expand their customer base and their product line. Within the company the Warehouse Manager stated that the customer comes first. This is very important when the organisation is expanding. Within the three R's only one growth strategy focuses on customer value rather than the overall profits, this is the robust strategy. This growth strategy also is the only one of the three R's that focuses on the long-term effect on the company's overall growth. The robust strategy will help the organisation to plan for future investment opportunities and developments. They will look at the financial risk assessment on the expansion and the product line expansion. It is an explosive growth strategy that can help the company maintain focus on the importance of customer value and the various product development opportunities (Rujeerapaiboon, Kuhn and Wiesemann, 2016). The robust strategy is a more organic growth method that uses principles to help focus on their customer base. The first principle is the use of customers and resources. This will then allow for an evaluation of the challenges within the market. This strategy would be very beneficial for the case study company to maintain in order to plan for future expansions.

6.9 Summary

In summary, there are a number of elements discussed above that emerged from the themes in the literature and the case study. The company expanded in an inorganic way, this was done through mergers and acquisitions of four companies. This was a planned move with a long-term focus. The company incorporated the robust strategy in order to focus on maintaining and growing customer satisfaction. This was appropriate in this instance as the '*safety first principle*' allowed the organisation to build on the internal management skills and knowledge while growing the business to ensure long term organisational sustainability. There is little evidence within the company of the Uppsala model being used.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

As companies are increasingly operating in a globalised economy, it is vital that a business is aware of the challenges they face such as rising costs, external factors, and increased competition. In order to face these challenges and continue to grow the company, organisations need to have a strategic plan regarding their growth strategy.

Academic researchers and authors favoured strategies for expansions such as the three R's, the Uppsala model and Organic and Inorganic growth within the hospitality industry. To satisfy the key research objectives, themes emerged from the literature and the findings of the case study. These include mergers and acquisitions, customer first and system updates. The research suggests that the catering supply company should continue to focus on their customers and continue to expand into more industry and geographical markets.

The findings from the case study indicated that the organisation uses a more robust approach over the radical and rational growth strategy. This is as a result of the customer value and the long-term outlook into the future. They also use a more inorganic method to grow and expand into new markets as they focus on acquiring companies in markets that will benefit their expansion plan and combat their challenges, such as Brexit. They made a strategic decision to purchase two companies that give them access to the UK market. This will also help with the supply chain issues from the UK market thus ensuring good operations. Even though the organisation is using items from some growth strategies, they lack the use of the Uppsala model as they have already established themselves. This is evident as they did not use any external bodies to assist with the expansion and they have not joined with suppliers.

As an Irish SME this approach could be suitable for other companies even outside the hospitality industry. SMEs by their nature often have a wealth of customer value and established management personnel and structures. Typically, they understand their industry and this robust (safety first principle) would be appropriate to combat the challenges that companies face. This approach may allow SMEs to remain viable, sustainable and grow into the long term. This strategy could be applied to domestic companies and international organisations.

7.1 Recommendation for further research

After completing this study, it has highlighted an opportunity for further study on the growth strategies that an Irish SME could use. The findings have indicated the importance for businesses to use the various growth strategies that will help them to expand into new markets and make the changes for the business sustainable for long term expansion method.

The effects that have been identified about the growth strategies are measured by the company's success. Further qualitative research can be completed on the business and on the growth as they continue to expand. Even more research can be carried out on the impact of the various strategies that have been identified within this case study, especially on the factors involving the businesses growth, the importance of a growth strategy and the application of the strategies across other organisations within the industry. This would offer better insight into the overall market. This study would also benefit by observing other businesses within the foreign markets in order to compare the customer behaviours within their hospitality industry.

Appendix

Interview Guide

- What is your job title and a brief description?
- How many years' experience do you have in this role?

Analyse the current challenges faced by an Irish company within the hospitality sector.

- 1) What are the main challenges the company are facing?
- 2) What are the main challenges that you face while expanding?
- 3) What implications has Brexit had?
- 4) What implications has covid had?
- 5) What has the organisation done to combat these challenges?
- 6) How have the mergers and acquisition helped with the challenges?
- 7) What are the biggest challenges that you have encountered with the supply chain?

Assess the existing development growth strategies currently used by the chosen case study.

- 1) How has the company expanded over the last 5 years?
- 2) What caused the expansion process within the organisation?
- 3) How effective do you think the company's expansion has been?
- 4) How has the expansions effected the businesses operations?
- 5) How are you measuring the success of the expansion methods?
- 6) What type or strategies does the company use to expand?
- 7) How has the business adapted as a result of the expansion?
- 8) How was the planning process for the expansion?
- 9) How would you describe the culture of the company since expanding?
- 10) How is the operations split between the different companies?

Identify the most appropriate growth strategies to allow the company to develop in the medium to long term.

- 1) What initiatives are in place to expand further
- 2) What would you change going forward to help expand?

- 3) How will the business expand in the future?
- 4) What growth strategies do you think the company can use in the future?
- 5) Will the company become more globalised? Explain?
- 6) How will the company grow internally?
- 7) Where do you believe the company will be in 5 years?

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