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“KEEPING AN EYE ON DYNAMICS”. A CUSTOMER-LED DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN A MICRO COMPANY.
Micro companies constitute the largest group of companies in Finland and they have an important role in employment and growth. The percentual number of micro companies in Finland in 2013 was 93.4% of all the company sizes. The economist Samuli Rikama (2014), from the Ministry of Employment and the economy in Finland, stated in the annual Business Review that micro companies have indisputable significance in Finnish society promoting economic growth and employment and yet the field lacks attention in research and the importance of the sector is often seen trivial.

This qualitative case study is investigating a customer-led development process in a micro company. The goal is to find out, how the selected service is appearing to the main customer segment and what are the developmental issues arise from the customers. The research is conducted an action research which goals for developing the existing operations model (Huovinen & Rovio: 94−95).

The framework for development is attribute map by Gunther McGrath and MacMillan (2000: 25). The research is also investigating the meaning of the development process for the case company in micro company context. The development process is conducted as an action research and it commits to the hermeneutic tradition is science.

The hermeneutic perspective emphasizes interpretation and prospect of significance in a process which produces information of the reality as overlapping cycle. The data collected in triangulation consist of an owner theme interview, electric inquiry with the customers and a theme group conversation among different professionals. The data is thematized with an attribute map in collecting and analyzing the data.

The results of the research propose that the developmental needs of the case company are related to marketing, communications, networking and web-sales. The research provided new opportunities to improve supporting operations and the product under investigation received positive feedback from the customers. The product was evaluated as a differentiator in the customer inquiry. The results concerning the meaning of the process raised the need to sustain an active role in development and networking both in the case company and in the micro company context.

Understanding the developmental possibilities in the micro company context and issues considering continuity and growth, the research results can provide aspects for change of generation or divestment processes, business model generation and in general, conception of the practical level. Further research of micro company entrepreneurship provides information for economic and societal perspectives and decision-making in general.
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1 INTRODUCTION

Growing up in micro company provides you insights into entrepreneurship in it’s very practical level. How has the business opportunity occurred and how is it best exploited? These questions and considerations together with the daily work activities and problems solving situations can lead to what is known as “entrepreneurial mindset” or “entrepreneurial lenses”. This was at least the case for me growing up in a catering service micro company founded and managed by my mother. Many foreign and domestic researches show that entrepreneurship is likely to run in the family (Niittykangas & Tervo 2005, Parker 2007) which also suggest that entrepreneurial attitude is something heritable.

Entrepreneurship research has attained academic interest and authority over the last 30 years (Davidsson 2016). Nevertheless, the field is seen as ambiguous and there is not a common agreement about the fundamental issues even though a conceptual consensus started to germinate in early 2000’s (Steyart & Hjorth 2003, Gartner 2004, Blenker & Thrane-Jensen 2007, Kuratko, Morris & Schindehutte 2015). The common understanding of entrepreneurial mindset refers to the characteristics of a person, who sees opportunities, seizes them and is interested in innovations and value creation. Entrepreneurship is scientifically seen as a process which includes a person with entrepreneurial activity turning a set of resources into a value creating new form to exploit a business opportunity (Kuratko et al. 2015: 7).

There are many types of entrepreneurship with manifold ambitions. A wide range of terms are used to describe the different forms of entrepreneurship and qualifying elements can be such as the size and the number of the entrepreneurial action, the use of technology, motivation and growth (Kuratko 2016). Entrepreneurship can also be recognized based on a gender or the area of execution. My mother has always been a self-employed micro-entrepreneur with the idea and love for the work she does. This has brought an income for the family, but there has never been a need or desire for growth in wider context.

As I have studied business and management in Oulu Business School, I started to consider, what are the possibilities to modernize this micro business and goal for
growth. I have no professional expertise in the food industry, but it is in my interest to investigate how this productive business idea could be otherwise advantaged and on the other hand, how this examination could be proceeded. Over the years, I have participated only a little in developmental issues concerning the company, so in this research I am taking a new stand to this otherwise familiar affair. When evaluating the current situation of the Väänänen’s Catering service, it occurred to me that this case company seemed to have the needed elements for further investigation. The business has been stable and marketable for 30 years already and there is a demand for the service. The company has a good and reliable reputation and there is a clientele which recommends the services to new clients. Due to the steady clientele, the company doesn’t do any marketing besides their web pages to maintain their regular capability to deliver orders. (Väänänen 2016.) The ideology of solo entrepreneurship is present in many operating models of the company.

Developmental processes of the case company have previously been led by the owner-manager but the current economic and commercial situation refers to more customer-oriented perspective (Teece 2010). Together with this consumer-led generation process, it is also interesting to picture, will this gained information influences company’s business model generation or future plans and how does it differ from the previous settings. This case study is an experiment which can at its best provide prospects for similar micro companies for their developmental issues. As a daughter, I see a playground to test my knowledge and as a researcher I am curious for the perspective of the micro companies.

Besides the personal interest to this issue, further research of micro company entrepreneurship provides information for economic and societal perspectives and decision-making in general. As I got interested in this theme, I realized that there was a little scientific research or theories available in the field of entrepreneurship for the micro company perspective. This was interesting acknowledgement, because micro companies comprise the largest group of small and medium-sized (SME) companies globally (Kushnir, Mirmulstein, & Ramalho, 2010) and functional SME sector is generally seen to formulate a strong basis for competitive economy in societies.
SME’s as such are regarded as highly valuable operators and there are multidimensional statistics and research available in many scientific fields. What seems to be lacking is still the perspective of the owner-manager led micro companies. The importance of this perspective is supported by the statistics, since for example in Finland under two employing companies comprise 67% of all the companies (Suomen Yrittäjät 2015: 12). As John Day (2000) states in his article, there is a difference in matter when we compare the constitutions of a large company to the ones at the smallest companies. Deakins and Freel (1998: 145) also recognize the importance of small firm owners and the entrepreneurial environments they operate in.

European Union’s cohesion policy has set the entrepreneurial activity to be one of its key objective and has promoted entrepreneurial environment in many ways (European Commission, 2016). The ambience in societies is positive towards entrepreneurial positions but the research field lacks the perspective of the micro agents. In some scientific discussions, small and stable businesses are delimited from the entrepreneurial description (Drucker 1985: 19–20) because they are not novel, nor growing and innovative in larger scale. This perspective reveals ignorance of the issues in micro companies who often operate in narrow market segments and with difficult profit concerns. Kerttu Saalasti Institute is a research unit at The University of Oulu and it operates under the research theme of micro companies (www.oulu.fi/ksi). The significance of the micro enterprises seems to be acknowledged yet there is still a little specific research concerning the ecosystem and environment of micro companies.

Understanding the developmental possibilities in the micro company context and issues considering continuity and growth, the research results can provide aspects for change of generation or divestment processes, business model generation and in general, conception of the practical level. According to the national change of generation -barometer and research published by The Federation of Finnish Enterprises (Suomen Yrittäjät 2015) the divestments of small and medium-sized companies are not happening at their best possible market potential. From this perspective, the entrepreneurial experience and ability could be better advantaged if we had better comprehension of the micro company level. The research interest towards micro companies can provide standpoints for understanding the obstacles in
developing the business. In the long term, acknowledging the perspective of the micro firm has positive effect to the local and national growth and welfare.

This qualitative case study is investigating a customer-led development process in a micro company. The goal is to find out, how the selected service is appearing to the main customer segment and what are the developmental issues arise from the customers. The research is conducted an action research which goals for developing the existing operations model (Huovinen & Rovio: 94–95). The framework for development is attribute map by Gunther McGrath and MacMillan (2000: 25). The research is also investigating the meaning of the development process for the case company in micro company context. The development process is conducted as an action research and it commits to the hermeneutic tradition is science.

The hermeneutic perspective emphasizes interpretation and prospect of significance in a process which produces information of the reality as overlapping cycle. The researcher has a presumption of the topic and the research is seen as an effort to bring up meaning-carrying entirety. (Anttila 2006: 305–308). The data collected in triangulation consist of an owner theme interview, electric inquiry with the customers and a theme group conversation among different professionals. The data is thematized with an attribute map (Gunther McGrath & MacMillan 2000: 25) in collecting and analyzing the data.

The results of the research propose that the developmental needs of the case company are related to marketing, communications, networking and web-sales. The research provided new opportunities to improve supporting operations and the product under investigation received positive feedback from the customers. The product was evaluated as a differentiator in the customer inquiry. The results concerning the meaning of the process raised the need to sustain an active role in development and networking both in the case company and in the micro company context.

1.1 Micro companies matter

Micro companies constitute the largest group of companies in Finland and they have an important role in employment and growth. The percentual number of micro
companies in Finland in 2013 was 93.4% of all the company sizes. Micro companies are also employing the highest number of employees working in enterprises which do not include the fields of agriculture, forestry and fishing industry. (Tilastokeskus, 2014). Numerically there is a huge potential existing in micro companies and investigations in this field would benefit many operators including policy-makers. Not many companies are born substantial and understanding the practical level helps to overcome the barriers of growth and support progress. Statistics will provide one standpoint, but information and experiences on practical level are needed.

Micro companies have several definitions globally and some differences in emphasis of the term exist. In general the term is a sub-part of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The European Union considers staff headcount and the company’s turnover or balance sheet in total when identifying the company status. Similarity in definition is needed in the area of European Union to better support different company forms by policies and programmes regulating these businesses. The EU definition also recognizes typologies of companies depending on the autonomous and possible partnerships the company has. (European Union, 2005) By the Comission recommendation, a microenterprise has less than 10 employees and an annual turnover under 2 million euros. The OECD definition also recognizes these aspects.

Statistical information collecting public authority Statistics Finland (Tilastokeskus 2014) defines a micro company as European Union and combines it together with the ownership status. According to it, a micro company has less than 10 employees, a turnover or a total balance sheet under 2 million euros and are not owned by 25 % or more by one enterprise or jointly owned enterprises which are not defined as small and medium-sized enterprises. Micro companies comprise a wide scale of companies from part-time lifestyle entrepreneur to growing start-up company. One of the reasons for lack of research in micro company field is the manifold subject of experiment. Public services are not easily adjusted for this disconnected group which consists of companies in different stages of development (Jokela, Niinikoski & Muhos 2016).

The economist Samuli Rikama (2014), from the Ministry of Employment and the economy in Finland, stated in the annual Business Review that micro companies have indisputable significance in Finnish society promoting economic growth and
employment and yet the field lacks attention in research and the importance of the sector is often seen trivial. In this statistical research, micro companies were considered as companies employing three or less employees. Rikama (2014) regards the term micro company to have sub-definitions depending on the number of employees and statistic from the years 2009-2012 show that these three or under persons employing companies increased their number of employees in the economically difficult period.

This raise of entrepreneurship ideology can be seen as a part of wider phenomena for example in Europe and also as a response to globalization (Gibb 2002: 235). Small owner-led companies are seen to promote democratic and active spirit in societies when offering services and products which either supplement the production of larger firms or are exclusive in their own trade (Parker 2007: 1). The meaning of entrepreneurship is manifold in producing economic growth, wealth, innovations and change. Besides the societal perspective, entrepreneurship has importance in individual level to entrepreneurial persons.

It seems justifiable to further investigate this numerically grand sector of enterprises and promote the field of entrepreneurship to better acknowledge the perspective of micro companies. A case company is chosen to gain detailed information of the customer-led generation process. A qualitative case research will provide information in natural settings combining multiple data collecting methods and it emphasizes the role of the researcher (Creswell 2013: 97).

1.2 Research gap and purpose of the study

This research is a practice-oriented qualitative research which aims to both understand and develop the target of the research. It relies on a case study and more specifically to an action research method where the researcher functions as a part of the target case and tries to affect the outcome by learning from the environment. This method is actually a learning cycle which takes place in social pursuit and produces information as an active process. An activity research method is often used in developmental cases and it is timely restricted (Heikkinen, 2007: 16–20.) The goal is to further understand the possibilities a customer-led development process provides to one case micro
company. My research commits to the hermeneutic tradition to describe and learn from the experiences originated from the process.

Entrepreneurs are in many ways and with different ambitions constitutive players of modern economy and society (Kuratko et al. 2015: 1). Yet the scientific entrepreneurship is diverse, there are still many areas uncovered or unconceived. Instead of expanding the research field more, Steyaert and Hjort (2003: 6–7) call for audacious research and new combinations in the field of entrepreneurship in order to support the position of the field. The authors see that besides the different viewpoints or “movements” inside the discipline, a new stage can be found by recognizing the multifaceted substance of the field and advantaging it collectively and creatively (Steyaert & Hjort 2003: 3–19).

This research combines the existing discussion considering entrepreneurial opportunities into very practical level of a micro company. The core of this study is to investigate at grass roots level, how business opportunities can be established by investigating the customer needs and requirements for future services. Micro companies hold a great economic growth potential, but this is only a little investigated area in entrepreneurship field. The findings in this case study apply straight to the company under investigation, but it is my presumption that the process will provide guidelines for other micro companies in similar situations.

As a researcher, I have a close relationship to the case company and this sets both possibilities and threats to the research. Being familiar with the company helps me understanding the operative environment and the current status in the market. Piekkari and Welch (2006) state that in Nordic countries companies tend to regard case researchers with positive attitude and mutual trust and respect are in key role in defining the relationship between researchers and companies. In an action research the researcher often investigates and a familiar subject which needs to be developed in practice (Huovinen & Rovio, 2007: 94–95). Having a well-functioning relationship and mutual trust with the owner of the company, it was natural and flexible to start co-operative process together. The trust was in significant role when I as the researcher received operational independency and authorization to design and conduct the development process.
Familiarity is also a threat in this research if my ex ante about the firm prevents me from learning from the research process and if I am not able to bound the case into the larger scale of entrepreneur field. Case study typically represents an issue by describing in-depth a case example and collecting data from multiple sources for analyzing the ensemble (Creswell 2013: 97–102). One of the key issues in estimating a case study is the description of the case, research action and process and how profoundly the research is set out to the reader (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 209). My personal and educational interest towards the entrepreneurship field and previous acknowledge in conducting an action research based case study support me in my researcher role. The chosen method -case study- provides possibilities to collect data in different ways and this diversifies the description of the characteristics of the object (Ghauri 2004: 109-110).

Teece (2010: 172) calls for a customer-oriented outlook for business model allocation in modern economy where the possibilities for consumers are endless and on the other hand service providers have emerging challenges to operate in changing environments. Companies have to be “on the pulse” to keep up with the future customer needs and advantage the development in business. My prime goal is to investigate the customer-led service and product development process which uses an attribute map (Gunther McGrath & MacMillan 2000: 25) as a framework.

1.3 Structure of the study

I have now introduced the background of this research in the first chapter and justified the significance of the study. The theme is scientifically interesting and the micro company perspective has a personal importance to me as a researcher. The statistics support the idea that issues in micro companies should be considered more profound. I am entering the field of entrepreneurship from a practical level and from the viewpoint of a micro company to learn more of the tactics and challenges of the small enterprises which are a little investigated objects in the field. I am collecting the data of a customer-led development process with multiple methods. This analyzed case can increase the understanding of the micro firm perspective and the possibilities of development and growth.
In the second chapter I will describe the theoretical framework in entrepreneurship field and the past and recent perspectives which have built the background for this research. Opportunity discussion is described to picture the theoretical starting points for creating and recognizing entrepreneurial opportunities. After this, micro company entrepreneurship is considered to extend the research on considerations of the owner-led small enterprises and on the other hand what is still lacking in the field of entrepreneurship.

The framework used in development process and data gathering is presented after the theoretical aspects. The Attribute Map is adapted from Rita Gunther McGrath and Ian MacMillan (2000: 25). The case company is introduced in the fourth sub-chapter based on an interview and other data available in internet to picture the company’s current situation and idea of business model and how advancement has been done in the case company.

Research design and methodological choices are described in the third chapter. The principals of a case study committing to the hermeneutic tradition are presented together with the perspectives of an action research. Research question and objectives are also described in the second sub-chapter and data and analysis in the third sub-chapter. The results of the study and theoretical aspects are considered in the fourth chapter. Conclusions together with the contributions and future research suggestions are presented in the final chapter five. Research limitations are also considered to estimate the ensemble.
2 ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A FIELD OF RESEARCH

Entrepreneurship is one of the leading topics in modern economies and the new flurry around it originates until the 1980’s (Bygrave 2007: 17–20). This interest is due to the strong economical and reformative role entrepreneurs present and the general urge for new innovative value creation. This chapter describes the field of entrepreneurship in its basics. The current research themes and future aspects are presented to deepen the theoretical perspective. Innovations and innovative performance is closely bond to entrepreneurship and it is shortly considered before moving to opportunity creation in the second chapter. Entrepreneurial opportunities are in essential role in the field of entrepreneurship and there are viewpoints presented considering the nature of opportunities to shape the theoretical roots of this research. Outline of micro entrepreneurship is considered in the second chapter. The framework for this research is presented in the third chapter by presenting the attribute map. This study views entrepreneurship from the management and strategy perspectives in the field of economy. The case company is presented in the fourth sub-chapter based on owner interview and data gathered from the company websites.

Shane and Venkataraman (2000: 219) conceive the importance of entrepreneurship in converting the technical expertise into new products, balancing the economy and promoting change in multiple levels of society. Even though the phenomena with its various forms has existed as long as there has been civilizations, scientifically entrepreneurship discipline has faced a new coming and it is still under development with manifold intentions. Entrepreneurship research has lately gained strong foothold in the field of management and there have been many attempts to explain and reason this multidimensional phenomena. Especially the last decade has been very prominent and productive in entrepreneurship research. (Wiklund, Davidsson, Audretsch & Karlsson 2011.)

Gartner (2004) states that entrepreneurship is about variation and the stories in everyday life reveal the same diversity that exists in the theoretical investigations and debates. The theory can be regarded and explained from different perspectives in sciences like sociology, culture, economy and psychology and it can be investigated with many different methods. Narrative (Fletcher 2007) and learning-promoting
drama-style research (Fletcher & Watson, 2007) are some of the maybe unexpected perspectives offered by related sciences in the context of entrepreneurship. The field has expanded while in seek for its theoretical contribution (Kuratko et. al. 2015: 2).

Entrepreneurship has been researched from many standpoints like the entrepreneuring individual (Sarasvathy 2001, Haynie, Shepherd, Mosakowski & Earley, 2010), organizational entrepreneurship (Hjorth 2005, Anderson, Kreiser, Kuratko, Hornsby & Eshima 2015), value creation (McGrath, MacMillan & Scheinberg 1992, Amit & Zott 2001, Trimi & Berbegal-Mirabent 2012), opportunities (Plummer, Haynies & Godesiabois 2007, McMullen, Plummer & Acs 2007) and the perspectives of culture (Dana, 1995, Eroglu & Picak 2011) and social enterprising (Chell 2007). Several suggestions for integrative frameworks have also been presented (Shane & Venkataraman 2000, Kuratko et al. 2015) in the recent years and efforts to reassemble the contributions of the field (Jones, Coviello & Tang 2011). Questions considering entrepreneurial education (Gibb 2002), venture financing (Dimov, Shepherd & Sutcliffe 2007) and family businesses (Morris, Allen, Kuratko & Brannon 2010, Chrisman, Chua & Steier 2011) have also have strong emphasis in the field lately.

The existence of entrepreneurship field is seen to be based on combining and borrowing from other sciences and there is a nascent understanding of its contents and theoretical basis besides the definitional disagreement (Shane & Venkataraman 2000: 217, Kuratko et al. 2015: 1–2). There are many definitions in the field concerning the nature and content of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs. This multivoiced discourse can also be seen as a strength when accepting that the phenomena is not univocal and instead of itemizing the differences and concentrating on progress, the research should focus on experimenting the existing theories as a field (Hjort & Steyaert 2003: 3–19). Thus, entrepreneurship with its interdisciplinary nature benefits from coherent theoretical touch which doesn’ t exclude the experimental disposition (Kuratko et al. 2015: 3).

Kuratko, Morris and Schindehutte (2015) have created an overarching model a “framework of frameworks” in which they have gathered the essential perspectives in taxonomy to better conceive the research field and the phenomena. The authors have categorized different research perspectives in one general model based on integrative
framework (Morris, Kuratko & Schindehutte 2001) which consists of entrepreneurial process affected by the entrepreneur, environment, organizational context, concept and resources. Entrepreneurial theories can be investigated from “schools of thought” framework both in macro and micro levels, the entrepreneurial process as an integrative framework, typologies of entrepreneurs, process perspectives, venture typologies and life cycles as stages and risk levels of ventures (Kuratko et al. 2015: 4–9). This accumulative model doesn’t define the field, but organizes the elements into different perspectives and it rests upon research in the field. It outlines the multiple discussions and aims for comprehensive understanding of the nature of entrepreneurship research.

Besides the obvious theme of value creation, the field has multiple dimensions considering the individuals, organizations, environments and the processes and each of these scientific efforts have built and diversified the conception of entrepreneurship. Despite the high volume, theory-driven and multidimensional research interest in entrepreneurship field some authors argue that the field would benefit even wider set of scholarly contributions (Davidsson 2016). Research themes have developed and led the field into new accomplishments which respond to the needs of current entrepreneurial practice.

Many policy-makers, scholars and business facilitators emphasize the meaning of innovation in current advanced globalized world and economy. As such, the term innovations is not new, but it has gained novel interest in defining the content, process and impacts in entrepreneurship. Managing innovations has long been in the core of many industries, but the urge for new products and services has become mandatory catalyst of growth in present competition. (Westland 2008: 3–6).

Schumpeter (1934) presented the idea of creative destruction and innovative entrepreneurs, who create new products, revise markets and promote change in society. The author has also had an impact on the discussion regarding entrepreneurial opportunities. Drucker (1985: 27) sees innovations as an entrepreneurial tool which revise materials into useful resources. In this perspective, entrepreneurship and innovation are interlinked and simultaneous –there can’t be one without the other. Innovation is a term linked with change and future perspectives.
In the discussions over the content of entrepreneurship and the future aspects, a phenomena-based perspective is offered to deploy the research in wide range instead of focusing on theory-driven context-based perspective (Wiklund et al. 2011: 5). This offers a possibility to narrow the research scope in specific issues and produce relevant information from many perspectives. The entrepreneurship discipline should produce useful and socially eminent information to other disciplines and societies (Wiklund et al. 2011). Many theoretical perspectives divide opinions in the field, but there is a common agreement on the nexus of opportunities and entrepreneuring individual in the core of the entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial opportunities are further contemplated in the next chapter.

2.1 Opportunities in entrepreneurship

The centrals of the studies in entrepreneurship field consider entrepreneurial behavior, the settings and dynamics of business and development and growth of entrepreneurial action. The long-argued question “Who is an entrepreneur?” has risen a multidimensional conversation, which has both created unity and dispersed it among the scholars (Gartner 2004). This polyphonic is continuing in discussions considering the theory of entrepreneurship, methodological reliability, environments supporting entrepreneurship and further more (Kuratko et al. 2015: 2). The debate over singular and profound themes reveal the differences of opinions among the scholars and it has become obvious that some of the discussions may not conclude in consensus (Venkataraman 1997: 120). Nevertheless, these discussions have built up the core theme in entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurs are individuals who actively create and lead their own businesses and aim for prosperity in their action. Entrepreneurship requires change oriented perspective and innovative way of solving problems. Casson (1982) describes entrepreneurial opportunities to be situations where new materials and services are organized in a way they produce marginal profit. Shane and Venkataraman (2000: 218) itemize the entrepreneurship field to involve research on sources of opportunities, the processes how opportunities are found, estimation and mode of exploitation of opportunities and individuals in these actions.
Thus entrepreneurship and its contribution as a field concerns “lucrative opportunities and enterprising individuals” (Venkataraman 1997: 121). The ensemble requires both elements to be an entrepreneurial issue and neglecting the other one will lead to inadequate description of the phenomena (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). This starting point is commonly agreed on but different interpretations of the nexus of entrepreneurs and opportunities exist. One perspective recognizes opportunities as objective phenomena but recognition requires timely subjective perspective and people have different conjectures of the value of resources (Shane & Venkataraman 2000: 220). These different beliefs concerning the resources is due to people’s personal perspectives (Shane & Venkataraman 2000) but also the disequilibrium of economies (Schumpeter 1934).

The rigorous discussion over entrepreneurial opportunities have developed and shaped the field of entrepreneurship and turned interest into research of emerging new ventures (Wiklund, Davidsson, Audretsch & Karlsson 2011: 3). The article “The promise of entrepreneurship as a field of research” presented by Shane and Venkataraman in 2000 was in many ways an influential initiative in the field of entrepreneurship (Blenker & Thrane-Jensen 2007a). It emanated an interesting and versatile debate over the substance of opportunities and individual in the nexus of individual-opportunity. There appears to be a common agreement among authors concerning the idea and interconnection of opportunity and individual in the center of entrepreneurship, but what seems to be debated is the content of both elements. (Plummer, Haynies & Godesiabois 2007, Blenker & Thrane-Jensen, 2007b).

Blenker & Thrane-Jensen (2007b) have assembled three different ontological perspectives defining individuals and opportunities in individual-opportunity nexus. All these perspectives serve a certain ontological emphasis on how opportunities exist and what is the role of the entrepreneur in the process. The authors describe the basic idea of opportunity as either existing “out there” or being created “in here” or third, being established through “enactment and sensemaking” process.

Blenker & Thrane-Jensen (2007b, 14) state that the definition presented by Shane and Venkataraman (2000) describes opportunities as existing independently in the environment and “enterprising individual” is acting upon the situations. This
perspective is dividing positions in entrepreneurship field and individual-opportunity nexus. The perspective of Shane and Venkataraman (2000) stands for the “out there” ideology where opportunities are discovered by different means by entrepreneurs and it wells from the ideas presented by Kirzner (1997). The exploitation of opportunities requires prior information to realize the possibility and personal capabilities to benefit from it (Shane & Venkataraman 2000: 222). This approach emphasizes the role of an active entrepreneur and opportunity recognition which requires different tools for analyzing the environment. Kirzner (1973: 1–9) stresses the markets to be based on a process rather than an equilibrium. The entrepreneur’s alertness to opportunities combined with previous knowledge provides the entrepreneur competitive advantage.

Opposite to “Out there” perspective, Blenker & Thrane-Jensen (2007a, 2007b) recognize an approach where opportunities are being created from “in here”. This perspective suggest that the entrepreneur has particular characteristics which help in creating new opportunities. This perspective is related to the Schumpeter (1934) ideology of entrepreneurs being innovative and creating new combinations which disturb the market equilibrium. Opportunities come to exist when the entrepreneurially thinking individual expresses the new formula of the present concept. Gaglio and Katz (2001) establish their work on Kirzners (1973: 1997) entrepreneurial alertness and contemplate it with comprehensive and cognitive approach. In this perspective, opportunities are created by talented individuals.

The third perspective is situated in the middle of the former opposite perspectives and it is based on “enactment and sensemaking” process (Blenker & Thrane-Jensen, 2007b). Opportunities arise from a process between the environment and the individual and it includes prior acknowledge which is transforming into new existence in action. Thus opportunities are created through sensemaking by embedded entrepreneurs. A social constructivism is related to this approach. (Blenker & Thrane-Jensen, 2007a). Sensemaking process is based on work by Weick (1995, 2005) and it is combined to active entrepreneurs who interact with their environment and other people. Opportunities are brought to exist by entrepreneurs making sense of the current situation and environment. Sarasvathy (2001) has emphasizes a creative view which acknowledges effectuation in which opportunities and means-ends relationships are created.
Companys and McMullen (2007) identify three different schools of thought for approaching opportunities. The authors state a functioning framework is essential in combining together the needed elements like strategy and performance to realize and exploit new opportunities. In general, opportunities are seen as profit possibilities in the framework and differing from opportunities which arise from optimization in production for example. Economic school of thought consider opportunities as objectively existing in the environment due to the changes in circumstances. This approach has roots in micro economic (Blenker & Thrane-Jensen 2007b) and discussion started by Shane and Venkataram (2000). Alert and talented entrepreneurs discover opportunities. (Companys & McMullen 2007: 301–306).

According to Companys and McMullen, the cultural cognitive school recognizes opportunities to be more of a subjective matter only existing when enacted by individuals. Opportunities are attached to the prior experience of the entrepreneur and sensemaking of the situation is required. (Companys & McMullen 2007: 305–306.) The sociopolitical school views opportunities both existing objectively and subjectively. Opportunities are embedded in the environment and their recognition requires a change in social or political situation which allows entrepreneurs to interpret the new situation in a social network. This approach emphasizes the meaning of a network rather than other materials. (Companys & McMullen 2007: 306–307.) It is acknowledged that scholars supporting these schools of thought have common interest of appropriate entrepreneurial strategies, but strategic choices vary between adaptive and proactive styles depending whether opportunity is seen objective or not (Companys & McMullen 2007: 311).

This multidimensional debate over the essence of entrepreneurial opportunities has created polarities to the field but it has also strengthened the theoretical premises of entrepreneurship. Authors have framed the nexus from different perspectives and depending on the starting points, different outlines have been presented. Two supported opposing approaches seem to be timely researched: The first perspective presented by Shane and Venkataram (2000) often described as “discovery view” and opposing to it sensemaking and enactment requiring process inspired by the work of Weick (1995, 2005) and presented by authors like Sarasvathy (2001) and Gartner, Carter & Hills (2003).
Gartner et al (2003: 104–105) highlight that the debate over opportunities has geological and theoretical limitations which results a little convergence with empirical evidence. The authors call for more practice oriented style in researching opportunities and involving entrepreneurs into the discussion and research. Acknowledging assumptions about opportunities and strategies conducted from them helps to realize opportunities in wider scale. It is important to perceive how entrepreneurs understand and opportunities. Entrepreneurial strategizing is comprising the nature of opportunity, chosen strategy and how the elements fit to the environment (Plummer et al. 2007). This results in how opportunity is perceived affects to the strategy and conducting the opportunity (Krueger 2000, Berglund 2007).

Berglund (2007) has researched how entrepreneurs in mobile industry conceive an entrepreneurial opportunity. The results implicate entrepreneurs to have a manifold impression of opportunities and both discovery and creation perspectives were found in analyzing the data. Berglund (2007: 268) suggests a holistic perspective which could reflect the different possibilities of an entrepreneur to experience opportunities. Entrepreneurial action in relation to entrepreneurial opportunities provide an interesting insight to venture development (Berglund 2007).

### 2.2 Micro company entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship can be described from many perspectives and there is not one inclusive definition for the term. Scientifically entrepreneurship field is contributing in “lucrative opportunities and enterprising individuals” (Venkataraman 1997: 121). Nevertheless, there has been a debate regarding the definition of an entrepreneur among scholars and the characteristics included in entrepreneurship and opportunities. It is commonly agreed on that entrepreneurship can exist in an organization and it doesn’t necessarily mean creation of new enterprises (Shane & Venkataraman 2000: 219). The essence of entrepreneurial opportunities is also attached to the conversation when considering the novelty of entrepreneurial opportunities and entrepreneurial strategizing (Plummer et al. 2007).

One profound discussion has concerned the entrepreneur and whether the term should be dissociated from small business owners (Carland, Hoy, Boulton & Carland, 1984).
The perspective of the small companies seems trivial. Searching material from electric repositories with reference of “micro company” or “micro enterprise” reveals the current situation; statistics and perhaps practical guidelines are available, but theoretical perspective seems to be lacking or it is unorganized. This raises the question: Is working in less complex environment less entrepreneurial? And on the other hand, is growth essential to entrepreneurship or is it entrepreneurial to sustain a micro company?

Small businesses are owned independently, are not key actors in their sector and not often goal for new innovations but rather for steady business (Kuratko 2016). To better explain the term entrepreneurial venture, Kuratko et al. (2015) propose a framework which acknowledges the different stages of venture by size and growth-rate: microenterprise, small or lifestyle ventures, medium-sized ventures and gazelle ventures. Microenterprises are described as subsistence ventures which have a minor growth perspectives and low reinvestment possibilities.

Sarasvathy and Venkataram (2011: 120) conclude that entrepreneurial method can’t exclude anyone since everyone is a potential entrepreneur and the skills and the “logic of exercise” should be more profoundly taught in schools. Owner-manager or life-style business founder can be distinguished from an entrepreneur by assessing the sense of entrepreneurship which in practical level can mean extraordinary skills in business context (Chell 2007). Gibb (2002) calls for stronger conceptual approaches for qualifying the perspectives of owner-managed business and entrepreneurship and argues, that owner-managed business often provides conditions which support entrepreneurial behavior. The contradiction between small business ownership and entrepreneurship can also be viewed from the perspective of the environment: stable and less uncertain, but require entrepreneurial performance (Gibb 2002: 238). The role of the founder has been estimated to have a higher achievement objective, proclivity for taking risks and tolerance for unclarity (Begley & Boyd, 1987).

The theoretical contribution of micro companies is still lacking in the field of entrepreneurship. The perspective of the smallest is derived from the perspectives of small and medium-sized companies, small business owners, life-style businesses, self-employed and family businesses. Either of these perspectives is fully capable in
recognizing, describing and investigating the substance of micro companies. Micro companies can for example consist of start-ups, self-employed, companies in growth, divestment, crisis or handling a change of generation, stable or regressing companies, developing and part-time companies (Jokela, Niinikoski & Muhos 2016: 11).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD, 27) report “Entrepreneurship at a Glance 2015” reveals that 63% of all the entrepreneurs in Finland are non-employers and 92% of total business population are micro companies. Micro companies comprise a large sector of companies from employing under ten employees to non-employers which are firms not employing. Therefore, micro companies are a challenging and heterogeneous assemblage of different operators whose development and research is difficult (Jokela, Niinikoski & Muhos 2016).

This research involves an experiment of development process in a case micro company. The idea for the process was first introduced by the researcher to manage a customer-led development enquiry which provides strategic information for the company. A business model development tool was first considered, but further investigations led to choose a more practical development framework. The attribute map is introduced in the next chapter.

2.3 Blockbuster design by Attribute mapping

The theoretical framework for this research required exploring the basic processes of starting and managing a company. The manager of the case company has the needed information for running a successful micro company, but none of the basic tools, such as business model, strategy, vision and mission were systematically considered or produced (Väänänen 2017). The idea of a business model has existed nearly as long as there has been trade among societies and business operators, but more profound understanding of the content and public awareness have grown over the last few decades. Still research on this subject in related scientific fields is rather new and lacks further theoretical investigations. (Teece 2010, Zott & Amit 2010, Trimi, & Berbegal-Mirabent 2012.) Nonetheless, the demand for practical models has promoted scholars to provide also theoretical aspects to this perspective. Fast technological change, increase of knowledge-based economy, general positive ambience towards
entrepreneurship, change in supplier-customer relationship and new structures in many levels of business in different trades are some of the reasons for the business model becoming so appreciated issue (Teece 2010: 172-174).

A carefully designed business plan has previously been the guided way to start and guide your own business. An ideological change has occurred during the past decade and entrepreneurial mode is one of the reasons behind the alteration. A business model canvas (Osterwalder & Pigneur 2010) is one of the currently used tools to promote business thinking and it can be employed in mature companies as generating tool. Business model canvas was one possible tool to develop the operations of a micro company by assessing the nine elements of the canvas. After interviewing the owner, it became obvious that the business model of the case company was actually a simple plan and verbalizing the situation may not develop the situation as much as choosing more elaborating tool. Business models are tools for entrepreneurs in venture change stages (Trimi & Berbegal-Mirabent 2012) but since the situation in the case company was stable, another framework was selected.

The case company has a little experience in formal planning and development actions have always been led by the owner (Väänänen 2017). For the research to have usefulness, the chosen framework has to produce new useful information for the company. Scientific theories seldom work at grass root level, therefore a practical tool was chosen. In their book “Entrepreneurial Mindset”, Gunther McGrath and McMillan (2000) present tools for entrepreneurial development. The basic idea of the book is to present how to regenerate entrepreneurial thinking and business. One considerable way to advance the entrepreneurial development is to consider the working conditions which can provoke for change and participation. One elementary way to change a business model is to redesign company’s products and services and goal for blockbuster performance. (Gunter McGrath & McMillan 2000: 23). Compared to business model development, the process in attribute map is conducted from down to top investigating the practice which may affect to the company management.

Every product consists of company’s capabilities at some state. The value of the product is an outcome of the skills and assets the producing company has. A buying decision of a customer is often based on several appealing features of an offering and
finding out the trade-off the customers prefer is important. Attribute map is tool for
discovering the essence of an offering – the most important features in an offering that
are more valuable to the customers than the price of the product. (Gunther McGrath &
McMillan 2000: 23–24.) The framework is suitable for performing a case study
investigations and collecting data in multiple situations and with different target
groups. The attribute map is preferred to enforce in different interest groups and it
depicts the correlation between the customer need and the product (Gunther McGrath

The map has two dimensions which produce different combinations depending on the
attributes. The customers attitude towards the investigated service or product is in the
left vertical direction and it can be defined as positive, negative or neutral. Positive
attitude replies to the attributes the customers appreciate and like. Negative represent
the attribute customers dislike and neutral responds to the insignificant attributes. The
lengthwise direction of the map has three different range in attributes attached to the
chosen product. The product can be estimated as “basic”, “discriminator” or as
“energizer” in relation to the rivals. Each vertical and horizontal confluence provide
an outcome with different meaning. (Figure 1.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CUSTOMER ATTITUDE</th>
<th>ATTRIBUTE OF PRODUCT OR SERVICE, RELATIVE TO COMPETING OFFERINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSITIVE</td>
<td>Nonnegotiable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGATIVE</td>
<td>Tolerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEUTRAL</td>
<td>So what?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. The Attribute Map (adapted from Gunther McGrath & MacMillan 2000: 25)

The positive-basic combination provides a result of nonnegotiable. It refers to a
product which has the needed element to create the positive feeling for the customer
and it includes features that the product must have or otherwise the attitude is no longer
positive. Positive-discriminator is a combination which separates the product
positively from the offerings of rivals. The best possible situation is when customers attitude is positive and the product works as an exiter. This means the product has unique and highly desirable features. Due to the fast evolution in the markets the features of energizers are often fast copied. (Gunther McGrath & MacMillan 2000: 26–29.)

Negative attributes are not desired and the company should always try to improve these combinations into positive. The negative experiences related to the rivals is a way to create business opportunities to a company. A product which induce the negative and basic combination is a product which is more negative than positive, but it is tolerable in ensemble. If the entrepreneur neglects this dissatisfaction, the product can become to a dissatisfier due to the fast development in the markets. Dissatisfier is a fusion of negative attitude and discriminator and it is not the desired direction for business. The most unwanted products are combinations of negative attitude and energizer working together as enragers which need to be eliminated. (Gunther McGrath & MacMillan 2000: 29–33.)

Neutral attitude together with basic perspective provides a “So What” product. The customers buy it when it otherwise serves them. The features of the product do not influence the purchase much. Neutral aspects can concern some part of the customers and the product but when concerning the entire segment the product should be redesigned. Neutral and positive attributes refer to features which are provided in parallel to the product. (Gunther McGrath & MacMillan 2000: 33–35.)

The first step in using the framework is choosing a product or a service under investigation and clarifying the customer segment attached to it. The authors define that due to the simplicity the attribute map can be used with different target groups like customers, personnel, distributors and other stakeholders and it provides material for strategic considerations. The map can be used in many ways, but it is suggested that preliminary assumptions are collected in the company before attending the customers. (Gunther McGrath & MacMillan 2000: 26.)

In this research, the attribute map provides a practical tool to be used in three different situations; constructing the conception of the entrepreneur of the main product and
customer segment, enquiring the customer and conducting a small group of professionals discussing the development possibilities in this micro company case. The company is introduced in the next chapter.

2.4 The case company

Micro ventures are often based on one person’s talent and aspiration and afford employment and feeling of opportunities. They operate in undifferentiated markets in highly competitive climate, yet they easy start and gaining capital is challenging. (Kuratko 2016). Väänänen catering service is a typical example of an owner-led micro company. The entrepreneur has created a business model to make a living based on a professional endowment and to operate with low risk. The market sector has been competed and gaining footstep has required both professional and entrepreneurial skills. After gaining a stable position the company has had a steady clientele which has recommended the service to new clients. The case company has websites but basically it doesn’t do any other marketing, because the entrepreneur doesn’t goal for growth. (Väänänen 2017)

The idea and will for entrepreneurship generated from the owners’ experiments on demand for the talented person in catering business. Independency in work and freedom were drivers to start a business. Business model and value creation are not clearly articulated but the idea of the business is clear. The strategy is to provide excellent food and service to customers organizing different occasions and celebrations flexibly and with customer-oriented emphasis. One strength is comprehensiveness in products and supporting services. Wedding, funeral, christening and birthday cater services together with other delicacies are the main services. (Väänänen 2017.) The company operates under the name of the owner referring to a characteristics of a family business.

The entrepreneurial school views the strategy existing as a leader-led adaptive perspective which has semiconscious and intuitive elements concerning the future of the firm. In this approach to strategy, the leader is seen close to the implementation and the strategy is often rather a narrow in form, recognizing specific gaps in the markets. (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand & Lampel 2009: 149.) The case company contains
many of these elements including personalized leadership with strategic vision about the company and it is acknowledged that this perspective is suitable for small organizations (Mintzberg et al. 2009: 151−154). Personnel resources changes according to seasons and The company owner regards the employee as family members (Väänänen 2017).

The owner has led the company by a value promise of reliability in delivery and providing a good service. The business opportunity was found in stages as the entrepreneur first started as a half-time entrepreneur in 1987. The form of the company was changed from privat enterprise into an incorporated company in 2013. (Väänänen 2017.) Indications of entrepreneurial behavior in this owner-managed micro firm refer also to the financial responsibility and family assets invested in the company, strong customer dependence and the importance of holistic management (Gibb 2000). The company stage has been stable especially the last decade but the entrepreneur has not been interested in growing the business. The obstacles for growth have the attitude of the entrepreneur, the last part of the entrepreneurs’ career and lack of supporting service. The challenges in micro company are regarded as difficulties in finding talented part-time employees, having a little possibility for mistakes and having a little resources in general processes attached to a running a company. (Väänänen 2017.)

Gartner et al (2003: 122) call for the experience of entrepreneurs in defining opportunities: “What do entrepreneurs talk about when they talk about opportunity?” According to the owner of the case company the customers were one group attached to the opportunity possibilities and analyzing the demand can bring new aspects to portfolio. The customer feedback and analysis had previously been done informally in addition to production by the entrepreneur. (Väänänen 2017.)

The entrepreneur was interested of the proposal of development process. The previous advancements had concerned mainly product development and efficiency in production and delivery processes. The strengths of the company are a good reputation, comprehensive services and reliability in delivery. The entrepreneur proposes the societal meaning of the company to be in employment and proving requested services. The nature of the development process was discussed together with the entrepreneur and because customer’s perceptions had never before been investigated in depth it was
selected to be the premises of the investigation. (Väänänen 2016.) Research design and methodology are described in the next chapter.
3 METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Bygrave (2007: 20) states in his historical overview of entrepreneurship field that the general focus in research emphasizes more theoretical aspect in modern research than in the early 1980’s. The author calls for a practical inquiry in order to serve field profoundly since many of the earlier practical investigations have benefitted several operators in the field. This principal is also in my interest as a researcher since my presumption considering the micro companies is that they would benefit from more concrete business culture and general practical acknowledgement of the micro perspective. An in-depth theoretical discussion considering the entrepreneurial opportunities has created different outlines of opportunity, but a little research is presented with the framing of micro company opportunities.

This research is a qualitative research and it has been induced by a personal interest of the researcher. Development possibilities in micro company arouse into further consideration after attending into entrepreneurship courses in Oulu Business School and having a family member as a micro entrepreneur. As I started to observe the start-up culture and ecosystems producing big winners it was interesting to acknowledge that there was a lack of identical culture and urge considering the micro company field. Due to the multifaceted range of different actors defined as “micro companies” the development procedures and tailored support is fragmented and there is not coherent information available for policy-makers and other business actors (Jokela et al. 2016).

Researching the little investigated premises of a micro company can provide further information on practical level of micro companies and also produce information for societal and policy making purposes. Perren (1999) states based on his research on micro enterprise growth factors that the development is attached to four drivers: the owner’s growth motivation, skills demanded in growth management, access to resources and demand. According to the author, micro companies require timely and tailored support which is based on need of the owner-manager and not a common procedure (Perren 1999: 382). A case study investigates the premises of one company but it can provide aspects for companies in similar situation and estimate the meaning of tailored support which in this research is conducted as an action research process.
The third chapter introduces the research design and validates the chosen methods. A qualitative case study is first presented with its nature and benefits in researching a customer-led development process in a micro company. As entrepreneurship has a unique nature and entrepreneurs are multifold in intentions (Gartner 2004) it was suitable to choose a perspective which supports realizing the causal relationships of one case company. The case study is implemented in hermeneutic manner in order to better understand the entrepreneurial event in question.

Hermeneutic tradition is a study of interpretation and the research attends to describe a concrete image of the research target (Anttila 2006: 305). The research is actualized as an action research to benefit from the researchers position in this developmental case and action research is introduced as a method the second sub-chapter. After this, the research problem together with objectives and questions are presented. Research data and analyzing process are described in the third chapter to picture profound image of the ensemble. Research limitations are discussed in the final fourth chapter.

3.1 A qualitative case study

Even though qualitative research is still in the minority in the field of international business research, it can produce information by investigating objects from their own premises which decreases the possibility of misapprehension (Marschan-Piekkari & Welsh, 2004: 5−8). Understanding the perspectives of a micro company requires a strategy which acknowledges abductive approach to the object of experiment. The research commits to the social constructivism paradigm in which individuals create meanings to experiences and this happens in a social conduct with other individuals (Creswell 2013: 24−25).

The philosophical commitments in science affect to the research entity in multiple levels. It involves ontological questions of the nature of knowledge, epistemological basis of how information can be received, methodological choices and it has an impact on theory selection and concepts. (Hirsjärvi et al. 1997: 129–131, Anttila 2006: 32–37.) Micro entrepreneurship as a phenomenon builds in relation to entrepreneurs, policy-makers, stakeholders and customers. The development process is performed as co-operational conduct in entrusting that information and new meanings are created in
social procedure by interpreting the learning cycle. Qualitative case study was selected to better cover both data and theory as interlinked process. Participants and field work are often in an important role in qualitative research (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 16) and this also the starting point in this research.

The goal of a qualitative design is to provide an explanation or a model of the phenomena under investigation, define different meanings attached to it and describe and interpret the research objective (Anttila 2006: 276). Micro companies are often defined and discussed in the light of statistics but describing the different perspectives and experiences connected to the phenomena help to build the general picture of the developmental issues. This research introduces one development process in a case company. Conducting a qualitative case study requires interpretation of the meaning-relations of the object and in relation to this it is important to describe pre-comprehension of the researcher (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2002).

As a researcher, I have a close relationship with the case company which provides me long-term information of the phases of the case company. Yet I have not previously been involved in decision-making or other significant developmental issues regarding the company. Due to the common interest in micro companies it was a natural choice to combine the developmental need of the company to my own interest in entrepreneurial activity, and micro companies in specific. The objectives and implementation of the process were discussed together with the entrepreneur and mutual trust provided liberty for me as a researcher to guide the process. In order to secure validity of the research I frequently verified information from the owner to avoid the mistake of creating the reality in research by myself. Objectivity in qualitative research is based on realizing subjectivity (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 18). A theme-interview with the owner was one resource of data.

Case studies often involve different manners of collecting and analyzing data and the strategy affords the possibility to pilot a both managerially and theoretically reliable unities (Piekkari & Welch 2006). This research combines several methods and sources of data which are chosen to gain a multiple picture of the development process. A case study starts by description of the research object in specific setting and time to perceive an image of the premises and identify the research compulsion (Cresswell 2013:
The second phase in conducting a case study is formulating a research plan (Anttila 2006: 288). This was first done in the end of the 2015 and the first plan acted as a starting point for the theoretical background investigations. It guided me to explore the extent of the micro company phenomena in Finland and globally. Reading the opportunity literature clarified that the research plan had to be revisited and connected to practical level. The research plan proceeded after outlining the theoretical basis of opportunities into finding and selecting the suitable framework. After comprehending the possibilities of the attribute map, I started to design the data resources and methods.

The research plan acknowledged the practical framework which enabled collecting the data from customers, professional and the owner. Inquiry for the customers and theme-interview of the owner were natural choices, but the small group discussion of professionals was chosen to diversify the perspectives. The nature of qualitative research is an evolving process which means that the research plan can change during the process (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 16) and research phases may not happen in linear continuum but they are overlapping and simultaneous. The third phase in conducting a case study is to assemble the data and this is followed by the analyzing which basically means organizing the integrated data into better describing an explaining the object. The final phase is to report research results and estimate the importance of the research. (Anttila 2006: 288.)

In hermeneutics, analysis is bond to the interpretation and it appears as “hermeneutic circle” (Suoranta & Eskola 1998: 148). This means that the analyzing phase may not be recognizable as singular procedure even though in research plan this is described as thematizing the data by attribute map. Interpretation of the object can include analysis and vice versa. Hermeneutic basis is considered more profound in the next sub-chapter.
3.1.1 Hermeneutics in interpreting and understanding

The subjective perspective rose to supplement the objective paradigm is science in 17th century and it emphasized the meaning of understanding and interpreting the phenomena. On contrary to positivist paradigm, hermeneutic approach perceives the interconnection of facts and values. (Anttila 2006: 548–549.) It emphasizes the meaning and uses interpretation as a way to describe the essence of the object. Understanding the meaning-relations of the subject is often described as a hermeneutic circle which produces information in every round and it functions as methodological principal and as the process of descending information. The circle refers to several investigated parts of the entity which formulate entirety. Hermeneutic circle is used in qualitative analysis as progressive process (Anttila 2006: 280, 305–306). In qualitative research a similar circle can be defined as data analysis spiral (Creswell 2013: 182–183).

Hermeneutic perspective considers the experiences of actors who value and give meanings to issues in a social conduct. The world is and reality is different for different people in different times and hermeneutic is about interpreting and understanding these experiences (Varto 1992: 65). Hermeneutic researcher coordinates a dialogue between different data and this requires a presumption of the target (Anttila 2006: 305). My presumptions as researcher considered the micro company perspective and the lacking common micro culture. First investigations highlighted that many quarters would benefit of more profound research on issues concerning micro companies. This presumption led me to research a case which could provide further details. In hermeneutics, the entity of research result is more than the collection of data and this refers that the singular parts of the ensemble seldom can picture the phenomena (Anttila 2006: 306). Hermeneutic circle has different levels and they all provide new information to the research.

The first loop in hermeneutic circle in this research represents the electric inquiry allocated to former customers of the company. The results provided a possibility of evaluating the current situation of the company, the customers’ ideas and the acknowledge of the entrepreneur of the current situation and developmental needs. The next level of spiral contains the in-depth description of the target and context in a case
study. (Anttila 2006: 280–281). In this research, the second round corresponds to the theme-interview of the entrepreneur which provided information of the company history and entrepreneurial principals. The attribute map and the company’s current situation together with the development possibilities were also discussed. The small group discussion is also situated in the second level of hermeneutic circle. The third level of the hermeneutic circle combines different qualitative methodologies to understand and interpret the entity (Anttila 2006: 281). Analyzing with the attribute map and opportunity considerations are located in third level together with the overall picture of the development process.

In hermeneutics, the understanding of the research objective evolve as hermeneutic circle and it consists of several learning cycles which all build the overall picture and meaning of the object. An action research is also cyclic by nature and activity is develop through consecutive processes (Heikkinen 2007: 19). An action research perspective is introduced in the next sub-chapter.

3.1.2 An action research method

An action research is often a timely limited and predesigned research and development process which can implement new ways of performing. Conducting the research plan can change as the research proceeds since the process is about learning and understanding and not about knowing. (Heikkinen 2007: 17–19.) An action research perspective was chosen to engage a flexible development process which was executed by the researcher. The goal was to design a series of development methods and reflect the emerging issues during the process.

The postulate related to an action research approach that the research can produce new information of the subject and process is required to develop the activity. Basically, this means that the development can’t solely be done in predesigning the activity in this specific case. (Kuula 1999: 291.) The development process in the case company required engaging the customers. A singular electric inquiry may have produced useful information of the gratification of the customers but a wider perspective on development possibilities required involving other methods of collecting the data.
Characteristics to an action research approach is commitment to situations, problem-based proceed and the active roles of the researcher and the attendees (Heikkinen 2007: 16–38). Researching the developmental issues of a catering service required different ways of encountering people. The phenomena and timely situation in modern society where fast changes affect to purchasing decisions and expectations of customers can be manifold, it was necessary to survey the experiences of group of professionals. The group discussion was facilitated by the researcher to raise ideas and perspectives of the topic. The role of the researcher in an action research is to collaborate with the other participants and deepen and conceptualize the presented ideas to others (Anttila 2006: 439). This emphasized both in theme-interview with the entrepreneur and in small group discussion. One key target was to by engaging customers and clients to better understand developmental issues and possibilities.

An action research development takes place in society and it contains advancement action which is reflected and analyzed in parallel to earlier conduct. The research contains creating alternative options to accomplishing objectives and it produces new information of the action. (Anttila 2006: 445.) This action research was initiated together with the owner of the case company in order to regenerate the performance of the company by investigating customer feedback and assembling the perspectives of the professionals. The research provides new operational information to the case company. The development process was based on intervention which is characteristics to an action research (Heikkinen 2007: 19–21). Intervention was targeted to the case company.

3.2 Research problem, objectives and questions

Micro companies constitute the largest group of enterprises percentually in Finland (Tilastokeskus 2014). Yet the premises of a micro company are still a little investigated area in the field of entrepreneurship. The employment impact of the micro companies in Finland is significant. In 2011, micro companies comprised 81 % of the employing companies (Sirviö, Saarela & Muhos 2016). The available information on micro companies is often limited to formal statistics which explain the quantitative side of the phenomena. Qualitative description of the realities of micro companies is needed to better consider the possibilities of support services or structures supporting
development and growth. This qualitative case study is researching one micro company and one temporal development process.

The objective of this research is to conduct a customer-led development process in a case micro company and further understand the possibilities the process provides to the company. Empirical part of the research is conducted as an action research which in practical level means that the researcher is an active participant in development (Suoranta & Eskola 1998: 127−128). The goal of the development process for the company is to gain important information of the selected customer segment and learn more of the advancement perspectives and future demand. A qualitative research in general applies to describe a phenomenon and this research pictures the sphere of operations in a micro company which is a little investigated research target. Keywords are micro company, micro entrepreneurship, attribute map and customer-led development process.

The main principal in this action research development process is to involve customers and professionals in a practical way to create a manifold picture of the current situation, preferences of customers and societal issues affecting to purchasing decisions. The empirical part starts with a theme-interview with the owner of the company. Secondly customer experiences are mapped to get an overall image of the current situation and how the service is evaluated comparing to the rivals. Future trends and regenerating ideas are also collected from the customers by an electric inquiry. The third part of the research is a small group of professionals who are gathered to discuss over the development ideas considering the case company and in general in micro company scene. The gathered data is analyzed with the attribute map framework as a hermeneutic interpretation and understanding process. The objective is to create options for development and evaluate the meaning of the development process.

The research question has dual and contemporaneous objective in investigating the experiences in customer-led development process in a micro company. First, this qualitative case study examines the development possibilities which are resulted in the use of the attribute map framework. The first research question is: What development aspects the customer-led process provides? Secondly, this research examines, what is the meaning of generation process to the company. The second research question is:
What is the meaning of this development process for the case company in micro company context?

3.3 Research data and analysis

The goal of understanding, developing and explaining the premises of a micro company have affected the outcome of the research design and decisions considering coherent data resources and collecting. A qualitative research is concentrating on defining specific quality of a case and a special essence of a case in a general phenomenon (Varto 1992: 77). This research investigates a development process in case micro company and the import of the research is based on the data and analysis. The researcher in qualitative research has to acknowledge three perspectives in assembling the data: context of the phenomena, intentions attached to the research and the process highlighting the phenomena (Anttila 2006: 277–278). Micro company context is described at the first two chapters. My personal intentions concern the starting points of this research and intentions of the participants are estimated in analyzing phase. The applicability of the research process is evaluated in general evaluation of the research results.

In this research, the data collection was decided in second research plan phase and data triangulation as well as method triangulation in collecting the data was chosen to secure diverse perspective for the research object. Data triangulation in a research means that different data are conflated to gain comprehensive assemble (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 68–74). The data of this research include a theme-interview of the owner, a discussion of the small group of professionals and an electric inquiry of customers.

The electric inquiry (appendix 1) was designed by the researcher with Webropol- tool and the link to the inquiry was set to 43 customers in 6.3.2017 together with an email providing further information. The owner of the case company had delivered email addresses of the customers who had a recent customership in occasion catering sector. The customers each had an experiment of the service either in wedding, funeral or in similar event. The inquiry was designed to enforce the attribute map by starting with
the selection of positive, negative or neutral experience. The inquiry led to next questions based on the first answer.

The second question drafted if the service was in comparable to a basic, a discriminator or an energizer based on the principals of attribute map (Gunther McGrath & MacMillan 2000: 25). The respondents were asked to literally describe their experiences, development suggestions and to choose the contents they value in an event catering service. The future food trends were mapped as well as the services the customers were willing to purchase. Nine questions were posed to each respondent and at the end of the inquire, the participants could take a part in a draw for a gift card worth of 55 euros. The draw required contact information from the respondents but it was promised the inquiry responses would not be linked with the persons. This was done to secure truthful answering. The inquiry was closed at 5.4.2017 and it had reached 28 responses. After closing the inquiry in 5.4.2017 the answers were summarized. The summary consists of the literary results of the customer feedback.

Justifications for choosing an interview as a method of gaining data are manifold in qualitative research. It is often chosen if the topic is new and a little investigated and the research requires to deepen the information (Hirsjärvi et al. 1997: 204–205). The owner of Väänänen Catering Service was interviewed at her home at 13.4.2017 and theme-based questions were sent beforehand by email (appendix 2). Both participants agreed that the interview was recorded on video and the nature of interview was discussed in beforehand. Question of the interview were thematized under themes of: Starting a company and entrepreneurship, management, development and development of micro companies. A few questions were presented under each theme in the pre-material to constitute the possible perspectives in discussion. This arrangement semi-structured the interview between familiar participants. The interview was filmed and transcribed verbatim in order to both gain basic information of the company and analyze the answers.

One data source in the research was a group discussion of professionals. The participants of the small group were gathered by the researcher from professionals which either work in the field of food business in different positions or in development related fields such as communications, service design and business consulting.
Selecting the suitable compound of expertise into the small group was challenging. Since the participants were not paid the attendance had to be based on both voluntariness and expertise. Each professional agreed to the invitation and they were found from several networks of the researcher, owner of the company and stakeholders. This organized and semi-structured group was identical to a group interview with a certain purpose (Anttila 2006: 198, Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 94–98).

The participating professionals were: Jarmo Savenius, a management consultant and a coach, Taina Tiri, an entrepreneur in catering service Lempeät Eväät, Titta Vilpa, a freelancer journalist, Satu Ruonaniemi, a service designer, Taina Pirkola, executive manager in Martat Pohjois-Pohjanmaa and Kirsti Kelloniemi, a waitress and a professional in food services. The participants were contacted by telephone and the purpose of the discussion was explained. Members of the small group received an email with practical information concerning the arrangements and a pre-material (appendix 3). The small group was optimal in size and discussion among six persons was easily manageable because the participants were enough homogeneous in understanding the topic (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 96). Three members of the small group were also micro entrepreneurs themselves.

The small group event proceeded after a short description of the situation by the researcher into discussing the development possibilities of a case company and in general. The basic information of the case company was presented but only in a common level considering the size, the work, services and management. The attribute map was used to guide the discussion of what are the timely needs for an event catering service and what are the institutional changes affecting the purchasing. The micro company context was considered in the end of the small group discussion. The discussion was recorded on video and it was later transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The researcher also made notes during the conversation based on her own understanding.

In qualitative research, analyzing is done to create clarity and consistency into information produced of the object of the research without losing the existence (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 137). This research undertakes the abductive logic which is bound to theory in reasoning but it acknowledges the information ascending from the data.
A qualitative research base on interpreting the object and the difference between interpretation and analysis is not always clear. Analyze in this research is affected by the hermeneutic perspective which is actualized as a learning process proceeding in cyclic manner. Hermeneutic circle is process which proceeds in multiple rounds interpreting different data (Anttila 2006: 280). The electric inquiry of the customers form the first phase of the circle in this study. The thema-interview of the owner settles in the second level and the small group discussion into the third level.

Analyzing in qualitative research begins by reflective reading of the data (Anttila 2006, 276) and this was done to reach an overall picture of the emerging themes. Reading the data was first done without any related ideas and the second reading was performed with a picture of the attribute map in the side. Theoretical thematizing helps in realizing essential information from the data like central topics related to the research problem (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 174–175). The attribute map worked as thematizing tool in structuring the data at the first phase and answering the first research question. Coding was used in the second phase of analysis to answer the second research question. Coding is systematizing the data into specific categories of information (Creswell 2013: 184–186).

3.4 Limitations

The primary goal of this research is to provide practical information to the field of entrepreneurship about a micro company case. Opportunity discussion is set as theoretical background for this research and attribute map (Gunther McGrath & McMillan 2000: 25) is considered as the framework. The development process of the case company is conducted as an action research which acknowledges the role the researcher as an active participant in the developmental intervention. An action researcher knows the context of the research based on previous research, literature and experience. An action researcher builds an operations model which is administered in practice. (Huovinen & Rovio 2007: 94–97.)

The purpose of a qualitative study is not to produce generable information but to describe a specific case as in-depth description of the phenomena (Eskola & Suoranta
1998: 61). Limitation in this research is related to the lack of information in the micro company context. A qualitative research provides information of this specific case which doesn’t shape the overall picture of the field but describes one example of the reality.

Limitation consideration concern also the role of the researcher. A starting point for empirical research is in accumulating individual experiences and therefore the experiences of the researcher on the theme involved can be seen as a benefit. Since a case study doesn’t aim for generality as such but rather introduces in-depth information on one case, the role of the researcher is always in some way present (Anttila 2006: 287). My role as a daughter and as a researcher was uncomplicated since the preface for conducting a research was considered profoundly with the owner of the company. The mutual trust and comprehension between the owner of the company and the researcher were supporting the choice of an action research which allowed the researcher to have indecency in remittance of the process.

A qualitative research conducted as an action research with hermeneutic perspective is not a common research design in economics. Micro enterprises are often described by statistics and as a cluster of companies. Further scrutiny reveal that the entity is made up of companies in many different sizes, phases and with multiple intentions for example in development. This research highlights one case behind the term and describes a development process conducted in the company. Describing the grass-root level of a micro company reveals the relevant issues in managing a micro company. The next chapter introduces the results of this research.
4 DEVELOPMENTAL FINDINGS

The opportunity research in the field of entrepreneurship has only a little empirical evidence in research (Gartner 2003: 104–105). This qualitative research is drilling down to the core of one case micro company and considers the possibilities of a customer-led development process in raising new opportunities. The research commits to the “enactment and sensemaking” perspective on opportunities since they are seen to descend from an active process between the entrepreneur, environment and other people requiring prior acknowledgement (Blenker & Thrane-Jensen, 2007b). This research commits to the social constructivism paradigm which is also in the premises of sensemaking (Blenker & Thrane-Jensen, 2007a).

This chapter builds a dialogue between the theoretical framework of the research, the data and the research questions. There are two research questions considered and the first one concerns the development possibilities produced in the customer-led process. This theme is partly covered with the attribute map -tool but perspectives arising as themes from the data are acknowledged. The second research question is considered in the second chapter and it estimates the meaning of this development process for the case company in micro company context.

4.1 Traditional values in modern outfit

In the present world of change it should be acknowledged among value creation in companies that besides the basic elements, the customers require increasingly substantial and emotional value in purchasing (Tikka & Gävert 2014). This was articulated in the perspectives of the small group conversation in value adding components of the service such as stories and life-style marketing and on the other hand ecologic perspectives. It was considered as one opportunity of a micro company supporting sales and building brand of the company. Also, the customer inquiry revealed that the buyers value traditional elements such as good food and good service the most, but there were new aspects raising in appreciating the fluent advancement of the event and consideration of different diets. Waitressing is still appreciated as serving food but it is also estimated as hosting the different parts of the dining.
The professionals in a small group were asked to reflect their opinions both as experts in their field and as consumers. The basic details of the case company had provided them both an understanding of the case company but also a general comprehension of micro company sector in food service market. Discussion over the positive features in service provided new perspectives and ideas for development. Each of the options – basic and nonnegotiable, discriminator and differentiator and energizer and exciter gained data related to the purchasing, marketing, communications, networking and sales. Negative customer attitude options were clearly not as imaginary and beneficial for the research as the positive options. Gunther McGrath and MacMillan (2000: 29) remark that negative attributes of the rivals offer an opportunity to develop your own service. This perspective was not in the research objectives and this may be the reason of the negative features being less lucrative. One presented perspective considering the negative alternatives was the theme of handling the negative customer experiences in a creative way and turning the customer relationship into positive track again. Lacking capability to interpret the social situations in events was also considered to be a negative feature in catering service.

It was acknowledged in the small group discussion that many functioning features and procedures of the service are rapidly copied by other companies, but handling the customer relationships and the personality of the entrepreneur can be unique assets of a micro company. Gunther McGrath and MacMillan (2000) regard especially the exciters products in attribute map to have duplicatable features. There are many good food suppliers in the markets so the main product may not be the way to distinguish from the rivals in catering service business. A micro company can be a brand based on the persona of the entrepreneur and the manners in customer relations. This idea could be one part of the modern micro company story telling. The case company has a value promise of excellent food and service (Väänänen 2017) and it could be attached to the persona brand of the owner and general marketing.

The combination of basic feature and positive attitude in the attribute map was defined in the data as the service “delivered as agreed” which in practice meant for example that the delivery contains right amount of food required in the event. To the same category, it was defined that he company has to be easily found by the customers and it has to have recognizable marketing, preferably in multiple channels. Based on the
customer inquiry and the interview of the owner the marketing of the company needs advancing. The primary marketing channel of the company is the websites which require a good quality pictures and a wider representation of service selection. Many of the customers have ordered the service based on recommendations. The reputation of the company is positive based on the data but this could be benefitted better in marketing. The next positive category in attribute map– differentiator –was defined from bringing forward the references in marketing.

Differentiators are the products which separate from other products in a positive way (Gunther McGrath & MacMillan 2000: 27.) The differentiator sector was the most useful sector in the data when considering the development. The service of the Väänänen catering service was evaluated in the inquiry to be a differentiator by the customers after their customiership. 27 customers out of 28 evaluated the service to be a positive experience and 17 of them regarded the service to be a differentiator and being better in some features than the rivals. Eight customers of 27 evaluated the service to be an exciter and clearly better than the competitors corresponding service. One customer evaluated the experience as neutral and some feature had affected the purchasing situation. The feedback was mainly positive and it forms an idea of the level and substance of the needed development. The customers were contended with professional service, good food, flexibility of the company both in planning and in service and fluency in doing business. Eleven of the respondents submitted development ideas which related into coverage in marketing and marketing in general.

High-quality pictures and modern communications were emphasized in the differentiator sector. Modern customers prefer adequate information concerning the service and different options to support the decision-making. Different options contain possibility to estimate the price of the service in the websites and electric counter was suggested to enhance the purchasing situation. The customer could first choose the preferred menu and add the number of guest and have pre-information on the expenses. A wide range in menu, special diets and service options were considered as a differentiator. Besides the traditional menus, it was suggested that a low carbonate footprint and ecological menus are the future trends and as such important to some part of the target group. A fluent purchasing situation and flexibility in service were also appreciated. The possibility of a customer to purchase everything included in
organizing an event was a suggestion which was supported by the idea that a micro entrepreneur needs networks and stake holders. Selling entire services for occasion requires a co-operation among circle of micro companies.

The idea of a counter and designed online service experience could work as a positive and discriminating feature in micro company catering service. Catering service companies rarely have their prices online due to the high variation in marginal profits in different food and services. The price of the service is an outcome of many labor requiring elements and therefore it is often calculated for specific events. (Väänänen 2016.) The online shopping service experience of the customers was considered as one valued development target which was estimated to have an impact on sales, marketing and growth. The idea of attribute map is to find out by which features of the product the customer value and make trade-offs in purchasing situations (Gunther McGrath & MacMillan 2000: 24). Based on the research data, marketing and web-selling of the service is defined to be in an important role in developing the case micro company.

The exciter products in attribute map hold features which customers highly value (Gunther McGrath & MacMillan 2000). This was identified in the research data based on the former differentiator. The exciter in catering service sector forms from high quality, conducting a yearly and channel-based communications and marketing plan which results a timely attracting image of the company. The exciter was defined in the data as the customer having the “wau-effect” which relates to the feeling that the customer is gaining beyond the expectations in the trade. It consists of refined details in service which creates the impression of well-thought service and entity. In marketing this can mean building an overall picture of the company values, profile and style by sharing ideas and images to customers. The idea of sharing something free in order to gain something chargeable can in practice mean for example sharing of recipes, writing stories in a blog or other vice building a more life-style and seasonal marketing.

The exciter perspective created development ideas for the marketing and sales. In order to create exciter features to the customer experience, surveying the customer profile as one phase of sales was acknowledged to be important. Catering service customers and
event service users in specific, contain a wide range customers with different needs and expectations. Background information could be collected in organized manner to better serve the demands of flexibility and personal service. Recognizing “Who is the customer” referred both to a method of sales and acknowledging the importance of the customer analysis. The research data consist also aspects of societal changes which affect the field of micro catering service. Related to customer profile mapping it was suggested that the change in population, behavior and immigration may create new traditions in celebrations and services. The general urge for new diets and food trends produced useful data on the demand for example of organic, local and gluten free food. In electric customer inquiry 16 respondents of 28 had emphasized the meaning of special diets in a catering service. This was the fourth important element in valuing a catering service.

Societal changes in attitudes considering for example consumption set new opportunities for micro companies. Emphasizing recycling and ecological choices are growing trends and this could be advantage in marketing and operations in the case company. For example, understanding the impacts of foodspill have created new opportunities like ResQ-app which helps restaurants to sell their leftovers in discount. The ecological perspective can be bound with participating in societal activities. Participating in voluntary work, which has high acceptance among customers, could for example mean guiding the leftovers into charity. These are all improvements which could be suitable for the case company.

4.2 Impacts of the development process

Independency and freedom are the most appreciated reasons to be an entrepreneur (Suomen Yrittäjät 2011) and these were also the values attached to entrepreneurship by the case company entrepreneur. Professional skills and the occurring demand were also affecting the decision of starting the case company. Besides the owner, the company has employed half-time employees based on the seasons. Previous development processes of the company have mainly covered product development. (Väänänen 2017.) The results of this research describe a timely tailored development process in a micro company. This research was conducted as an action research which requires participative observation from the researcher, who is an actively driving the
development and change (Huovinen & Rovio 20017: 95, 104). The research was
designed based on the needs of the company and the development process would not
have taken place without the research. The second research question consider the
meaning of this customer-led development process for the case company in micro
company context.

Micro companies benefit from tailored support evolving from the needs of the owner-
manager (Perren 1999). Structural support is available for micro companies often in
the establishment phase but what seems to be lacking is the support in the mature
phase. The available public support seen fragmented and ineffectual (Työ- ja
elinkeinoministeriö 2012). The lack of experience and expertise prevent the full
growth and development potential in micro companies. The owner of the case
company had not received specific help from outside the company even if it had been
necessary at some points of managing the micro company. The main source of support
had been the accounting company which can only clarify certain administrative issues.
(Väänänen 2017.) The idea of lack of supportive services was shared by the micro
entrepreneurs in the small group discussion.

The customer inquiry pictured the status of the current service among the customers
and provided genuine feedback of the service. It also pictured the features customers
prefer in the current service and together with other data it revealed a problem
concerning the marketing coverage of the company. The data provided many solutions
in correcting the situation. The use of attribute map starts by checking the assumptions
concerning the product inside the company (Gunther McGrath & MacMillan 2000:
41). The data also revealed the fact that the entrepreneur had a good understanding of
the company status without any formal process. This was due to the active role in
customer interface and following of the customer feedback in practice. The benefit of
the inquiry was in mapping the experiences of the customers and supporting the overall
picture of the data collection. The use of the attribute map brought consistency and
structure to the development. The tool highlighted the current opportunities in many
level. The gained results contained new ideas which would not have other vice been
generated by the company.
The development process confirmed that the service was appreciated as positive differentiator among the customers and this offers perspectives for further evaluation of the strengths of the company. The inquiry also raised the fact that the company’s values came across in the service but they needed to be highlighted more in the marketing. The research results brought societal phenomena into practical level and offered more perspectives for opportunities. The data from the small group discussion emphasized the meaning of networks in micro entrepreneurship. Stakeholders and networks were estimated to be important for the micro company entrepreneur for many reasons. The most important element in peer network was the perspective of development. The opportunities created in the small group of professionals from different fields was proved efficient way of developing the service in this case.

Co-operation with other companies enables synergy for example in hiring employees, offering a full service to customers and in procurements. One concrete development suggestion concerned the idea of overarching webpages which would bring all the catering service micro companies under one site creating unity for the customer for the purchasing situation. Co-operation between the micro operators would benefit the companies to receive also substantial orders in business to business scene. Brainstorming, coaching and practical help among other micro entrepreneurs were also appreciated in the research. The case company owner is a member of the local federation of Finnish enterprises but not otherwise active in networking even though the benefits were a little acknowledged. (Väänänen 2017.) To sustain a benefitting network of micro companies requires change in attitudes and a coherent micro company culture.

The development process created perspectives for the company’s inner work and to work which is directed outside the company. The development possibilities concerned the product, sales, marketing and operations for example in form of a new business opportunity in online services and a yearly communications and marketing plan. Besides the concrete ideas the process produced new themes and structures into planning.
5 CONCLUSIONS

Many scholars together with visionary entrepreneurs have substantiated the raise of entrepreneurship as one of the most interesting and significant topics of the modern economy. Steve Blank (2010) an honored entrepreneur, stated after the financial crisis when situation seemed inconsolable that there was actually more entrepreneurial potential in the West and especially in the USA than ever before. He stated that the decade of entrepreneurial revolution had started since many barriers no longer existed. This statement concerned mainly the startups and the ecosystem generating big winners. The public discourse, statistics and research still lack the perspective of the smallest—the micro companies. The same implications as Blank described in modern startup context should be outspoken in the perspective of micro companies. What are the obstacles and accelerators generating and supporting these small but important actors of societies?

Statistically micro companies exist under the term small and medium-sized companies. This supports the image, that the phenomena has no precise relevance. The existence of the micro companies is described as one part of a bigger structure. There are practical tools and information available on how to start a business and different financial possibilities to support entrepreneurship but we lack the system of developing mature micro companies. We need a turn in attitudes and a practical support which acknowledges the issues of the small. By focusing on micro companies, we gain the full potential and growth possibilities among the percentually biggest group of companies. Micro companies promote local circumstances, democracy, welfare and employment. One example of the importance is that micro companies governed the job creation in economically difficult times (Tilastokeskus, 2014). The capability to employ was also valued by the case company entrepreneur (Väänänen 2017).

Many essential domains of economics and management lack the perspective of micro companies and therefore theoretical models and approaches need to be adjusted to better suit the perspectives of the micro actors. This research is an attempt to understand the premises of a micro company by investigating a customer-led development process in a micro company. There have been new openings in the field of entrepreneurs to support the development of both new and old companies. Start
Again, thinking has set the ground for a new culture in supporting existing companies. The attribute map by Gunther McGrath and McMillan (2000: 25) offers a possibility to change a business model by redesigning the company’s products into blockbuster products. This requires finding out the different perspectives concerning the chosen product with different target groups. Every product comprises some of the capabilities and assets of the company and the goal is to find out what are the blockbuster features which need to be enhanced. (Gunther McGrath & McMillan 2000: 23–24.) The goal of this research was to find out what development aspects the customer-led development process provides for the case company and what is the meaning of this conducted process to company in micro company context.

The research was executed as practice-oriented action research which goals for developing the working environment and changing the existing operations model (Anttila 2006: 440) The results concerning the development ideas were fruitful and they brought forward that the development needs of the case company concern marketing, communications, networking and web-sales. The current status of the case company’s main product was defined as a differentiator by the customers who evaluated their experience of the service. In general, the investigation offered a picture of the experiences of the customers and combined to the small group discussion of professionals it provided a wider and in-depth view of the company’s current situation and future aspects. As it was acknowledged in the small group, customer inquiries rarely produce business opportunities as such, but the data triangulation provided different perspectives which created the understanding of the situation.

Data collected from the grass root level of micro company provide insights into the ecosystem of the small. The simple idea of “Keeping an eye in dynamics” is presented as the final activity in using the attribute map (Gunther McGrath & MacMillan 2000: 45–47) and it describes the developmental rubric for the case company as well. A somewhat systematic consideration of the future trends is required in every day level and building company procedures and spirit adaptable for change is essential. The meaning of the development process for the case company can be densified into the experience of structured analysis of the current situation and recognizing the strengths of the company.
5.1 Evaluation of the research

This research was conducted as a qualitative case study with an action research perspective. The case study observes a customer-led development process in a micro company and strives to describe the experiments collected in the development process and create an overwhelming picture of the entity. This chapter contemplates evaluation of the research and considers validity related to research. Considered aspects are subject of the research, arrangements and the role of the researcher. Validity is a custom for estimating scientific research and originally, it was created together with reliability to measure quantitative research. A qualitative research requires also estimation and validity is adapted for this purpose. (Hirsjärvi et al. 1997: 231–233.) A qualitative analysis can be estimated as reliable when it is uncontradicted (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 213).

The qualitative research text has to be descriptive that the readers can estimate if there is a logic in reasoning in the research. According to Anttila (2006: 513) the emphasis in estimating the research validity in qualitative research is on research manner and applicability of the selected methods in relation to the phenomenon under investigation. My purpose in this research was to describe a specific case, a micro company and an action research approach was chosen because of the strong emphasis on development. The research plan, methods and data of this research are typical to a qualitative research and I have described my reasoning concerning the different perspectives of the research. The reader is able to estimate my decisions based on the description. The research theme has a societal importance and describing the phenomenon by introducing a case example can produce information for example for policymakers and entrepreneurs.

Essential in qualitative research is acknowledging the subjectivity of the researcher (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 211). I have described my personal relation both to the theme of micro company and to the case company. A data triangulation was chosen to strengthen the validity of the research and to provide qualitative data of the phenomenon (Anttila 2006: 471). A data triangulation produces dense information of the research object and it is validated in picturing a new subject. Producing dense information is characteristic to a qualitative research and hermeneutic circle supports
the overlapping learning processes which produce new information of the target (Anttila 2006: 305). In qualitative research, reliability can be estimated through the accuracy of the research combination including chosen theory, methods, analysis and altogether the process and the role of the researcher (Eskola & Suoranta, 1998, 208–224).

5.2 Perspectives for future research

This research revealed an existing defect in the field of entrepreneurship. There are many uncovered perspectives in entrepreneurship and acknowledging the perspective of the micro companies would produce important information of the phenomena and extend the field. The information would support a better understanding of the practice of the micro companies and benefit decision-making. Considering the current economic and employment situation in Finland and especially in the rural areas, self-employment and micro entrepreneurship are important factors in welfare (Rikama 2014). Understanding the problematics of the micro actors helps revoke the barriers of development and growth. Future research perspectives concern the overarching picture of micro entrepreneurship and the practice of the micro companies.

There are manifold statistics available concerning the micro companies, but the field lacks coherent research of the phenomena from different perspectives. Information and description is needed to help build a comprehensive micro company business culture and develop the possibilities of growth. Offering tailored developmental services for mature micro companies is one interesting perspective for future research. The current services available for the micro companies are often fragmented due to the manifold character of the companies (Jokela et al. 2016). Internationalization of the micro companies is also statistically investigated but defining the affecting factors seems an interesting topic. Both quantitative and qualitative research on micro companies are needed.
REFERENCES


Appendix 1

AN ELECTIC INQUIRY

Asiakaskysely Väänäsen pitopalvelu

Oliko asiakaskokemuksenne: *
- Positiivinen
- Negatiivinen
- Neutraali

Oliko Väänäsen Pitopalvelun palvelu: *
- Vastaava kuin kilpailuilla palveluntarjoajilla
- Parempi kuin kilpailuilla palveluntarjoajilla joissakin asioissa
- Selvästi parempi kuin kilpailuilla palveluntarjoajilla

Oliko Väänäsen Pitopalvelun palvelu: *
- Vastaava kuin muilla palveluntarjoajilla
- Huonompi joissakin asioissa kuin muut palveluntarjoajat
- Selvästi huonompi palvelu kuin kilpailijoilla

Oliko Väänäsen Pitopalvelun palvelu: *
- Satunnaisesti valittu ja vastaa yleisesti alalla olevia palveluja
- Valintaan vaikutti jokin seikka kokonaisuudessa
- Muu, mitä?

Kuvaile omia sanoja, mitkä seikat tekivät kokemuksestanne positiivisena? *

Kuvaile omia sanoja, mitkä seikat tekivät kokemuksestanne negatiivisena? *

Kuvaile omia sanoja, mitkä seikat tekivät kokemuksestanne neutraalina? *
Mikä on mielestänne tärkeää pitopalvelun palvelussa? *
Voitte valita yhden tai useamman vaihtoehtoon.
- Palvelun hinta
- Palvelun tilaamisen sujuvuus
- Hyvä palvelu
- Hyvä ruoka
- Ruoke-aineallergioiden huomioiminen
- Ennen juhlaa saadut ja sovitut ennakkotiedot
- Juhlan sujuva kakkau
- Kokonaisvarasto
- Muu, mikä?

Miten kehittäisitte Väänäsen Pitopalvelun palveluita tai markkinointia? *

Mitä ruoka-alan palveluita olisitte valmis ostamaan? *
- Juhlapalvelut (läätet, hautajaiset, syntymäpäivät, kastejuhlat...)
- Senioren korttujuokupalvelu
- Lapsiperheiden korttujuokupalvelu
- Leivonnaisia
- Muu olisi valmis ostamaan palveluja
- Muu, mikä?

Millaisia tulevaisuuden ruokapalveluita ja trendit ovat?

Tähän tilaan voitte kirjoittaa mahdolliset muut ajatuksenke Yäänäsen Pitopalveluun ja sen tarjontaan liittyen.


Etunimi
Sukunimi
Matkakuluntieni
Sähköposta
OUTLINE OF A THEME INTERVIEW

Haastattelija: Anu-Maarit Moilanen
Haastateltava: Aila Väänänen
Päivämäärä: 7.3.2017
Kello: 13-

YRITYKSEN PERUSTAMINEN JA YRITTÄJYYS

1. Kuvaile lyhyesti yritykseesi perustiedot. (Henkilöstö, asiakaskunta, markkinointi, milloin perustettu)
2. Millainen olet yrittäjänä?
3. Mitkä seikat vaikuttivat yrityksen perustamiseen? Mitkä olivat tavoitteesi?
4. Ovatko ajatuksesi yrittäjyydestä muuttuneet vuosien varrella?
5. Mitä arvoja liität yrittäjyyteen?
6. Mikä on ollut strategiasi yrityksesi johtamisessa?

JOHTAMINEN

7. Miten olet johtanut yritystä? Onko sinulla ollut mottoja tai johtoajatuksia työssäsi?
8. Oletko saanut tai tarvinnut apua yrityksesi johtamiseen?
9. Mikä on ollut mielestäsi olennaisinta yrityksen johtamisessa?

KEHITTÄMINEN

10. Arvioi yrityksesi kilpailuasemaa markkinoilla. Millä keinoilla yrityksesi on pärjännyt?
    Miten olet reagoinut kilpailuun?
11. Miten asiakkaat näkevät yrityksesi?
12. Millä tavoin olet kehittänyt yritystäsi?
14. Mitä ajattelet yrityksen kasvusta? Onko yrityksesi hakenut kasvua?

MIKROYRITYSTEN KEHITTÄMINEN

15. Millaisia haasteita mikroyrityksen kehittämisessä on?
16. Miten mikroyritysten kehitystä ja olemassa oloa voitaisiin yhteiskunnallisesti tukea?
    Millaiselle tuelle voisi olla tarvetta?
17. Miten mikroyritysten näkökulmat eroavat suurempien yritysten näkökulmista?
Appendix 3

MATERIAL USED IN SMALL GROUP

Miten kehitettiä mikroyrittystä?
Tapaus: Väänäsen Pitopalvelu

Miksi mikroyrittystä?

- Mikroyrittystä laskeutetaan tässä tutkimuksessa 1-3 henkilöä työllistävät yritykset. (Vaihtoehtoinen määritelmä: alle 10 henkilöä työllistävät yritykset ovat mikroyrittystä.) Ne ovat Suomessa usein omistajain yksin johtamia ja toteuttamia yrityksiä.
- Yrityksistä alle 10 työntekijän yrityksistä on 264 435 eli 93,4% (Suomen yrityjät, 2013).
- Mikroyritykset luokitellaan osaksi pieniä ja laajakäyttöä yrityksiä. Mikroyritysten kysymyset ja näkökulmat poikkeavat kuitenkin merkittävästi niitä suurempien muiden PK-yritysten näkökulmista.
- Toimiva PK-sektori rakentaa ja tukee toimivaa taloutta. PK-yrityksistä prosentuaalisesti suurin osa on mikroyrityksiä.

- Mikroyritykset edistävät demokratiaa, täydentävät suurempien toimittajien vaikuttamaa palveluja ja tarjoavat työllistymismahdollisuuksia erityisesti epävakaina aloilta. Niillä on myös suuria taloudellisia vaikutuksia.
- Vaahin tutkittu aihealue, ja tutkijan mielestä Suomessa ei kannusteta mikroyritysten kehittämiseen käynnistysvaiheen jälkeen (vrt. Startup-kulttuuri).
- PK-yritysten myynniltä evät todeutu parhaalla mahdollisella volymilla ja suurin mikroyritysten ja pienyritysten kohdalla jatkuvuus ei toteutu toivotulla tavalla. (Suomen Yrittäjät)
- Vuonna 2015 Suomessa kaikista yrityksistä 67% oli alle kaksi henkilöä työllistävät yrityksiä. (Suomen Yrittäjät) Pienten näkökulmasta on tärkeää.

Kehittyökaluna tutkimuksessa on Rita Guntherin ja Ian MacMillanin työkalu "The Attribute Map" Käytämme kehikosta suunnattua versiota ja se on esillä seuraavassa diassa.

The Attribute Map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CUSTOMER ATTITUDE</th>
<th>ATTRIBUTE OF PRODUCT OR SERVISE, RELATIVE TO COMPETING OFFERINGS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Basic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSITIVE</td>
<td>Nonnegotiable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEGATIVE</td>
<td>Tolerable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEUTRAL</td>
<td>So what?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASIKAAN ASENNENESTE</th>
<th>TUOTEEN/PALVELUN OMINAISPIIRRE, VERRATTUJA KILPAILUOHJAIN/KILPAILEVIAHIN PALVELUJINEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POSITIVINEN</td>
<td>PERUS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siedettävä, ok</td>
<td>Ei neuvottelevasta oleva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IHAN SAMA</td>
<td>Tyytyväisyyttä herättävä</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kartan avulla keskustelemme esimerkkiyöksen palveluiden kehittämisestä. Mitä palvelussa tulisi olla ja millä tavoin yrityksen on mahdollista erottua positiivisesti. Lisäksi pohdimme, miten välttää palvelua likithottaita negatiiviset asiakaskokeemukset. Keskustelussamme tueemme myös alueen tulevuuksien trendejä: miten yhteiskunnalliset muutokset vaikuttavat palveluihin ja mitä mahdollisuuksia niiden mukana syntyy?

Miten kehittää mikroyrityksiä?

Lisäksi keskustelemme mm. seuraavista aiheista:

- Milloin mikroyritysten kehitystö näyttää olevan teille?
- Miten mikroyrityksiä voitaisiin tukea liiketoiminnan kehitystä?
- Mitä haasteita mikroyrityksen kehittämiseen liittyy (yhteiskunnalliset/yksilökohtaisilla)?
- Tuleeko mikroyritysten hakea kasvua?