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The influence of CEO leadership on organizational learning in internationalizing high-tech companies in China

Fan Wu, BA, MSc

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Abstract

This research explores how CEO leadership affects the learning process of internationalizing high-tech companies. There has been a growing recognition of the role of leadership in the international learning process. For example, scholars have discussed the influence of several factors, such as leaders' cognition, decision-making style, and entrepreneurship, on international learning process. Moreover, CEO leadership has been treated as an important factor that can affect a company's organizational learning. However, very few studies have discussed the role of leadership in the organizational learning process of companies' internationalization. Based on a review of existing research gaps in the role of leadership in organizational and international learning literature, this research seeks to gain rich insights into how leadership influences organizational learning in high-tech companies' internationalizing in the Chinese context. This research focused on two common leadership styles in China, authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership. These two leadership styles can be explained through Chinese traditional philosophy and from the lens of power, authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership are deserved to be compared.

This research adopts a qualitative approach based on 8 case studies of Chinese high-tech internationalizing companies. Semi-structured interviews with the CEO and at least two senior managers were carried out in each case. This research contributes to international learning process literature. CEO leadership is proposed as a key factor that can influence each construct associated with the international learning process and cause different international learning processes. This research also contributes to both leadership and internationalization literature as it uses organizational learning as a bridge linking leadership and internationalization. Different leadership styles could cause different internationalization outcomes in performance and management perspectives due to different international learning processes. Moreover, CEO leadership could be changed during companies' internationalization process.

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Glossary of Terms

High-tech	High-Technology
IB	International business
IK	Internationalization knowledge
IP	Internationalization process
INV	International new venture
KBV	Knowledge based view
MK	Market knowledge
RBV	Resource based view
R&D	Research and development
SME	Small and medium sized enterprise
TK	Technological knowledge
TMT	Top management team

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Research background

This research investigates how CEOs' leadership influences the organizational learning process of internationalizing high-tech companies in China. China's high-tech industry is developing rapidly (Duan et al., 2021). Because high-tech companies face short product life cycle and frequent technological replacement (Li et al., 2012), competition among them is becoming fierce (Fu et al., 2006). Therefore, many high-tech companies are steadily moving toward internationalization and are increasing their international sales, in order to expand their market (Lin et al., 2009). A remarkable phenomenon is that China's huge volume of exports is increasing in the high-tech field (Ning, 2009). According to the China Statistical Yearbook on high-tech industry (2020), from 2006 to 2018, China's high-tech exports showed significant growth, from 273,132 million dollars to 731,891 million dollars. As high-tech companies enter the international market, they have to face two problems: lack of knowledge related to internationalization and the challenge of managing international companies.

Internationalization implies that the company requires a significant resource commitment (Knight, 2001). Companies not only need the investment necessary for financial growth and the acquisition of the requisite competencies to overcome entry barriers, but also need the knowledge to coordinate units across different countries and to understand the differences between host and home markets in terms of their political, economic, legal and cultural dimensions (Kuivalainen et al., 2007; Kocak & Abimbola, 2009). Knowledge and organizational learning have been recognized as important factors in internationalization research (e.g., Filatotchev et al., 2009; Freixanet et al., 2020; Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2017). Moreover, organizational learning is especially crucial for SMEs, because SMEs are unable to allocate substantial resources for international knowledge development (Mejri et al., 2018).

Organizational learning begins at the individual level (Kim, 1993). Many scholars have highlighted the importance of the role of senior managers, or CEOs, especially in the internationalization learning process (e.g., Coviello et al., 2017; Fletcher et al., 2021; Freixanet et al., 2018; Freixant & Renart, 2020; Forsgren, 2002; Johanson & Vahlne, 2017; Stoian et al., 2018). However, most leaders in international high-tech firms have good technological knowledge (Lin et al., 2009; Nordman & Mele'n, 2008) but the same cannot always be said for their international knowledge (Nordman & Mele'n, 2008). Therefore, it is important for leaders to learn and promote organizations to learn related knowledge for internationalization. Existing research has discussed the influence of leaders' cognition (Freixanet & Renart, 2020; Freixanet et al., 2018; Stoian et al., 2018), interpretation (Hsu et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2011; Zander et al., 2015), perception (Hsu et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2011; Zander et al., 2015), decision-making style (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), entrepreneurship (Johanson & Vahlne 2009; 2017) and/or knowledge and experience (Freixanet & Renart, 2020; Freixanet et al., 2018; Stoian et al., 2018) on the company's internationalization, especially on the learning process of internationalization. Leaders' cognition, interpretation and decision making are important factors when researchers discuss leadership. Furthermore, leadership has been identified as the driver of organizational learning (Liao et al., 2017; Northouse, 2016; Khurosani, 2018; Kim & Park, 2019). Therefore, it is reasonable to consider the influence of CEO leadership on companies' international learning process. There has, however, been limited research carried out into the influence of CEOs' leadership in terms of organizational learning in companies' internationalization.

Moreover, although leadership has been recognized as the important factors to influence organizational learning, existing research related to leadership and organizational learning still has several gaps. First, many scholars have pointed out that leadership can be perceived differently and show different results in different contexts (e.g., Chen & Ke, 2014; Cheong et al., 2019; Sheer, 2013). Leadership in the Chinese context shows clear differences from leadership in the western context (Rui & Qi, 2021). However, when discussing the influence of leadership on organizational learning, limited research considered the cultural context. Furthermore, research regarding the relationship between leadership and organizational

learning has not involved an extensive list of leadership styles (Xie, 2019). For example, authoritarian leadership, the dominant leadership style in China (Hay Group, 2017), is hardly discussed. The current research attempts to fill research gaps in existing research by exploring how leadership affects the international learning processes in high-tech companies in China.

1.2 Research questions

Based on the research context, this thesis addresses the following research question:

How does CEO leadership influence organizational learning processes in internationalizing processes?

Thus, the research objectives include the following:

- ⑩ To explore the authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership in the Chinese context.
- ⑩ To explore the different impacts of authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership on the international learning processes.
- ⑩ To explore the interaction between leadership and international learning processes.

1.3 Research context

Chinese high-tech SMEs were selected as the research context for the analysis of how leadership affects organizational learning in internationalization processes. This section describes the phenomenon of Chinese high-tech SMEs.

With changes in the world's competitive environment, the Chinese government has realized that technology development and innovation are essential and has formulated and promulgated a series of policies promoting high-tech industries (Zhou et al., 2005; Hong et

al., 2016). For example, in 1988, the Chinese government launched the 'Torch Program', which has promoted the construction of Science and Technology Industry Parks and the establishment of Technology Business Incubators, Pioneer Parks for Returned Overseas Scholars, University Science Parks and special incubators focused on software, IC design, biotechnology, optoelectronics and advanced materials (Huang et al., 2004). In addition, the Chinese government has established special policies and offered financial grants to enhance the development of high-tech industries (Hong et al., 2016). These policies support the development of a large number of small and medium-sized high-tech enterprises, which has been a significant phenomenon in recent years.

Existing research in the field does not provide a clear definition of high-tech industries, with several industries being treated as being high-tech. For example, Bao et al. (2012) regarded information technology, software development, biotechnology and electronics product development as being high-tech industries. Ranft & Lord (2000) considered computer hardware and software, electronics, telecommunications, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals as being high-tech. According to Hatzichronoglou (1997), based on direct R&D intensity and R&D embodied in intermediate and investment goods, manufacturing industries could be classified using four categories: high-technology, medium-high-technology, medium-low-technology and low-technology. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), based on Hatzichronoglou's classifications, suggested that high-tech industries include aircraft and spacecraft; pharmaceuticals; office, accounting and computing machinery; radio, TV and communications equipment; medical, precision and optical instruments (OECD, 2011).

The National Bureau of Statistics of China published its high-technology industry (manufacturing industry) classification, in 2013. This classification lists six categories of industries belonging to the high-tech industry category: the manufacture of medicines, the manufacture of aircraft and spacecraft and related equipment, the manufacture of electronic and communication equipment, the manufacture of computer and office equipment, the manufacture of medical equipment and measuring instruments, and the manufacture of electronic chemicals. Each category also lists sub-industries, which are shown in Table 1.3.1.

Table 1.3.1 Classification of high-tech industry in China (NBS, 2013)

High-tech Industries	
Manufacture of Medicines	Manufacture of Chemical Medicine
	Production of Finished Traditional
	Chinese Herbal Medicine
	Manufacture of Biological Medicine
Manufacture of Aircraft and Spacecraft and Related Equipment	Manufacture of Airplanes
	Manufacture of Spacecraft
Manufacture of Electronic Equipment and Communication Equipment	Manufacture of Communication Equipment
	Manufacture of Communication System Equipment
	Terminal Equipment
	Manufacture of Broadcasting and TV Equipment
	Manufacture of Radar and its Fittings
	Manufacture of TV Set and Radio Receiver
	Manufacture of Electronic Appliances
	Manufacture of Electronic Vacuum Appliances
	Manufacture of Semiconductors
	Manufacture of Integrated Circuits
	Manufacture of Electronic Components
	Manufacture of Other Electronic Equipment
Manufacture of Computers and Office Equipment	Manufacture of Entire Computers
	Manufacture of Computer Components and Parts
	Manufacture of Computer Peripheral Equipment
	Manufacture of Office Equipment
Manufacture of Medical Equipment and Measuring Instruments	Manufacture of Medical Equipment and Appliances
	Manufacture of Measuring Instruments
Manufacture of Electronic Chemicals	

In the knowledge-driven, global economy, international high-tech SMEs are a driver of economic growth (Autio & Rannikko, 2016; Shane, 2009; Yli-Renko et al., 2002).

International high-tech SMEs often suffer from the restrictions of being small and competitive pressures (Crick & Jones, 2000; Filatotchev et al., 2011), a lack of critical resources and knowledge and the operational capabilities enjoyed by large high-tech multinationals (Lindstrand et al., 2011; Oehme & Bort, 2015; Reuber et al., 2017). Learning is the key factor in helping high-tech SMEs to overcome the disadvantages of being small and the related resource constraints (Jones et al., 2011; Reuber & Fischer, 2011). In order to explain the factors that can influence the learning process in companies' internationalization, many scholars (e.g., Freixanet and Renart, 2020; Forsgren, 2016; Johanson & Vahlne, 2017) have called for more research on the role of leaders, including CEOs, entrepreneurs and key managers, in relation to companies' internationalization.

Leaders of Chinese companies, especially Chinese SMEs, often adopt an authoritarian leadership style (Chen et al., 2017; Takeuchi et al., 2020). In Chinese organizations, authoritarian leadership is considered to be a pervasive and effective leadership style that fits in with traditional values: Confucianism and Legalism (Cheng et al., 2004; Liu, 2017; Sheer, 2007). The leaders of high-tech companies, however, often adopt an empowering leadership style in order to encourage creativity and innovation (Caniels et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2018) and can be explained through the Chinese philosophy of Daoism (Ma & Tsui, 2015; Zu, 2019). Authoritarian and empowering leadership are not only all grounded in Chinese philosophy, but also related to power distribution in the organization (Boulu-Reshef et al., 2020; Lorinkova et al., 2013; Sims et al., 2009). To be specific, with authoritarian leadership, leaders have absolute authority and control over subordinates. With empowering leadership, leaders share power with subordinates and provide greater decision-making autonomy. A detailed comparison between authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership is discussed in the Chapter 2. Based on these reasons, this research focuses on authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership as two key leadership styles in the Chinese context.

1.4 Research approach

This study adopts an interpretivism research philosophy to explore the influence of leadership on organizational learning processes in Chinese internationalizing high-tech companies, because the interpretivism philosophy can establish a subjective approach, which can motivate the subjective meanings of social actors' actions (Saunders et al., 2019). This research adopts flexible pattern matching approach and aims for theory building. In addition, this research is concerned with qualitative phenomenon which is grounded in rich context and focuses on subjective understandings of external world from the perspective of participant (Easterby-smith et al., 2008). Therefore, the qualitative multiple case study method is used, since this research is hard to distinguish phenomenon from the Chinese and high-tech context and participants is fundamental for the research (Iacono et al., 2009).

Eight cases companies featured in this research were identified through purposeful sampling strategies (Patton, 2002). This indicates that they were rich with information pertaining to leadership and international learning. Multiple sources of data were used (Yin, 2018), including semi-structured interviews, documentations (e.g., organizational structure map, financial accounts, reports, guides), and direct observation (Yin, 2018). In order to explore in more detail how leadership affects the international learning process, this study uses the internationalization event as a unit to ask interviewees about leadership and organizational learning process during specific internationalization events. The data were analyzed through within-cases comparisons across internationalizing events and through cross-case comparisons among cases with authoritarian leadership and those with empowering leadership (Miles et al., 2014). The specific details of the methodology are outlined in Chapter 4.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters, as follows:

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research, starting with the research background,

which illustrates the importance of organizational learning in companies' internationalization and the role of leadership in organizational learning. The chapter then focuses on the research question and introduces the research context and approach.

Chapter 2 presents a review of leadership and organizational learning literature. The chapter seeks in particular to review the literature on authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership. The chapter also focuses on literature of different leadership styles, in the Chinese context. At the end of the chapter, the influence of CEO leadership on organizational learning, especially in relation to companies' internationalization, is discussed and existing research gaps are highlighted.

Chapter 3 presents a literature review of knowledge and organizational learning processes relating to internationalization. It reviews the definition of knowledge, the resource-based view and the knowledge-based view, to explain the importance of knowledge in companies' internationalization. The chapter then reviews literature on the learning processes involved in internationalization, covering the definition of organizational learning, the process of organizational learning and learning in the internationalization process. Chapter 3 concludes by discussing the role of individual factors in internationalization, especially in the learning process, and by highlighting current research gaps.

Chapter 4 presents the research methodology, starting with the research philosophy and approach. The chapter then discusses the qualitative method and multiple case study method that are adopted in this research, since they are suitable for the proposed 'why' and 'how' research questions. After explaining the research design, this chapter provides details of the data collection and the processes used for data preparation and analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations of the research.

Chapter 5 presents the within-case analysis of five cases that illustrate authoritarian leadership. The within-case findings include insights into leadership styles, the influence of leadership on organizational learning during three key internationalization events in each case and the impact of leadership on internationalizing outcomes in each case.

Chapter 6 presents the with-case analysis of three cases that show empowering leadership. The within-case findings include insights into leadership styles, the influence of leadership on organizational learning during three key internationalization events and the impact of leadership on internationalizing outcomes in each case.

Chapter 7 presents cross-case analysis of five cases with authoritarian leadership and three cases with empowering leadership separately. Then the cross-case analysis of all eight cases is presented. Cross-case findings are presented with reference to three themes, namely leadership style in the Chinese context, the influence of leadership on the international learning process and outcomes from the effect of leadership on the internationalization learning process.

Chapter 8, the final chapter, discusses all findings based on the objectives of the research. This chapter concludes with the contributions of research on leadership, organizational learning and internationalization literature and social implications and identifies the limitations of the thesis, with suggestions for the direction of future research.

Chapter 2　　Leadership and organizational learning

2.1 Introduction

Research on leadership has shown that it can greatly affect the success and failure of organizations (Avolio et al., 1999). Many scholars (e.g., Day et al., 2004; Grint, 2005; Sheer, 2013) have suggested that leadership is inherently complex and has a different meaning to different people, depending on their experiences, background, and development levels. Therefore, culture-specific considerations are a helpful way to understand the influence of leadership on organizational outcomes in different contexts (Atwater et al., 2005; Atwater et al., 2009). In the past, many scholars have tried to understand the relationship between leadership and organizational learning (Do & Mai, 2020) and leadership, especially CEO leadership, has been treated as the driver of learning in organizations (Liao et al., 2017; Northouse, 2016; Khurosani, 2018; Kim & Park, 2019). Therefore, it can be expected that CEO leadership plays a role in the learning process of companies' internationalization.

This chapter seeks to review leadership and organizational learning literature and to highlight the gaps in existing research, especially in the internationalization context. First, this chapter discusses the definition of leadership, leadership in the contexts of China, SMEs, high-tech and internationalization, and view leadership through the lens of po wer. It focuses on two leadership styles - authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership - in the Chinese context, exploring the various definitions and providing a critical evaluation of these two styles, comparing them with similar types of leadership. At the end of this chapter, the influence of leadership on organizational learning, especially in terms of internationalization, is discussed.

2.2 The concept of leadership

The modern academic study of leadership started at the beginning of the 20th century (Day & Antonakis, 2012). Since then, a large number of studies have appeared in the field of leadership (Dinh et al., 2014) and leadership has been discussed in detail by many scholars (e.g., Bennis, 2009; Bennis & Nanus, 2003; Gallos & Heifetz, 2008; Grint, 2012; Stogdill, 1974; Yukl, 2013). In spite of the number of studies available, there remains ambiguity as to the concept of leadership (Grint, 2010; Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). Bass (1990, p.11) stated that "there are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept". Leadership has been conceptualized in various ways, with no single, universally accepted definition. Some scholars (e.g., Stogdill, 1974; Yukl, 2002; Grint, 2012), however, have pointed out that the various definitions of the concept of 'leadership' have arisen from how each researcher has considered leadership.

According to Grint (2012), the various definitions of leadership stem from whether leadership is considered as a person, a position, a result or a process. To be specific, when scholars consider leadership in the context of a 'person', leaders have strong personal attributes; for example, they have the traits, skills and/or abilities required to lead followers, to achieve goals (Bass, 1990; Grint, 2012; Yukl, 1989). When scholars consider leadership as a 'position', leadership means the position which gives a person what is needed to lead others (Grint, 2012). Some scholars have suggested that formal positions provide authority, but not leadership, since leadership requires more than holding a particular role or position (Jing & Avery, 2008). Heifetz (1994) distinguished between formal and informal leadership and suggested that both could address leadership issues, but through different processes. For example, informal leaders can work through influence rather than through authority or direct control. When scholars consider leadership in terms of a 'result', leaders are judged on what they accomplish (Grint, 2012), so that scholars explore the leadership-performance relationship and debate the effectiveness of different leadership styles and behaviors on organization performance and value creation (Avery, 2004; Hawkins & Dulewicz, 2009; Hiller et al., 2011; Shamir & Howell, 1999; Yukl, 1999). Many studies have acknowledged that there is no 'panacea'. Different leadership styles reflect social and historical roots

(Bryman, 1992; Finkelstein et al., 2009; Hiller et al., 2011; Jing & Avery, 2008; Shamir & Howell, 1999; Yukl, 1999) and affect performance differently, depending on the context. When scholars consider leadership as a 'process', leaders have been evaluated by the means they use to lead their followers and organizations (Grint, 2012). This view considers leadership as a set of interpersonal processes or dynamics between leaders and followers (Barker, 2001; Bass, 1990). Leadership involves an array of activities concerned with motivating and influencing people to define and achieve outcomes. Individuals can adopt both leader and follower roles. If they are influencing others, setting directions and providing support they are playing a leadership role. In contrast, if they are being influenced, following directions and receiving support they are playing a follower role (Day et al., 2004; Kellerman, 2008). Definitions of leadership generally adopt one or more aspects (e.g., Dinh et al., 2014; Li et al., 2020). In the current research, the researcher adopts these four aspects (a person, a position, a result and a process) when discussing leadership.

Many scholars (e.g., Day et al., 2004; Grint, 2005b; Sheer, 2013) have pointed out that the definition of leadership is inherently complex because it has a different meaning to different people, depending on their experiences, background, development level, and different view to leadership. Research has suggested that historical (the development history of the country or the maturing process of leaders in a specific context), societal (the social structure or networks in a specific context) and/or cultural (values, ideational systems, and behavioral models) factors in a specific region or country could affect leadership outcomes and should be taken into consideration (Chen & Ke, 2014; Dickson et al., 2003, 2012). These factors may be unique in different contexts and require the 'indigenous approach' by researchers. Therefore, this section discusses leadership in the Chinese context and in the context of SMEs, high-tech and internationalization, and highlights gaps in existing research first. Then, this section explains and compares different leadership styles through the lens of power and highlights the two leadership styles, authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership, which are chosen for this research.

2.2.1 View the leadership in the Chinese context

Although research on leadership has taken place for a century, almost all leadership studies have been conducted in the West and most leadership theories have been developed in the Western context (Barney & Zhang, 2009; Child, 2009; Hui, 2022; Sanchez-Runde et al., 2011; Tsui, 2006; Wang et al., 2022). Many scholars (Rousseau & Fried, 2001; Wang et al., 2022) have pointed out that developing leadership theories in the Western context enables them to apply to different economic contexts. Leadership research in China started around forty years ago, so it is still a relatively recent phenomenon (Zhao & Jiang, 2009). Barney & Zhang (2009) pointed out that most studies on Chinese leadership have followed the same pattern: finding Chinese phenomena that exemplify existing leadership theories developed in the West. Until now, a large body of research on Chinese leadership continues this pattern (e.g., Cui, et al., 2022; Gu et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022). As Wang et al. (2005, p.429) stated that "Although our findings are based on samples drawn from mainland China, we have no reason to expect different results were the same study to be conducted in the West". Moreover, when Western scholars study Chinese indigenous leadership, they are unlikely to understand Chinese culture as well as Chinese scholars. However, "Chinese researchers themselves also pay surprisingly little attention to the impact of the Chinese context on the leadership phenomena" (Cheng et al., 2009, p.94).

According to Triandis & Gelfand (1998), national cultures can be separated into two groups: horizontal individualism and vertical collectivism. People in horizontal individualism cultures (e.g., the United States, the UK, Canada, and Australia) are more likely to regard themselves as being independent of others and having equal status to others, including their leaders (Lee et al., 2018). In contrast, people in vertical collectivism cultures (e.g., China, Singapore, Japan, and Korea) are more likely to regard themselves as being interdependent with others and show respect to authority, because they have a higher power distance orientation (Rockstuhl et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2018). Therefore, leadership in the Chinese context has clear differences from leadership in the Western context (Rui & Qi, 2021). For example, Tsui et al. (2004), through two surveys involving nearly 1,500 middle managers, found six leadership dimensions: articulating vision, monitoring operations, being creative

and risk-taking, relating and communicating, showing benevolence, and being authoritative. They suggested that, based on the Chinese culture, people in leadership positions should treat subordinates with kindness, gentleness and benevolence, which is different from leadership in the West (Tsui et al., 2004). Tsui et al. (2004) also pointed out that multiple forces create unique leadership behavior in China, including traditional values, communist ideologies, economic reform and Western management theories and practices. Traditional cultural values influence leadership because traditional beliefs dictate certain values that leaders are willing to insist upon (Low, 2014). In general, Chinese leaders and subordinates harbor high levels of collectivism, power distance and traditional values (Au & Kwan, 2009; Wang et al., 2019), because Chinese culture is believed to be dominated by Confucianism (Keller & Kronstedt, 2005; Hui, 2022). Moreover, Chinese culture also incorporates Legalism and Daoism (Hui, 2022), which are important Chinese philosophies relating to leadership as discussed below.

Confucianism highlights an array of values, such as harmony, hierarchy, filial piety, conformity, face-saving, reciprocity and submission to authority, which provides the fundamental logic of paternalism and collectivism in China (Lin, 2010) and is still the most influential ideology in China (Song & Beckett, 2013). Cheung & Chan (2005) argued that Confucianism advocates collectivism, benevolence, learning, loyalty, righteousness and humility. Confucianism has fostered collectivism in China (Tsang, 2007). Legalism assumes that people are selfish (Hwang, 2008). Legalism argues that 'fa' (law), 'shu' (management technique) and 'shi' (power) are the core skills for being a leader (Jin, 2001). To be specific, fa (law) is the rule and regulation that subordinates should follow (Hwang, 2008). Leaders use fa to govern subordinates (Jin, 2001). Shi (power) refers to a variety of resources that leaders can use to control subordinates (Hwang, 2008), which includes positional power, which has an important part in Legalism. Legalism believes that the leader is the person who occupies the leader's position and has the right to make certain decisions (Hwang, 2008). Otherwise, it is hard for a person to exert influence. Shu (management technique) refers to management skills that are necessary to realize organizational goals (Hwang, 2008). Legalism emphasizes that management skills need to involve objectivity, enforceability, practicability and universality (Hwang, 2008). Legalism suggests that punishments and

rewards should be based on the performance of subordinates and highlights the control of subordinates. Therefore, generous rewards and austere punishments are necessary factors in Legalism (Cheung & Chan, 2005). In Chinese culture, there is a tension between Confucianism and Legalism (Liu, 2017). There are two leadership styles that are deeply rooted in Confucianism and Legalism, which are often discussed by scholars in the Chinese context. These are authoritarian leadership (Cheng et al., 2004; Duan et al., 2018) and paternalistic leadership (Chen et al., 2014). Confucianism is the basis for these leadership types, while Legalism provides practical methods for them (Liu, 2017). Authoritarian leadership and paternalistic leadership are discussed specifically in section 2.3, as they are the typical leadership styles in the Chinese context.

The founder of Daoism, Laozi, was born about 2500 years ago, who was a contemporary of Confucius (Ma & Tsui, 2015). Daoism is the only native religion in China (Liu, 2017) and is regarded as one of the main philosophical foundations impacting Chinese leaders' thinking and behavior (Cheung & Chan, 2005). Daoism is named after "Dao" which is a difficult-to define term (Ma & Tsui, 2015). The most essential meaning of "Dao" comprises true, authentic, unchangeable laws which rules all things (Ma & Tsui, 2015). Therefore, people, including leaders and employees, must follow Dao's guide. Laozi's book, Dao De Jing, which was written to instruct hereditary rulers, highlights the main principle of Daoism is govern by doing nothing that goes against nature. "Doing nothing" does not mean that leaders should avoid making critical decisions or changes. It suggests that leaders need to avoid extra, and counterproductive actions based on "Dao" (Ma & Tsui, 2015). Due to readers must make judgements regarding what kind of actions could align with "Dao", Daoism is usually understood as simply "doing nothing", although Laozi did not advise doing nothing (Ma & Tsui, 2015). One of the most famous saying that Laozi said is "Governing a large state is like cooking a [pot of] small fish" (Lynn, 1999, p. 164). There are two interpretations of this sentence. One explanation is that governing a country is like cooking a dish, with neither too much nor too little seasoning. Related to management, in order to achieve desirable outcomes, leaders need to balance giving guidance to and not interfering subordinates (Ma & Tsui, 2015). Another way to explain this saying is that when cooking small fish, don't stir too much, or it will easily break the fish. In other words, "action

results in much harm, but quietude results in the fulfillment of authenticity. Thus, the larger the state, the more its ruler should practice quietude, for only then can he widely obtain the hearts/minds of the mass of common folk" (Lynn, 1999, p. 164). Regardless of the interpretation, Daoism proposes empowerment and striking the right balance (Li et al., 2020; Ma & Tsui, 2015). Therefore, Daoism shows significant differences from Confucianism and Legalism. Confucianism and Legalism highlight exercising control over subordinates to achieve high performance. In contrast, Daoism highlights empowerment and openness (Prince, 2005). Some scholars (e.g., Ma & Tsui, 2015; Zu, 2019) have adopted Daoism to explain empowering leadership or the empowerment behavior of leaders in China, because these leaders empower subordinates and give them autonomy. Empowering leaders believe that subordinates can make the right decisions (Ou et al., 2014) and involve them in decision making (Ahearne et al., 2005). Similarly, Daoism philosophy states that effective leaders should refrain from active problem solving and leave decisions to subordinates (Ma & Tsui, 2015). Empowering leadership is discussed in detail in section 2.4.

2.2.2 View the leadership in the SME, high-tech and internationalization context

Fanco & Matos (2015) pointed out that leadership has an increasingly fundamental role in SMEs. In general, SMEs have uncomplicated operational structures, a small number of staff and bounded business activities (Hoang et al., 2020). In SMEs, the entrepreneur or owner is the most influential decision-maker (Yan & Yan, 2013). Therefore, most SMEs' strategies reflect the objectives and ambitions of the owner (Covin & Slevinm, 1989). SMEs are significantly different to large firms as they tend to have limited human resources, financial resources and managerial expertise (Cao et al., 2009; Chang & Hughes, 2012). Due to these limitations, leadership in SMEs has more influence on firms' innovation behavior (Dunne et al., 2016; Vargas, 2015) and performance (Garavan et al., 2016) than in larger firms. Greiner (1972, p.6) pointed out that, in the growth processes of SMEs, the first challenge lies in the 'crisis of leadership'. Therefore, the importance of leadership is unequivocal (Yukl, 2010). Understanding the influence of leadership on SMEs can help SMEs' growth process (Franco & Matos, 2015). Existing research states that leadership in SMEs has a more informal style

compared to bigger companies. Franco & Matos (2015), through empirical evidence of SMEs, concluded that there is no pure leadership style of SMEs' leaders. The leadership styles of SMEs depend on their operating environment, such as their sector and geographical region. However, a limited amount of research has discussed different leadership styles in the context of SMEs (Fanco & Matos., 2015; Garavan et al., 2016).

Due to short product life cycles and frequent technological replacement, high-tech companies face fierce competition (Li et al., 2012). Therefore, many leadership studies have chosen the high-tech industry as the research context, with high-tech companies having a higher demand for innovation and creativity (e.g., Tung & Yu., 2015). For example, Tung & Yu (2015) collected data from 103 employees in Taiwan's high-tech industry, to examine the influence of innovation leadership (including participative, supportive and instrumental leadership) on employee creativity. According to their research, participative and supportive leaders can enhance employee creativity. In general, most leaders in international high-tech firms have a strong technological background and are good at dealing with technological issues (Lin et al., 2009). At the same time, they may lack management, market and international knowledge (Nordman & Mele'n, 2008). However, few studies have considered the characteristics of high-tech leaders in this context.

Due to the fierce competition, more and more high-tech SMEs choose to start internationalization to expand their markets (Avolio et al., 2003). With internationalization, SMEs face a more dynamic environment and global competition and so need to change the way in which they deal with human resources (Franco & Matos, 2015). Leaders must be taken into consideration in this process because they are the main facilitator of this process. It is important to understand, in the internationalization context, how leaders face the challenges of working with a culturally diverse subordinate (Franco & Matos, 2015). Therefore, leadership has a more fundamental influence in the context of global competition (Franco & Matos, 2015). Few scholars have, however, discussed leadership in the internationalization context.

2.2.3 View the leadership through the lens of power

Power is defined as "having the discretion and the means to asymmetrically enforce ones will" (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015, p. 139). Sturm and Antonakis (2015) view power as a personal capacity owned by leaders which is "a state, trait and psychological experience" (Sturm & Antonakis, 2015, p. 138). Power can be seen as a fundamental issue in current leadership theory and practice (Krauter, 2020). Collinson (2005) proposes that rather than see power as a dependent variable between leaders and followers, it is a deeply embedded and inseparable feature of leadership structures, culture, practices and relations. In other words, leadership and power are intertwined (Ross et al., 2014). However, "puzzling absence of any mention of power in the vast majority of leadership scholarship" (Firth & Carroll, 2017, p.128).

Empowering, participative, directive and authoritarian leadership are all related to power in the organization (Boulu-Reshef et al., 2020; Lorinkova et al., 2013; Sims et al., 2009). Empowering leadership emphasizes enhancing individual motivation through delegating authority to the lowest organizational level (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014; Sahrma & Kirkman, 2015). Participative leadership involves encouraging subordinates to take a certain amount of responsibility (Sauer, 2011). Participative leaders tend to consult their subordinates, ask for their suggestions and take those suggestions into consideration before making decisions (Chen & Tjosvold, 2006; de Poel, Stoker & Van der Zee, 2014; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). They prefer consultation to direction and try to build consensus among team members (Amabile et al., 2004). Sharma & Kirkman (2015) pointed out that empowering leadership is broader than participative leadership, in that empowering leadership can result in subordinates making their own decisions, rather than influencing leaders' decisions (Ahearne et al., 2005). On the other hand, authoritarian leadership involves asserting absolute authority and controlling over subordinates and demanding unquestionable obedience (Cheng et al., 2004). Directive leadership accentuates the leader's position of power (Lorinkova et al., 2013), referring to setting goals for the organization and structuring and sequencing tasks for subordinates with unspoken rules (Lorinkova et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2013). Directive leaders focus on giving guidance, advocating goals,

monitoring performance and correcting mistakes (Boulu-Reshef et al., 2020). They expect subordinates to comply with instructions, without giving subordinates scope to think or to anticipate problems (Mukherjee & Mulla, 2021). Directive leadership only corresponds to the non-participative behavior of subordinates, which does not entail authoritarian leadership (Lonati, 2020). Authoritarian leadership highlights the leader's absolute authority and demands unquestioning obedience (Cheng et al., 2004).

Many studies (e.g., Boulu-Reshef et al., 2020; Martin et al., 2013, Sims et al., 2009) have compared empowering or participative leadership with directive leadership to investigate the way that leaders use power when guiding their organization. Lonati (2020) proposed that participative leadership and directive leadership have a neutral connotation. In other words, directive leadership only corresponds to non-participative behavior, which is neither autocratic nor authoritarian (Lonati, 2020). Participative leadership only corresponds to non-directive behavior, which is not the same as full empowerment. Therefore, the current research views authoritarian, directive, participative and empowering leadership as representing a sequence of leadership styles where power is increasingly delegated from leaders to subordinates. To be specific, with authoritarian leadership, leaders have absolute authority and control over subordinates. With directive leadership, leaders expect subordinates to comply with instructions. With participative leadership, leaders encourage subordinates to participate in decision making. With empowering leadership, leaders share power with subordinates and provide greater decision-making autonomy. Therefore, authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership are two typical leadership styles related to the distribution of power: authoritarian leaders tend to control all power, while empowering leaders tend to share all power.

Existing research (Blanchard et al., 1985; Fiedler, 1967; Fiedler & Garcia, 1987) considers that leadership style should be flexible and should be amended to align with the environment, circumstances, different followers, and the different tasks of the company. Findings from previous studies have demonstrated that the effectiveness of leadership depends on the context (Boulu-Reshef et al., 2020). For example, Sims et al. (2009) proposed that a directive is more effective than empowering leadership, when either subordinates lack experience, or

the problem is critical. Many studies have proposed that organizations may choose different leadership styles depending on the changing environment (e.g., Lonati, 2020; Mukherjee & Mula, 2021). Lonati (2020) observed participative and directive leadership in the history of agricultural society. For the large majority of humans' evolutionary past, there have been many nomadic, hunter-gatherer, small-scale societies, which have adopted participative leadership (Gintis et al., 2015). People in these small-scale communities have even killed leaders who have had too much coercive influence (Gintis et al., 2015). In crisis situations (e.g., wartime), however, participative leadership can be temporarily discarded in favor of directive leadership. Colovic (2021) used business model innovation as a bridge to connect CEOs' leadership with SMEs' internationalization in the context of Japan. Colovic (2021) used directive leadership and empowering leadership as two contrasting leadership styles (Hmieleski & Ensley, 2007; Lorinkova et al., 2013). This study made the interesting point: "some (but not all) of the CEOs who displayed directive leadership style in the early stage of internationalization allowed that style to evolve toward empowering leadership as the internationalization unfolded" (Colovic, 2021, p.14). Zheng et al. (2021) examined ways in which empowering, and directive leadership behaviors could be used to support the ambidexterity of the theory of leadership, which describes how leaders can balance, and switch between, directive and empowering leadership to address distinct tasks and issues.

2.2.4 Summary

This section has discussed the definition of leadership and has highlighted the importance of understanding context in leadership research. It has also reviewed the limitations of leadership research in the Chinese context and introduced how traditional Chinese philosophies relate to leadership: Confucianism and Legalism, which are linked with authoritarian leadership, and Daoism, which is linked with empowering leadership. This section has also discussed existing leadership research in the context of SMEs, high-tech and internationalization. Then, this section compared four leadership types, including empowering leadership and authoritarian leadership throughthe lens of power. This research focuses on authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership not only because they related to Chinese traditional philosophy, but also because they are two typical leadership styles

related to distribution of power, which are deserved to be compared and explored. The next two sections discuss, in detail, existing research on authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership.

2.3 A review of authoritarian leadership literature

Hay Group published a White Paper, in 2017, which revealed that authoritarian leadership was still a dominant leadership style in the world. Based on the report, 45% of Chinese business leaders had adopted authoritarian leadership (Hay Group, 2017). Therefore, it could be argued that authoritarian leadership is a typical leadership style in China, which deserves to be discussed in the Chinese context. This section first reviews the definition, and critical evaluations, of authoritarian leadership, before analyzing differences in the effects of authoritarian leadership in the Chinese context and comparing it with similar leadership styles in generally context.

2.3.1 The concept of authoritarian leadership

Authoritarian leadership behaviors are derived from the Chinese word 'liwei', which means 'awe' and 'inspiring fear' (Cheng et al., 2004). In the Western definition, authoritarian leadership allows leaders to make unilateral decisions (Chan et al., 2013; Tsui et al., 2004; Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2005) and prevail over subordinates (Chan et al., 2013; Harms et al., 2018; Pelligrini, Scandura & Jayaraman, 2010; Schaubroeck et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2013). Cheng et al. (2004, p.91) conceptualized authoritarian leadership as "a leader's behavior that asserts absolute authority and control over subordinates and demands unquestionable obedience". The idea behind authoritarian leadership is the notion of social control: leaders show dominance over subordinates and subordinates stay submissive and obedient to leaders (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). Leader's stress personal dominance (Tsui et al., 2004) and subordinates need to be submissive, dependent, and obedient (Pelligrini et al., 2010). Authoritarian leaders strictly control the hierarchical order (Pelligrini et al., 2010) and enforce rules and determine rewards and punishments (Aryee et al., 2007). Authoritarian

leaders are more closed to communication and tend to use a top-down approach in the company (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün et al., 2021).

Regarding the dimension of authoritarian leadership, different scholars have proposed different classifications. Zheng & Fan (2000) suggested four dimensions of authoritarian leadership: authoritarian style, image grooming, derogating subordinates' ability and teaching. Authoritarian style refers to superior centralized power, the close monitoring of subordinates and closed communication. Image grooming refers to how leaders build their image in front of subordinates. Derogating subordinates' ability means belittling subordinates' abilities, refusing their suggestions and avoiding praising them. Teaching refers to fostering high-performance standards among subordinates (Zhou & Liao, 2012). Zhang et al. (2021) suggested three main characteristics of authoritarian leaders. Firstly, authoritarian leaders highlight personal prestige. To be specific, they have high power requirements and prefer communication from top to bottom in the hierarchy (Zhang et al., 2021). Secondly, authoritarian leaders care about their image and reputation and always exhibit self-confidence (Zhang et al., 2021). Thirdly, authoritarian leaders tend to show high performance requirements to subordinates. They will provide substantial rewards to subordinates who achieve high performance, and publishment to subordinates who fail to do so. According to Li et al. (2021), there are two types of authoritarian leadership. The first type is the "Do what I say" approach (Goleman, 2000, p.82). In other words, leaders control subordinates through a more informal way. The second type is the formal control approach, in which authoritarian leaders tend to control subordinates through setting strict rules, demanding responsibilities, promising rewards for obedience and punishing noncompliance (Aryee et al., 2007; Chen & Farh, 2010).

The research described above emphasize that authoritarian leadership draws the boundaries of discretion and subordinates are not allowed to cross these boundaries (Aryee et al., 2007). If subordinates fail to follow the rules and procedures set by authoritarian leadership, they will bear the consequences (Chen et al., 2014). Authoritarian leadership aims to achieve operational efficiency and pursue centralized decision making (Huang et al., 2015; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). At the same time, authoritarian leadership emphasizes subordinates'

performance by controlling, belittling and pressing them (Cheng et al., 2004), which may cause subordinates to view authoritarian leadership as an undesirable leadership style that erodes their self-identity. This is why authoritarian leadership is often treated as a destructive and ineffective leadership style (Aryee et al., 2007; House et al., 2004). The current research is based on one assumption about authoritarian leadership: an authoritarian leader's commanding style is intended to achieve efficiency through maintaining power, rather than harming subordinates or organizations (Ahmad Bodla et al., 2019).

2.3.1.1 Limitations of authoritarian leadership

There are many labels that describe authoritarian leadership in a negative light, such as 'abusive supervision' (Tepper, 2000), 'despotic leadership' (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008), 'petty tyranny' (Ashforth, 1997) and 'destructive leadership' (Einarsen et al., 2007). Authoritarian leadership has been viewed as a dysfunctional leadership style (Lee et al., 2018). Aryee et al. (2007) claimed that authoritarian leadership is a destructive, or dark, leadership style, which could have adverse consequences for subordinates and organizations.

Researchers have been critical about authoritarian leadership because it entails extremely direct, or commanding, behaviors for controlling subordinates (Shen et al., 2019). Many scholars have pointed out that authoritarian leadership has been shown to have a negative relationship with important attributes of subordinates (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008; Chan et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2014; Shaw et al., 2020), such as trust (Chen et al., 2014), voice (Liu et al., 2021), performance (Wu et al., 2021), organizational citizenship behavior (Chen et al., 2014), subordinate creativity (Guo et al., 2018). To be specific, Chen et al. (2014) stated that, because authoritarian leaders tend to show commanding and strong, controlling behavior, without expressing positive emotions or demonstrating amicable concern, subordinates may think that they cannot benefit from making an additional effort. Studies have found that leaders' authoritarian behavior evokes negative emotions among subordinates, for example, subordinates can feel anger, hostility and fear (Wu et al., 2003; Farh et al., 2006). Authoritarian leadership has also been shown to have a negative influence on subordinates' commitment, satisfaction and loyalty toward leaders (Cheng et al., 2002). Chiang et al. (2021) claimed that controlling emotional expression is an integral part of authoritarian leaders'

influence. Authoritarian leaders tend to discourage subordinates from showing emotion by creating an organizational climate in which emotions must be suppressed (Chiang et al., 2021). Therefore, subordinates' personal agency is inhibited (Liu et al., 2021). When subordinates work with authoritarian leaders, they have fewer opportunities to express their views to leaders and have limited capacity to influence leaders' decision-making processes (Tost et al., 2013). When subordinates can only achieve the assigned performance goal set by leaders, they may view themselves as an extension of authority (Liu et al., 2021), making it difficult for them to implement moral self-sanction in order to evaluate their own work (Butterfield et al., 2000; Treviño, 1986). Wu et al. (2012) suggested that authoritarian leadership has a negative impact on subordinates' performance and on organizational citizenship behavior. Ahmad Bodla et al. (2019) pointed out that subordinates are less involved in extra-role behavior when they have authoritarian leaders.

Moreover, authoritarian leadership could have detrimental effects on companies' performance (Chen et al., 2014). Many scholars have pointed out that authoritarian leadership has been shown to have a negative relationship with workplace outcomes, such as team interaction, subordinates' organizational commitment, task performance (Chan et al., 2013; Chen et al., 2014; Duan et al., 2018; Harms et al., 2018; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008; Schuh et al., 2013; Shen et al., 2019). Zhang et al. (2015) pointed out that the level of agreement between leaders and subordinates is important to authoritarian leadership, because authoritarian leadership entails the power-oriented interactional approach. In some cases, however, the views of subordinates and leaders are different. Therefore, authoritarian leaders often engage in one-way, top-down communication with subordinates (Zhang et al., 2015). Subordinates may not be receptive to their leaders' control (Graham et al., 2017). Authoritarian leaders are unwilling to listen, share information or hear complaints from subordinates, which creates a silent culture in companies (Huang et al., 2005). In order to make decisions independently, authoritarian leaders may control resources and rules (Chan, 2013) and even conceal key information (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Wang et al., 2013), which can have a negative impact on organizational performance (Wu et al., 2012).

2.3.1.2 Benefits of authoritarian leadership

Some researchers have found authoritarian leadership to be related to positive job attitudes and a positive contribution to companies' revenue, especially in the Chinese or Asian context (Cheng et al., 2004; Huang et al., 2015). Wang & Guan (2018) proposed that authoritarian leadership can enhance subordinates' performance based on the Chinese samples. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, leaders setting specific and unambiguous goals is effective for organizations. As discussed above, authoritarian leaders always make the final decision and define a single, precise mission, which can reduce uncertainty among subordinates (Cheng et al., 2000; Schaubroeck et al., 2017). According to goal setting theory, when the goal is specific, it is easier for both organizations and individuals to achieve a higher performance (Locke & Latham, 2006). Secondly, as Rast et al. (2013) pointed out, authoritarian leaders are more likely to provide a clear, unambiguous and direct role model for subordinates, so that the latter can better understand what they should do and what they should not do. Thirdly, authoritarian leaders tend to set higher performance expectations for subordinates (Aycan, 2006). Wang & Guan (2018) stated that subordinates with higher performance standards, strict control and clear rules may have more motivation to perform better based on the Chinese context.

Liu et al. (2021) argued that the power of authoritarian leaders comes from the dependence of subordinates on their leaders' abilities and experience. In this view, authoritarian leaders' primary role is to convey the methods of achieving success to subordinates and train them to achieve higher levels of performance (Liu et al., 2021). Authoritarian leaders tend to make subordinates obey and agree with the company's vision, so that they can guide subordinates' behavior in order to achieve the company's goals. This can also enhance subordinates' sense of identity with the company (Cheng et al., 2004). When subordinates believe they belong to the organization, they will feel the emotional value of belonging to that organization (Zhang et al., 2021). Moreover, subordinates may develop an organizational identity and a perceived insider status (Wang et al., 2017). If subordinates believe that the authoritarian behavior of leaders is purely for the purpose of business, and is not personal, then they may agree with authoritarian leadership (Wang & Guan, 2018). Huang et al. (2015) suggested that when a firm faces resource constraints authoritarian leadership is positively related to firm performance. However, authoritarian leadership cannot always result in positive

consequences (Karakitapoglu-Aygün et al., 2021). The above studies all based on the Chinese context or Chinese sample. Therefore, culture-specific considerations are a helpful way to understand why authoritarian leadership can have different impacts on subordinates' behavior (Chen et al., 2014; Chen & Farth, 2010), and this is discussed in the next section.

2.3.1.3 Authoritarian leadership and paternalistic leadership

In the Chinese context research, there is a leadership style, paternalistic leadership, that is similar to authoritarian leadership and is also often mentioned. Paternalistic leadership is also a widespread leadership style in China (e.g., Chen & Kao, 2009; Cheng et al., 2000). Cheng and his colleagues (e.g., Cheng et al., 2004; Farh & Cheng, 2000) conceptualized paternalistic leadership with three dimensions: authoritarianism, benevolence and morality. Authoritarianism refers to the leader's strong authority and control over subordinates, which is the same as authoritarian leadership (Cheng et al., 2004). Benevolence relates to leaders individualized and holistic concern for subordinates' personal and familial well-being (Cheng et al., 2004). Morality is depicted as leaders' superior moral character and integrity through acting unselfishly and leading by example (Cheng et al., 2004). In general, paternalistic leaders play a father-like role and take care of their subordinates' professional and personal lives in exchange for their loyalty and compliance (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008).

Paternalistic leadership is often compared with authoritarian leadership in the Chinese context (e.g., Cheng et al., 2000; Schaubroeck et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2020). On the one hand, some studies have considered paternalistic leadership as consisting of multiple leader behaviors, which means that authoritarian, benevolent and moral leadership are distinct leader behaviors and independent of one another (Cheng et al., 2014; Chou et al., 2015; Farh et al., 2006; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). Therefore, these scholars have treated authoritarian leadership as being one dimension of paternalistic leadership (e.g., Cheng et al., 2004; Wu et al., 2020). On the other hand, some scholars have argued that paternalistic leadership is the combination of high levels of authoritarianism and high levels of benevolence (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008; Zheng et al., 2020). Authoritarian leadership can be coupled with both low and high levels of benevolence (De Hoogh et al., 2015; Zheng

et al., 2020). Since this research attempts to compare authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership, the biggest difference between them, according to the western definition, is the distribution of power. Therefore, this research adopts the latter view and more focus on CEO's authoritarianism rather than benevolence or morality.

2.3.2 Authoritarian leadership in the Chinese context

Existing research has highlighted that national culture is a contextual variable that might influence the outcomes of leadership (Atwater et al., 2005; Atwater et al., 2009). Gu et al. (2020) pointed out that Western studies have shown strong negative reactions to authoritarian leaders or leadership (e.g., Aryee et al., 2007; Hoel et al., 2010; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008; Shaw et al., 2020), because Western individuals place a greater emphasis on power-sharing and equity (Cheng et al., 2004). Authoritarian leadership is a prevalent leadership type in collectivistic cultures and high-power distance societies (Chan et al., 2013). In high power distance cultures, subordinates have been conditioned to respect authority and hierarchy, and they tend to comply with their leaders' instructions without question (Hofstede, 1983). Generally, authoritarian leadership plays an important role in high power distance societies where subordinates tend to seek guidance and instruction for carrying out their responsibilities (Farh et al., 2006). According to Ahmad Bodla et al. (2019), cultures with high power distance and collectivism can result in a positive relationship between authoritarian leadership and subordinates or organizational outcomes. Subordinates in collective cultures tend to obey leaders without objection (Chan et al., 2013). With authoritarian leadership, subordinates comply with authoritarian leaders and meet extra-role expectations in order to develop a harmonious relationship and act in line with social norms (Ahmad Bodla et al., 2019).

Traditional Chinese values emphasize authority, fatalism, obedience and a general sense of powerlessness (Yang et al., 1989). Chinese people show a strong preference for social order, rather than social chaos (Gabrenya & Hwang, 1996). Family is the basis of social relationships in Chinese society (Wu et al., 2020). Through the pan-familism process, the parent-child relationship crosses the boundary of family and is generalized to the leader-

subordinates relationship in the workplace (Wu et al., 2020). Therefore, in many Chinese companies, leaders behave like parents and subordinates act like children (Wu et al., 2020). Scholars have suggested that, due to traditional Chinese values, as well as to Legalism and Confucianism, authoritarian leadership has been encouraged and practiced in China (Cheng et al., 2004; Duan et al., 2018). In Chinese organizations, authoritarian leadership is considered to be a pervasive and effective leadership style, which fits with traditional values (Cheng et al., 2004). In China, managers tend to be more authoritarian, and this is based on Confucianism (Cheng et al., 2004). Chinese managers tend to emphasize authority, obedience and unquestioning compliance, demanding high levels of performance (Cheng et al., 2004). Hongyu et al. (2012) found that authoritarian leadership positively affects organizational citizenship behavior, based on a Chinese sample. Collectivism mediates the relationship between authoritarian leadership and organizational citizenship behavior. Wu and Liao (2013) stated that authoritarian leadership can reduce subordinates' feelings of uncertainty and also reduce the negative impacts of procedural and distributive injustice on job satisfaction.

Farh et al. (2006) suggested that authoritarian leadership has a negative effect on the satisfaction of subordinates, with little endorsement of traditional Chinese values (Farh et al., 2006). Moreover, if authoritarian leadership remains at a low level, a certain degree of organizational deviance, for example, working slow and taking long breaks, will be frequent, especially in a high-power distance culture (Huang et al., 2015). Although the cultural context may not completely explain the difference in findings relating to the role of authoritarian leadership, it is still important in explaining how authoritarian leadership influences subordinates' work behavior (Shen et al., 2019).

2.3.3 Summary

This section has reviewed the definition of authoritarian leadership and has discussed the limitations and benefits of authoritarian leadership. Although authoritarian leadership is portrayed in a negative light, it shows more benefits in the Chinese context, because it relates to traditional Chinese values, as well as to Confucianism, Legalism, paternalism,

collectivism, and high-power distance societies. This section has also compared authoritarian leadership with paternalistic leadership. The next section discusses empowering leadership.

2.4 A review of empowering leadership literature

As business environments have become complex and uncertain, more and more organizations have decentralized and gradually shifted from hierarchical leadership to a more collective and empowering style (Yammarino et al., 2012). Empowering leadership is unique and important for leadership research, as leaders cannot make all decisions (Sharma & Kirkman, 2015). This section reviews definitions and critical evaluations of empowering leadership, before analyzing the effects of empowering leadership in the Chinese context.

2.4.1 The concept of empowering leadership

Employee empowerment appeared as a management concept in the 1980s (Wilkinson, 1998). Empowering leadership is related to psychological empowerment, intrinsic motivation and exploratory behaviors (Cheong et al., 2019; Kim, 2019; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). It emphasizes enhancing individual motivation through delegating authority to the lowest organizational level (Ahearne et al., 2005; Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Sahrma & Kirkman, 2015; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Zhang & Bartol (2010, p.109) defined empowering leadership as "the process of implementing conditions that enable sharing power with an employee by delineating the significance of the employee's job, providing greater decision-making autonomy, expressing confidence in the employee's capabilities and removing hindrances to performance". Gao et al. (2011, p.788) defined empowering leadership as leadership behaviors in which "authority, autonomy and responsibility are shared with employees to enhance and encourage employees to be more receptive and adaptive to their work environment". The concept of empowering leadership is often claimed to be beneficial, humane and virtuous (Chen et al., 2011; Srivastava et al., 2006; Vecchio et al., 2010; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Some have argued that the best way to

engender empowerment is to remove external leadership altogether and allow organizations to be entirely self-managed (Lee, Willis & Tian, 2018). However, others argue that entire self-management is not a realistic way to create empowerment and can make subordinates feel abandoned by their organization (Hackman, 1990).

Existing literature on empowering leadership has developed from two different perspectives (Cheong et al., 2019). One perspective focuses on managerial practices (Arnold et al., 2000; Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Manz & Sims Jr., 1990; Strauss, 1964). Based on this perspective, Arnold et al. (2000) suggested five main dimensions of empowering leadership: leading by example, participative decision making, coaching, informing and showing individual concern. Ahearne et al. (2005) described four key dimensions of empowering leadership: enhancing the meaningfulness of work, fostering participation in decision making, expressing confidence in high performance and providing autonomy from bureaucratic constraints. Amundsen & Martinsen (2014) defined two core dimensions of empowering leadership, namely autonomy support and development support for subordinates. Autonomy support refers to behavior such as the delegation of decision making, information sharing, encouraging personal initiative, self-defined goal focus and the provision of inspiration, to facilitate subordinates' self-leadership (Kim & Beehr, 2020). Development support refers to behavior such as modelling, guiding and coaching, which provides subordinates with opportunities to increase their skills, abilities and learning experiences (Kim & Beehr, 2020). The other perspective focuses on psychological empowerment (Cheong et al., 2019). Psychological empowerment is a cognitive and motivational state that includes meaning, competence and self-determination (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). Amundsen & Martinsen (2014) suggested that empowering leadership can only be considered effective when it evokes subordinates' experience of empowerment. Cheong et al. (2019) pointed out that these two perspectives are always combined in existing research. The current research also adopts these two perspectives when discussing empowering leadership, in terms of the research questions.

2.4.1.1 Benefits of empowering leadership

Empowering leadership is often advocated because it is expected to benefit organizations (Kin & Beehr, 2020). Existing research provides evidence for the positive influence of empowering leadership on subordinates' job satisfaction (e.g., Amundsen & Martinsen, 2015), work engagement (e.g., Tuckey, Bakker & Dollard, 2012), career success (e.g., Kim & Beehr, 2017), in-role and extra-role behavior (e.g., Humborstad et al., 2014; Raub & Robert, 2010) and reduced depression (e.g., Kim & Beehr, 2017). Empowering leadership can aid subordinates in solving, and coping with, problems and help them to become more resilient (Kim & Beehr, 2020). Subordinates can recognize new opportunities and alternatives by themselves, which can expand options for problem solving (Kim & Beehr, 2020). Such experiences can enhance subordinates' feelings of meaningfulness, competence, self-determination and impact (Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Existing research has shown that empowering leaders can make subordinates believe in, and focus on, their own competencies (Chen et al., 2011; Konczak et al., 2000; Yukl & Becker, 2006). Empowering leadership behavior, including giving employees greater autonomy, the removal of bureaucratic constraints and exposing employees to opportunities, can improve subordinates' organizational citizenship behavior (Raub & Robert, 2010; Lee et al., 2018). In other words, empowering leadership establishes conditions that allow subordinates to have greater opportunities, greater motivation and the ability to display their organizational citizenship behavior (Lee et al., 2018).

Empowering leadership can, however, also have detrimental effects on companies' performance. Zhang & Bartol (2010) stated that empowering leadership leads to increased productivity, performance and creativity through encouraging subordinates to participate in decision making and express confidence, and so provide autonomy. Empowering leaders can emphasize trustworthiness through their empowerment behavior (Huang et al., 2009), which can increase subordinates' willingness to take risks in their work (Becerra et al., 2008). Mom et al. (2009) concluded that empowerment, especially decision-making authority, enhances subordinates' ability to solve problems, take risks and improvise. The autonomy provided by empowering leaders could help subordinates to accept more responsibility and show more commitment (Johnson et al., 2010). Empowering leadership can be particularly effective in helping subordinates to respond to challenges when they are geographically dispersed (Hill

& Bartol, 2016).

2.4.1.2 Limitations of empowering leadership

As Cheong et al. (2016) pointed out, empowering leadership can be both "enhancing" and "burdening" for subordinates based on the Chinese samples. It is "burdening" when subordinates feel more stress when they receive extra assignments, and additional responsibilities, from leaders (Cheong et al., 2016). Lee et al. (2018) proposed that the effects of empowering leadership are determined by how subordinates perceive leaders' behavior. For example, when leaders foster participative decision making, subordinates could view this behavior as an indication that leaders trust them and provide them with opportunities for self-development. However, subordinates may also view this behavior as an indication that leaders lack the ability to lead or that they pass responsibility to subordinates in order to avoid making difficult decisions (Li et al., 2017). Moreover, Hakimi et al. (2010) suggested that empowering leaders may assume increased risk, because they share power with subordinates. Therefore, empowering leaders must believe that subordinates are ready for, and will positively respond to, empowerment (Ahearne et al., 2015). Moreover, empowering leadership may reduce efficiency and waste resources because subordinates may lack focus and require excessive time and resources for gathering and analyzing information (Hmieleski & Ensley, 2007).

2.4.1.3 Empowering leadership and transformational leadership

The term 'transformational leadership' (TL) was first coined by Burns (1978) and has been associated with one of the most influential leadership theories. Burns (1978, p.20) defined transformational leadership as an interaction where "leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation". According to Bass (1999, p.21), TL refers to "the leader moving the follower beyond immediate self-interests through idealized influence (charisma), inspiration, intellectual stimulation or individualized consideration". Dóci & Hofmans (2015, p.437) defined transformational leadership as "a leadership style that enhances subordinates' motivation, morale and performance through a variety of mechanisms, such as showing an example, providing a sense of mission and vision, and

challenging subordinates' beliefs and assumptions". Transformation leadership refers to a process whereby leaders inspire subordinates to adopt the vision of the organization as their own vision and focus their energy on achieving collective goals (Moriano et al., 2012). Transformational leadership highlights a high level of commitment and identification with the leader's, and the organization's, vision among subordinates (Bass & Avolio, 2000; Tipu et al., 2012). Islam et al. (2018) also stated that transformational leadership involves encouraging employees to work toward the shared vision of an organization.

Similar to empowering leadership, transformational leadership refers to empowerment. However, compared with empowering leadership, transformational leadership places a greater emphasis on sharing values and visions of the organization to strengthen the commitment of employees (Sadler, 2003). Moreover, some scholars (e.g., Bass, 1997; Martin et al., 2013; Sharma & Kirkman, 2015) have pointed out that transformational leaders may inspire subordinates with a vision or challenge subordinates intellectually, while retaining their leadership authority and making decisions themselves.

2.4.2 Empowering leadership in the Chinese contexts

According to Sharma & Kirkman (2015, p.195), "theoretical ambiguity remains as to why, how, and when empowering leadership is most likely to benefit work settings and employees". Cheong et al. (2019) pointed out that culture, as a moderating condition, has an impact on the effectiveness of empowering leadership. For example, in Asia, where there is a cluster of collectivist societies (e.g., China, Singapore, South Korea and Japan), subordinates might feel more pressured by empowering leaders than subordinates in individualistic societies (e.g., the United States, the UK, Australia and Canada) (Cheong et al., 2019; House et al., 2004). Lee et al. (2018) pointed out that contextual factors play an important role in determining the outcomes of empowering leadership. Although Xie et al. (2008) suggested that, after 2000, materialism and globalization reduced the dominance of traditional Chinese values, which originate from Confucianism, Chinese society is still strongly characterized by high power distance. Robert et al. (2000) pointed out that high power distance might reduce the positive effects of empowerment, which is founded in low

power distance societies. Rockstuhl et al. (2012) argued that subordinates in high power distance societies perceive empowerment as being inconsistent with societal norms.

Existing research (e.g., Fong & Snape, 2015; Harris et al., 2014; Humborstad et al., 2014; Martin et al., 2013; Zhang & Bartol, 2010) shows that the impact of empowering leadership on proactive work and creativity behaviors is less susceptible to contextual factors (Lee et al., 2018). However, Martin et al. (2013) pointed out that the benefits of empowering leadership might have less value in relation to more routine tasks which are associated with core task performances. Moreover, Li et al. (2017) found that, in individualistic cultures, the effect of empowering leadership on task performance was not significant. In contrast, in collectivistic cultures, empowering leadership has shown significant positive effects on task performance (Li et al., 2017).

2.4.3 Summary

This section has reviewed the definition of empowering leadership and has discussed the limitations and benefits of empowering leadership. Empowering leadership also has different levels of influence in the Chinese context. This section has compared empowering leadership with transformational leadership and participative leadership, and has analyzed the relationship between empowering, participative, directive, and authoritarian leadership. The next section discusses the relationship between leadership and organizational learning, especially in the internationalization context.

2.5 A review of the CEO leadership and organizational learning literature in the context of internationalization

The CEO is usually the most powerful leader in the company (Yi et al., 2022). As the face of companies, CEOs normally have an even greater impact than other managers, even those of supervisor-level managers, because their traits are reflected in organizations and outcomes (Lee & Kim, 2022). Many scholars point out that CEOs can set the tone for internal

communication in companies (Schein, 2000; Tourish and Robson, 2003, Lee & Kim, 2022). Moreover, without effective CEOs' leadership, companies could not occur effective decision making (Yi et al., 2022). CEOs could influence firm's behaviors through their values, actions, decisions, experiences and personalities (Basker et al, 2020; Hambrick, 2007). Due to the CEOs' hierarchical positions, their leadership tend to have significant influence on employee's activities and goal attainment (Cao et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2012). For example, CEOs could help managers and employees better understand organizational norms and behave appropriately (Cao et al., 2022). However, the unique influence of the CEO leadership remains largely uncharted (Yi et al., 2022). This section reviews the literature on leadership, especially CEO leadership, and organizational learning, including international learning process and highlights six research gaps in existing research.

2.5.1 The role of CEO leadership in organizational learning

Waldman et al. (2009) suggested that leadership has affected organizational learning. In the past, many scholars have tried to understand the relationship between leadership, especially CEO or TMT's leadership, and organizational learning, from different perspectives (Do & Mai, 2020). Earlier research highlighted the role of leadership in fostering psychological safety requisite for organizational learning (Edmondson, 1999). Other research has suggested that leaders are the facilitators of organizational learning (MacNeil, 2001) and can transform organizational culture to facilitate organizational learning (Popper & Lipsgitz, 2000). In recent years, CEO leadership has been found to be the driver of learning in organizations (Liao et al., 2017; Northouse, 2016; Khurosani, 2018; Nyukoron, 2016; Kim & Park, 2019; Sun & Anderson, 2012).

Although many studies have focused on the role of leadership in organizational learning, research on leadership and organizational learning has clear limitations. For example, scholars have found that different leadership theories have led to different practical applications (Xie, 2019). Leaders with different mental models and behaviors are responsible for different organizational learning results. (Xie, 2019). Different leadership styles have different impacts on a same firm (Cui., 2022). However, Xie (2019) examined

58 articles related to leadership and organizational learning. Of these, 34 articles focused on discussing the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational learning. Xie (2019) pointed out that research into the relationship between leadership and organizational learning has not included an extensive range of leadership styles.

There is no doubt that transformational leadership has been the most frequently used leadership style in leadership-organizational learning research (Do & Mai, 2020; Xie, 2019). Many scholars have found that transformational leadership has had positive influences on organizational learning (e.g., Carter et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2011; Kim & Park, 2019; Sattayaraksa & Boon-itt, 2016). Transformational leaders encourage knowledge sharing (Fullwood et al., 2013; Le and Lei, 2017; Noruzy et al., 2013), create a knowledge sharing climate (Yao et al., 2007) and promote organizational learning (Choudhary et al., 2013; García-Morales et al., 2012; Sattayaraksa & Boon-itt, 2016). Research on transformational leadership and organizational learning still has significant limitations. For example, Flatten et al. (2015) collected data from 608 firms in Austria, Brazil, Germany, India, Singapore and the USA and used a quantitative research method to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and firms' absorptive capacity. Their findings show that transformational leadership has had a positive impact on absorptive capacity, although this has been moderated by power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Like Flatten et al.'s study (2015), almost all studies (e.g., Khurosani, 2018; Kim & Park, 2019; Salas-Vallina et al., 2017; Vermeulen et al., 2017) have been based on the positivism research philosophy and have adopted a quantitative research method, which means that they have used transformational leadership and organizational learning as two variables and have examined the relationship between them. These studies cannot explain the process whereby transformational leadership influences organizational learning. Moreover, organizational learning is a process which includes, for example, knowledge acquisition, assimilation, transformation and exploitation (Zahra & George, 2002). Only Vashdi et al. (2018) have separated organizational learning into sub-processes, (knowledge acquisition, distribution, information interpretation and organizational memory), to examine the relationship between transformational leadership and each sub-process of organizational learning.

Studies related to leadership styles other than transformational leadership also have same limitations. For example, Singh (2010) adopted a quantitative research method and suggested that, in Indian software firms, consulting and delegating leadership styles have had a positive impact on organizational learning. In contrast, directive and supportive leadership styles have had a negative impact (Singh, 2015). Dzinic (2015) also adopted a quantitative research method and argued that participative leadership in the context of city government has had a positive impact on organizational learning. In educational institutions, instructional, strategic and charismatic leadership styles have had a positive impact on organizational learning (Berson et al., 2015; Millward & Timperley, 2010). These quantitative studies cannot, however, explain the process how different leadership styles affect the organizational learning and they treat organizational learning as an entire whole rather than a process which includes several constructs.

Moreover, many leadership studies have emphasized that culture-specific considerations are helpful in understanding the influence of leadership on organizational outcomes in different contexts (Atwater et al., 2005; Atwater et al., 2009). Only a few studies have considered the cultural context when discussing leadership and organizational learning. The current research focuses on authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership, as they are two comparable leadership styles that are rooted in the Chinese context. Previous studies have not discussed the relationship between organizational learning and authoritarian leadership and/or empowering leadership. There have, however, been some studies that have discussed the relationship between organizational learning-related concepts (e.g., knowledge sharing, creativity and innovation) and authoritarian leadership or empowering leadership.

2.5.1.1 Authoritarian leadership

According to Chaing et al. (2021), most studies related to authoritarian leadership have used psychological mechanisms to explain the impact of authoritarian leadership on subordinates' job attitudes and performance. A few studies have explained how authoritarian leadership affects team and organization outcomes (Chaing et al., 2021). Lee et al. (2018) examined the adverse impacts of dark leadership (including authoritarian leadership) on knowledge

sharing. They used emotional exhaustion as a mediator and revealed that abusive supervision had a positive relationship with emotional exhaustion and a negative relationship with knowledge sharing behaviors among subordinates. Chen et al. (2018), however, stated that authoritarian leadership can promote knowledge sharing among subordinates. Authoritarian leaders positively affect subordinates' perception of fairness, then promote knowledge sharing among subordinates, and innovation (Chen et al., 2018).

Wang & Guan (2018) suggested that authoritarian leadership can strengthen subordinates' learning goals and enhance subordinates' performance. They provided two reasons. Firstly, due to high expectations from leaders, subordinates may realize that learning and building their competence are the best ways to meet high-level goals (Wang & Guan, 2018). When subordinates become aware of the gap between their performance and leaders' expectations, they will learn and improve their competence and skills, to achieve self-development (Gong et al., 2017). Secondly, in order to achieve the best performance, authoritarian leaders tend to share information among the organization (Wang & Guan, 2018). According to Zhang et al. (2021), with changes in markets and the technological environment, leaders need to learn, and develop advanced technologies, to maintain a competitive advantage. When organizations are in a state of crisis, authoritarian leaders tend to share information with subordinates (Schaubroeck et al., 2017) and lead subordinates to solve problems (Zhang et al., 2021).

Some studies have suggested that authoritarian leadership has a negative linear relationship with organizational creativity (e.g., Wang et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2011). In contrast, other studies have suggested that authoritarian control behaviors can stimulate organizational creativity (e.g., Huang et al., 2015; Leung et al., 2014; Wang & Guan, 2018; Zhou, 2006). Leung et al. (2014) argued that the controlling behavior of authoritarian leadership can be perceived as an attempt to mentor, or assist, subordinates. Moreover, authoritarian control can also be the stressor causing arousal (Aryee et al., 2007), which means that the level of authoritarian control either enhances or suppresses creativity (Gu et al., 2020). On one hand, when subordinates work for a leader with a low level of authoritarian leadership, they may not generate useful and new ideas as a result of having less stress (Gu et al., 2020). On the

other hand, higher levels of authoritarian leadership may have negative effects on subordinates, such as passive obedience (Cheng et al., 2004), conformity (Mumford et al., 2002), and reduced knowledge sharing (Chen et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2011), all resulting in reduced creativity (Gu et al., 2020).

2.5.1.2 Empowering leadership

Empowered employees can develop their own exploitation activities, exploration activities and the ability to identify opportunities, which can make them feel more responsible and competent (van Assen, 2020). Exploitation refers to improving organizational knowledge, while exploration refers to the search for new knowledge (March, 1991). Empowering leadership strengthens the relationship between business ties, exploration, and exploitation (Wu & Peng, 2020). Mom et al. (2009) concluded that empowerment, especially decision-making authority, enhances subordinates' ability to solve problems, take risks and improvise. Empowered subordinates are more likely to have an open attitude toward errors and treat errors as opportunities for learning (van Assen, 2020). They are more proactive and continuously seek opportunities to improve work processes and innovative solutions to complex problems (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999), which is related to exploitative learning (van Assen, 2020). Moreover, empowered subordinates are more likely to feel safe and to trust leaders to support and reward them for their creativity (Caniels et al., 2017). This suggests that empowering leadership stimulates subordinates to perform explorative activities (Caniels et al., 2017). In other words, empowering leadership is also related to explorative learning (van Assen, 2020). Many scholars have suggested that empowering leadership can help companies to improve their innovation capabilities (Amoroso et al., 2021; Wu & Peng, 2020).

Lee et al. (2018) proposed two reasons for empowering leadership having a positive impact on knowledge sharing. Firstly, empowering leaders can encourage subordinates to express their ideas and confirm that their inputs are valuable, which has been considered to be an important pre-requisite for encouraging knowledge sharing in organizations (Srivastava et al., 2006). Secondly, the coaching behavior of empowering leaders can inspire subordinates

to solve problems together, which can promote knowledge sharing among subordinates (Arnold et al., 2000). Moreover, many scholars have stated that empowering leadership has a positive impact on knowledge sharing in organizations (e.g., Kuo et al., 2011; Lee et al.; 2018; Rao et al., 2019; Srivastava et al., 2006; Xue et al., 2011).

2.5.2 The importance of CEO leadership on organizational learning in relation to internationalization

As discussed before, high-tech SMEs faced fierce competition (Li et al., 2012), which result in many of them choosing to start internationalizing to expand their markets (Avolio et al., 2003). Many scholars have suggested that, with the exacerbation of global competition, companies need to complete more uncertain tasks and face the more complex environment that requires subordinates do more efforts to share, integrate and distribute knowledge (Chen et al., 2018; Hau et al., 2013). Therefore, the learning process in internationalization has often been highlighted (Bruneel et al., 2010; Fletcher et al., 2021; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, 1990; Oviatt & McGougall, 1994) and this is reviewed in detail in the next chapter. Based on the review of this chapter, CEO leadership has been treated as an important factor that can affect companies' organizational learning (e.g., Kurland et al., 2010; Liao et al., 2017; Northouse, 2016; Nyukoron, 2016; Khurosani, 2018; Kim & Park, 2019; Sun & Anderson, 2012; van Dierendonck, 2011). However, very few studies have discussed the role of leadership, especially CEO leadership, in the organizational learning process of companies' internationalization, which constitutes a research gap.

Although there is limited research discussed the relationship between CEO leadership and internationalization with organizational learning, there are several studies have discussed the role of leadership on other factors which are also important in companies' internationalization. For example, Colovic (2021) discussed how leadership influence the business model innovation during the process of internationalization and proposed that empowering leadership can facilitate the business model innovation in the companies' internationalization. As Cotae (2010, p.6) highlights leaders play an important role in each stage of the internationalization process, and states that "leadership comes into play as an

organization faces the ever-changing need of dealing with changes in the business, social, cultural and political landscapes". Therefore, it can be expected that leadership can influence the organizational learning in companies' internationalization process.

2.5.3 Summary

This section has reviewed literature related to the influence of leadership on organizational learning. Although there is limited research related to authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership, it can be expected that both have an influence on companies' organizational learning. This section has also discussed the link between leadership and organizational learning in the internationalization context, which is also a significant research gap.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on literature concerning leadership, especially authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership, and their influence on organizational learning, especially in the internationalization context. First, the chapter discussed the definition of leadership and described definitions in four contexts: leadership as a person, a position, a result, and a process (Grint, 2012). This chapter then reviewed the limitations of leadership research in the Chinese context, outlined the main characteristics of the Chinese context, which is based on Confucianism, Legalism and Daoism, with an emphasis on collectivism and high-power distance (Au & Kwan, 2009; Wang et al., 2019), and highlights the two common leadership styles based on the Chinese context: authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership. The chapter has also reviewed leadership research in relation to SMEs, high-tech and internationalization, and has highlighted research gaps. Then this chapter reviewed leadership through thethe lens of power and clarified why this research focuses on authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership. The chapter has provided a definition, and a critical evaluation, of authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership and has discussed the different roles that are involved in the Chinese context. The two styles

of leadership have been shown to have different influences in the Chinese context. In addition, this chapter has reviewed literature related to the influence of leadership on organizational learning, especially in the context of companies' internationalization. The chapter has identified six research gaps in existing research: 1) There is limited research that discusses the role of CEO leadership in the organizational learning process of companies' internationalization. 2) A limited range of leadership styles is discussed in research relating to leadership and organizational learning. 3) Few studies have considered the cultural context when discussing leadership and organizational learning. 4) Limited research has focused on leadership in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). 5) Limited attention has been directed toward the relationship between CEO leadership and different dimensions of the organizational learning process. 6) Few studies have used a qualitative approach when exploring the relationship between leadership and organizational learning.

This chapter only discusses the impact of leadership on organizational learning but does not specifically discuss the relevant literature on organizational learning. Therefore, the next Chapter will continue to review the organizational learning process in the internationalization context.

Chapter 3   International learning processes and Leadership

3.1 Introduction

Many internationalization studies tend to focus on large multinational enterprises (Steen & Liesch, 2007). With the increasing importance of SMEs in the international economy, a growing body of research has focused on SMEs' internationalization (e.g., Basly, 2007; Freixanet et al., 2020; Gassman & Keupp, 2007; Hsu et al., 2013; Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2017; Schwens et al., 2018). It is crucial for SMEs to learn different knowledge because SMEs are unable to allocate substantial resources for international knowledge development (Mejri et al., 2018). In general, the main capital of SMEs, especially high-tech SMEs, for achieving success in internationalization is their storage of knowledge (Zakery & Saremi, 2021). Many scholars have suggested that the role of leaders (key managers, CEOs, or entrepreneurs) in companies' internationalization is worthy of discussion, especially in terms of learning processes in internationalization (e.g., Coviello, 2015; Coviello et al., 2017; Fletcher et al., 2021; Forsgren, 2002; Freixanet et al., 2018; Freixanet & Renart, 2020; Johanson & Vahlne, 2017; Stoian et al., 2018).

This chapter starts with providing a definition of organizational learning and its processes. Then, this chapter reviews knowledge and organizational learning literature in internationalization research, starting with reviews of the resource-based view and the knowledge-based view of internationalization, to explain the importance of knowledge in internationalization. There is a discussion of the importance of organizational learning in the internationalization process, which includes pre-internationalization and post-internationalization before exploring the influence of leaders on organizational learning using existing research, while highlighting research gaps. The chapter ends with a summary of two literature review chapters, again highlighting the research gaps identified, and proposes research questions, objectives, and a framework for the current research.

3.2 Organizational learning in the internationalization context

This section focuses on a discussion of organizational learning and its processes, especially in the international business context. Therefore, this section reviews the definition of organizational learning and the processes of organizational learning, which combines Huber's learning framework, absorptive capacity and Argote's learning framework.

3.2.1 Definition of organizational learning

The definition of organizational learning derives from decision theory (e.g., Cangelosi & Dill, 1965; Levitt & March, 1988; March and Olsen, 1994) and management development (Argyris & Schön, 1978; 1996), where organizational learning is treated as an actionable theoretical construct for enhancing management decisions and mitigating the effects of organizational errors (Elkjaer, 2021). Later, the understanding of organizational learning not only included management, but also viewed organizations as a whole in which learning as an aspect of work (e.g., Cook & Yanow, 1993; Gherardi et al., 1998). In other words, organizational learning can be seen as "a thing that can be made to do something to somebody (e.g., help motivate persons) or something (e.g., help make organizational strategies come through)" or "part of everyday work and organizing in which learning is an unfolding aspect that cannot be predicted and controlled, but maybe supported" (Elkjaer, 2021, p.3). Organizational learning has generally been described as a change (Easterby-Smith et al., 2000) or development (Huber, 1991; Fiol & Lyles, 1985) in cognition or in behavior. For example, Fiol & Lyles (1985) defined organizational learning as "the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding". Argote et al. (2021) defined organizational learning as a process through which experience is converted into knowledge, and then changes the organization and influences its future performance. Many scholars have claimed that organizational learning facilitates behavior change, which leads to improvements in performance (Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Garvin, 1993; Senge, 1990). Huber (1991), however, suggested that organizational learning may not be due to the apparent behavioral changes. He (1991, p.89) stated that "an entity learns if, through its processing of information, the range of its potential behavior is changed".

Existing organizational learning research can generally be divided into three categories: 1) adaptive learning behavior, 2) organizational learning processes and 3) organizational learning and knowledge creation (Chung et al., 2018). The first categories views organizational learning as a form of adaptive behavior learning, which means that learning represents a change of behavior (Cyert & March, 1963; Shrivastava, 1983; Daft & Wick, 1984). It is the view of adaptive behavior researchers that organizational learning can help firms to build the capability to adapt to rapidly changing environments. The second category advances the first category by viewing organizational learning as a process, rather than as a single organizational management action (Crossan et al., 1999). Learning processes involve individuals, groups and organizations (Cyert & March, 1963; March, 1991; Shrivastava, 1983), which provides a useful theoretical platform. The third category integrates adaptive learning behavior and learning process research by viewing organizational learning as knowledge acquisition, transference, and integration (Huber, 1991; Jimenez-Jimenez & Sanz-Valle, 2011; Lord & Ranft, 2000). The next section is based on the third of these categories and will discuss the processes of organizational learning in the international business context.

3.2.2 Processes of organizational learning

There are many learning-related frameworks used by scholars in IB research. Learning can take many forms (Choi et al., 2019). Cyert & March (1963) proposed the first organizational framework, in which companies learn from experience with the intention of adapting themselves to their environment. In the 1990s, there was a very large increase in the number of publications on organization learning. A growing number of scholars highlighted systematic reviews and built holistic frameworks of organizational learning (Argote et al., 2021). Huber's (1991) learning framework was a seminal schema, which includes a full-range explanation of new knowledge acquisition, including internally and externally focused learning. Huber's framework was widely adopted for discussing the learning factor that facilitates companies' internationalization (e.g., Fletcher & Prashantham, 2011; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Casillas et al., 2015; Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2015; Hutzschenreuter et al.,

2016).

The information process approach includes four constructs: knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation and organizational memory. Companies' absorptive capacity concerns absorbing and leveraging external knowledge (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). Absorptive capacity has been widely adopted in studies which focus on internationalizing companies' external learning process (e.g., Fernhaber et al., 2009; Gunawan & Rose, 2014; Hernández & Nieto, 2016). Zahra & George (2002, p.186) stated: "the absorptive capacity is a set of organizational routines and processes by which firms acquire, assimilate, transform and exploit knowledge to produce a dynamic organizational capability". Absorptive capacity emphasizes a firm's ability to combine both internal and external knowledge, which is different from "learning-by-doing" (Cohen & Levinthal, 1989; 1990). With absorptive capacity, companies become more practiced and efficient, because of having prior knowledge, and acquire external knowledge that will permit them to develop alternative strategies (Cohen & Levinthal, 1989). Argote et al. (2021) divided organizational learning processes into the processes of search, knowledge creation, knowledge retention and knowledge transfer. They also pointed out that these learning processes are interrelated and can be complementary or interchangeable (Argote et al., 2021), as described in the discussion below. Considering that organizational learning is conceptualized as companies' information processing, this section aligns and presents the organizational learning processes proposed by Huber (1991), Zahra & George (2002) and Argote et al., (2021).

3.3.2.1 Knowledge acquisition

Huber (1991) suggested that knowledge acquisition is the process of acquiring knowledge from different sources. Huber (1991) suggested that there are five main means of knowledge acquisition: congenital learning, experiential learning, vicarious learning, grafting, and searching and noticing. These can, in turn, be classified into two categories: internally focused learning (congenital learning and experiential learning) and externally focused learning (vicarious learning, grafting, and searching and noticing) (Weerawardena et al., 2007). From the absorptive capacity perspective, knowledge acquisition refers to a firm's ability to identify and acquire externally generated knowledge (Cohen & Levinthal, 1989;

1990; Zahra & George, 2002). Although absorptive capacity focuses on external knowledge, as Cohen and Levinthal (1990) pointed out, a firm's ability to evaluate and utilize external knowledge depends on its prior related knowledge and intensity of effort. Many scholars have pointed out that individuals' relevant prior knowledge can lead to a recognition and an understanding of external knowledge (Lane et al., 2006). Research has shown that learning from direct and indirect experience are complementary (Argote et al., 2021). In other words, the more organizations learn from their own experiences, the more they are able to learn from other organizations (Bresman, 2010). Therefore, each means of knowledge acquisition proposed by Huber (1991) will be discussed in this sub-section.

Huber (1991) defined congenital learning as inheriting knowledge from the organization and context-specific experience from the organization's founders that were acquired before the establishment of the organization. Such knowledge and experience are the foundation of a new organization which enables it to understand its environment, perceive opportunities and plan for the future (Tsang, 2018). The nature of founders and the organization's foundation determine the effects of congenital learning (Schein, 1984; Boeker, 1988). Congenital learning is closely related to recognizing the value of knowledge in the future, which can influence companies' performance (Todoroca & Durisin, 2007). For example, Oviatt & McDougall (2005) claimed that companies whose founders have lived abroad and have prior overseas work experience can enter a foreign market quicker and they show a greater commitment to internationalization. Weerawardena et al. (2007) proposed that owner-managers' prior international experience indirectly influences both how quickly a company enters a foreign market for the first time, and the scope of the company's internationalization.

Experiential learning is the most frequently researched means of knowledge acquisition (Tsang, 2018). Experiential learning is also known as 'experiment learning'. The main methods of experiential learning are organizational experiments and organizational self-appraisal (Staw, 1977). Organizational experiments generally occur in two contexts: formally designed organizational experiments (Staw, 1977; Warner, 1981) and informal natural experiments (Huber et al., 1979). In both contexts, feedback is important to experiential learning (Huber, 1991). In other words, experiential knowledge stems from

feedback and analysis. Organizational self-appraisal stresses the gathering of information within the organization, with an aim to improve (Burke, 1982; French & Bell, 1990) and to solve problems (Argyris, 1982; Peters & Robinson, 1984) for the organization. Many scholars have pointed out that organizations should continue with experiential learning as they develop (Tsang, 2018), because experiential learning is an important way in which to acquire first-hand knowledge. Huber (1991), however, pointed out that there are many obstacles to companies' experiential learning. Firstly, "units capable of learning from the experience of other units may not have access to this experience", because of routines, the management structure, and organizational politics (Huber, 1991, p.95). Secondly, feedback can be distorted and suppressed (Huber, 1982). Thirdly, experience gained at the organizational level largely depends on experiential learning at the individual level (Tsang, 2018). The flow of experiential knowledge at the individual level, however, functions imperfectly, which reduce the effectiveness of experiential learning (Feldman & March, 1981; Arnold & Feldman, 1986). Therefore, companies cannot rely solely on the knowledge generated from their own experiences (Tsang, 2018).

Learning from others' experience is also essential, especially when the company ventures into a new domain, such as investment in a foreign country (Tsang, 2018). Vicarious learning is knowledge acquisition through imitation (Fuerst & Zettining, 2015). A company can actively observe its network partners, clients or competitors and then replicate their knowledge (Fuerst & Zettining, 2015). For example, Fernhaber & Li (2010) used a sample of 150 publicly held new ventures in the USA to investigate how international market entries by these new ventures depended on the degree of internationalization of other firms in the ventures' home country, which would enable the new ventures to imitate their more experienced peers. The depth of vicarious learning depends on the extent to which the company can observe the operations of the learning target (Tsang, 2018).

Knowledge grafting refers to the acquisition of knowledge from "new members who possess knowledge not previously available within the organization" (Huber, 1991, p.79). Individuals can be carriers of experiential knowledge (Nonaka, 1991). Therefore, the inclusion of individuals can be a quick means of increasing the knowledge of the company

(Huber, 1991). Knowledge grafting can enhance the speed of internationalization because it enables a company to acquire experiential knowledge (Hilmersson & Johanson, 2020; Johanson et al., 2020). Therefore, grafting is often used by firms that wish to avoid the slow process of internationalization and internationalize earlier or faster (Casillas et al., 2015; Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Fletcher et al., 2013; Johanson et al., 2020; Loane et al., 2007; Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2015; 2017). Vicarious learning and grafting can be faster than experiential learning, especially in a technological context. Grafting is often the major technique for high-tech industries' acquisition behavior (Tsang, 2018). In high-tech industries, it is hard for most companies to develop all the technologies and capabilities that they need in order to keep their competitive advantages, because of the speed and magnitude of technological changes (Tsang, 2018). There are, however, some difficulties with knowledge grafting, because newly hired employees need time to gain sufficient knowledge of the company to enable them to function properly (Jonhanson & Vahlne, 1977; 2009; Johanson et al., 2020). Moreover, knowledge integration needs time and resources to enable new experiential knowledge to be combined with the knowledge that already exists within the company (Lindstrand et al., 2011). Therefore, other learning processes (e.g., knowledge integration) are important to the success of knowledge grafting (Johanson et al., 2020).

Organizations can also acquire knowledge through searching and noticing (Huber, 1991). Searching refers to the wide-ranging scanning of the organization's external environment and focused examination of a particular segment of the environment in order to respond to opportunities or threats (Huber, 1991). Searching can be internal or external to the focal organization; it seeks alternatives and their consequences (Argote et al., 2021). Argote et al. (2021) divided searching behavior into two categories: problemistic search and slack search. Problemistic search is stimulated by a problem and aims to find a solution (Cyert & March, 1963); this occurs when an organization's performance falls below an aspired level (Argote et al., 2021). When an organization is performing well and has excess resources, slack search is undertaken, which can lead to the development of new capabilities in the long term (Levinthal & March, 1981). Tsang (2018) suggested that searching has a direct link with internationalization because, when a company considers expanding into overseas markets, the natural first step is to 'scan' the environment.

3.3.2.2 Knowledge interpretation and assimilation

After knowledge is acquired by a company, it must be interpreted before being processed and implemented (Tsang, 2018). Assimilation refers to a firm's ability to analyze, process, interpret and understand information obtained from external sources (Kim, 1998; Zahra & George, 2002). Argote (2013) suggested that the interpretation of an organization's direct experiences is easier than interpreting the indirect experiences of another organization. Tsang (2018) pointed out that the outcome of interpretation depends on who is involved in the process. Members of the organization need to learn how to utilize knowledge better and to assess who is good at which tasks (Argote et al., 2021). No matter members interpret knowledge successful or fail, knowledge interpretation process can stimulate knowledge searching (Argote et al., 2021).

3.3.2.3 Information distribution and knowledge transfer

In recent years, the topic of knowledge transfer has received considerable attention (Argote et al., 2021). Knowledge transfer is the process through which an organizational unit (individuals, groups, or a whole organization) learns from, or is affected by, other units (Argote & Ingram, 2000). The ability to transfer knowledge from other organizations, or across organizational units, is the key factor in building an organization's competitive advantages (Argote & Ingram, 2000). Similar to knowledge transfer, information distribution refers to the way in which new knowledge, or information, is shared and shows the knowledge flows (Huber, 1991). Huber (1991) also pointed out that the occurrence, and breadth, of organizational learning depends on information distribution.

Argote et al. (2021) claimed that knowledge transfer can also be viewed as vicarious learning or knowledge spillover. Knowledge transfer can occur through many mechanisms, including the hiring of employees, the use of reverse engineering, the acquisition of knowledge from suppliers, customers or consultants, and so on (Argote et al., 2021). In recent years, the topic of knowledge transfer has received considerable attention (Argote et al., 2021). Many studies have proposed that the extent of knowledge transfer among units has considerable variance (Argote et al., 2021; Lapré & Van Wassenhove, 2001). Existing research examines many

factors which can influence the effectiveness of knowledge transfer, including the characteristics of knowledge, the senders of knowledge, the recipients of knowledge and organizational contexts, as well as the methods of knowledge transfer, such as personnel movements, routine transfer, and so on (Szulanski & Lee, 2020).

3.3.2.4 Organizational memory, knowledge retention and exploitation

Organizational memory refers to the stored information generated from an organization's history of operation, which can influence its future decisions (Walsh & Ungson, 1991). Knowledge can be stored in two types of 'bin': human and non-human (Tsang, 2018). Anything that is in an individual's mind or memory is stored in the 'human bin'. The non-human bin exists in many different forms, including operations manuals, regulations, rules, organizational charts, reports, memos, and so on (Tsang, 2018). Similar to organizational memory, retaining knowledge refers to embedding knowledge in a repository, such as a routine or a transactive memory system (Argote et al., 2021). Exploitation refers to the ability to incorporate acquired and transformed knowledge into the firm's operations, which emphasizes the application of knowledge (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Lane et al., 2006; Zahra & George, 2002). According to Spender (1996), the outcomes of exploitation include the creation of new goods, systems, processes and new organizational forms; this relates mostly to knowledge storage in the non-human bin. Once the company has acquired and retained knowledge, knowledge can be transferred to other units or organizations (Argote et al., 2021).

Feldman & Feldman (2006) proposed that interpretivists define organizational memory as the process of reconstructing the past, and that it includes remembering and forgetting. According to this view, history and memory are not "truthful" reconstructions (Coraiola et al., 2015). They are the narrative constructions of the past and are framed on present collective understandings and institutions (Coraiola & Murcia, 2020). This definition emphasizes the actor's capacity to reinterpret and reshape the past based on present goals and interests (Coraiola & Murcia, 2020). In contrast, Levitt & March (1988) pointed out that functionalist research often conflates memory with knowledge, which means that memory is unambiguous and transferable (Eisenhardt & Santos, 2006). From the functionalist point of view, memory can be described, measured and assessed in terms of its integrity and

truthfulness (Hatch & Schultz, 2017). Functionalism tends to conflate history with the past (Coraiola et al., 2015). From this viewpoint, companies can, through memory retrieval, acquire resources that may be instrumental in achieving competitive advantages (Ren & Argote, 2011).

3.2.3 Summary

This section has reviewed the definition of organizational learning and has discussed the processes of organizational learning. It has also described Huber's organizational learning framework (1991), absorptive capacity (Zahra & George, 2002) and Argote's organizational learning framework (2021) and has separated organizational learning into four processes: knowledge acquisition, knowledge interpretation and assimilation, information distribution and knowledge transfer, and organizational memory, knowledge retention and exploitation. These learning processes are interrelated and can be complementary or interchangeable (Argote et al., 2021).

3.3 Knowledge and organizational learning in internationalization

Knowledge is an essential requirement for internationalization (Filatotchev et al., 2009; Freixanet et al., 2020; Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2017; Zakery & Saremi, 2021). Organizational learning is also generally considered to be an important factor in international business research (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2021; Zakery & Saremi, 2021). This section discusses the resource-based view and the knowledge-based view of internationalization to explain the importance of knowledge.

In the discussion of the knowledge-based view, three types of knowledge are highlighted, (market knowledge, internationalization knowledge and technological knowledge), which are important and so are usually discussed in internationalization research. This section presents the role of organizational learning in companies' whole internationalization process, including pre-internationalization and post-internationalization.

3.3.1 The knowledge-based view (KBV)

The knowledge-based view (KBV) developed from the resource-based view (RBV) and highlights the importance of knowledge and the capacity to manage knowledge resources (Curado, 2006; Nakos et al., 2019). Knowledge is important factor in both RBV and KBV theories, but it differs slightly in the two theories (Pareira & Bamel, 2021). On the one hand, RBV consider knowledge as a generic resource (just like other firm resources) that determines companies' competitive advantages. Whereas KBV suggests that knowledge is the most important and strategic resource, which is imitate, socially complex, and more specific to companies' product and services (Pareira & Bamel, 2021). On the other hand, RBV has constantly suggested that the internal resources of companies drive competitive advantages. KBV theory complements this view through answering how to sustain resource heterogeneity for achieving sustainable competitive advantage, which integrates resource and capabilities (Kull et al., 2016; Pareira & Bamel, 2021).

KBV looks at the specific aspect of the management of intangible assets, such as managerial knowledge, proprietary technology, and coordination inside the company (Nakos et al., 2019). Knowledge resources are valuable because they are tacit and embedded within the organizational processes and routines that are specific to the company (Winter, 2003). These knowledge resources, especially explicit knowledge resources, establish a basis for long-lasting competitive advantages (McEvily & Chakravarthy, 2002). Nonaka (1991) suggested that, in the context of global market integration, knowledge is the only lasting competitive advantage of companies. KBV assumes that knowledge is the essential input of production and the main source of value that is crucial for the success of the company (Grant, 1996; 2002). In addition to knowledge resources, KBV suggests that, in order to sustain competitive advantage, the capabilities of absorbing knowledge and creating new knowledge are also important (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Kogut & Zander, 1992). In KBV, companies can be treated as dynamic systems (Nonaka et al., 2000) that include knowledge production and application (Spender, 1996). Knowledge production depends on individuals' specialization in the particular knowledge area (Grant, 1996); it refers to new knowledge creation, existing knowledge acquisition and knowledge storage (Grant, 1996). Knowledge

application refers to effective knowledge transfer, which can prove that knowledge can be utilized effectively (Blome et al., 2014). Moreover, there are three elements that influence the efficiency of knowledge-based competitiveness of a firm, which are level of common knowledge, the frequency and variability of integration of common and specialized knowledge, and organization structures that economize the communication process necessary for integration of knowledge (Hereden, 2020). In general, according to KBV, organizational learning is very important whether a company wants to maintain a competitive advantage or improve its competitive efficiency. This view will be discussed in detail in Section 3.3.3.

3.3.2 The knowledge-based view of internationalization

KBV of internationalization is driven by Carlson's early research, from 1974 (Welch, 2015). Entering foreign markets implies dealing with uncertainty (Johanson et al., 2020). Internationalizing companies need knowledge in terms of the information, opinions, and skills that they can apply to their internationalization activities in order to mitigate challenges (Johanson et al., 2020). When companies decide to enter a foreign market or expand, they need to commit knowledge resources in different types of foreign operation (Welch, 2015). Some of this knowledge is explicit and easy to obtain. Some unique characteristics of overseas markets can constitute tacit knowledge, which is almost impossible for a company to acquire in a short time (Nakos et al., 2019). Lacking knowledge creates uncertainly in foreign markets. Experiential knowledge can help companies to reduce uncertainty (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; 1990; Welch, 2015). Autio (2017) suggested that, based on work by Oviatt & McDougall (1994), the knowledge intensity of resource endowment constitutes an important factor for new international ventures. Moreover, knowledge can be combined rapidly and flexibly with more fixed assets in target overseas markets. Autio et al. (2000) suggested that greater knowledge intensity can promote faster international growth. Companies which are more knowledge-intensive are more likely to develop the necessary learning capabilities to adapt to a foreign environment (Autio et al., 2000). These knowledge-intensive companies are also more likely to identify sustainable and less costly opportunities for foreign expansion.

The perspectives of both the internationalization process (IP) (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; 1990), and international new ventures (INVs) (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994) highlight knowledge as being the essential resource in companies' internationalization (Casillas et al., 2009). They emphasize, however, different content, roles, and sources of knowledge (Prashantham, 2005). Johanson & Vahlne (1990; 1997) have emphasized the importance of market knowledge, which can regulate resources committed to foreign markets (Prashantham, 2005). Companies can acquire market knowledge through their experiences of foreign operations (Johanson & Vahlne 1977; 1990) or network relationships (Johanson & Vahlne, 2003; 2006; 2009). Johanson & Vahlne (1997; 1990) have also neglected the importance of internationalization knowledge (Forsgren, 2002). Companies' knowledge resources are a vital source and originate from entrepreneurs' professional experiences (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; McDougall et al., 1994; Prashantham, 2005) and the key management team's internationalization experience (Reuber & Fischer, 1997). Oviatt & McDougall (1994) highlighted the importance of technological knowledge. In the following sections, three types of knowledge (market knowledge, internationalization knowledge and technological knowledge) are discussed in detail.

3.3.3.1 Market knowledge

Market knowledge has been defined by Johanson & Vahlne (1977) as focusing on specific characteristics of the host country and its market (Hilmersson, 2014); this includes knowledge of local government, institutional frameworks, rules and norms (Eriksson et al., 1997), local conditions and opportunities (Chetty & Blankenburg Holm, 2000; Schweizer et al., 2010) and market behaviors of local customers (Blomstermo et al., 2004; Coviello & Munro, 1995; Johanson & Mattsson, 1988; Johanson & Vahlne, 2003; 2009). According to Fletcher & Harris (2012, p.632), "market knowledge is country and market specific, but it is not firm specific". Due to market knowledge being specific to a particular foreign market, it cannot be easily transferred to other overseas markets serviced by the company (Galdion et al., 2019). Market knowledge is perceived as a mechanism for reducing uncertainty, which represents the additional costs faced by a company due to its unfamiliarity with the host country environment (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; Galdion et al., 2019). Market knowledge

is also perceived as an antecedent for the successful recognition of opportunities (Arte, 2017). With an understanding of the culture, institutions, customers, competitors and market conditions of a particular foreign market, a company may be more aware of specific international opportunities (Zhou, 2007).

Experiential market knowledge can be acquired through experience from current business activities in an overseas market, which generates business opportunities and drives the internationalization process (Johanson & Vahle, 1990). Although some scholars have argued that imitation of another company can also reduce market uncertainty (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Forsgren, 2002), experiential market knowledge cannot be easily acquired in the same way as objective market knowledge, which means that it is the primary way of reducing market uncertainty (Johanson & Vahlne, 1990). Eriksson et al. (1997) proposed two types of experiential market knowledge: business knowledge and institutional knowledge. Business knowledge refers to experiential knowledge of suppliers, competitors, local clients, and customers, while institutional knowledge refers to knowledge of government, institutional frameworks, rules, norms, and values (Eriksson et al., 1997). Lacking market knowledge can result in uncertainty and risk in the company's internationalization (Johanson & Vahlne, 1990). The major obstacles to the development of international operations are inadequate volume and poor access to market knowledge (Lamb & Liecsh, 2002).

3.3.3.2 Internationalization knowledge

Adding international territories increases the difficulties of management and the complexity of an organization (Fletcher et al., 2021). Internationalization knowledge is the "way of going international" (Eriksson et al., 1997). Internationalization knowledge refers to the systematic and abstract knowledge of how to develop and execute internationalization strategies and to internationalize in different countries (Blomstermo et al., 2004; Zakery & Saremi, 2021). To be specific, internationalization knowledge embraces the ability to successfully enter successive new markets (Fletcher et al., 2013), including the ability to search information, identify and evaluate opportunities, screen country markets, evaluate strategic markets and manage customs operations and foreign exchanges (Prashantham & Young, 2011; Welch et al., 2007). Internationalization knowledge is not specific to either a

certain country or a specific entry mode (Eriksson et al., 1997), which means that it gives the company an overall understanding of the internationalization process that can be applied across all foreign markets (Eriksson et al., 1997; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). It is a company-specific knowledge and evolves gradually in line with the development of companies (Zakery & Saremi, 2021). Through drawing on previous experiences in foreign markets, the company can incorporate learned routines to support not only its current internationalization processes (Sapienza et al., 2006), but also its future expansion into new foreign markets (Hakanson & Kappen, 2017; Prashantham & Young, 2011). The new market can be both similar, and different to previous markets (Kim et al., 2012), since international knowledge can be more freely transferred between different countries or markets (Child & Hsieh, 2014). Similar to market knowledge, internationalization knowledge is perceived as a mechanism for uncertainty reduction (Kim et al., 2012). Internationalization knowledge can also help a company to recognize and develop new international opportunities (Galdino et al., 2019).

Fletcher et al. (2013) separated internationalization knowledge into three categories: market entry internationalization knowledge (MEIK), localization internationalization knowledge (LIK) and international enterprise internationalization knowledge (IEIK). According to Fletcher et al. (2013, p. 51), MEIK is mainly about the company's market entry which refers to "knowledge to develop market entry strategies in new territories and how to implement market entry decisions". LIK is mainly about the company's competitive advantages, which refers to "knowledge to source competitive knowledge, evaluate necessary and available capabilities to develop competitive strategies and implement appropriate competitive and/or collaborative strategies in new territories" (Fletcher et al., 2013, p.51). IEIK is mainly about companies' international management, which refers to "knowledge to source and evaluate information about international challenges, different ways in which international companies can be structured and managed, and how to implement internal structures and procedures for international business performance" (Fletcher et al., 2013, p.51).

3.3.3.3 Technological knowledge

Technological knowledge refers to knowledge related to products, technologies, and processes (Zakery & Saremi, 2021). Technological knowledge enables companies to design

and develop their products and provides the necessary technical support for customers (Zakery & Saremi, 2021). Technological knowledge is company-specific and is deeply rooted in companies' products and manufacturing processes (Zaker & Saremi, 2020). Technological knowledge can be intangible (skills and knowledge) or tangible (patents and databases) (Ensign, 1999). Yeoh (2004) pointed out that technological knowledge is generally tacit, difficult to codify and hard to understand. Compared to market knowledge, technological knowledge can be used without modification to fit the local market (Fang et al., 2007). According to Zahra et al. (2021), new technological knowledge is not country specific. Therefore, companies' technological knowledge is important in providing company-specific advantages that are transferable across borders (Buckley & Casson, 1976; Caves, 1971; Hymer, 1976; Kogut & Zander, 1993) and in early and rapid internationalization (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Yli-Renko et al., 2002). Technological knowledge can encourage the discovery and exploitation of opportunities (Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003) and is positively correlated with the company's financial performance (Zahra et al., 2000) and international growth (Yli-Renko et al., 2002). Autio et al. (2000) suggested that new technological knowledge can help knowledge-intensive companies avoid stagnation in existing markets. Companies have to offer innovative technology-intensive products or services if they wish to compete with rivals in the host country (Caves, 2007). Therefore, the accumulation of technological knowledge supports the ambition of companies' internationalization (Caves, 2007).

3.3.3 The role of organizational learning in internationalization process research

When researchers have applied KBV to view companies' internationalization, the role of knowledge and learning processes has been highlighted (Johanson et al., 2020; Nakos et al., 2019). This section discusses the role of organizational learning in companies' entire internationalization process. Internationalization process (IP) theory (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977, 1990) and international new ventures (INVs) theory (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994) are the two fundamental theories that are used in internationalization research. They are both, however, more focused on the pre-internationalization process. The duration of the pre-

internationalization and post-internationalization stages are two-time dimensions for international ventures (Mudambi & Zahra, 2007; Sleuwaegen & Onkelinx, 2014). Pre-internationalization refers to the earliness of internationalization (Zhou & Wu, 2014). Post-internationalization refers to internationalization that follows cross-border expansion (Meschi et al., 2017). This sub-section discusses the role and outcomes of organizational learning according to IP theory, INVs and post-internationalization separately.

3.3.4.1 The role of organizational learning in internationalization process theory

The Uppsala model regards internationalization as a continual adjustment process (Johanson & Vahlne, 2006). Johanson & Vahlne (2011) assumed that companies often maintain risks at a controlled level and that decision-makers are risk-averse. The main barrier to internationalization is resource constraints and the lack of knowledge and capabilities (Vahlne & Johanson, 2009; 2017). Therefore, the Uppsala model focuses on organizations' learning and on how their learning affects their behavior (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; 1990). The model reflects a core assumption of behavioral theory, that the enactment of a central learning process is essential to organizational performance (Fletcher et al., 2021). This view supports the assertion that knowledge is necessary to market entry success, and that knowledge can be learned from experiences of organizations' exposure to international implementation, operation, and management (Fletcher, 2021). Experiential learning is the key component of the IP model (Hutzschenreuter & Matt, 2017; Santangelo & Meyer, 2011; 2017). Johanson & Vahlne (2009) claimed that experiential knowledge can be accumulated and shared, which means that the relevant knowledge base can extend beyond company boundaries and be nested in relationships and networks (Welch et al., 2016). The exchange of relevant knowledge in such relationships and networks may result in the creation of new knowledge that can help companies to build their competitive advantages (Welch et al., 2016). Because experiential knowledge needs time to accumulate, companies internationalize slowly and incrementally when they enter new markets and increase their commitments (Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2017).

Therefore, in the updated Uppsala model, Johanson & Vahlne (2017) linked the pace of

internationalization with the interaction between knowledge and the development of capabilities and the commitment process (see Figure 2.6.1). The Uppsala model suggests that companies should firstly invest in foreign markets which need a lower intensity of resource commitment, so that they can subsequently move to a higher level. Vahlne & Johanson (2017) claimed that this gradual approach reduces risks to an organization's operations. This can improve the organization's prospects of survival and provide it with greater flexibility. The market knowledge of organizations can affect resource commitment decisions but market knowledge and learning in foreign markets are obstructed by psychic distance. Therefore, Vahlne & Johanson (2017) suggested that companies should reduce uncertainty by first entering foreign markets with "close compounded distance". After developing knowledge, capabilities and networks, organizations can enter other markets, with larger compounded distances, with more confidence. The Uppsala model is not a stage model, which is a model of successive and interlinked commitment decisions (Welch et al., 2016). The accumulation of knowledge, the reduction of uncertainty and the recognition of new market opportunities in one period affect the decisions made by companies in the subsequent period (Welch, 2016).

Figure 3.3.1 The Uppsala model (2017)
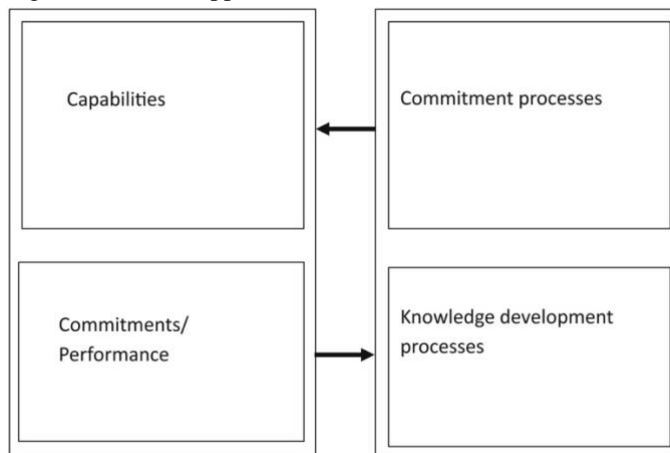
Source from: Vahlne & Johanson (2017)

Many scholars have critically pointed out limitations of the Uppsala model. From the organizational learning perspective, the Uppsala model limits the application of organizational learning theory (Forsgren, 2002). The Uppsala model presumes that experiential learning is the exclusive driver of internationalization and that other channels

of learning show less impact on internationalization (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). However, Forsgren (2002) pointed out that other types of learning, such as searching and grafting, may have more influence on the internationalization of organizations. This leads to three main limitations.

Firstly, according to Hurmerinta et al. (2015), accumulating experiential knowledge can help companies to recognize international opportunities. However, it can also lead to an ignorance of opportunities in markets where little knowledge exists (Hurmerinta et al., 2015). Secondly, Hutzschenreuter & Matt (2017) pointed out that experiential learning can be helpful when companies expand their business in the same country, but not all experiential learning is transferrable internationally. To be specific, some experiential learning is related to "non-location-bound knowledge", which can be exploited in different countries without significant costs of adaptation (Clarke et al., 2013). In contrast, "location-bound knowledge" is specifically related to aspects of the market such as institutional-, competitor- or client-specific issues (Schwens et al., 2018). Location-bound knowledge is not globally transferrable without significant costs of adaptation (Clarke et al., 2013). Previous IP model studies primarily focused on changes in commitment in the same market, so that it was less relevant whether knowledge obtained from experiential learning were location-bound or non-location-bound (Clarke et al., 2013; Hutzschenreuter & Matt, 2017; Schwens et al., 2018). Thirdly, the Uppsala model oversimplifies the relationship between learning and organizational behavior. According to Forsgren (2002), the Uppsala model does not pay much attention to individual learning, which means that it may ignore the possibility of individuals' different understanding of experiences. Different interpretations of experiences can cause different internationalization routes to those predicted by the Uppsala model (Forsgren, 2002).

3.3.4.2 The role of organizational learning in new international ventures

With changes in the internationalization environment, an emerging phenomenon has discussed more fluently within IP literature (Autio, 2005), which cannot be explained by the Uppsala model. International entrepreneurship (IE) is an emerging field, which provides a new explanation of internationalization (Oviatt & McDougall, 1999). Oviatt & McDougall

(2005) defined IE as "…the discovery, enactment, evaluation and exploitation of opportunities - across national borders - to create future goods and services". There are two key concepts in IE research: INVs (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; 1999; 2005) and Born-global (Knight & Cavusgil, 1996). Since the 1980s, researchers in both the IB and IE areas have treated INVs as a new phenomenon. This type of SME shows both a willingness to engage in international markets from its inception and rapid internationalization (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994). Oviatt & McDougall (1994) defined an INV as "…a business organization that, from inception, seeks to derive significant competitive advantage from the use of resources and the sale of outputs in multiple countries". An aspect of this definition needs to be highlighted; this is that INVs differ from start-ups in as much as they focus on foreign markets from the beginning of their operations (Oviatt & McDougall, 1997). Therefore, an INV is generally defined as an entrepreneurial start-up that begins rapid internationalization soon after its inception (Acedo & Jones, 2007). INVs internationalize through entrepreneurial action, rather than though the accumulation and development of resources (Sapienza et al., 2006), which highlights risk-taking and innovation. Born-global companies represent an extreme case of INVs (Madsen & Servais, 1997). Companies that deviate from the gradual path of international growth might benefit from superior performance, but they are also likely to experience greater uncertainty and more failures (Santangelo & Meyer, 2017).

INV theory also views internationalization as a learning process (Casillas & Acedo, 2013). Many researchers have promoted INVs as a challenge to the Uppsala model. While INVs do not refute the role of experiential learning, the literature on INVs challenges the supremacy of experiential learning, noting difficulties related to 'learning-by-doing'. INVs can learn more rapidly, so they may be able to take advantage of short 'windows of opportunity' and sustain a rapid expansion into foreign markets (Meschi et al., 2017; Prashantham & Young, 2011). Many studies have used Huber's knowledge-acquisition processes to resolve the challenge of experiential learning, suggesting that internationalizing companies also use learning processes such as congenital learning (Bruneel et al., 2010; Yeoh, 2004), vicarious learning (Casillas et al., 2010; Freeman et al., 2010; Schwens & Kabst, 2009), searching (Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Li et al., 2004) and grafting (Gabrielsson et al., 2008; Loane et al.,

2007). For example, INVs rely heavily on congenital learning (Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Laperrière & Spence, 2015; Oviatt & McDougall, 1994). Pellegrino & McNaughton (2015) suggested that, with the focus of knowledge shifting from product knowledge to market knowledge and internationalization knowledge, INVs gradually rely more on experiential learning and grafting learning. Vicarious learning could support early internationalization if companies are surrounded by other companies that have the relevant experience (Fernhaber et al., 2009), or INVs is typical approach for companies in the industry or sector (Fernhaber & Li, 2010). Jiang et al. (2014) reported that learning, especially vicarious learning, decreases the negative influence of the speed of foreign expansion on company survival. Some studies have pointed out that INVs also use grafting, especially when they invest directly in offshore markets; they can hire staff and/or acquire companies in order to gain foreign business knowledge (Gabrielsson et al., 2008; Loane et al., 2007), product knowledge and business network knowledge, and to access financial resources (Loane et al., 2007).

Compared with IP theory, INVs adopt more flexible sources of knowledge with a rapid speed of learning. INV research pays more attention to the role of entrepreneurs or top managers in early internationalization. This is rarely discussed in the IP literature. Every company inherits abilities and experiences from entrepreneurs and top managers, with entrepreneurs playing an important role in rapid learning (McDougall et al., 2003). At a company level, Autio et al. (2000) pointed out that INVs are more flexible in terms of organizational inertia, which can help them to integrate new knowledge faster than traditional companies. Huber (1991) suggested that well-established companies should 'unlearn' routines developed in the domestic market before starting the learning process abroad. In other words, INVs with less organizational inertia can acquire new knowledge quicker than old, well-established companies.

3.3.4.3 The role of organizational learning in the post-internationalization process

Prashantham & Young (2011) pointed out that researchers have tended more to focus on companies entering a new market, although they expect that internationalization involves

extended learning after entering the market. Only limited research has discussed the specific learning processes of internationalizing companies undertaking overtime (e.g., Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2017; Saarenketo et al., 2004). There is a lack of consensus among researchers on optimum methods of learning to support long-term internationalization (Bunz et al., 2017; Casillas et al., 2009; Cui et al., 2005; Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2017; Prashantham & Young, 2011; Yalcinkaya et al., 2007). Theoretically, as companies accumulate a greater level of international experience, they will be able to manage the internationalization process more efficiently (Freixant & Renart, 2020). Foreign customers may provide key information on production methods in order to obtain higher quality, or more affordable, products (Zahra et al., 2000). Therefore, companies can access a new pool of knowledge and technology through longer and continued exposure to international markets (Salomon & Jin, 2010). At the same time, with the continued development of internationalization, companies build routines and processes to efficiently adapt new and constantly changing environments (Barkema et al., 1997). These routines and processes constitute the new dynamic managerial and marketing capabilities that are needed for companies' sustainable expansion in international markets (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004).

Fletcher et al. (2021) suggested two types of learning, retrospective learning and prospective learning, that might be used to build a learning process in a company's internationalization process, rather than a market entry process (see Figure 3.2.2). Retrospective learning is similar to the experiential learning that is discussed in the Uppsala model (Fletcher et al., 2021). Retrospective learning includes "observation of a failure (to meet the aspirations held by the managers), diagnosis of its causes through 'problematics search', a period of learning and the institutionalization of a new structure and/or strategy for the business" (Fletcher et al., 2021, p.4). Retrospective learning is necessary so that companies can assess risks and maintain performance levels. Prospective learning is "planned to develop capabilities that the company expected to need in the immediate future" (Fletcher et al., 2021, p.13). Prospective learning is complementary to retrospective learning, because prospective learning enhances managers' managerial capabilities, which helps them to diagnose problems and address problems with greater speed (Fletcher et al., 2021). Both retrospective learning and prospective learning have an important role in companies' internationalization

processes. Learning processes related to internationalization are dynamic (Fletcher et al., 2021).

Figure 3.3.2 Retrospective and prospective processes of organizational learning (2021)
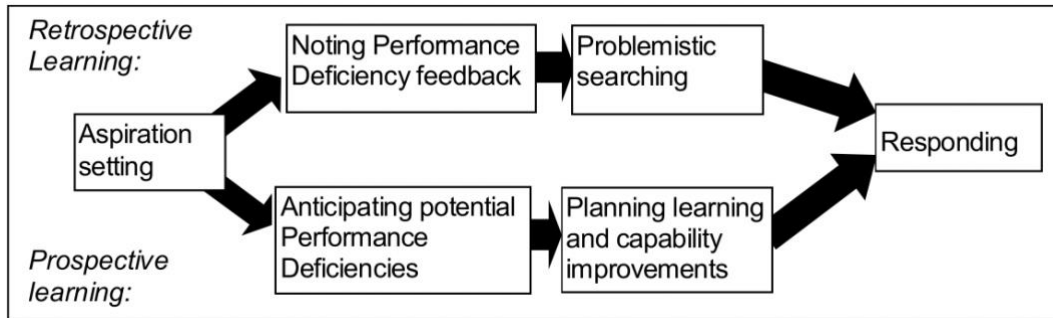
Source: Fletcher et al. (2021)

3.3.4 Summary

This section has discussed the knowledge-based view and has explained the importance of knowledge and organizational learning in internationalization. On this basis, the section has discussed the role of organizational learning in the internationalization process. According to IP, INV and post-internationalization literature, knowledge is an important resource for international operations. Researchers discussing the learning process in the context of internationalization initially focused on the acquisition of market knowledge from experience (Fletcher et al., 2021). Knowledge perspectives in IP and INV, however, are different because they provide a different view of resource commitments. In IP literature, experiential market knowledge and internationalization knowledge are key resources for international expansion. According to the Uppsala model, market knowledge and internationalization knowledge require a high degree of market commitment specificity. This leads that organizations' investments in one market are difficult to apply to other markets (Autio, 2005). Therefore, companies are willing to choose a less aggressive strategy in their internationalization process. In contrast, INVs highlight resource fungibility, which is underpinned by the mobility of knowledge resources (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994). Many INV studies use congenital learning, vicarious leaning, searching, and grafting to address

the challenge of experiential learning. Resource fungibility reduces risks and accelerates INVs' initial entry speed through alternative governance mechanisms (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994). Therefore, INVs are often prevalent in knowledge-intensive sectors (Autio, 2005), because knowledge intensity provides a high degree of resource fungibility for knowledge resources and managerial experience (Oviatt & McDougall, 2005). In the post-internationalization process, researchers have proposed retrospective learning and prospective learning as means of building the dynamic learning process in companies' internationalization processes, rather than in market entry processes. Companies can learn in different ways, follow different learning methods, and change how they learn over time (Bunz et al., 2017; Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2017).

3.4 The influence of leadership on the international learning process based on the resource-based view

Over the past three decades, the resource-based view (RBV) has emerged as one of the most influential theories leading to companies making strategic choices to achieve and sustain competitive advantages in dynamic markets (Zahra, 2021). Barney (1986) developed some core resource-based arguments, proposing that, to develop and implement strategies, companies must acquire the necessary resources and capabilities for obtaining economic rents (Barney, 2001). There are two key assumptions of RBV: 1) resources within different companies are heterogeneous; 2) these resources are immobile (Barney, 1991, p.104). RBV has been developed and used to explain how companies' competitive advantage can be achieved and sustained (Barney, 1991; 2001; Peteraf, 1993; Zahra, 2021). Barney et al (2021) suggested that, in order to gain sustainable competitive advantages, companies need to obtain resources that are: 1) valuable for exploitation; 2) rare from competitors; 3) costly to imitate and 4) unbearable to substitute. RBV focuses on company-level resources (Peng, 2001) and maintains that competitive advantages can be more effectively achieved by exploiting internal, instead of external, factors (Barney & Hesterly, 2010). Resources include physical capital resources, human capital resources and organizational capital resources (Barney, 1991; Hanson et al., 2013), such as leaders (Castanias & Helfat, 1991; Zahra, 2021),

organizational culture (Barney, 1986) and knowledge-based assets (Kogut & Zander, 1992). Resources can be tangible or intangible (Hason et al., 2013) and consist of stocks of available factors within a company that have certain qualities that make them the key element of such an advantage (Hason et al., 2013; Makadok, 2001; Zahra, 2021).

RBV has evolved to become the most used theoretical lens in management research (Collins, 2020) and has become a critical theoretical perspective for international business (IB) research (Peng, 2001). Through the literature on RBV, the role of resources has been widely recognized (Zahra, 2021). In general, the basis for value creation is dependent on rare, imperfectly imitable, and imperfectly substitutable resources (Arroteia & Hafeez, 2020). However, these resources cannot inevitably lead to the creation of value (Arroteia & Hafeez, 2020). The capability of companies, which is related to something that companies "do" rather than "have" and implemented by humans (Arroteia & Hafeez, 2020), causes companies to differ in the way they use resources. SMEs normally have few firm-level resources and lack of human capital beyond the leaders (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010; Sarasvathy et al., 2013). Therefore, leaders make the differences in terms of creating value and shape firm-level outcomes (Aguinis et al., 2020; Arroteia & Hafeez, 2020; Rui et al., 2016). Zahra (2021) proposed that human judgement on the value of resources is the foundation of RBV's propositions. In other words, leaders use their judgement when applying foresight, insight and hindsight, as well as their understanding of industry, in order to carry out the different activities associated with resource management (Zahra, 2021).

From an organizational learning perspective, Kim (1993) claimed that organizational learning begins at the individual level. Volberda et al. (2010, p.932) argued that "absorptive capacity has an important, but hitherto neglected, set of distinctly organizational antecedents, such as organizational structure, reward systems and systems of HR practices and policies". Therefore, researchers should pay more attention to managers who adopt learning processes to improve internationalization performance (Fletcher et al., 2021). Many scholars have pointed out that a company's internationalization is affected by manager-specific factors, especially in SMEs' internationalization (e.g., Forsgren, 2002; Pedersen & Petersen, 1998; Petersen et al., 2008; Weerawardena et al., 2007). As the literature on SMEs'

internationalization has acknowledged of the importance of the CEO or entrepreneurs' cognition, interpretations, and perceptions for the international behavior of companies (Hsu et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2011; Zander et al., 2015). In other words, to understand the international entrepreneurial behavior of SMEs, it is first necessary to understand the individual who drives the company (Coviello, 2015; Coviello et al., 2017; Stoian et al., 2018).

Many scholars have concluded that key managers' cognitive and attitudinal characteristics have an influence on companies' international and economic performance (Freixanet et al., 2018; Leonidou et al., 2002). Stoian et al. (2018) suggested that individual cognition and vision drive companies' international involvement. Studies of the Uppsala model, INVs and post-internationalization all have highlighted the importance of CEOs, entrepreneurs, key managers and decision makers. In most of these models and theories, however, leaders do not have a role (Aharoni et al., 2011). For example, Johanson & Vahlne (1977, p.26) pointed out that the Uppsala model is a "partial model" and they "do not deal explicitly with the individual decision-maker". Johanson & Vahlne (1977, p.23) also claimed that they do not consider the variation in decision-making styles and the conditions that prevail in specific decision-making situations. Johanson & Vahlne (2009; 2017) have nevertheless suggested that future research can further explore how the style of decision makers affects the knowledge-commitment cycle. Johanson & Vahlne (2009) claimed that a step forward in research into the internationalization process would be to combine entrepreneurship with the business network perspective. Forsgren (2016) also called for more research on the role of entrepreneurship in relation to the Uppsala model, especially research which can explain how entrepreneurship will affect the speed and direction of companies' internationalization. Moreover, both INV (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; 2005) and Born-global (Knight & Cavusgil, 2004) have drawn attention to the role of key managers in the development of firms' internationalization strategy. Managers might bring their own knowledge and experience to INVs to compensate for a lack of organizational routines and knowledge, and thus contribute to improving organizations' chances of survival (Freixanet et al., 2018; Sapienza et al., 2006). Huber (1991) claimed that companies do not start with "a totally clean slate" (Freixanet & Renart, 2020, p.4). Companies inherit the experiences and competencies of their entrepreneurs or managers (Sapienza et al., 2006). The INV approach underlines the

role of managers' knowledge and competencies (Oviatt & McDougall, 1994). Individual-level knowledge and international experience are key for identifying international opportunities and the subsequent deployment of resources (Stoian et al., 2018). In relation to the post-internationalization process, Freixant & Renart (2020) pointed out that, if managers are willing to commit further resources to export activities, then future international market entries will be more likely to succeed.

Existing research has discussed the influence of leaders' cognition (Freixanet & Renart, 2020; Freixanet et al., 2018; Leonidou et al., 2002; Stoian et al., 2018), interpretation (Hsu et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2011; Zander et al., 2015), perception (Hsu et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2011; Zander et al., 2015), decision-making style (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), entrepreneurship (Johanson & Vahlne 2009; 2017) and/or knowledge and experience (Freixanet & Renart, 2020; Freixanet et al., 2018; Oviatt & McDougall, 1994; Sapienza et al., 2006; Stoian et al., 2018) on the company's internationalization, especially on the learning process of internationalization. As Felix et al. (2019) stated, leadership is the driver of entrepreneurship. Leaders' cognition, interpretation and decision making are important factors when researchers discuss leadership. For example, as discussed in Chapter 2, one of the huge differences between authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership is the decision-making styles of leaders. Moreover, leadership has been treated as an important factor that can affect companies' organizational learning (e.g., Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; van Dierendonck, 2011). Therefore, it is reasonable to consider the influence of leadership on the international learning process. However, almost no studies have discussed the role of leadership in the organizational learning process of companies' internationalization, which is a research gap.

3.5 Synthesis of reviewed literature and summary of research gaps

Three streams of literature (leadership, organizational learning and internationalization) have been reviewed in this research (see Figure 3.5.1). It is necessary to synthesize them and

highlight research gaps, in order to develop an integrated research framework to explain the influence of leadership on organizational learning in companies' internationalization.

Figure 3.5.1 An illustrative summary of the literature connecting leadership with organizational learning in an internationalization context
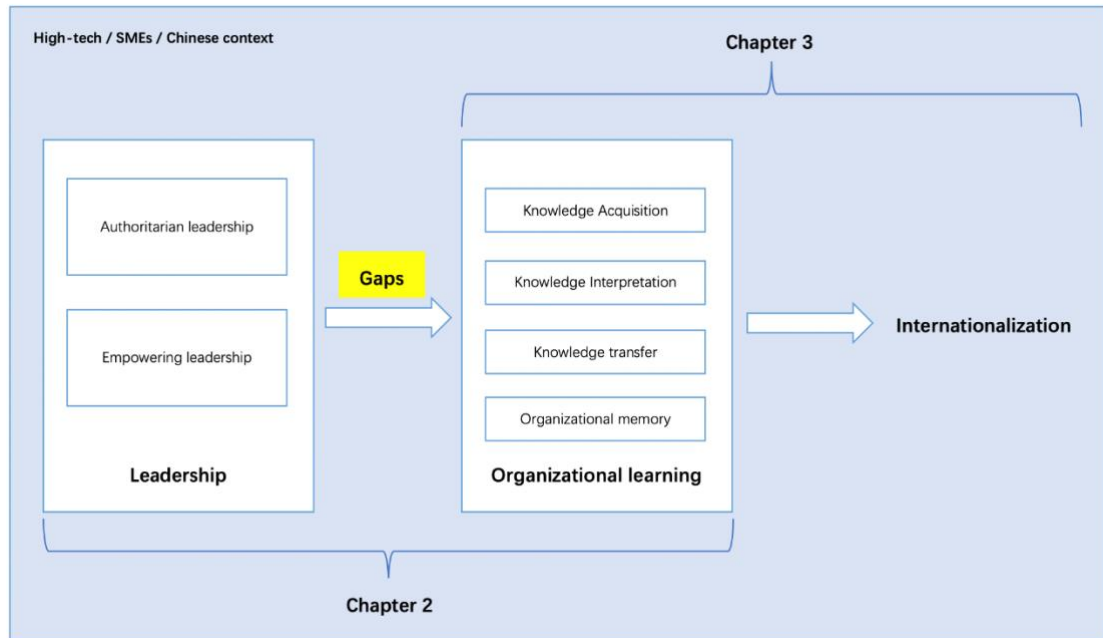
Source: Summarized by the researcher.

3.5.1 Summary of literature on leadership and organizational learning

The definition of leadership is inherently complex because it has a different meaning to different people, depending on their experiences, background, and development levels (Sheer, 2013). In other words, leadership is heavily influenced by context. Although existing research has paid attention to the Chinese context, high-tech industry, SMEs, and internationalization have not yet been discussed in depth.

Most leadership theories have been developed in the Western context (Barney & Zhang, 2009; Child, 2009; Jia et al., 2011; Sanchez-Runde et al., 2011; Tsui, 2006; Yukl, 2010). The Chinese context differs from the Western context because Chinese leaders and subordinates have a commitment to collectivism, power distance and traditional values (Au & Kwan, 2009; Wang et al., 2019). Chinese culture incorporates Confucianism, Legalism and Daoism. On this basis, two leadership styles, authoritarian leadership, and empowering leadership, are prominent and these are rooted in Chinese culture. It is important for

authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership to be compared because both of them are related to power in the organization (Boulu-Reshef et al., 2020; Lorinkova et al., 2013; Martin & Liao, 2013). With authoritarian leadership, leaders have absolute authority and control over subordinates (Chan et al., 2013; Harms et al., 2018; Schaubroeck et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2013). With empowering leadership, leaders share power with subordinates and provide greater decision-making autonomy (Cheong et al., 2019; Kim & Park, 2019; Zhang & Bartol, 2010).

Existing studies have discussed the influence of leadership on organizations' learning (Do & Mai, 2020; Liao et al., 2017; Northouse, 2016; Khurosani, 2018; Kim & Park, 2019; Waldman et al., 2009). However, research on leadership and organizational learning has clear limitations. Firstly, research into the relationship between leadership and organizational learning has not included an extensive range of leadership styles (Xie, 2019). Secondly, almost all studies (e.g., Khurosani, 2018; Kim & Park, 2019; Salas-Vallina et al., 2017; Vermeulen et al., 2017) have been based on the positivism research philosophy and have adopted a quantitative research method, which means that they have used leadership and organizational learning as two variables, examining the relationship between them. These studies cannot explain how leadership influences the organizational learning process. Thirdly, organizational learning includes many sub-processes, for example, knowledge acquisition, interpretation, transfer, and organizational memory. Few research studies have paid attention to these sub-processes. Fourthly, only a few studies have considered the cultural context when discussing leadership and organizational learning. Fifthly, with the intensification of global competition, although the role of the learning process in internationalization has often been highlighted (Bruneel et al., 2010; Fletcher et al., 2021; Johanson & Vahlne, 1977; 1990; Loane et al., 2007; Oviatt & McGougall, 1994; Yeoh, 2004), few studies have considered the influence of leadership on the organizational learning process in the internationalization context.

3.5.2 Summary of literature on internationalization and organizational learning

Organizational learning is a commonly used theoretical lens in research related to internationalization, since it provides a theoretical foundation for IP and INVs. Relevant theories, such as KBV, Huber's organizational learning framework and absorptive capacity, are widely used as important pillars to explain phenomena relating to early internationalization and post-entry internationalization (Zahra, 2005). This research combines Huber's organizational learning framework (1991), absorptive capacity (Zahra & George, 2002) and Argote's organizational learning framework (2021) to provide a comprehensive and clear framework of organizational learning processes, including knowledge acquisition, knowledge interpretation, knowledge transfer and organizational memory. From the resource-based view, existing studies have pointed out the importance of considering the role of leaders in the international learning process (e.g., Coviello et al., 2017; Stoian., 2018; Zahra, 2021). Scholars have discussed the influence of leaders' cognition (Freixanet & Renart, 2020; Freixanet et al., 2018; Stoian et al., 2018), interpretation (Hsu et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2011; Zander et al., 2015), decision-making style (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977) and entrepreneurship (Johanson & Vahlne 2009; 2017) on companies' internationalization, especially on the learning process of internationalization. These factors are important aspects of leadership. Moreover, leadership has been treated as an important factor that can affect companies' organizational learning (e.g., Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; van Dierendonck, 2011). Very few of the studies, however, have discussed the role of leadership in the organizational learning process of companies' internationalization.

3.5.3 Summary of research gaps

The research gaps in leadership literature, leadership and organizational learning literature, and internationalization and organizational learning literature are summarized below.

Gaps in leadership literature:

1) Little research has focused on leadership in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

2) Few studies have considered the characteristics of high-tech leaders in this context

3) Little research has discussed leadership in the internationalization context

Gaps in leadership and organizational learning literature:

1) A limited range of leadership styles has been discussed in research relating to leadership and organizational learning.

2) How leadership influences the organizational learning process is little known, due to a lack of qualitative research.

3) Limited attention has been directed toward the relationship between leadership and different dimensions of the organizational learning process.

4) Few studies have considered the cultural context when discussing leadership and organizational learning.

5) Relatively little is known about how different leadership styles influence the organizational learning process in the internationalization context.

Gaps in internationalization and organizational learning literature:

1) The effects of CEO leadership on organizational learning need to be confirmed in the context of internationalization.

3.6 Research questions and objectives

Based on the reviewed literature and the research gaps discussed above, this research aims to explore how leadership affects organizational learning in internationalizing high-tech companies in China. The research objectives and research question are as follows:

Research question: How does leadership influence organizational learning processes in internationalizing processes?

Objectives:

- ⑩ To explore the authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership in the Chinese context.

- ⑩ To explore the different impacts of authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership on the international learning processes.

- ⑩ To explore the interaction between leadership and international learning processes.

3.7 Initial research framework

This section integrates the literature on leadership, organizational learning and internationalization and establishes a framework for researching how leadership affects organizational learning in internationalizing high-tech companies in China (see Figure 3.7.1). Based on leadership literature, context should be considered in the whole process of the research, including the contexts of internationalization, high-tech industry, SMEs, and China. In terms of the Chinese context andthe lens of power of leadership, this research focuses on authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership. Based on Huber's organizational learning framework (1991), absorptive capacity (Zahra & George, 2002) and Argote's organizational learning framework (2021), organizational learning includes four sub-processes: knowledge acquisition, knowledge interpretation, knowledge transfer and organizational memory.

Figure 3.7.1 Initial framework for researching the influence of leadership on organizational learning in companies' internationalization process based on the existing literature
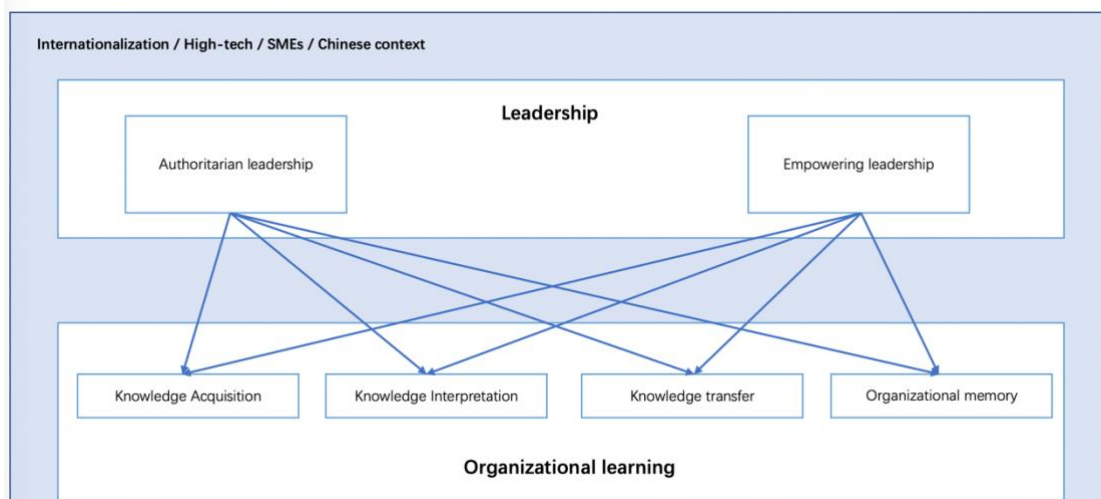
Source: Summarized by the researcher.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on a literature review of knowledge and learning in internationalization research. Firstly, this chapter has reviewed the definition and processes of organizational learning, including knowledge acquisition, knowledge interpretation, knowledge transfer and organizational memory. Secondly, this chapter has reviewed knowledge-related theories in internationalization research, including the resource-based view and the knowledge-based view. In the knowledge-based view, in the internationalization sub-section, this chapter has highlighted three types of knowledge that are widely recognized in the IB and IE literature: market knowledge, technological knowledge and internationalization knowledge (Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Pellegrino & McNaughton, 2017). This chapter has then discussed the importance of organizational learning in the internationalization process. The internationalization process model emphasizes the role of experiential learning (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977). INV pays more attention to the role of congenital learning (Brunel et al., 2010; Yeoh, 2004), vicarious learning (Casillas et al., 2010; Freeman et al., 2010; Schwens & Kabst, 2009), searching (Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Li et al., 2004) and grafting (Gabrielsson et al., 2008; Loane et al., 2007). Studies related to post-internationalization suggest that there are more types of organizational learning process, such as retrospective learning and prospective learning (Fletcher et al., 2021). All these studies highlight the important role of learning in companies' internationalization process. Thirdly, the chapter has discussed the importance of considering the role of leaders in the international learning process (Coviello et al., 2017; Stoian, 2018; Zarhra, 2021) and has highlighted research gaps, such as the lack of research that has considered the influence of leadership on organizational learning in companies' internationalization. At the end of this chapter, a summary has been provided of the two literature review chapters and of research gaps. On this basis, the chapter has highlighted research questions, research objectives and a research framework. The next chapter presents the methodology of this research.

Chapter 4 Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

According to Burns (2000), research is defined as "a systematic investigation to find answers to a problem" (p.3). Mertens (2014, p.2) developed this view, claiming that research is not only a process of systematic inquiry, but also a process in which data can be collected, analyzed, interpreted, and used. This chapter provides details of the methodology of the current research, whose purpose is to explore the relationship between leadership and the international learning process. The chapter begins with research philosophy, after which it describes the research design (which includes the research approach), the case study method and the case selection procedure. Subsequent sections discuss data collection, data analysis and research ethics.

4.2 Research philosophy

Rubin and Rubin (2012) point out that research philosophy varies on the objectives of the research and how it can be achieved. This research adopts an interpretivism approach to provide a cause-effects explanation of how leadership influences the international learning process for theory building. The interpretivism position considers that the world is socially constructed (Bryman, 2012; Saunders et al., 2019). From an interpretivism view, "reality is determined by people rather by objective and external factors" (Easterby-Smith et al., 2018, p.30). According to Piekkari et al. (2011, p.12), "reality is subjective, and knowledge is value dependent". Interpretivism requires the researcher to grasp the subjective meaning of social action (Bryman, 2012). Although research based on interpretivism receives less attention than research based on positivism in business research (Myers, 2013), some scholars claim that the interpretivist research philosophy is highly appropriate for research into business and management because business situations are complex and unique (Saunders et al., 2019). The interpretivist view is concerned with context-rich, subjective, qualitative phenomena (Godfrey & Hill, 1995). The researcher believes that the reality behind the leadership and

international learning process is subjective, and it depends on social actors' understanding (Lodico et al., 2006) and relies on the Chinese context. The researcher adopts an empathic stance, entering the social world of research subjects, and building an understanding from their point of view (Saunders et al., 2019). Hence, the current research is based on the interpretivism research philosophy in an effort to uncover the role of leadership in the organizational learning processes in the context of internationalization in Chinese high-tech. In contrast, positivism, advocated by Auguste Comte (Pickering, 2009), underpins the perspective that reality is objective and can be quantified independently of both participants and researchers (Silverman, 2013). According to Eisenhardt (1989, p.546), the main objective of the positivist view is "the development of testable hypotheses and theory which are generalizable across settings". Positivism seeks to utilize empirical data and scientific methods (Jakobsen, 2013), and aims to generate data that are valid and reliable. Thus, evidence collected in an objective and unbiased way is the key tenet of positivism (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The purpose of this research was not to find an effect relationship or to test an established theory, which is exploring the role of leadership in the international learning process. Furthermore, a positivist view cannot accommodate the interpretation of unobservable processes, or the exploration of practitioners' thoughts, as required in the current research. Therefore, the positivism research philosophy is not suitable in this research.

4.3 Research design

Research design refers to "the general plan of how you will go about answering your research question(s)" (Saunders et al., 2019, p.163). This section introduces the research approach, case study method and case selection design.

4.3.1 Research approach

Based on the existing literature, this research is interested in the role of leadership in international learning process. Flexible pattern matching is the most suitable approach for

exploratory research designs (Sinkovics, 2018). In general, flexible pattern matching need initial definition of research questions and an initial tentative analytical framework which can provide guidance and some focus for the explorations (Sinkovics, 2018). Then, researchers could combine the initial framework to explore and build theories based on the collected data (Sinkovics, 2018). It is important that in the research process, both research questions and the constructs or frameworks could shift (Sinkovics, 2018).

From the existing literature, it can be expected that leadership plays important role in companies' international learning process, although this is a research gap. This research aims to find out whether leadership has influence on international learning processes and how leadership affects organizational learning in the specific context. This research therefore needs to explore the relevance and possible relationships between leadership and international learning process that had not been combined and applied previously. In the current research, 'articulated preconceptions' (Dubois & Gadde, 2002) are developed through literature reviews, (and are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3), and involve the key concepts of organizational learning, leadership and internationalization. The section 3.7 shows the theoretical framework of this research based on existing literature. Based on the initial framework, this research needs fine-grained data from firms and individuals to explore and build the theory. Therefore, the current research employed a flexible pattern matching approach and sought to build a theory to explain the role of leadership in the organizational learning process in Chinese high-tech internationalizing companies. Theory building takes place through an iterative process, using continuous comparisons between theory and empirical findings.

4.3.2 Case study research method

Yin (2018, p.15) defined a case study as "an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context, in particular, the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident". The case study method is a common method in international business research (Piekkari et al., 2009), which offers in-depth contextual insight (Fletcher & Plakoyiannaki, 2011). Since the current

research concerns whether, and how, leadership influences the organizational learning process in Chinese high-tech internationalizing companies, case study is the most appropriate research method. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, the case study method is known to be appropriate for research that aims to answer "'how' or 'why' some social phenomenon works" (Yin, 2018, p.4). The main research questions of the current research are 'how' questions. Secondly, according to Eisenhardt (2021), the case study method is good at addressing "research questions for which there is little or conflicting prior theory and/or empirical evidence" (Eisenhardt, 2021). Based on the evidence reported in Chapters 2 and 3, there is little prior theory related to the influence of leadership on organizational learning. Thirdly, case studies are helpful when research needs an "in-depth" investigation of social events and phenomena because they rely on multiple sources of evidence to ensure the quality of research, which is helpful for theory development (Yin, 2018). Therefore, the case study method is the most appropriate method for finding the underlying processes, or reasons, for a phenomenon (Yin, 2018) and suitable for this research.

The case study method can be both quantitative and qualitative (Ghauri, 2004). Qualitative research tends to be highly context- and process-specific, and it places great significance on "how events and patterns unfold over time" (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.296). Qualitative research also allows the researcher to view the social world through participants' own eyes and has the flexibility to consider individuals' perspectives that the researcher has not anticipated. Therefore, compared with quantitative research methods, the qualitative case study copes better with certain situations, providing many more potential variables. This is particularly important in international business research, where the researcher's background and understanding of content translates into "budding participant observer skills" (Birkinshaw et al., 2011, p.574). Employing the research philosophy of interpretivism and a flexible pattern matching research approach, a qualitative case study method is employed for this research, which focuses on words, rather than the quantification of data. Although the qualitative approach has the main disadvantage that findings are based on the researcher's interpretations, so that propositions cannot be generalized to the wider population, generalizability is not a major task of the current work; this is because the main aim of the current research is to gain insights into leadership and organizational learning

processes in a complex context (Saunders & Lewis, 2012). The qualitative case study method can help this research gain deep insight of leadership and organizational learning from participants' eyes and grounded in the Chinese internationalization context.

4.3.3 Case selection design

Careful case selection is important in the case study approach (Eisenhardt, 2021) because it determines the contribution of the case study (Siggelknow, 2007). Research has also highlighted the importance of case selection to producing trustworthy qualitative data (CuervoCazurra et al., 2016). Sample size, the units of sampling and sampling strategy of the current research are discussed in this section.

4.3.3.1 Sample size and the units of sampling

Yin (2018) defined four types of case study design: holistic single case, embedded single case, holistic multiple case, and embedded multiple case (Table 4.3.1). Holistic designs treat the case as one unit (Rowley, 2002). Embedded designs separate the case into several subunits, such as meetings, roles, or locations, whereby these subunits can be explored individually and drawn together to provide an overall picture (Rowley, 2002). Embedded design offers more opportunities for replication and variation (Eisenhardt, 2021). There is no ideal number of cases in the case study method, but theory built from a number of case studies is more robust and generalizable than that derived from a single case study (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007), because it enables the researcher to find cross-case patterns in order to capture novel findings within the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Eisenhardt (2021) claimed that, although it is hard to specify the ideal number of cases, studies involving four to ten cases are common and often work well.

Table 4.3.1 Matrix depicting single and multiple holistic cases versus single and multiple embedded cases (Yin, 2018)

	Holistic	Embedded
Single	One case with one unit of analysis	One case with several units of analysis
Multiple	Several cases each with one unit of	Several cases each with several units of

	analysis	analysis

Therefore, the embedded multiple case study approach has been adopted in this research. There are two embedded units of analysis: authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership. At the start of the research, the unit of analysis was only one: leadership. After analysis of a number of pilot cases, it was found that a distinction could be made between CEOs with authoritarian leadership and CEOs with empowering leadership. The current research included eight cases, of which five CEOs showed authoritarian leadership and the other three showed empowering leadership. The profiles of cases are shown in section 4.4.2.

4.3.3.2 Sampling strategy

Patton (2015) proposed 15 strategies for purposeful sampling: extreme or deviant case sampling, intensity sampling, maximum variation sampling, homogenous sampling, typical case sampling, stratified purposeful sampling, critical case sampling, snowball or chain sampling, criterion sampling, theory based or operational constructs sampling, confirming or disconfirming cases, opportunistic sampling, random purposeful sampling, sampling politically important case and convenience sampling. The underlying principle of these strategies is to select information-rich cases (Patton, 2015). Therefore, criterion sampling us used to select and identify cases that fulfil predetermined criteria in this research (Eduardsen & Lvang, 2016).

Based on the research question and the research objectives, the current research selected cases using three criteria. Firstly, the sampled companies had to be high-tech companies, and this selection was informed by the certification of High and New Technology Enterprise (HNTE) proposed by the Chinese Government in 2008, which identifies high-tech companies. China's HNTE program provides a reduced tax rate for innovative companies that meet the following specific qualification criteria (USCBC, 2013): 1) the company continuously conduct research and development (R&D) activities and transform intellectual property (IP) developed into products or services; 2) it has obtained proprietary intellectual property rights for the core technology of its main product (or service) over the past three years through self-research and development, transfer/purchase, donation, merger and

acquisition, etc., or through an exclusive license with a term of more than five years; 3) it conducts business in a qualified high- and new-technology sector (such as aviation and aerospace, biological and medical, electronic information, new-energy and energy conservation, new-materials, high-tech services, or resources and environmental technology, as well as high and new technologies that transform traditional sectors); 4) it engages 10% of employees in R&D work, with 30% or more having at least an associate degree; 5) it invests 3-6% of its total revenue on R&D and 60% of its R&D expenses occur in mainland China; and 6) it earns more than 60% of total revenue from high- and new-technology products and services. Secondly, sample cases had to involve international business. To be specific, sampled companies had to have stable overseas sales (overseas sales accounting for more than 10% of total sales), to ensure that the selected companies were international companies. Thirdly, since many scholars have pointed out that leadership has a different level of influence in different sizes of company (e.g., Dunne et al., 2016; Garavan et al., 2016; Vargas, 2015), the companies sampled had to have 200-500 employees, to ensure consistency within the sample.

4.4 Data collection

This section describes the case selection process and case profiles. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, documentation, and observation. Multiple sources of data were used for data triangulation, to enhance the validity of the research (Meyer, 2001; Yin, 2018).

4.4.1 Case selection process

In order to select suitable cases, a review was made of the list of HNTEs in Beijing, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong and Anhui, where there were many HNTEs, according to the Chinese high-tech enterprise certification management website. These lists only showed the name of high-tech companies that had already achieved HNTE certification and did not include information on size or percentage of internationalization. Therefore, a check was made of the website of listed HNTEs to verify contact details and ensure that each company undertook international business. Then, 423 companies were contacted via email and

telephone to both check that they were internationalizing companies and seek authorization to conduct qualitative research based on semi-structured interviews. This screening procedure generated a smaller sample, with 23 companies agreeing to participate in this research. A further check was made that the companies in this sample fulfilled the predetermined criteria (Eduardsen & Lvang, 2016). Ten companies were selected for case study after the criterion sampling strategy had been applied. When the researcher compared ten selected companies, two companies were withdrawn from the research. These two companies were transformed from a state-owned company to a semi-state-owned company. In China, state-owned or semi-state-owned companies are led by the party (Leutert, 2018), which means that the head of the company is the party committee secretary. It is hard to remove the direct influence of government to define the leadership of the CEO or the party committee secretary. Based on the definitions of authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership, five cases showing authoritarian leadership were identified, with three cases showing empowering leadership.

4.4.2 Case profiles

This section presents the brief profiles of the eight remaining cases; they are summarized in Table 4.4.1.

Table 4.4.1 Case profiles (Source: the researcher)

Company Code	Industry sector	Major products	Employees	Year of establishment	Year starting internationalization	Main Overseas Markets
A	Biomedical	Heterocycles for chemical and pharmaceutical industries	420	2007	2007	USA, France, Canada, Japan, UK
B	Communication Tech	Broadband equipment	230	2003	2004	Southeast Asia, Latin America
C	Manufacturing	Motorcycles electric vehicles shock absorbers	350	1984/2008	1999/2015	Vietnam, Southeast Asia, India
D	Manufacturing	Rail transit equipment	230	2012	2016	Sudan, Australia, Hungary, Oman
E	Manufacturing	LED products	260	2015	2015	America, Japan, EU, Korea
F	Biomedical	Pharmaceutical excipient	490	2001	2006	Europe, America
G	Communication Tech	Cloud data center lifecycle solution	450	2011	2016	Southeast Asia, North America, EU
H	Communication Tech	Motion capture paradigm	240	2012	2012	Over 40 countries

Case A is a provider of heterocycles for chemical and pharmaceutical industries. The CEO founded this company in 2007 with five friends after he graduated from his PhD program in Chemistry. Since 2007, the company has tried to expand its market into the EU. The first overseas subsidiary of the company was built in France in 2016. Since then, it has continued to expand its market to America, Canada, and Japan. As of August 2019, the company has subsidiaries in France, the USA, Japan, Canada; it also has an office in the UK and a total of 420 employees. The company's overseas sales have accounted for over 80% of its total sales. Furthermore, the company received 600 million RMB in finance from the market in 2019. The company's goal for the next three years is to achieve an output value of 1 billion RMB.

Case B is a broadband equipment provider. Its customers are mainly major telecom operators. The CEO of the company achieved a Master's degree in a broadband network-related subject. He built the company in 2003, and at that time the company had nearly 100 employees. The company began its internationalization in 2004, but the development of its overseas markets was slow. In 2015, the company shifted its development focus to overseas markets because the company found that its domestic market could not meet the company's development needs, as the company only focuses on specific segments of the market. The company completed its listing in 2016. At the time of the interview (2019), the company had 230 employees and had expanded its overseas market to Southeast Asia (including India, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Thailand) and Latin America (including Mexico, Colombia, Chile, Peru and Argentina). The company's goal for the next three years is to focus on developing foreign markets and building localized sales teams in its foreign markets.

Case C is a family business, a company manufacturing shock absorber. The CEO's parents built the company in 1984 and expanded to Vietnam in 1999. At that time, Chinese companies accounted for 80% of Vietnam's market. However, Chinese companies entered with low-price competition and did not update their products over time. As a result, Indian companies took the opportunity to use newer products to occupy the market. Consequently, the company failed in the Vietnamese market and almost went bankrupt in 2008. At that time, the current CEO was working in an environmental governance company, but due to the poor situation of his family company, he resigned and returned to his hometown to take over the

company and start a second venture, in 2008. By 2008, the company was left with only 18 employees. The company re-attempted internationalization in 2015, following its failure in 2008. At the time of the interviews (2019), the company had 350 employees and had expanded its overseas market into South Asia, India, and Pakistan. The company's goal for the next three years is to expand into the West African market.

Case D is a rail transit equipment manufacturing company. The CEO built the company, with his team, from his previous company, in 2012. When the company started, it employed 20 people. The company had its first overseas business with a customer in Sudan, in 2016. As the time of the interview (2019), the company had 230 employees. The company's main overseas markets are Sudan, Australia, Hungary, Kenya, Uganda and Oman. Its overseas sales account for around 15% of its total sales. The company's goals for the next three years are to focus on expanding its overseas markets, in particular its markets within the 'one belt one road'[1] countries. The CEO expects the share of overseas sales to grow at an annual rate of 10%.

Case E is a leading designer and manufacturer of LED products. The CEO sold his previous LED product manufacturing company in 2010. After the expiry of the competition clause, he built the current company with his previous team (of around 50 people), in 2015. The company started as a joint venture with a French company, which holds 30% of the shares. The CEO had sufficient experience in overseas markets and thought that overseas markets would bring higher profits than the company's domestic market. Therefore, the company began its internationalization as soon as it started. Overseas sales account for over 90% of the company's total sales each year. At the time of the interview (2019), the company had 260 employees and its overseas markets were mainly in America, Japan, the EU, and Korea. The company's goal for the next three years is to mainly focus on the American market and to try to improve localized services.

Case F is a pharmaceutical excipient manufacturer. The CEO has worked in pharmaceutical

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[1] In 2013, the Chinese Government put forward a national-level top-level cooperation initiative named "Belt and Road Initiative" (B&R), and in 2015 started to promote business cooperation among 49 countries in the B&R Economic Zone.

manufacturing since graduating with a PhD in pharmacy. Previously, he led a team focused on the R&D of pharmaceutical excipient for a different pharmaceutical manufacturer. In 2001, he bought the pharmaceutical excipient business from the company, allowing him to start his own company alongside his previous team, which at that time consisted of 23 people. In 2006, the company began to enter the Southeast Asian market and, from 2014, began to expand to the EU and America, something it was able to accomplish due to the improved quality of its products. In 2015, the company was successfully listed on the stock market and, in 2016, established a new international marketing department. In 2019, the company had 490 employees and international sales accounted for 20% of total sales. The company's goal for the next three years is to increase the share of overseas sales to 50%.

Company G provides cloud data center lifecycle solutions and Software-Defined Networking systems. The company was built in 2011. The CEO graduated with a computer development degree and worked for Amazon, before starting the company with four friends. The company had 450 employees in 2019, having begun internationalization in 2016, acquiring an entire foreign operations and R&D team from a Hong Kong company, and putting it in charge of its overseas market expansion. The company has already expanded into Southeast Asian, North American, and European markets. The company has invested a great deal in building over 300 network infrastructures in overseas markets. The company's overseas sales accounted for 15% of the company's total sales in 2019, at which time the company looked forward to explosive growth in overseas sales in the next three years.

Case H was a Born-global company founded in 2012 and focuses on research and development related to motion capture-related products, such as the perception neuron studio sensor and the VR glove. The CEO and CTO are co-founders of the company. Both achieved a doctorate in mechanics. In 2012, there were only seven employees in the company, but by 2019 (at the time of the interview), the company had 240 employees and sold products in more than 40 countries. The United States and Japan are the company's most important overseas markets. The company did not have specific goals for its international business for the next three years. The company's main goals were fulfilling the needs of different customer industries, using innovative technology to lead market development.

4.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

In this research, interviews have been the main source of data. A qualitative interview is a data collection method that can be described as a purposeful discussion between two or more people (Kahn & Cannel, 1957; Saunders et al., 2019). In the interview process, the interviewer aims to gain insight into the interviewee's perceptions of a particular topic (Kvale, 1996; Thomas et al., 2004). Semi-structured interviews are widely used in IB research (e.g., Fletcher et al., 2013; Tsang, 2002), which focuses more on respondents' views than on the interviewer's preconceived ideas (Legard et al., 2003). The loose structure of such interviews can ensure that all the important topics of the research are covered (Bell, 1999). Semi-structured interviews were employed for the current research because the study has three main topics: the firm's internationalizing process, organizational learning and leadership, which need to be structured, to prevent the interviews from losing their focus. Flexibility is, however, also essential to the current research because the researcher cannot predict the details of organizational learning processes and internationalization events in the complex internationalizing events of sample companies. The details of organizational learning process and internationalization events are emerged from the interview.

Semi-structured interviews were the main data source. In order to gain sufficient information from each case, it was intended that three to four interviews would be completed for each case, including an interview with the CEO, the HR manager and at least one other senior manager. Having interviews with different interviewees in same case can also be used for data triangulation, which can enhance the validity of the research (Miles et al., 2020). Interviews lasted for approximately an hour and included 15 to 20 questions. The interview schedule was designed to explore issues of interest to the research study and also the views of the interviewees themselves (Harris, 2000; Yin, 2018) and included participant information, information on the company (including the firm's internationalization details), organizational learning during the internationalization process and leadership. The interview theme of protocol can be seen in Appendix 2 and 3. The current research focuses on an in-depth investigation of 'critical events' in high-tech companies' internationalization. The

events explored are firms' important or crucial incidents (Miles et al., 2020). Respondents were asked to 'tell the story' of three 'critical event', including its nature and consequences (Eisenhardt, 1991). Miles et al. (2020, p.304) pointed out that "a process, after all, is essentially a string of coherently related events". Therefore, this research asked interviewees to provide 2 or 3 critical events in recent three years (2016-2019), in order to provide context for organizational learning and a greater understanding of the specific nature of the problems faced by the managers (Loane et al., 2004; Loane & Bell, 2002).

At the start of this empirical enquiry, pilot interviews were carried out in two sample firms, to evaluate the effectiveness of the interview schedule and provide opportunities for the researcher to more deeply understand the phenomena investigated and adjust the interview theme. During these pilot investigations, interviews were held with the company's CEO, HR manager and at least one other manager who was familiar with the international business of the company. It was noticed, however, that the HR manager in one small and medium-sized company was not familiar with any international business, or overseas employees, at all. The HR department is normally not fully functional in Chinese SMEs; they only have a small number of overseas employees, who are hired, and managed, by the CEO directly. In this case it would not have been fruitful to interview with the HR manager, so the decision was taken to interview a manager with knowledge of the company's international business, instead of the HR manager. These managers were involved in these companies' international business. The details of interviewees in each company are listed in Table 4.4.2. In total, 25 interviews were held with representatives of the eight companies in the sample. Each interview lasted 30 to 90 minutes and was individually conducted, voice-recorded and transcribed.

Table 4.4.2 Interviewees participating in semi-structured interviews (Source: the researcher)

Case		Interviews with CEO	Interviews with manager 1	Interviews with manager 2	Interviews with manager 3
A	Position	CEO	Operational vice president	Marketing manager	HR manager
	Year of joining company	2007	2007	2018	2007
	Educational background	PhD in Chemistry	BSc in Chemistry	BSc in Chemistry	BSc in Chemistry & MBA
	Professional background	Built Company A after he graduated with his PhD	Worked in a chemistry company for a short time. Built Company A with CEO	Responsible for supplier management in a consumer goods company in Singapore, for 6 years	Had an internship in Company A during the last year as an undergraduate and joined the company after graduation
	Number of times interviewed	1	1	1	1
	Length of interview	40 mins	65 mins	80 mins	45 mins
B	Position	CEO	Marketing manager	Administrative manager	
	Year of joining company	2003	2009	2004	
	Educational background	MSc in broadband networks	MSc in control theory and control engineering	BSc in law	
	Professional background	Worked in a broadband network company	Worked in an American international business company	Joined the company after graduation	
	Number of times interviewed	1	1	1	
	Length of interview	50 mins	90 mins	40 mins	
C	Position	CEO	Administrative manager	Financial manager	
	Year of joining company	2008	2017	1996	
	Educational background	MSc in environmental engineering & MBA	BSc in mechanical design	BSc in mechanical design	

	Professional background	Worked in a green facilities company	Worked in a Japanese motorcycle company	Worked with CEO's parents since the company was established	
	Number of times interviewed	2	1	1	
	Length of interview	70 min and 20 mins	50 mins	30 mins	
D	Position	CEO	Chief engineer	Administrative manager	
	Year of joining company	2012	2017	2012	
	Educational background	BSc in mine exploration	BSc in machine made	BSc in law	
	Professional background	Worked in a state-owned company and was responsible for construction	Worked in a state-owned company, being responsible for R&D of fork road for train	Worked in a real estate company	
	Number of times interviewed	2	1	1	
	Length of interview	80 mins and 5 mins	40 mins	45 mins	
E	Position	CEO	Marketing manager	Quality manager	
	Year of joining company	2015	2015	2015	
	Educational background	BSc in auditing	BSc in marketing	BSc in microelectronics	
	Professional background	CEO of an LED company	Worked in a press	Worked in a Japanese communications corporation	
	Number of times interviewed	2	1	1	
	Length of interview	40 mins and 40 mins	60 mins	70 mins	
F	Position	CEO	Marketing director	International marketing manager	
	Year of joining company	2001	2004	2007	
	Educational background	PhD in pharmacy	BSc in biology	BSc in international business	
	Professional background	Responsible for R&D in a pharmaceutical manufacturing company	Worked in a pharmaceutical company	Worked in the company after graduation	
	Number of times interviewed	1	1	1	

	Length of interview	30 mins	30 mins	65 mins
G	Position	CEO	Vice president	Marketing manager
	Year of joining company	2011	2017	2013
	Educational background	MSc in embedded development	BSc in electric	BSc in wireless communication
	Professional background	Worked in a world-leading e-commerce company	Worked in a world-leading ICT provider company	Worked in a world-leading ICT provider company
	Number of times interviewed	1	1	1
	Length of interview	40 mins	90 mins	30 mins
H	Position	CEO	Administrative manager	International sales manager
	Year of joining company	2012	2012	2016
	Educational background	PhD in structural engineering	BSc in electronic communication & MBA	MSc in international business
	Professional background	Professor and senior engineer	Worked in an electric commoditization company	Worked in the company after graduation
	Number of times interviewed	1	2	1
	Length of interview	30 mins	65 mins and 20 mins	40 mins

4.4.4 Other sources of data

Documentation is frequently used in case study research (Yin, 2018), as they can be a "rich source of information, contextually relevant and grounded in the contexts they represent" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.277). Prior (2003) also suggested that documents, processes, thoughts, and organizational activities can offer insights into the content and the context of events in time. Documents collected include data searched online and other published publications, such as news from mainstream media, government reports, guides, etc., as well as data from selected companies, such as an official website, an organizational structure map, financial accounts, reports, guides, etc. The current research collected documents as a secondary source of data to support the interview data, providing an overview of the background and situation for each specific case. The main documentations collected for this research include those available on company websites, organizational structure charts, industry documents and other secondary sources.

The researcher was also provided with a guided tour of the companies and factories. As all interviews were conducted at the headquarters of the companies, this provided the opportunity to collect some product brochures, helping the researcher to understand companies' products, organizational structure, and internationalization pathway. The adoption of other sources of data is justified for two reasons. Firstly, documentation and observations were mainly used to verify the factual statements of interviewees in semi-structured interviews (Yin, 2018), in order to prevent interviewers from misremembering objective facts. Secondly, documentation was used to clarify any uncertainty relating to details obtained from interviews (Yin, 2018), such as interviewees' exact position in an organization.

4.5 Data analysis design

This section discusses how the data were analyzed in the current research. The research adopted analysis techniques from grounded theory for theory-building (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data analysis in this research was a cyclical process involving the interaction between

data condensation, data display and conclusion drawing and verifying (Miles et al., 2020), as shown in Figure 4.5.1.

Figure 4.5.1 Components of data analysis: interactive model (Miles et al., 2020)
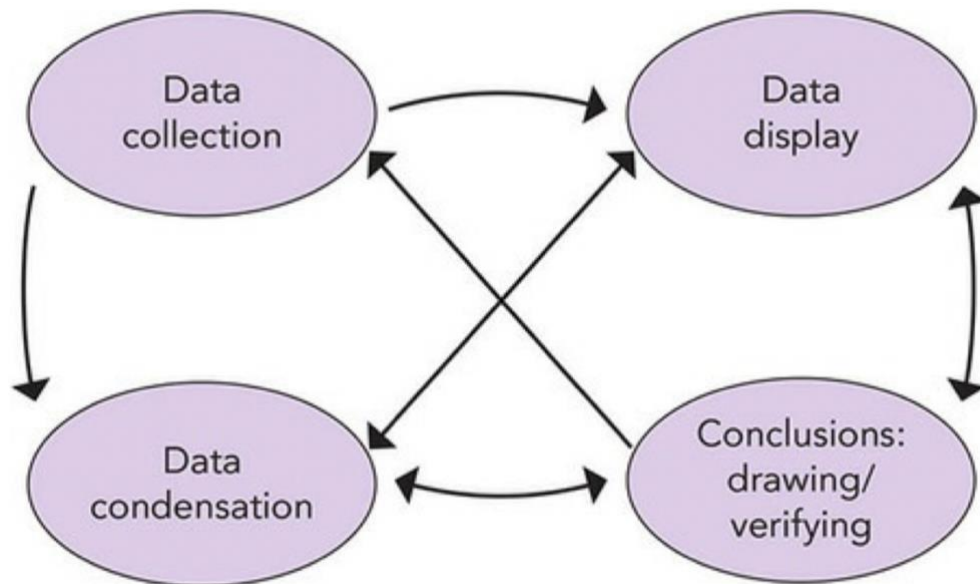
4.5.1 Data condensation

The main challenge of qualitative research is the management of abundant data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, a major issue concerning qualitative research is to decide how the data should be transformed from an extensive assortment of raw material into a concise and meaningful description (Easterby-Smith et al., 2020; Ritchie et al., 2003; Thomas et al., 2004). Data condensation refers to "the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data that appear in the full corpus (body) of written-up field notes, interview transcripts, documents and other empirical materials" (Miles et al., 2020, p.37). To make interviewees feel comfortable, all interviews were conducted in the Chinese language, meaning that the interviews needed to be translated from Chinese into English when being transcribed. The translating process also provides the opportunity for data condensation.

Based on the flexible pattern matching approach, although this research has an initial

framework, it still needs to base on the collected data to build the theory. Therefore, open coding was then carried out in order to identify related narratives and narratives that could be labelled as a 'code'. The research mainly used descriptive coding, value coding and process coding. Initially, codes and categories were named to reflect the emerging data or well-established concepts. During the open coding process, open codes were compared with leadership literature and international learning process literature. If an original code shared a meaning with a theoretically established code, the research adopted that established code, such as 'knowledge acquisition', 'knowledge transformation' and 'organizational memory'. Otherwise, novel codes were used for theory building, such as 'adapted leadership'. Then the researcher summarized the first-round codes into a smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts to do the pattern coding (Miles et al., 2020).

4.5.2 Data display

The second stage of data analysis is data display, which is an "organized, condensed assembly of information that allows analytic reflection and action" (Miles et al., 2020, p.38). Data display involves presenting and demonstrating data that can help to draw, or verify, conclusions (Hair Jr et al., 2011). It is important to let reader ensure that each extracted theme "emerges from the data" (Creswell & Clark, 2018, p.215). In this research, there are three major themes which are identified during the within-case analysis and provide the basis for multiple-case analysis. This includes 1. CEO leadership styles; 2. how does leadership influence the organizational learning process; 3. outcomes of the effect of leadership on organizational learning during the internationalization process. In this step, the researcher used narrative description, matrices, and network to find the link between themes (Hair Jr et al., 2011; Miles et al., 2020). For example, this research uses extensive table to show links between leadership and international learning process (see table 5.3.3 in Section 5.2.2.1) and network figures to explain the learning process with the effects of leadership (see figure 7.4.1 in Section 7.4.2).

Cases were divided into two groups for analysis: five cases with authoritarian leadership and three cases with empowering leadership. In order to deepen understanding and explanation

(Miles and Huberman, 1994), within-case analysis was conducted across five cases with authoritarian leadership and three cases with empowering leadership separately. Then a cross-case analysis was conducted across all case companies in order to compare similarities and differences (Yin, 2009). The combination of with-case analysis and cross-case analysis could enable the cross-case search for patterns (Huberman and Miles, 2002).

4.5.3 Drawing and verifying conclusions

The third step in data analysis is conclusion drawing and verification. In fact, from the start of data collection, the researcher already begins to interpret meaning, by noting patterns, assertions, propositions, explanations, and causal flows (Miles et al., 2020). 'Conclusions' are vague at first, then become increasingly explicit and grounded (Miles et al., 2020). Creswell & Clark (2018, p.216) pointed out that the drawing and verifying of conclusions "involves stepping back from the detailed results and advancing their larger meaning in view of research problems".

Based on the flexible pattern matching, the current research attempted to identify explanatory links between leadership and the international learning process based on the initial framework and collected data. In order to develop the initial framework, the researcher identified key themes through with-in case and developing theoretical statement. Then, cross-case analysis was used to continue adapt statements, over a number of iterations, through a process of constant comparison. In the end, this research tried to build a new framework to show how different CEO leadership styles impact the international learning process, and the interaction between CEO leadership and international learning process.

4.6 Research ethics

Ethics in research is emerged as "the standards of behavior that guide your conduct in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work, or are affected by it" (Saunders et al., 2016, p.239). There are various principles regarding ethics in research,

including: (1) the avoidance of harm, (2) informed consent, (3) the privacy of the participants and (4) the avoidance of deception (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p.134).

Firstly, 'harm' in social studies mainly relates to mental well-being or stress (Israel & Hay, 2006). Before the fieldwork commenced, the researcher obtained ethical approval to conduct the research from the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee, after a thorough vetting process, to ensure that no participant would be harmed in any way.

Secondly, obtaining informed consent is a critical aspect of research ethics. The ethical approval process includes preparing a participant information sheet and a consent form for every participant. The participant information sheet introduces the purpose of the research, the potential risks of participating in the research and how the data will be used. The consent form states the rights of participants, such as the right to participate voluntarily and to withdraw their consent at any time without giving a reason. The participant information sheet and consent form used in the current study are contained in Appendix 2 and 3, respectively.

Thirdly, respecting the privacy of participants includes that of both individuals and organizations (Hair Jr et al., 2011). The researcher considered participants' confidentiality to be of great importance, and so took responsibility for confidentiality and anonymity during the whole process of the research, ensuring that participants could not be recognized. The researcher confirmed to participants that all personal data would be used for research purposes only, stored securely and destroyed at the end of the research.

Finally, there is the principle of the avoidance of deception, so the researcher used the participant information sheet to provide details of the research clearly and honestly and visited sample companies before the start of the interview.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has explained the methodology adopted for the research. The key

methodological aspects are summarized in Table 4.7.1.

Table 4.7.1 Overview of the research methodology (Source: the researcher)

Research philosophy and approach	
Philosophical assumptions	Interpretivism
Research purpose	Subjective research for theory building
Research outcome	Relationship explanation
Theorizing logic	Flexible pattern matching
Theoretical function	Theory building
Case selection strategies	
What to select	Chinese internationalizing high-tech companies employing between 200 to 500 people
How to select	Criterion sampling
Number of cases	Eight cases
Data collection	
Primary data	Semi-structured interviews
Other sources of data	Company website, organizational structure chart, industry documents and other secondary sources, supplemented with direct observation.
Data analysis	
Data condensations	Open coding (descriptive coding and process coding)
Data display	Matrices, networks, and graphics
Drawing and verifying conclusions	Within-case and cross-case findings Build explanation

To sum up, this research adopted an interpretivism research philosophy to explore the relationship between leadership and the international learning process. The research used a qualitative multiple case study method, with a flexible pattern matching approach, to increase the breadth of research (Vissak, 2010). A sample of eight companies agreed to participate in this research. They were internationalizing high-tech companies employing 200 to 500 employees. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, documentation, and observation. Data analysis involved within-case and cross-case analysis for building explanation. The next two chapters present the research findings, including within-case and cross-case findings. They are divided into two groups, relating to authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership.

Chapter 5   Within-case findings (authoritarian leadership cases)

5.1 Introduction

The research findings are separated into three chapters. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the within-case analysis of cases that concern authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership respectively. Chapter 7 focuses on cross-case analysis. The current chapter presents the within-case findings of five cases, all of which with authoritarian leadership. According to Patton (1990), a useful starting point for within-case analysis is to construct a visual format for the data that can be used to present information in a clear and systematic manner. For this research, the data are displayed according to three key internationalization events from the period 2016-2019 and the firm's experience of it in each case, as identified by the interviewees in each firm. Leadership styles are presented in each case, as well as the effect of leadership on organizational learning in the firm's internationalization process.

The findings from each case are presented according to three themes:

A. CEO leadership styles
B. How does authoritarian leadership influence the organizational learning process?
C. Outcomes of the effect of leadership on organizational learning during the internationalization process.

Each case will be analyzed according to the following structure. Firstly, the leadership styles presented in each case, as observed through the responses of the interviewees, will be discussed. Secondly, the influence of leadership on organizational learning in the internationalization process will be presented based on the three key events related to the internationalization of the firm in each case; these key events will be discussed in chronological order. Thirdly, the effect of leadership on organizational learning, in relation to each key event, will be analyzed.

5.2 Authoritarian leadership: Case A

5.2.1 CEO leadership style

Based on interviews with the CEO, operational vice president, marketing manager and human resource manager, the CEO of Case A showed strong control over the company, making almost all decisions by himself. When others within the company had different opinions, he would explain his opinion to them but, whether others agreed or not, the CEO would always make his own decisions. The operational vice president described the CEO leadership as "militarized". All interviewees stated that the company's employees, including senior managers, showed a high level of obedience. They not only chose to follow the CEO, but also deferred to the CEO's ability and judgement. The marketing manager and HR manager both explained that this was because saving time is important for start-up companies, with the CEO leadership style reducing the need for employees to think. Employees' ability to focus on the execution of the CEO's plans had many benefits for the company.

Four interviews with Company A employees suggested that it was clear that the CEO made decisions in isolation, often ignoring the opinions of employees; in cases where employees' opinions differed from those of the CEO, it was always the decision of the CEO that was followed. In addition, employees openly chose to follow decisions made by the CEO. Such behavior is typical of an authoritarian style of leadership, which allows the CEO to make unilateral decisions (Chan et al., 2013; Uhl-Bein & Maslyn, 2005) and prevail over employees (Chan et al., 2013; Harms et al., 2018; Pelligrini, Scandura & Jayaraman, 2010), with employees following orders (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). The CEO also showed benevolence towards employees, by taking care of employees' daily life and cheering them up. Evidence to support the above findings is presented in Table 5.2.1.

Table 5.2.1 Authoritarian leadership in Case A

Authoritarian leadership	Quotations	
	CEO	**Managers**
Leaders make unilateral decisions	"My role is to ensure everything is implemented. I think that any decision has risks. No one can predict the future. If other employees treat the company as their own business, they will have their own opinion and highlight the risks of my decision for me. However, I think of this as interference. I can explain the reason for my decision, but I cannot allow them to influence my decision."	"The CEO is a powerful leader. In general, he has made decisions and we must follow his decisions." (Marketing manager). "Important decisions of the company, such as future development goals, are made by the CEO. Therefore, the atmosphere of the company is harmonious" (Marketing manager).
Leaders prevail over employees	"With the development of the company, all employees have a cohesion which I think is related to my personality"	"The CEO leadership style is militarized." (Operational vice president). "At the beginning, our leadership model was the Taliban model." (Operational vice president). "We are democratic when the majority of our employees agree with our decisions. But when our decision is opposed, we, especially the CEO, don't have to be democratic, because execution is crucial for small and medium-sized private companies" (Operational vice president). "The CEO can be described as a dictator" (HR manager).
Employees follow directions	"I think my employees are very obedient and executive"	"For startups, execution is essential. The development of our company to the present is inseparable from the CEO's decisions. Therefore, whatever he decides, we will just do it" (Marketing manager). "Even when most people object, as long as the CEO decides to do it, we will follow him" (Operational vice president). "The CEO is a very authoritarian person, but I think his way of leadership makes sense. He has a deeper understanding of the market than us and he will think about it in the longer term. We may not understand some of the decisions he makes at the time, but it may be that his decision was the correct one in the long term. He sometimes explains his decisions and sometimes he doesn't, but regardless we all need to execute them." (HR manager).

Leaders show benevolence to employees		"The CEO often eats with employees in the cafeteria and cares about their daily lives" (HR manager). "The CEO cares about the emotions of his employees, often boosts our morale and makes us more comfortable with his decisions through communication" (Marketing manager).

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

5.2.2 How does authoritarian leadership influence the organizational learning process?

The influence of leadership on a company's organizational learning during the process of internationalization was analyzed across the following three key events, as gathered from interviews with the CEO and three key managers, namely: the building of strategic partnerships with customers in the EU (2016), the addition of a large and important customer in America (2017) and the establishment of a Japanese subsidiary (2019). The following sections discuss the learning process with each event and analyze how authoritarian leadership influenced the learning process in connection with the internationalization events, in chronological order.

5.2.2.1 Event 1: Building strategic partnerships with customers in the EU (2016)

The first key event identified by the CEO and operational vice president was the building of strategic partnerships with customers in the EU. For such partnerships to be established, knowledge regarding internationalization and the EU market was required by the company. Prior to 2016, although the company had entered the European market smoothly and achieved good results, it had mainly acquired overseas business through agents. Most of these agents did not allow the company to face overseas customers directly, meaning that the company had limited prospects of building long-term strategic partnerships with prospective customers. As a result, the CEO decided to establish the company's first overseas subsidiary, in France, in 2016, and expected it to help the company to have opportunities to create strategic partnerships with customers. Behavior relating to organizational learning, and the way in which authoritarian leadership influenced the learning process in connection with this key event, are listed in Table 5.2.2.

Table 5.2.2 Organizational learning process for Company A in relation to Event 1

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"**I always believe that building a partnership with our customers is very important.** At that time, we contacted customers through an agent, which caused many problems. For example, it was difficult for us to accurately find the actual needs of foreign customers" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
	Market knowledge	"In fact, there is no gap between our technology and that of European and American companies. **We mainly do not understand the specific situation of the European market. In this regard, we can only rely on ourselves to constantly try and learn from experience**" (CEO). "Including the CEO, all of our entrepreneurial team did not have overseas educational or work backgrounds. Therefore, we can't fully understand the overseas market - at the beginning and even now" (Operational vice president).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"**I tried many ways to build the partnership with our customers by myself.** However, these ways didn't work due to the cultural differences." (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on first-round knowledge interpretation process
Knowledge acquisition			
Noticing and searching	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"**I noticed that maybe I can find some foreign employees to help us**" (CEO)	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the way to acquire needed knowledge
Knowledge interpretation			

Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"**I decided to build the French subsidiary**" (CEO). "**The CEO hired all overseas employees by himself**" (HR manager).	The CEO made unilateral decisions in the second-round knowledge interpretation process
Knowledge acquisition			
Grafting	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"All people in our top management team did not have overseas educational or working background. Therefore, our overseas customers and we could fully understand each other. Therefore, **I decided to hire foreign employees to help us build a trust relationship with overseas customers**" (CEO). "These expatriate employees bring us more than 20 years of experience in the industry. They have helped us a lot, from developing new business directions, entering new market models, to designing the company's website" (Operational vice president).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the way to acquire needed knowledge
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From overseas employees to CEO to domestic managers and employees	"The overseas employees are directly led by me" (CEO). "**I informed employees of my decision** of building the French subsidiary and hired overseas employees by myself" (CEO). "**After I made the decision, almost all departments took part in building the French subsidiary**" (CEO). "The CEO directly communicates with overseas employees and conducts overseas business" (Marketing manager). "We have calls with overseas employees every day" (Operational vice president).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on knowledge transfer Employees followed directions in knowledge transfer
Organizational memory			
In human bin	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"**I learnt that building subsidiaries is a good way to enter a new market.** Therefore, I used this experience in the Japanese market" (CEO). "At the beginning, we tended to build the partnership with large companies. From the EU employees, we also noticed that there are many small and medium-sized companies which can also provide us with a lot of business. These companies and we could develop together" (Marketing manager).	The CEO made unilateral decisions in organizational memory
	International	"In this process, **I continued learning how to manage overseas employees because of cultural differences**" (CEO).	

	enterprise internationalization knowledge	"There is a big difference in managing foreign employees and domestic employees, which is a process that requires constant running-in. In general, as long as foreign employees do not violate company regulations, I am willing to give them more freedom at work, which can allow them to make decisions in their work" (CEO) "We fully trust and empower foreign employees. In my opinion, due to the limited number of overseas employees and frequent communication, we can empower them because they are good at, and fully understand, overseas markets" (Operational vice president).	
In non-human bin	New subsidiary	"We build out first overseas subsidiary in France" (CEO). "Our company hired two French employees and three British employees to build the EU subsidiary" (Marketing manager).	The CEO prevailed over employees in organizational memory
	Rules	**"We also learnt from overseas employees and adjusted several rules of the company.** For example, through learning from overseas employees, we began to make the detailed plans for the company, which includes a one-year, three-year and five-year plan" (Operational vice president). "With overseas employees joining us, we learnt a lot about Western management philosophy, like standardization. For example, before working with overseas colleagues, we sent emails to customers in an informal way. Every employee in our marketing department had his or her own way of writing emails. However, we noticed that our overseas colleagues used the same format to write emails" (Operational vice president).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

According to the CEO, the company lacked internationalization and market knowledge at the beginning of Event 1. Regarding internationalization knowledge, the CEO did not have a clear idea about how to establish an overseas subsidiary and how to build strategic partnerships with European customers. In terms of market knowledge, the operational vice president stated that "including the CEO, all of our entrepreneurial team don't have overseas educational or work backgrounds". Therefore, the company also lacked market knowledge when facing customers without the help of an agent. In order to gain internationalization and market knowledge, the CEO, through experiential learning, realized the importance of building strategic partnerships; lacking knowledge of the company, he tried many ways to build a partnership with customers. This did not work, however. The CEO then used target searching to ensure the grafting of knowledge from overseas employees as a new, useful and efficient way to acquire needed knowledge. The CEO followed this by deciding to invite his previous Ph.D. colleague to be the top manager of the French subsidiary, a decision he made without discussing with others in the management team. The manager of the French subsidiary had worked in the biomedical industry for 20 years and had previously built his own company in the EU. He fully understood the industry and the European market and brought his experience and knowledge of the EU market to the company. Because the CEO made unilateral decisions in the three rounds of knowledge acquisition – interpretation, he was the only actor in the process. The CEO decided on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way of sourcing the needed knowledge. To be specific, the CEO decided the company needed to build partnerships with overseas customers and noticed that grafting was a useful way to acquire needed knowledge. The CEO also made the unilateral decision to build the French subsidiary and hired overseas employees.

The CEO was directly responsible for all overseas business. He tended to make unilateral decisions and employees were willing to follow his decisions. Therefore, the knowledge transfer process showed a 'top-down' path in the domestic company, from overseas employees to the CEO to domestic managers and employees. Based on the interviews with the CEO and the operational vice president, overseas employees had calls with managers almost every day. In terms of organizational memory, knowledge can be stored in two types of 'bins': human or non-human (Tsang, 2018). In the 'human bin', due to leaders making

unilateral decisions, most organizational memory resided with the CEO. The CEO also began to accept suggestions from the manager of the French subsidiary (see highlighted quotations). Initially, Company A focused more on cooperating with large companies, but the manager of the French subsidiary stated that cooperating with small and medium-sized companies would be a good opportunity for Company A to develop alongside its customers. He believed that a strategic partnership involving mutual growth would be more stable for Company A. The CEO accepted his suggestions and revised the company's direction of development. By 2019, the company had built strategic partnerships with five EU customers. Furthermore, the CEO and operational vice president stated that they had found many cultural differences between China and the EU, and that they could not use the same authoritarian ways to manage their overseas employees. The CEO said that: "As long as they do not violate the regulations, I am willing to give them more freedom". In the non-human bin, the company built the French subsidiary and revised several rules, such as making one-year, three-year and five-year plans for the company and increasing standardization in companies' daily operations. The authoritarian CEO prevailed over employees to accept, and adapt to, the changes.

5.2.2.2 Event 2: Gaining an important customer in America (2017)

The second event identified by the CEO, vice president and marketing manager was the addition of an important customer in America. Prior to 2017, the company had already entered the American market. In 2017, the company had an opportunity to cooperate with one of the World's Top 5 biomedical companies. After establishing this cooperation, the company wanted to become a long-term supplier of the American firm, allowing them to make their operations in the American market more stable and, in turn, to increase the company's reliability in the worldwide market. As a contract research organization (CRO), however, it needed full trust from its customers, as CROs need customers to provide designs for basic pharmaceutical ingredients when working with them. To secure this trust, the company kept in touch with the customer for over a year. During this time, the customer insisted on using an agent, because they did not trust Company A. Eventually, the company's continued efforts were rewarded when it was finally placed on the customer's long-term supplier list. Behavior relating to organizational learning and the ways in which authoritarian

leadership influences the learning process, in relation to this key event, are listed in Table 5.2.3.

Table 5.2.3 Organizational learning process for Company A in relation to Event 2

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Localization internationalization knowledge	"We believed that lower price and high quality were competitive advantages of our company. However, the customer still didn't accept us to be their long-term supplier. From this perspective, we learnt from practice. **In my view, some training, including MBA or EMBA, is useless for employees**" (CEO). "As we continued to engage with our clients, **I realized that the biggest problem of our company was lacking the trust of the customer**." (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"People are willing to trust someone who is more like them, which is the same as a company. Therefore, **I believe that companies are more willing to trust other companies that are similar to them**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the first-round knowledge interpretation process
Knowledge acquisition			
Vicarious learning	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"We learnt the customer's organizational structure and imitated a part of the structure that suits our company. **I always believe that customers are the best teachers for us**" (CEO). "We imitated the customer's standard operating procedure" (Operational vice president).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"**After I realized that our company needed to make some changes, I informed employees of my decisions**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions in the second-round knowledge interpretation process
Knowledge transfer			
Path of	From prospective customer to	"Usually, it is me who is contacting the customer" (CEO).	The CEO prevailed over

knowledge transfer	CEO to domestic employees	"We had the meeting almost every day at that time, to conclude our practice and share suggestions or demands from the customer" (CEO). "Since many employees do not agree with our changes in production process and organizational structure, we need meetings and some in-company training to tell them the benefits of the changes. **We don't have incentives in this process, we just make demands, explain why, and if employees still can't do it, they can only be fired**" (Operational vice president).	employees on knowledge transfer
Organizational memory			
In human bin	Localization internationalization knowledge	"Our managers changed our mind. At the beginning, I felt that our technology was good or cost-effective, and customers should choose our company. Later, **I gradually understood that foreign customers need more trust when choosing suppliers**" (CEO). "Our management team had a change of mind, which was that we needed to continue to improve ourselves, to meet customers' needs. For example, foreign customers emphasize the traceability of the production process. Most Chinese companies, especially SMEs, cannot understand this need from customers. For example, in the beginning, I could not understand this need. In my mind, the most important thing is the quality of products. As long as I give you good quality products, you don't need to care how I found out. But now I fully understand that we need to improve ourselves to achieve the trust of customers" (Operational vice president).	The CEO made unilateral decisions in organizational memory
In non-human bin	Organizational structure	"We adjusted our organizational structure based on the customer's suggestions" (CEO).	The CEO prevailed over employees in organizational memory
	Production process	"We adjusted our production process based on the customer's needs" (Operational vice president).	
	Standard operating procedure	"We also imitated the standard operating procedure of the customer" (CEO).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

At the beginning of this event, the company lacked internationalization knowledge related to the building of the relationships required for market entry and competitive advantage. Through experiential learning, the CEO became sure that the company needed to gain the trust of customers. He unilaterally decided to use vicarious learning to imitate the intended customer. The CEO found that there were many differences in the organizational structures of the two companies, which often caused confusion when the company and its prospective customer engaged in cooperation. The HR manager said: "As a start-up company, our organizational structure was chaotic and often changed due to the frequent movement of staff. We knew that we had problems with our management, but we were not sure what the problems specifically were and as a result we didn't know how to solve them. However, after cooperating and learning from the American customer, we managed to gain a greater insight into what our problems were and, as a result, some potential solutions to our problems."

The CEO stated that "people are willing to trust someone who is more like them. Therefore, I believe that companies are also more willing to trust other companies that are similar to them". Due to the CEO making unilateral decisions, he was the main actor involved in the second round of knowledge acquisition and interpretation process.

Due to the CEO being the person who directly contacted the customer, the knowledge transfer process followed a top-down path, from the customer to the CEO to domestic managers and employees. Knowledge transfer became more formal because the CEO needed employees to accept many changes in their work. In terms of organizational memory, due to the CEO making unilateral decisions, localization internationalization knowledge resided with the top management team, especially the CEO. Since the CEO prevailed over employees, Company A revised its organizational structure to reflect that of their prospective customer, whose representatives came to China several times, in 2017, to carry out audits, leading to suggestions relating to the company's production management and operational systems. The customer also highlighted product traceability as being one of the company's key weaknesses and expressed doubts about the environment of the laboratory. The CEO insisted on revising the production system and rebuilding the laboratory, based on the

requirements indicated. In the process, many employees felt dissatisfied; for example, the production department was required to carry out additional work to ensure product traceability. The CEO, however, ignored their complaints and forced the company to make the changes. During the entire organizational learning process, the CEO had a strong willingness to adjust to the needs of the potential customer, but not to the needs of his employees, which is an impact of authoritarian leadership.

5.2.2.3 Event 3: Establishing a Japanese subsidiary (2019)

The third event identified by the CEO and marketing manager was the establishment of a Japanese subsidiary. In 2016, one of the company's U.S. customers acquired a large Japanese pharmaceutical company and transferred a program from America to Japan. Company A joined the program when the program was based in America. Therefore, Company A entered the Japanese market as a result of taking part in this program. Prior to 2019, attempts to expand into the Japanese market had not been successful for the company but, using the internationalization knowledge the company had gained from Event 1, it decided to try to establish a subsidiary in Japan in 2019. Organizational learning behavior and the influence of authoritarian leadership on the learning process in this key event are listed in Table 5.2.4.

Table 5.2.4 Organizational learning process for Company A in relation to Event 3

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market knowledge	"At the beginning, a Japanese customer found us to buy some products. **Several times, I tried to connect with their core business, because I wanted to build a long-term relationship between them.** Otherwise, since we needed to develop and produce different products according to the requirements of different customers, a random business approach would have consumed too much manpower and would not have had a significant impact on the development of the company" (CEO). "Japanese market is quite unique, which almost doesn't have flexibility. We cannot learn market knowledge specifically. However, the aim of all our actions is to meet the needs of our customers, in other words, 'learning-by-doing'" (CEO). "**I tried to ask customers whether they can give us more orders. If they refused, I also tried to ask for their suggestions**" (CEO). "The Japanese market is quite special. Japanese customers are more likely to find suppliers through intermediaries they are familiar with. But our practical experience tells us that direct cooperation is more efficient and profitable" (Marketing manager).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"**I learnt that building subsidiaries is a good way to enter into a new market. Therefore, I used this experience in the Japanese market**" (CEO). "We are very busy. Therefore, we didn't have enough time to have a meeting or training. What we can do is to communicate when there is a problem or when we do not understand" (Marketing manager).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in	CEO	"**I am directly responsible for the connection of the Japanese subsidiary**" (CEO). "**All overseas employees were hired and managed by the CEO directly**" (HR manager).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the knowledge

interpretation			interpretation process
Knowledge acquisition			
Grafting	Market knowledge	"**I invited several employees of customer companies to join our company and built the Japanese subsidiary, because they fully understand their markets**" (CEO). "**I also hired our marketing manager**, who had worked in a large international enterprise for many years and was good at international business" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the way to acquire needed knowledge
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From overseas employees to CEO to domestic marketing manager	"**I informed employees of my decision to build the Japanese subsidiary**" (CEO). "**The Japanese employees are directly led my me**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on knowledge transfer
Organizational memory			
In human bin	Market knowledge	"For now, the marketing manager is the best at internationalization knowledge and market knowledge in our company" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions and employees followed his decisions
	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"From a management perspective, with the continuous participation of foreign employees, **we continue to be more standardized and process-oriented in management, changing the previous model of arbitrary management**" (Operational vice president).	
In non-human bin	New subsidiary	"**We built the Japanese subsidiary in May**" (CEO).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

The marketing manager said: "The Japanese market is totally different from western markets, due to the differences in culture. However, even though Japan and China have similar cultures, the Japanese market is still different to the Chinese market". Therefore, the CEO and the marketing manager believed that the reason for the companies' prior failures in the Japanese market had been a lack of market knowledge. They said that there are two main characteristics of the Japanese market: the first one is that Japanese companies have strict hierarchical systems; the second is that Japanese companies prefer to use familiar local agents to gain suppliers. The CEO stated, however, that he knew of a CRO company that cooperated direct with Japanese companies, without using agents. Based on the experiential knowledge he gained from Event 1, the CEO decided to build a subsidiary and hire local employees in Japan to bypass the use of agents. The CEO stated that the employees of customers know the customers best, even though they may be low-level employees. As a result, he also hired some of their potential customers' employees to join in with the building of the Japanese subsidiary. In the second round of the knowledge acquisition and interpretation process, the CEO made a unilateral decision on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way of gaining the required knowledge (i.e. grafting). Moreover, because the CEO unilaterally decided to build the Japanese subsidiary and hired local employees without asking others' opinion, he became the main actor in the knowledge interpretation process.

Due to overseas employees being directly led by the CEO, the knowledge transfer process was top-down in nature, proceeding from overseas employees to the CEO to domestic managers and employees. Establishing the Japanese subsidiary was not complete at the time of interviewing, but the market knowledge and international enterprise internationalization knowledge has been stored in the 'human bin' of organizational memory. The marketing manager stated that they had already gained a greater understanding of the Japanese market and that he believed they would have future opportunities to gain Japanese customers, without agents. Although this event had not concluded, the influence of authoritarian leadership on organizational memory can be seen on the CEO made unilateral decisions on building Japanese subsidiary and employees followed his decisions to build the subsidiary and the operational vice president also gained needed international enterprise

internationalization knowledge.

5.2.3 The effect of authoritarian leadership on organizational learning during the internationalization process

The impact of leadership and outcomes of the three key events are listed in Table 5.2.5. The outcomes mainly feature four aspects: performance, strategic decisions, competitive advantage and management style and leadership. Two findings are highlighted. Firstly, the strategic decisions the company made when building strategic partnerships with customers in the EU (Event 1) directly influenced the company's decision regarding its mode of entry into the Japanese market (Event 3). Secondly, during Event 1, the CEO tried to empower overseas employees, which showed that the CEO leadership was not solely authoritarian; the CEO showed some empowering leadership, at least in his dealings with overseas employees. Therefore, in addition to organizational learning during the company's attempts at internationalization, there was also some development in leadership, particularly where the CEO was concerned.

Table 5.2.5 The effect of leadership on organizational learning in the internationalization process (2016-2019)

Outcomes / Events	Performance	Strategic decisions	Competitive advantages	Management and leadership
Event 1: Building strategic partnerships with customers in the EU (2016)	Built strategic partnerships with five customers in the EU at 2019	Establishing an overseas subsidiary is an effective way to expand and create more/stronger partnerships in the overseas markets.	More reliable than other overseas suppliers for customers	Authoritarian leadership had changed Revised management rules
Event 2: Gaining an important customer in America (2017)	Became the stable supplier of the prospective customer in 2018 Achieved a large number of orders from the		Increased reliability for Company A in overseas markets.	New management mind-set of top management team Traceable production process New organizational structure

	customer		New standard operating procedure
Event 3: Establishing a Japanese subsidiary (2019)	Process incomplete at the time of interviewing	Cooperated with Japanese customers without agents	Better understanding of the Japanese market	

5.3 Authoritarian leadership: Case B

5.3.1 CEO leadership style

Based on interviews with the CEO, marketing manager and administrative manager, the CEO had strong control over the company. He and the two managers all stated that the CEO made almost all decisions by himself and that employees seldom shared their own opinions. Although the company was listed on the China growth enterprise market in 2016, the CEO was also the chairman of the board and was not bound by the decisions of the board of directors. The company's administrative manager, who was also the CEO's secretary and board secretary, stated that: "The CEO thinks that our employees are not capable of dealing with many decisions by themselves. Therefore, he prefers to give us less power and for us to simply follow his decisions."

The marketing manager said that the CEO was a high-level professional within their industry. Therefore, they were willing to follow his decisions. This behavior indicates a typical authoritarian style of leadership, which allows the CEO to make unilateral decisions (Chan et al., 2013; Uhl-Bein & Maslyn, 2005) and prevail over employees (Chan et al., 2013; Harms et al., 2018; Pelligrini, Scandura & Jayaraman, 2010), meaning that employees follow directions (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). The CEO also showed benevolence to employees; the marketing manager said that the CEO cared about the development of every employee.

Evidence supporting the CEO's authoritarian leadership in Case B is listed in Table 5.3.1.

Table 5.3.1 Authoritarian leadership in Case B

Authoritarian leadership	Quotations	
	CEO	**Managers**
Leaders make unilateral decisions	"In terms of leadership, I am an authoritarian leader. The company's decisions are basically made by me" "I think I am a steady leader. In fact, there are many opportunities in the market now, but I never choose to do something I am not good at or unfamiliar with. We have been doing subtraction, focusing on our subdivided fields"	"The company's decisions are almost always made by the CEO. He is a leader who pays close attention to detail. He pays close attention to all aspects of the company, from procurement to production and sales" (Marketing manager). "The CEO is the person who decided the strategic plans" (Marketing manager).
Leaders prevail over employees	"Asking employees to do what I have decided is the most efficient way in most cases"	" When he leads us, he is strict with us. He thinks that our employees are not capable of dealing with many decisions by themselves. Therefore, he prefers to give us less power and asks us to follow his decisions." (Administrative manager).
Employees follow directions	"When I make a decision, the staff do not raise any objections"	"The CEO is very good at technology, so we generally follow his requirements to complete related tasks" (Marketing manager). "I agree with the CEO's view. Expanding to the overseas market is the most urgent and important thing for the company now" (Marketing manager). "In fact, most employees don't have any opinions" (Administrative manager)
Leaders show benevolence to employees		"The CEO is very kind. He cares about the development of every employee and encourages us when we encounter difficulties." (Marketing manager)

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher

5.3.2 How does authoritarian leadership influence the organizational learning process?

According to the CEO, due to the company focusing on very segmented field, the domestic market was insufficient for the development of Company B. Therefore, the company tried to enter overseas markets from 2004. From 2014 to 2015, in particular, the company's domestic market shares gradually stabilized, and the company strengthened the development of its markets overseas. The influence of authoritarian leadership on a company's organizational learning during the process of internationalization will be analyzed in the context of the following three key events, according to interviews with the CEO, the marketing manager and the administrative manager: entering the Indian market (2016), establishing an overseas office in Latin American (2019) and cooperating with American chip manufacturers to develop new technologies (2019). The following sections discuss the learning process relating to each event and analyze how authoritarian leadership influenced the learning process in these internationalizing events, in chronological order.

5.3.2.1 Event 1: Entering the Indian market (2016)

The first event identified by the CEO and the marketing manager was the company's entrance into the Indian market. The company was an original design manufacturer (ODM) of core components for gateway products when it first tried to enter the Indian market, in 2016. Company B produces access network equipment, so its target customers are telecom operators. The company's business relates to network security issues, so the market entry threshold is relatively high. The company originally entered the Indian market through an agent who sold the company's products under another company's brand. Since telecom operators in different countries need to adjust the core procedures of gateway products according to specific local requirements, the company needed to frequently communicate with Indian telecom operators, which it did through agents. This approach, however, resulted in many problems. On one occasion, for example, the requirements of the telecom operators according to the company's agents were found to be incorrect. Because of this, and the CEO's belief that the company could gain greater levels of trust from overseas customers if it could communicate with them directly, the CEO decided to produce finished products for

the Indian market under the company's own brand, rather than use agents and the brand of an Indian producer. Organizational learning behavior and the influence of authoritarian leadership on the learning process during this key event are listed in Table 5.3.2.

Table 5.3.2 Organizational learning process for Company B in relation to Event 1

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"We cooperated with the agent several times. However, it caused many problems. For example, on one occasion, the requirements of the telecom operators, obtained by the company through agents, were found to be incorrect. Therefore, **I began to think that we needed to skip the agent and build our own brand**".	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
Noticing and searching	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"In the beginning, a customer bypassed the agent and asked the CEO whether we could directly provide the end product they needed, because they realized that the core part of this product is provided by our company. **The CEO noticed that this is a good opportunity for our company**" (Marketing manager).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	**"I decided that we need to produce the end products"** (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the knowledge interpretation process
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From CEO to domestic managers and employees	**"I informed other managers through a meeting.** During the meeting, we discussed what we need to change in order to produce the end products and build our own brand. **Almost all departments participated in this event**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on knowledge transfer. Employees follow directions in knowledge transfer
Organizational memory			
In human bin	International enterprise Internationalization knowledge	"Our employees who are now in charge of overseas business did not directly follow the overseas business at that time. We learn together in this process. From the beginning, we were afraid of losing business because we couldn't express ourselves clearly to customers, but now we can communicate with customers confidently"	

		(Marketing manager).	
In non-human bin	New overseas brand	"We began to produce the end products and use our own brand in the Indian market" (CEO).	Employees followed directions in knowledge transfer
	Revised production lines	"We began to produce the end products directly, so we revised our production lines" (Marketing manager).	
	Two marketing systems	"We have established two sets of pre-sales and after-sales systems for domestic and foreign customers, because different customers have different views on delivery, pre-sale and after-sale" (Marketing manager).	
	New department	"The company has recruited some new employees and built a new department to be responsible for the design of the product" (Marketing manager).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

In the beginning, the company was found to be lacking internationalization knowledge. As the CEO stated: "As our products were hidden behind other brands and telecom operators did not even know us, it was difficult for us to build trust with customers. But I believe that the company's technology, R&D capabilities and work efficiency will allow us to eventually gain the trust of our customers."

The CEO found this problem when the company entered the Indian market. Due to the CEO making unilateral decisions, and through experiential learning and observation, he gained the necessary market entry internationalization knowledge. He unilaterally decided that the company could produce the end products and build its own brand.

Because domestic employees became involved in this event after the CEO had interpreted knowledge and made decisions, the CEO was the main contributor to knowledge interpretation. Moreover, because the CEO made unilateral decisions and employees followed his direction, the knowledge transfer process was from CEO to employees in the marketing and manufacturing departments. In addition, authoritarian leadership influenced the company's organizational memory, especially in terms of the 'non-human bin', because employees followed the CEO's decision to build the new brand and to revise production lines and the organizational structure.

5.3.2.2 Event 2: Establishing the overseas office in Latin America (2019)

The second event identified by the CEO and marketing manager was the establishment of an overseas office in Latin America. The company began to enter the Latin American market in 2017. The CEO stated that: "The European and American markets have high barriers to entry for network equipment. We have tried to participate in a lot of foreign exhibitions in the last four years, but no obvious results have been achieved. Among the company's overseas markets in the past four years, only the Southeast Asian market has developed well. The company cannot enter the European and North American markets. In the past two years, we have shifted our target to the Latin American market. The technical requirements of the Latin American market are lower than those of the North American market, but higher than

those of the Chinese market. Therefore, it will be relatively easy for us to break through any technical barriers and will be conducive to the company's technological development. Moreover, the entire Latin American market is constantly developing, which gives us more space in which to develop."

As shown in the above statement, the CEO found that seeking to internationalize through customer acquisition via exhibition participation and cooperation with agents was not effective with regard to entering the Latin American market. Therefore, he decided to change the way in which the company sought to enter the Latin American market. He instead decided to hire local employees and build an overseas office. Organizational learning behavior and the influence of authoritarian leadership on the learning process in relation to this key event are listed in Table 5.3.3.

Table 5.3.3 Organizational learning process of Company B in relation to Event 2

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market knowledge	"We have three employees who are responsible for the overseas business. All of them didn't have the background to deal with international business. However, all of them have good English communication ability. Therefore, they are learning-by-doing" (CEO). **"I think discussing problems and problem-solving are the process of learning"** (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"Accepting overseas business through an agency has brought us some experience in overseas business, making it easier for us to gain the trust of customers. But at the same time, we have some problems in the Indian market and the Latin American market. So, **the CEO decided to establish our subsidiary in the Latin American market**" (Marketing manager).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	**"I decided to build the Lain American office without asking others' opinion"** (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the first-round knowledge interpretation process
Knowledge acquisition			
Grafting	Market entry internationalization knowledge	**"I decided to hire two local employees in Latin America.** They have worked in our industry for many years and have their own network in the local telecommunications industry" (CEO). "The Latin American market is a consortium composed of many national markets. Telecom operators are the same in most countries, except Brazil and Argentina. However, although the number of operators is small, they have many branches, in various countries. Therefore, the local employees really help us a lot to build the networks with customers" (Marketing manager).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the way to acquire needed knowledge
	Market knowledge	"The Latin American market has some very special geopolitical and humanistic cultures that we cannot fully understand. The local staff helped us solve these problems" (Marketing manager).	

Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From CEO to managers	"**No one in the company had different opinions**" (CEO). "When there are conflicts between domestic projects and overseas projects, **the CEO always asks us to prioritize overseas projects**" (Marketing manager).	Employees followed directions in knowledge transfer and the CEO prevailed over employees
Organizational memory			
In human bin	International enterprise knowledge	"In the process of cooperating with Latin American customers, the standardization of the company's internal management process has been strengthened. For example, **I asked employees to be more disciplined in fulfilling our commitment to customers, which can also reinforce our company culture**" (CEO).	The CEO prevailed over employees and made unilateral decisions on organizational memory
	Technological knowledge	"The technical requirements of the Latin American market are higher than those of the Chinese market. Therefore, **in my view, having business with customers in Latin America gives us a hint of the direction of technological development and gives us the opportunity to grasp the latest direction of technological development, based on the customers' requirements**" (CEO).	
In non-human bin	Organizational structure	"We built the Latin American office in January" (CEO). "**I've already decided to add full-time positions to strengthen ties between overseas offices and domestic companies.** We don't have an independent overseas marketing department yet, but there are already three people who are responsible for this part of the business" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on organizational memory
	Management rules for overseas employees	"The management of overseas employees is indeed different from the management of domestic employees. For example, domestic employees can work overtime at any time. However, this does not work for the overseas employees" (Marketing manager). "In fact, we do not have a clear performance appraisal for domestic employees. But since it is impossible for us to see what they are doing every day, **the CEO decided to build performance appraisal standards for them**, such as the number of customers visited, and the number of orders signed within a certain period of time" (Administrative manager).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

The company lacked internationalization knowledge regarding the 'right way' for them to enter a new overseas market and they also lacked knowledge of the Latin American market. The CEO did, however, seem to learn one thing from the company's previous entry into the Indian market, as he stated that: "After we used our brand in the Indian market, I noticed that, if we want to communicate with customers directly, we must have employees who are familiar with the local market." Therefore, he hired two local employees in the Latin American market who had worked in the industry for many years and used these employees to establish an office in Colombia. The company obtained internationalization knowledge from practice and market knowledge from the two overseas employees. Because of the CEO making unilateral decisions during the first round of the knowledge acquisition/interpretation, he was the only actor in the process. The CEO decided on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way of sourcing that knowledge.

Because domestic employees were involved this event after the CEO had interpreted knowledge and made decisions, and they then followed the CEO's decisions, the direction of the knowledge transfer process was from the overseas employees to the CEO, and then from the CEO to the company's domestic employees. In the domestic company, the knowledge flow followed a top-down process. The company gained international enterprise knowledge and technological knowledge in the 'human bin' in the form of organizational memory. In terms of internationalization knowledge, the CEO prevailed over employees to adopt the company's culture, which put an emphasis on standardization. Because the CEO made unilateral decisions, he became the source of technological knowledge. In the context of the 'non-human bin' of organizational memory, the CEO made unilateral decisions to build an overseas office, add full-time positions for international business and develop performance appraisal standards for overseas employees.

5.3.2.3 Event 3: Cooperating with an American microchip manufacturer to develop new technologies (2019)

The third event identified by the CEO and the marketing manager was cooperation with an American microchip manufacturer to develop new technologies. The CEO appears to have been very concerned with improving the company's technology. He said: "I have always

insisted on maintaining the company's technological innovation. This will not only improve our company's technical level, but also help our business stability. Our customers are all telecom operators. They are large companies that will exist for a long time. Our customers biggest worry is the supplier's stability and sustainability. We are constantly following up with European and American customers to understand the latest development trends. The company has invested heavily in research and development to maintain our technology's leading position in our domestic and Southeast Asian markets and to prove to our customers that we are sustainable."

As a result, the company decided to cooperate with an American microchip manufacturer in order to further develop new technologies. By August 2019, the company's new products had been developed but were still at the testing phase. Organizational learning behavior and the impact of authoritarian leadership on the learning process, in relation to this key event, are listed in Table 5.3.4.

Table 5.3.4 Organizational learning process of Company B in relation to Event 3

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Technological knowledge	"**According to my long-term experience, the next technical problem that the company needs to solve is to enrich the network channel with edge computing capability**" (CEO). "Were already on the cutting edge of technology, so we've always learned by doing" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
	Localization internationalization knowledge	"**Experience tells me that we must seize the opportunity of this new technology**, otherwise customers will not buy our products in the future" (Marketing manager).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"According to the company's own situation and market needs, as well as my long-term experience in the industry, **I have determined that the network will definitely become intelligent, which is the direction of our research and development**" (CEO) "**I think everyone can see that intelligence is the direction of technological development.** Therefore, we didn't discuss the process. I made the decision" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the knowledge interpretation process
Knowledge acquisition			
Grafting	Technological knowledge	"We cannot solve these technical problems ourselves, so **I decided to cooperate with professional chip companies for research and development**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
Knowledge transfer			

Path of knowledge transfer	From the cooperating company to the CEO and domestic managers	"**I told employees we had a cooperation with the American chip companies during the meeting**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on knowledge transfer
Organizational memory			
In human bin	Technological knowledge	"There is no doubt that, in this process, our technology has been improved" (CEO).	
In non-human bin	New products	"We have just made a new product. It has not been put on the market yet, it is still in the testing stage" (CEO).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

The CEO acquired information regarding technological trends from experience from American and European markets, which alerted him to the desire for artificial intelligent to be used within products. He realized, however, that the company still lacked the technological knowledge to combine artificial intelligence technology with its products. To address this issue, he found an American chip manufacturer and grafted the required technological knowledge. The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way in which it would be acquired, as part of the wider knowledge acquisition and interpretation process. He was, therefore, the main actor in the knowledge interpretation process. Because he made unilateral decisions, the knowledge transfer process was 'top-down' in nature, from the cooperating company to the CEO to domestic employees. In terms of organizational memory, because this event was incomplete at the time of the interview, the influence of authoritarian leadership on organizational memory was not clear.

5.3.3 The effect of authoritarian leadership on organizational learning during the internationalization process

The impact of leadership on the outcomes of the three key events is illustrated in Table 5.3.5. The outcomes are largely defined according to four aspects: performance, strategic decisions, competitive advantage and management style and leadership. At the time of the interviews, the new product mentioned in connection with Event 3 had not been put on the market, meaning that some of the outcomes of Event 3, particularly performance, were unclear. For Case B, there were no significant management and leadership changes in relation to the three key events.

Table 5.3.5 The effect of leadership on organizational learning in the internationalization process (2016-2019).

Outcomes / Events	Performance	Strategic decisions	Competitive advantage	Management and leadership
Event 1: Entering the Indian market (2016)	Sold products with their own brand	Building brand Producing end products directly	More opportunities to communicate with customers	Added production lines Built two marketing systems

				Built new department
Event 2: Establishing overseas offices in Latin America (2019)	Established overseas offices in Latin America	Building overseas offices and subsidiaries is good for entering overseas markets	Gained more trust from customers due to using local employees	Used different methods to manage overseas employees. Established overseas offices
Event 3: Cooperating with an American chip manufacturer to develop new technologies (2019)	New products (Not finished, still in the testing process).	R&D was important to the strategy of the company	New products with advanced technologies The capability to continue updating technology	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher

5.4 Authoritarian leadership: Case C

5.4.1 CEO leadership style

Based on interviews with the CEO, administrative director and financial manager, the CEO appears to make unilateral decisions. The CEO admitted that he makes all the decisions and that employees only need to understand and implement his decisions. The administrative director said that the CEO even takes care of employees' personal situations. Due to the company starting as a family company, the CEO's mother used to control the financial department and his parents were able to use the company's money as they wished. Since taking over the company, however, the current CEO has hired professional finance staff and ensured that every member of the company, including family members, has received money through a salary. Therefore, he and his parents no longer use the company's money as they wish.

Such behavior is typical of an authoritarian style of leadership and allows the CEO to make unilateral decisions (Chan et al., 2013; Uhl-Bein & Maslyn, 2005) and prevail over employees (Chan et al., 2013; Harms et al., 2018; Pelligrini, Scandura & Jayaraman, 2010), with employees following orders (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the CEO showed high-level benevolence to employees. The CEO said: "I regard the company as my life and my family". He also treated the employees as his family members. Evidence of the CEO's authoritarian leadership, in Case C, appears in Table 5.4.1.

Table 5.4.1 Authoritarian leadership in Case C

Authoritarian leadership	Quotations	
	CEO	**Managers**
Leaders make unilateral decisions	"I make all the decisions, especially regarding the company's business." "After my parents failed and the company withdrew from the Vietnamese market, I took over the company. I think if we can't guarantee the quality of the product and continue to upgrade the product, the company will fail, in my hands, for a second time. Therefore, I insisted on automating all old equipment, starting product development and increasing R&D investment."	"Our management team (including each department manager) discuss things together, but the CEO makes the decisions in the end." (Administrative director) "The company's development plan is decided by the CEO" (Financial manager).
Leaders prevail over employees	"No one is as familiar with the company's overseas business as me. They only need to implement my decisions." "Chinese employees need to be unified in their thinking, so we will hold a plenary meeting every month to inform all employees about the company's situation and goals" "As the company was started as a family business, this came with many disadvantages. After taking over the company, I had to first change both my parents and me. For example, after taking over the company, I made sure that both myself and my parents would receive a salary as employees, instead of withdrawing the company's money at will"	"Although he will discuss with us very gently, everyone must follow the CEO's decisions in the end" (Financial manager).
Employees follow directions	"For some decisions, I discuss with our top management team. No matter whether we had same view or not, in the end, they will follow my decisions" (CEO).	"Although we often have meetings to discuss strategy, we only discuss the established strategy, how to advance the strategy" (Financial manager) "We had conditions in which the two departments had different opinions. In the end, everyone listened to the CEO's advice" (Administrative director).

| Leaders show high-level of benevolence to employees | "I regard this company as my life and my family"
 "I always think of the company as a family. The relationship between my employees and me is that of a family, and everything can be discussed. If employees have difficulties, even private ones, they can come to me." | "The CEO cares a lot about the company's affairs, including the personal conditions of employee, which makes us feel at ease. For example, one of our employee's father was sick. The CEO helped them to contact good doctor and paid part of the medical bills for them" (Administrative director).
 "Our corporate culture has always been a family culture, and all our employees are one family" (Administrative director). |

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

5.4.2 How does authoritarian leadership influence the organizational learning process?

With more and more large cities in China banning motorcycles, the domestic motorcycle market is becoming smaller and smaller, so the company must return to overseas markets. The influence of leadership on a company's organizational learning during the process of internationalization will be analyzed in the context of the following three key events, which were identified from interviews with the CEO, marketing manager and administrative manager: cooperating with a top motorcycle company (2016), entering the Pakistan market (2017) and competing with Indian companies in the Southeast Asian market (2016-2019). The following sections discuss the learning process relating to each event and analyze how authoritarian leadership influenced the learning process during internationalization, in chronological order.

5.4.2.1 Event 1: Cooperating with a top motorcycle company (2016)

The first key event identified by the CEO was the company's cooperation with a top motorcycle company. When talking about the failure of the company in 2008 and his takeover of the company, the CEO stated that: "I think there are two main reasons for my parents' failure. The first is that the company's original business model was that of a family workshop, with no complete or thorough management system. I decided to hire an external consulting company because I found that I did not have the ability to change the company, a fact that became clear to me while I was studying for my MBA. To address this, I hired a professional management consulting company to help me withdraw power from my relatives and establish a modern scientific management system. The second reason for the company's failure in 2008 is that the company never had a technical competitive advantage and always competed on price at the lower end of the market. Therefore, the main strategy of the company, following the previous failure, has been to gain a greater competitive advantage through investment in technology."

Taking the CEO's second point into consideration, the company decided to increase efforts regarding collaboration with outside companies. It was to this end that, in 2016, the company attempted to pursue an opportunity to cooperate with one of the world's top motorcycle companies. Organizational learning behavior and the impact of authoritarian leadership on the learning process, in this key event, are presented in Table 5.4.2.

Table 5.4.2 Organizational learning process of Company C in relation to Event 1

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Congenital learning	Localization internationalization knowledge	"Based on my previous knowledge, **I believe that two things are very important to our competitive advantages.** The first is our ability and facility. The second is our customer. In fact, we are producing products according to customer requirements. If we are serving good customers, they will have higher standards or requirements of products, which will drive our technology development and make us more competitive in the market, thus creating a virtuous circle. However, if we stay at the lower end of the market, these customers' only requirement will be a lower price, which will drag the company into a vicious circle of low-price competition" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
Experiential learning	Localization internationalization knowledge	"We gave up a Nigerian Government procurement order at the beginning of 2016. Our contract was almost negotiated, but the other side was still trying to lower the price. For low prices, they could give up a lot of quality requirements, but this was invisibly reducing the quality of our products. So, we ended up giving up on this order. From this incident, **I am more determined to cooperate with customers who pursue quality**" (CEO).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"**I decided the first thing for our company to do was to increase R&D investment and try our best to cooperate with high-level customers**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the first round of the knowledge interpretation process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Technological knowledge	"Because customers had put forward higher requirements for us, we had to make some adjustments in technology to meet customer needs. This had greatly improved the company's technology and research and development" (CEO).	
Vicarious	International	"A lot of the company's regulations and organizational structure didn't show any drawbacks when we	The CEO made unilateral decisions

learning	enterprise internationalization knowledge	hadn't start internationalizing. But, when we officially started the process of internationalization, **I noticed that our management model, costs and the ability of employees were exposed as having a series of problems**. As I worked with this customer, I learned a lot of from them" (CEO).	on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	**"I realized that we need to learn from the customer and made some change"** (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the second round of the knowledge interpretation process
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From the customer to the CEO to domestic employees	**"I was responsible for contacts with the customer"** (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on knowledge transfer and employees followed directions
Organizational memory			
In human bin	Technological knowledge	"There is a big classroom in our company. Every month we have a class for all our employees to share their new technology. **Everyone in the company must attend these classes**" (CEO).	The CEO prevailed over employees in organizational memory
In non-human bin	Improved regulatory process	"We also improved our regulatory process by imitating our customer. **Employees did not have any different opinions**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions and employees followed directions in terms of organizational memory
	Revised the production lines	**"I asked employees to revise our production lines to improve the quality of our products"** (CEO).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

The CEO, through congenital and experiential learning, became convinced that it was only through cooperation with a higher level of customers and improvements to products that the company could achieve competitive advantages. The CEO said: "I noticed that screening customers was necessary for us. A good customer can help the company improve its technology and build competitive advantages." Through this process, the company created the opportunity to cooperate with the world's top motorcycle companies. From the beginning of the company's collaboration, it was found that the accuracy of its products did not meet the requirements of their potential new client (the motorcycle company), thus showing the company's lack of technological knowledge. As a result, the CEO decided to invest heavily in revising the company's production line, using knowledge and insights gained from their target customer and learnt from practice. At the second round of the knowledge acquisition/interpretation process, the CEO always made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire, the way to acquire needed knowledge and knowledge interpretation, without asking others their opinion.

Regarding knowledge transfer, because the CEO made unilateral decisions and employees followed his directions, knowledge transfer process in the company was top-down in nature. To be specific, the knowledge transfer process was from the target customer to the CEO, then from the CEO to other employees within the company. For organizational memory, the company not only gained technological knowledge in the "human bin", but also revised production lines and improved regulatory processes in the "non-human bin". The CEO prevailed over employees to improve their technological knowledge. In the context of the "non-human bin", the CEO made the unilateral decision to revise production lines and regulatory processes and employees accepted his decisions.

5.4.2.2 Event 2: Entering the Pakistani market (2017)

The second key event identified by the CEO, financial manager and administrative director regarding the company's internationalization was the company's entrance into the Pakistani market, in 2017. Organizational learning behavior and the impact of authoritarian leadership on the learning process in relation to this key event are presented in Table 5.4.3.

Table 5.4.3 Organizational learning process of Company C in relation to Event 2

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market knowledge	"Pakistan is an Islamic country. Their way of life and cultural atmosphere are completely different from China, so **we can only understand their culture and needs through the process of continued contact with them**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"**In my view, hiring Pakistani sales personnel is a good option for helping our company to enter the Pakistani market quickly**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions in the first round of the knowledge interpretation process
Knowledge acquisition			
Grafting	Market knowledge	"It is difficult for our domestic sales personnel to understand a new market immediately. Therefore, **hiring local sales personnel is a good way to expand to the special market**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
Experiential learning	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"After we hired the Pakistani employees, **I found that it was difficult to manage them, because of their unique culture**. Moreover, because of our ideological gap, if we do not handle the relationship with local employees, it can easily become a political issue" (CEO).	
	Market entry Internationalization knowledge	"A big problem with using Pakistani employees is that, once they are familiar with our supply routes, it is easy for them to take on private work for themselves. **Therefore, from my understanding, building our own brand is necessary for us to reduce this problem and achieve brand internationalization**" (CEO).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors	CEO	"**The CEO was in charge of the entire process of establishing the joint venture in Pakistan**"	The CEO made unilateral decisions

involved in interpretation		(Financial manager) "I am not clear about our business in Pakistan. **The CEO is responsible for the overseas business directly**" (Administrative director).	in the second round of the knowledge interpretation process
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From the joint venture company to the CEO to employees	"**I am responsible for the business in Pakistan.** You don't have to ask other employees; they did not know much about the company's international business. I only inform them my final decisions" (CEO) "I am not clear about our business in Pakistan" (Administrative director).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on knowledge transfer
Organizational memory			
In human bin	Market entry internationalization knowledge	**"We set up a joint venture in Pakistan, where we provide the brand and technology**. The cooperating local company provided local managers and employees, which effectively solved the problem of being unfamiliar with the Pakistani market and the difficulty with managing local employees" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on organizational memory
In non-human bin	New joint venture company and brand	**"With my arrangement, we set up a joint venture company in Pakistan and registered our brand in Pakistan**" (CEO).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

At the beginning of Event 2, the CEO went to Pakistan several times and, through experiential learning, found that the company lacked market knowledge. According to the CEO, Pakistan is a unique market because it is an Islamic country with many cultural differences to the domestic market in China. Therefore, initially, the company lacked knowledge of the Pakistani market. The CEO stated that: "I had been thinking about how to enter the Pakistani market, and because of the language barrier and the local political situation and the social security of Pakistan, I decided to use a local sales team. However, one risk with using a local sales team was that they could easily have ended the cooperation after they learnt about our supply routes"

The CEO therefore used grafting in order to acquire the necessary market knowledge. In the process of cooperating with Pakistani employees, the CEO, through experiential learning, acquired international enterprise and market entry internationalization knowledge, to effectively control local employees. In the second round of the knowledge acquisition/interpretation process, the CEO always made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire, the way to acquire that knowledge and knowledge interpretation, without asking others for their opinions.

After the CEO had made all the decisions and interpreted the knowledge gained, there was no evidence of knowledge transfer within the company. Knowledge was transferred from the joint venture company to the CEO alone. The CEO stated that others in the company had no clear knowledge of the company's international business. Both the financial manager and the administrative director admitted that they did not clearly know the company's business in Pakistan. In terms of organizational memory, the CEO gained market entry internationalization knowledge and stored this in his memory bin. Based on the knowledge he gained from Event 2, he unilaterally decided to set up a joint venture company in Pakistan. In the context of this joint venture company, Company C provided the brand and the technology; the cooperating company provided local managers and employees, which effectively solved the problem of Company C's lack of familiarity with the Pakistani market and difficulties with managing local employees.

5.4.2.3 Event 3: Competition with Indian companies in the Southeast Asia market (2016-2019)

The third event identified by the CEO and the administrative director was competition with Indian companies in the Southeast Asia market. The CEO said: "The company had a factory and a subsidiary in Vietnam when my father was the CEO of the company. Although our company withdrew from the Vietnamese market before I took it over, the factory in Vietnam still insisted these years. When the company returned to the Southeast Asia market, we met our old rivals - Indian companies. The Southeast Asia market is price sensitive. Therefore, it is easy for us to get into low-price competition with Indian companies."

As a result, the CEO began to explore a new way to increase the company's competitive advantages in the Southeast Asia market. Organizational learning behavior and the impact of authoritarian leadership on the learning process, in the context of this key event, are described in Table 5.4.4.

Table 5.4.4 Organizational learning process of Company C in relation to Event 3

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Congenital learning	Localization internationalization knowledge	"In my view, even if we keep improving the precision of our products, it is difficult for us to surpass our Japanese counterparts. **So, according to my experience, we should change our approach to improving our competitiveness**, such as using magnetorheological liquid caustic soda, or carrying out automation transformation" (CEO). "My parents' experience of failure taught me that we can't follow the needs of the market. For example, Vietnamese customers like a pattern on the product, so we added a pattern. **What we need to do is to guide the needs of customers, not to accommodate the needs of customers**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
Experiential learning	Market knowledge	"The Vietnamese market is also very specialized. Many people in Vietnam use drugs. This caused us some problems in the management of local staff" (CEO). "**The CEO always encourages us learn-by-doing, especially related to different markets**" (Administrative director).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"**I realized that we cannot fully improve some technical problems by ourselves, so I thought of finding ways to cooperate with research institutes**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions in the first round of the knowledge interpretation process
Knowledge acquisition			
Grafting	Technological knowledge	"We cooperate with the Chinese Academy of Science to try to carry out research and development" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
Knowledge interpretation			

Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"**I was responsible for contacting several research institutes, and finally decided to cooperate with the Chinese Academy of Science**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions in the second round of the knowledge interpretation process
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From CEO to managers	"**I informed managers and employees**, especially in the technical department, that they were to cooperate with the research institution" (CEO). "Our company has meetings every week. **I need to inform employees of my decisions and we discuss how to implement my decisions**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on knowledge transfer
Organizational memory			
In human bin	Technological knowledge	"**We are currently determined to be the first to revolutionize our products by using magnetorheological liquid alkali**" (CEO)	The CEO made unilateral decisions on organizational memory Employees followed the CEO's decisions
	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"There are some workers who cannot be paid monthly, because they are given a lot of money at once and they go to buy drugs and can't come to work the next day. **So, we can only pay daily**" (CEO).	
In non-human bin	Mobility policy	"**We adopted a mobility policy.** Almost all our technological managers need to work in the Vietnam subsidiary for at least half the year. **No employee raised any objection**" (CEO).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

Initially, the company lacked a strategy for the localization of internationalization knowledge and market knowledge in terms of the Southeast Asia market. The CEO, based on what he had learnt from his parents, decided that the company could only improve its competitiveness by improving technology and guiding customer needs; otherwise, it would continue to fall into a vicious circle of low-price competition. The CEO then decided to cooperate with a research institution in order to revolutionize the company's products and was solely responsible for choosing the institution. The CEO learnt, from a research institution, that there was a new technology that could increase the precision of the company's product by 2% while the cost would remain almost unchanged. In the second round of the knowledge acquisition/interpretation process, the CEO always made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire, the way to acquire such knowledge and knowledge interpretation, without asking others' opinion.

The direction of the knowledge transfer process was from the research institution to the CEO, due to the CEO controlling the company's international business. The CEO used a formal way (through meetings) to inform employees of his decisions and so complete knowledge transfer. In terms of organizational memory, the CEO gained technological knowledge and international enterprise knowledge of how to manage local employees in Southeast Asian countries. The CEO also established a mobility policy, asking technological managers to work in the Vietnam subsidiary for at least half the year. The CEO made this decision alone and employees obeyed the mobility policy.

5.4.3 The effect of authoritarian leadership on organizational learning during the internationalization process

The outcomes of the impact of leadership, in the context of the three key events identified, are listed in Table 5.4.5. Four specific aspects have been highlighted: performance, strategic decisions, competitive advantage and management style and leadership. For Case C, there were no significant management and leadership variations across the three key events.

Table 5.4.5 Outcomes of the effect of leadership on organizational learning in the internationalization process (2016-2019).

Outcomes / Events	Performance	Strategic decisions	Competitive advantages	Management and leadership
Event 1: Cooperating with a top motorcycle company (2016)	The technological level of the company's product was greatly improved	Screening customers is necessary	Product standards reached the top of the industry	Improved regulatory process. Revised production lines
Event 2: Entering the Pakistan market (2017)	Built a factory in Pakistan. The market share in Pakistan can reach about 15%	Joint venture is a good way to enter an overseas market	The brand in the Pakistani market	
Event 3: Competing with Indian companies in the Southeast Asia market (2016-2019)		Continued to focus on R&D on the insistence of the CEO	New technology	Mobility policy

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher

5.5 Authoritarian leadership: Case D

5.5.1 CEO leadership style

Based on interviews with the CEO, the chief engineer and the administrative manager, the CEO showed strong control of the company. He always made unilateral decisions, despite other employees within the company sometimes having different views to his own. In situations where employees did voice opposing opinions to those of the CEO, the CEO often chose to ignore such opinions in favor of his own. However, employees did appear to choose to follow the decisions of the CEO. For example, the chief engineer said: "I do not think our overseas market is easy to expand, although the CEO has always been optimistic about the overseas market. However, we'd like to support him in his endeavors."

This behavior is typical of an authoritarian style of leadership, which allows the CEO to make unilateral decisions (Chan et al., 2013; Uhl-Bein & Maslyn, 2005) and prevail over employees (Chan et al., 2013; Harms et al., 2018; Pelligrini, Scandura & Jayaraman, 2010), with employees follow orders (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). At the same time, the CEO showed high-level of benevolence. He treated all employees as family members and took care of them and their family. For example, he had given money to employees whose relatives were sick. Based on this analysis, the CEO featured in Case D displayed authoritarian leadership. Evidence supporting this conclusion can be found in Table 5.5.1.

Table 5.5.1 Authoritarian leadership in Case D

Authoritarian leadership	Quotations	
	CEO	**Managers**
Leaders make unilateral decisions	"In fact, I always make all the decisions. As the company develops and grows, I may prefer to discuss with others. But my decision is still the priority."	"The CEO is always a very thoughtful and visionary leader. And he is also very courageous when making decisions. When making decisions, he always listens to himself." (Administrative manager)
Leaders prevail over employees	"If I disagree with other managers, they cannot understand, but they must follow my decision" (CEO).	
Employees follow directions		"The CEO has an advanced awareness of the direction of the company's development, and he has worked hard to understand the market. Therefore, we are willing to follow his decisions" (Chief engineer) "I do not think our overseas market is easy to expand, although the CEO has always been optimistic about the overseas market. However, we'd like to support him in his endeavors." (Chief engineer)
Leaders show high-level of benevolence to employees	"I hope to affect my employees emotionally, including the employees' family members. I hope that they think of the company as a big family". "I think anyone can make mistakes, so, if an employee makes a mistake for the first time, I will not punish him directly. Generally, I will teach him what to do next time and we will give him the opportunity to correct his mistake." "When an employee wants to leave the company, I always tell them that the company's door is always open to them. I think it is necessary to give employees opportunities to compare and choose their job"	"His previous career was good, and he was already earning a good salary. Nevertheless, he still chose to build this business. He always said that he wanted to build an enterprise not only for himself, but also for his employees. He always said that if the company failed, he would be able to maintain decent living conditions. However, he needs to be responsible for all employees. CEO really treats us like family" (Chief engineer) "The CEO always shows his respect to every employee. He attaches great importance to the cultivation of talent and always helps the personal development of employees." (Chief engineer) "The CEO is very friendly in the management of employees, so our company's cohesion is still relatively strong." (Administrative manager).

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

5.5.2 How does authoritarian leadership influence the organizational learning process?

The influence of leadership on a company's organizational learning during the process of internationalization will be analyzed in the context of the following three key events, as identified from interviews with the CEO, chief engineer and administrative manager: gaining the company's first overseas customer in Sudan (2016), encountering a 'scam' in the Indonesian market (2018) and trying to enter the Oman market (2018-2019). The following sections discuss the learning process related to each event and analyze the influence of authoritarian leadership on the learning process in terms of these internationalization events, in chronological order.

5.5.2.1 Event 1: Gaining the company's first overseas customer in Sudan (2016)

The first key event identified by the CEO was gaining the company's first overseas customer in Sudan. According to the CEO: "Since our industry has been monopolized by central enterprises for a long time in the domestic market, only by entering foreign markets can we fully release our production capacity."

At the same time, the CEO realized that the countries in the Belt and Road Initiative Economic Zone had a high level of recognition for China's railways and supporting products. The CEO decided that this was an opportunity to begin the company's internationalization. Therefore, in 2016, the company participated in many industry exhibitions and gained its first overseas customer, in Sudan. Organizational learning behavior and the impact of authoritarian leadership on the learning process in relation to this key event are presented in Table 5.5.2.

Table 5.5.2 Organizational learning process of Company D in relation to Event 1

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"In the process of completing orders from Sudanese customers, **I first learned about the process of completing an international business**" (CEO). "From my dealings with the agent, **I learned that the net profit of the agent can be double our net profit**" (CEO)	The CEO made unilateral decisions on knowledge acquisition
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"**I was responsible for the whole process of the business in Sudan**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From the customer and agent to the CEO to domestic managers	"**I was responsible for the entire process of contacting customers, arranging production and arranging delivery**" (CEO). "I had private discussions with several managers about my expectations for international markets" (CEO)	The CEO made unilateral decisions on knowledge transfer
Organizational memory			
In human bin	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"After realizing the profit of the agency, **I firmly decided that I must let the company's products enter the international market and get rid of the agency**" (CEO). "At that time, **I imagined the overseas market to be too nice. I thought our company can easily enter it and gain higher profits**" (CEO).	Because the CEO made unilateral decisions, he was the keeper of knowledge

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

Initially, the company lacked knowledge of how to enter markets. The CEO said that they attended many exhibitions and that, during one exhibition, a Sudanese agent approached the company. The CEO stated that: "Our first international business was completed very successfully, with the help of the agent. Through our communication with the agent, I learned that the profits made by the agent could be almost double our net profit. This made me start to rethink our overseas market entry model."

The CEO made unilateral decisions in the whole learning process. He only communicated his expectation of overseas markets to other managers after he had made the decisions. To be specific, through experiential learning, he learnt that overseas markets were a good opportunity for the company and that changing the entry mode could result in huge profit for the company. Therefore, knowledge transfer in the company was characterized by a top-down process, from the CEO to other managers. In terms of organizational memory, because the CEO made unilateral decisions and only told other managers of his expectation for overseas markets, the market entry internationalization knowledge gained resided mainly with the CEO.

5.5.2.2 Event 2: Encountering a 'scam' in the Indonesian market (2018)

The second key event identified by the CEO and the administrative manager was the company's encounter with a 'scam' in the Indonesian market. After the CEO had learnt from Event 1 (gaining the first overseas customer in Sudan) and had begun to reconsider the entry model of the company, a man claiming to be the manager of an Indonesian company provided the CEO with a program. The CEO found the relevant information on the official website of this Indonesian company on the Internet and also, at the invitation of the man, went to Indonesia to see the company's office. The CEO said: "Since our first international business went successfully, I was too optimistic about the overseas market and approached it too simplistically. I thought this was a good opportunity, so I signed a contract with that person without discussing it with anyone. But they were a gang of scammers and we lost nearly 10 million yuan."

Organizational learning behavior and the effects of authoritarian leadership on the learning

process in relation to this key event are presented in Table 5.5.3.

Table 5.5.3 Organizational learning process of Company D in relation to Event 2

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"Since the previous business in Sudan was very smooth, **I was overly optimistic about the company's international business expansion**. In fact, **I checked** the official website of the Indonesian group and the relevant information on the Internet and went to the local office to inspect the site. But, after signing the contract, I found out that I had been cheated" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on knowledge acquisition
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"**The whole thing was basically handled by me alone, and the rest of the company didn't know about it**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on knowledge interpretation
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"After I found out that I was scammed, **I actively contacted the relevant government departments and the police, to help us get the money back.** In this process, **I learnt that the Chinese Government has now built many platforms to help private enterprises to internationalize**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on knowledge acquisition
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From CEO to administrative manager	"The CEO only told me about this event and asked me to help him handle some formalities. **Considering the confidence of employees in overseas markets, the CEO requested that this matter be kept secret in the company for the time being**" (Administrative manager).	The administrative manager followed the CEO's direction.
Organizational memory			
In human bin	International enterprise internationalization	"This event was a lesson for me. It was unreasonable that all the company's business decisions were bring made by me alone. So, after this incident, **I decided that any business decision must be made after discussion with all managers**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions

	knowledge		
	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"In the process of recovering the funds, **I learned that the Chinese Government has now built many platforms to help private enterprises to internationalize**" (CEO). **"I also learnt to not think too simplistically about entering foreign markets**" (CEO).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

In the beginning, the company lacked market entry internationalization knowledge. Due to authoritarian leadership, the CEO signed the contract without asking the opinion of others within the company. After the CEO found out that he had been deceived, to maintain the company's employees' confidence in the international market he only told the administrative director, who helped him with the relevant procedures. Therefore, the knowledge transfer process took place only from the CEO to the administrative manager, which was a top-down process within the company. In terms of organizational memory, the CEO gained internationalization knowledge from this event. The CEO showed his willingness to take advice from others, which shows the CEO moving beyond authoritarian leadership (see highlighted quotations).

5.5.2.3 Event 3: Trying to enter the Oman market (2018-2019)

The third event identified by the CEO, administrative manager and chief engineer was the company's attempt to enter the Oman market. After Event 2 (Encountering a scam in the Indonesian market), the CEO tried to get help from the Government. In 2018, the Prince of Oman decided to build the first railway in Oman. China's state-owned railway engineering companies were negotiating with the Omani Government. The company seized this opportunity and, as a supporting product company, joined the project, with the help of the Chinese Government. As the project was large and dominated by state-owned enterprises, although the company had signed a framework agreement with the Omani Government, it was still awaiting the final results of the negotiations between the cooperating state-owned enterprises and the Omani Government. According to the CEO, if this cooperation is successfully concluded, this project will become the company's largest project in the next three years. Organizational learning behavior and the impact of authoritarian leadership on the learning process in relation to this key event are presented in Table 5.5.4.

Table 5.5.4 Organizational learning process of Company D in relation to Event 3

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Grafting	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"This project is too big for us; we needed the power of the Government, to move forward. Therefore, I was actively seeking more assistance from the Government." (CEO). "The CEO and I met the Prince of Oman at an exhibition organized by the Government. Chinese Government staff made referrals and introductions for us" (Chief engineer).	
Experiential learning	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"This project is a very large project for us but, for the Government and state-owned enterprises, this project is only a small project. So, they didn't move forward with the project very quickly" (CEO).	
	Market knowledge	"In fact, there is a huge cultural gap between us and Sudan. In my view, their work efficiency is relatively low. This project is to build Sudan's first railway, so the client is also very cautious" (Administrative manager).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO and chief engineer	"This time, the chief engineer and I participated in this event together. He gave me lots of support, especially in technological aspects" (CEO).	
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From CEO and chief engineer to other employees	"Every time, CF and I go to communicate with customers, sometimes with other employees. Now, the company's top management team has weekly meetings where we discuss the progress of the event" (CEO).	
Organizational memory			
In human bin	International enterprise	"As the company grows, I feel the company needs the wisdom of more people. So, now I discuss many decisions with the company's top management team and let more people make some	

	internationalization knowledge	decisions for the company" (CEO).	
	Market entry internationalization process	"This contact with the Prince of Amman gave us new inspiration. We have recently been reaching out to other countries' transportation departments through the Chinese Government. This is a new way for us to expand overseas markets" (Chief engineer)	
In non-human bin	Organizational structure	"Because this is a big project for our company, we need to add about 100 people and use this opportunity to take the company to the next level" (Administrative manager). "The CEO asked me to start work on recruiting more professionals. However, if we go through the normal recruitment process, it is difficult for a company of our size to attract truly capable people to join. **Therefore, the recruitment work is still carried out by the CEO himse**lf" (Administrative manager). **"I have started to set up the company's overseas business department, and I have begun to try to acquire a professional foreign trade team"** (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

Since this is the company's first international business through a government platform, the company lacked market entry internationalization knowledge and knowledge of the market in Oman. More employees participated in this event and played some key roles. Compared to Events 1 and 2, it was not only the CEO who learnt from the advancement of the project. The chief engineer and administrative manager also participated in the learning and decision-making processes in this event, so the CEO did not show typical authoritarian leadership in this case. He did, however, make several unilateral decisions, such as hiring professional staff by himself when there was insufficient HR management capacity. Overall, the CEO made real changes to his leadership style, allowing more people to participate in the decision-making process and seeking advice more often (see highlighted quotations). The administrative director suggested that, because this was a huge project, the company needed to hire appropriate employees and revise the company's organizational structure, to prepare for the project. However, when the CEO tried to empower to the administrative manager to ask her responsible for recruiting, the administrative manager stated that she cannot handle this. Therefore, the CEO began to make unilateral decisions on recruiting employees again. At the time of the interviews, this event was incomplete.

5.5.3 The effect of authoritarian leadership on organizational learning during the internationalization process

The impact of leadership on outcomes related to the three key events identified are presented in Table 5.5.5. The outcomes have been assessed largely on the basis of four aspects: performance, strategic decisions, competitive advantage and management style and leadership. One key finding that should be highlighted relates to Event 2 (encountering a scam in the Indonesian market), where authoritarian leadership led to huge losses for the company. After this event, the CEO realized the shortcomings of authoritarian leadership. Therefore, in Event 3 (trying to enter the Oman market), he made some changes. He began to discuss his decisions with his managers and accepted their suggestions, and he tried to empower other managers. Therefore, through organizational learning during the company's

internationalization, the leadership of the CEO changed.

Table 5.5.5 The effect of leadership on organizational learning in the internationalization process (2016-2019).

Outcomes \ Events	Performance	Strategic decisions	Competitive advantages	Management and leadership
Event 1: Gaining the company's first overseas customer in Sudan (2016)	Obtained 30% of the net profit for the year from projects in Sudan	To expand into future overseas markets without the use of an agent		
Event 2: Encountering a scam in the Indonesian market (2018)	The company lost nearly 10 million Yuan	To try to acquire a dedicated foreign trade team		Changed leadership style
Event 3: Trying to enter the Oman market (2019)	If the company manages to obtain a place on this program, the company's annual revenue will increase by at least 100%, with the program continuing for at least the next four years	Hiring more employees, especially those with talent for international business.		Changed leadership style

Revising the company's organizational structure. |

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher

5.6 Authoritarian leadership: Case E

5.6.1 CEO leadership style

Based on interviews with the CEO, marketing manager and quality manager, the CEO had

a high level of control over the company's business. He described himself as a "dictatorial

leader". The CEO displayed a typical authoritarian style of leadership, which allows the

CEO to make unilateral decisions (Chan et al., 2013; Uhl-Bein & Maslyn, 2005) and prevail

over employees (Chan et al., 2013; Harms et al., 2018; Pelligrini, Scandura & Jayaraman,

2010), with employees following orders (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). Moreover, according to the marketing manager, the CEO also "leads by example" and "is like a father in the company", which showed a high-level of benevolence of the CEO. Evidence supporting this conclusion is shown in Table 5.6.1.

Table 5.6.1 Authoritarian leadership in Case E

Authoritarian leadership	Quotations	
	CEO	**Managers**
Leaders made unilateral decisions	"I am a dictatorial leader." "I make all the important critical decisions of the company, and employees are only responsible for implementation"	"The CEO decides the company's development direction and major business" (Marketing manager)
Leaders prevail over employees	"I rarely care about specific things. Generally, I set the direction and wait for the results. I don't care about what they really think or the way in which they deal with the problem. I only need them to meet my requirements" "The company must run as I wished. There is no board system in our company"	
Employees follow direction		"The CEO is a very charismatic person. We have a few managers who are particularly difficult to coordinate. However, as long as the CEO is there to coordinate, things always go smoothly" (Marketing manager)
Leaders show high-level of benevolence to employees	"As a leader, I need to protect my employees. One of the reasons I decided to give up the cooperation with the French company was that in one of our discussions their attitude was too bad, which caused one of our female salesmen to feel offended and cry. I thought this was unacceptable"	"The CEO has always been supportive of my work" (Quality manager) "The CEO is like a father in the company" (Marketing manager) "The CEO is a very generous boss. Our company was established in mid-2015 and, by the end of the year, the CEO had sent us many bonuses and gifts" (Marketing manager).

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

5.6.2 How does authoritarian leadership influence the organizational learning process?

According to the CEO, when the company was founded, the CEO positioned the company to be an international company. Therefore, 99% of the company's business is overseas business. The influence of leadership on the company's organizational learning during the process of internationalization will be analyzed in the context of three key events identified during interviews with the CEO, marketing manager and quality manager. These events are: terminating cooperation with a French company (2017-2018), gaining an important customer in Japan (2018-2019) and cooperating with a German company (2018-2019). The following sections discuss the learning process relating to each event and analyze the impact of authoritarian leadership on the learning process during these events, in chronological order.

5.6.2.1 Event 1: Terminating cooperation with a French company (2017-2018)

The first key event, identified by the CEO, was the termination of cooperation with a French company. This was originally a joint venture between the company and the CEO, with the French company having a 30% stake. The CEO stated that: "Because I had previous entrepreneurial experience, my initial idea was to cooperate with a European company so that we could quickly open the European market. So, I chose this French company that was doing traditional advertising, which I had previously cooperated with when I had my first company. They would provide the company with about $6 million in orders each year. Our company customized production lines and molds for them."

After the cooperation had continued for two years, however, the CEO decided that it was not a suitable choice for the company, so the relationship was terminated, in 2017. The company had a challenging year in 2018, due to the need to pay compensation and a sharp drop in orders. Organizational learning behavior and the impact of authoritarian leadership on the learning process in relation to this key event are listed in Table 5.6.2.

Table 5.6.2 Organizational learning process of Company E in relation to Event 1

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Congenital learning	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"According to my first entrepreneurial experience, **I think that finding a foreign partner to jointly establish a factory is a shortcut to realizing the internationalization of the company**" (CEO).	
Experiential learning	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"**I am an 'arbitrary' leader. I am very uncomfortable with the board system.** Although the French company only has 30% of the shares, I still need to listen to them as shareholders. The relationship between us is not only the relationship between customers and suppliers, but also the relationship between shareholders." (CEO). "In the process of cooperating with the French company, I gradually felt that the French company tried to highlight the importance of the board system and interfere with many decisions of mine through the board system" (CEO). "Since we are a joint venture company, there have been many conflicts between me and the French company in the company's internal management, especially financial management. The company is divided into two factions. This led to a series of problems, and **I even ended up firing my assistant**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
	Localization internationalization knowledge	"I talked to the French company about our cooperation before. They had been in a state of continuous loss over the past few years. **I think our product positioning needs to be adjusted to make our products more competitive.** However, the French company is a big company. It is hard for them to adjust their product positioning" (CEO).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in	CEO	"**I decided to terminate the partnership with the French company**" (CEO)	The CEO made unilateral decisions in the first round of the knowledge

interpretation			interpretation process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"According to our original agreement, the French company needed to place an order of 6 million US dollars with us every year. But, since I put forward the idea of canceling the cooperation, the French company only gave us an order of 60,000 US dollars in 2018." (CEO). "The French company skipped us and found a mold company that produced molds for us to work with. So, **I decided to sue the mold company**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"Sometimes, I have some private conversations with several managers to explain my idea. But, overall, **I made the decision and handle the whole process**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions in the second round of the knowledge interpretation process
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From the cooperating company to the CEO to domestic employees	"In fact, 2018 was a very difficult year for the company. There were many different opinions within the company at the time. **But I could only choose to ignore the opinions of the company at that time, because, in my heart, I had formed the company's new strategy and positioning**" (CEO)	The CEO made unilateral decisions and prevailed over employees in knowledge transfer
Organizational memory			
In human bin	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"**I realized that, as a leader, I really can't accept other people's interference in my decisions.** Therefore, the joint venture is not suitable for our company" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions relating to organizational memory
	Localization internationalization knowledge	"**I think the main reason we are very passive in dealing with this crisis is that our products did not have enough competitive advantages**" (CEO).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

On the subject of why the cooperation with the French company was terminated after two years, the CEO stated that he and the French company continued to have disagreements. He said: "I am an 'arbitrary' leader. I am very uncomfortable with the board system. Although the French company only has 30% of the shares, I still need to listen to them as shareholders. The relationship between us is not only the relationship between customers and suppliers, but also the relationship between shareholders."

The CEO would not disclose some details to the French company and, as a result, the French company bribed the CEO's assistant to disclose some company details. It took at least a year for the CEO to discover the assistant's problem and investigate it. He found that the assistant had not only leaked company information to the French company, but also made mistakes in the process of settlement with the French company. Furthermore, a female Company E employee in charge of sales was offended by the rude language of employees within the French company. The CEO felt indignant about these things. Therefore, due to the CEO's strongly authoritarian leadership and high level of benevolence, he decided to terminate the partnership. During 2018, after the CEO made this decision, the company's losses exceeded $5 million. Due to the CEO making unilateral decisions, he was the main actor in the second round of the knowledge acquisition/interpretation process. He decided on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire, the way to acquire needed knowledge and knowledge interpretation.

Because the CEO made all decisions and merely informed employees of the decisions he had made, the direction of knowledge transfer was top-down, from the CEO to managers and employees. Due to the huge financial loss, many managers and employees did not agree with his decision; he insisted on terminating the cooperation and ignored others' opinions. The international enterprise and localization internationalization knowledge gained from the event resided with the CEO.

5.6.2.2 Event 2: Gaining an important customer in Japan (2018-2019)

The second event identified by the CEO and quality manager was the gaining of an important

customer in Japan. During the termination of the contract with the French company, a German company with which the CEO had previously cooperated recommended a Japanese customer. Organizational learning behavior and the impact of authoritarian leadership on the learning process in relation to this key event are presented in Table 5.6.3.

Table 5.6.3 Organizational learning process of Company E in relation to Event 2

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market knowledge	"We have cooperated with other Japanese companies before. I have already experienced the rigor of the Japanese, or it can be said to be a dogma. Japanese companies have very high requirements for quality management. They can even be accurate as to what parts are held in the left hand and what tools are held in the right hand by an employee at a certain workstation." (CEO). "Because we were dealing with the termination of the contract with the French company at the time, this Japanese customer, who would give us a large number of orders, was especially important to us. So, **I felt, at the time, that no matter what the customer's request is, we have to do our best to meet it and win all orders**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
Noticing and searching	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"From my constant contact with Japanese clients, I find that they focus on very small areas. But they can make the product the best, the most standardized and establish a complete set of standardized production processes" (CEO).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"The French company has relatively few requirements for company internal management, especially quality management. So, when we faced the requirements of Japanese customers, we felt their very strict, and even dogmatic, requirements. **Although I was also annoyed before. But I think this is good for the development of the company**" (CEO) "**I think it is very difficult to make changes to the internal management system on our own, so I decided to go to a professional to help us make adjustments**" (CEO).	Leaders made unilateral decisions in the first round of knowledge interpretation
Knowledge acquisition			

Grafting	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"**I invited our current quality manager to join the company.** She has previously worked as a quality manager in the best company in Japan and is very experienced" (CEO). "I have worked in a Japanese company for ten years, and it is very easy for me to build a quality management system" (Quality manager).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO/Quality manager	"**I think, whether the employees agree or not, it must be implemented first.** There must be a reason why Japanese products have a good reputation in the world. Although it is difficult for us to adjust now, it must be beneficial to the future development of the company. Therefore, I accept all suggestions from the quality manager" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From the customer to the CEO and quality manager to employees	"I often hold meetings with employees and organize some training" (CEO). "I am responsible for the main process of building the quality management system" (Quality manager).	
Organizational memory			
In human bin	Localization internationalization knowledge	"I **decided that we can learn from the Japanese customer to reduce product categories and improve the product technology**" (CEO). "The more products we make, the higher the input cost and the less controllable standardization will be. On the contrary, a very much smaller product range brings us higher, comprehensive benefits. From supply chain to production to quality, it is relatively simple, and it is easier to strengthen the standardization of each step in the production of products. At the same time, the efficiency of product production will also be improved" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions and prevailed over employees
	International enterprise	"Our employees are excellent. They can work overtime to solve very troublesome problems and explore new technologies spontaneously. They prefer to do things that give them a sense of accomplishment. They	

	internationalization knowledge	are bored by the standardization and fine-grained demands of their work. But **I think that's what the company lacks, and it needs to change urgently**" (CEO).	
In non-human bin	New quality management system	"The new quality management system involves many details. Some requirements may not initially appear to employees to be meaningful. For example, the gloves worn by workers cannot have a hole, the transfer boxes used by the factory must be of the same specifications and quantity of each semi-finished product on the production report should be clearly recorded. Many employees, including our management, resisted at first. They thought these actions added to their workload but could not create value. However, **I forced them to accept it"** (CEO). "**I have always emphasized that changes in our management system are not formalized but must actually be made**" (CEO). "Many have negative emotions when confronted with my assigned quality management standards. I was also very depressed at the time. For example, I require my employees to be first-in-first-out for raw materials during production. I talked to the relevant employees, round by round, but they didn't make any noticeable changes. **The CEO gave me a lot of support and helped me force our employees to produce as required**" (Quality manager).	
	Organizational structure	"**I hired the quality manager and built the quality inspection department**" (CEO).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

Initially, the company lacked market knowledge of Japan and international enterprise internationalization knowledge to meet the requirements of the Japanese customer. The Japanese customer had high demands regarding the quality management of its supplier. The CEO unilaterally decided that they needed the Japanese company, so Company E needed to change, especially in the quality management domain. The CEO therefore decided to use grafting, hiring the quality manager, to acquire needed knowledge. The quality manager had worked for a top Japanese company prior to joining the company and was a high-level professional in quality management, especially in relation to Japanese quality management systems. Therefore, the company learnt from the quality manager and Japanese customers' demands. The knowledge transfer process was from the customer to the CEO and quality manager and employees. In the first round of knowledge acquisition and interpretation process, the CEO always made unilateral decisions. After the CEO hired the quality manager, however, he began to empower the quality manager and the quality manager contributed to the second round of knowledge interpretation (see highlighted quotations) rather than showed authoritarian leadership. The nature of knowledge transfer remained top-down, in the company, but the quality manager was at the top level.

For organizational memory, The CEO accepted suggestions from the quality manager and empowered her. The CEO only supported her in her work when needed. In order to improve the quality management system, all employees needed to accept many new rules, which meant that many employees showed dissatisfaction with the new quality management system. As a result, the CEO showed authoritarian leadership to force employees to follow the new rules and to lead by example. Furthermore, the CEO noticed that the Japanese customer only focused on relatively few products, and he considered this to be something that he had learnt, to aid the company's development. If the company had insisted on developing multiple products, it may have caused the company to invest a great deal in developing different production lines and molds, which would have reduced the competitiveness of the company's products. Reducing product categories would effectively control costs and enable the company to improve product technology.

5.6.2.3 Event 3: Cooperating with a German company (2018-2019)

The third key event identified by the CEO and the marketing manager was the company's cooperation with a German company, which happened at the same time as Event 2. The CEO met the German company at an exhibition when he first started his business, in 2010. This is the German company that recommended the Japanese company in Event 2. In 2018, Company E formally established a strategic partnership with the German company. Organizational learning behavior and the impact of authoritarian leadership on the learning process in relation to this key event are presented in Table 5.6.6.

Table 5.6.4 Organizational learning process of Company E in relation to Event 3

Learning process		Quotations	Authoritarian leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Localization internationalization knowledge	"We need to make European customers feel that, although we cooperated with a French company before and now, we have replaced it with a German company; our product quality and service are not different, or even better" (CEO) "We still need a European partner to help us provide localized services to our customers" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and the way to acquire needed knowledge
Grafting	Localization internationalization knowledge	"German companies have very strong localized engineering after-sales service capabilities. **This is what I value most and what the company needs**" (CEO)	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"Basically, the CEO was responsible for contacting, and negotiating with, German companies. Every time he went to Germany, the CEO brought two or three sales together. **But the decisions were made by the CEO**" (Marketing manager).	Leaders made unilateral decisions in the first round of knowledge interpretation
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"Based on my previous experience of working with French companies, this time, **I decided not to cooperate in a joint venture. We only build the strategic partnership.** Our company and German companies are now inseparable from each other. Of course, we are now in the honeymoon period; the conflict has not yet arisen" (CEO).	The leaders made unilateral decisions on the way to cooperate with the German company.
Vicarious learning	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"I also felt the requirements for quality management from German companies. The quality manager suggested that we can also combine their advantages, and system, into our quality management system" (CEO).	
Knowledge interpretation			

Actors involved in interpretation	CEO and quality manager	"The quality manager discussed it with me, and we integrated some of the German company's advantages in quality management" (CEO).	
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From quality manager and the CEO to employees	"After I shared my ideas with the CEO, he encouraged me to implement my plan" (Quality manager).	
Organizational memory			
In human bin	Localization internationalization knowledge	"**The company's current goal is to focus on a few products, to maximize their technical level of quality, and to lead the industry**" (CEO).	The CEO made unilateral decisions and prevailed over employees
	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"Through contacts with Japanese customers and German companies, **I feel that strict quality control is the foundation of a good product**. This is not something I can fully address by giving my staff more training. This requires a mindset shift among all employees. **For employees who are unwilling to change their attitudes, I will introduce them to other companies that we cooperate with domestically**" (CEO). "**In the beginning I would scold employees when I found out that they were not working as required**. Later I felt that this would not solve the problem. So now I often hold meetings with employees, organize some training and subtly 'brainwash' the employees" (CEO). "Because we are a private enterprise, it is difficult for our employees to attend many training courses at a relatively high cost. So how to train employees is a 'project' for me. I also practice learning-by-doing. Sometimes, I feel very insecure about my ability to work, because I often talk to employees four or five times, and they still don't want to follow the rules. All I can say is that, without the support of the CEO, my work might have been harder to advance" (Quality manager).	
Non-human	Product categories	"**I decided to give up several products and ensure the '3 plus 3' product structure, which includes**	

bin		three main products and three additional products. For the three main products, I think our goal is to make them reach the top level in the industry" (CEO).	
	Increase production equipment	"Since our orders are full every quarter this year, **I bought new production equipment for the company three times**" (CEO).	
	Improved performance appraisal system	**"I decided to separate the performance appraisal system into two groups, one for employees in factories and one for sales employees"** (CEO)	
	Improved quality management system	"According to the actual situation of the company, combined with the German quality management system, I have made new adjustments to the company's quality management system. Overall, the company's quality management has improved tremendously since I joined the company" (Quality manager).	
	Office environment	"In order to satisfy the German partner and maintain a cooperative relationship with us, our office environment has greatly improved. For example, the floor of the factory is uniformly painted with green paint, staff wear uniforms and there is no smoking in office area" (Quality manager).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

Initially, the company lacked localization internationalization knowledge. According to the CEO, the company still needed a partner in the EU market to help them to maintain and develop the market. Based on previous experiential learning from cooperation with the French company, the CEO decided to use grafting to gain the needed localization internationalization knowledge, but to change the way of cooperating with the German company. In the first round of knowledge acquisition and interpretation, the CEO made unilateral decisions. During the cooperation with the German company, the quality manager suggested learning from practice and from the German company, to continue to improve the company's quality management system. As with Event 2, the CEO empowered the quality manager, and the quality manager became the leader in relation to the quality management system rather than only showed authoritarian leadership (see highlighted quotations). Therefore, knowledge transfer within the company was from the CEO and quality manager to employees.

In terms of organizational memory, the CEO made some unilateral decisions; for example, he clearly identified the '3+3 products' strategy, meaning that the company would focus on producing three main products and pay less attention to the other three products. The company would only produce these six products in the future. The CEO also prevailed over employees. To solve the problem of employees refusing to accept the new changes, for example, the CEO revised the organizational structure. He relocated employees who were unwilling to change to the new quality management system. The CEO leadership did, however, change during the process. First, he tried to empower the quality manager to build and implement a quality management system. Second, as he said: "In the beginning, I would scold employees when I found out that they were not working as required. Later I felt that this would not solve the problem. So, now I often hold meetings with employees, organize some training and subtly 'brainwash' the employees" (CEO).

According to the marketing manager: "The CEO led by example. For example, the company stipulated last year that smoking should not be allowed in the work area. The CEO is very addicted to cigarettes, but he never smoked in the company again. We gradually feel that we can do it, too"

5.6.3 The effect of authoritarian leadership on organizational learning during the internationalization process

In terms of the impact of leadership, the outcomes of the three key events are presented in Table 5.6.5. The outcomes are focused on four aspects: performance, strategic decisions, competitive advantage and management style and leadership. There are two findings which need to be highlighted. Firstly, the three key events happened in the same period, so it is difficult to separate the outcomes of the three events, especially Events 2 (gaining an important customer in Japan) and 3 (cooperating with a German company). Secondly, section 5.6.2 showed that the CEO showed his ability to delegate aspects in which he had less confidence to the quality manager. Moreover, he no longer enforced the implementation of the quality management system by simply prevailing over employees (as seen in Events 2 and 3). Through organizational learning during the company's internationalization, therefore, the leadership of the CEO improved.

Table 5.6.5 The effect of leadership on organizational learning during the internationalization process (2016-2019).

Outcomes \ Events	Performance	Strategic decisions	Competitive advantages	Management and leadership
Event 1: Terminating cooperation with the French company (2017-2018)	Returned all capital invested by the French company. In 2018, the company's losses exceeded 5 million U.S. dollars	Joint venture was not a good way for the company. Increasing products' competitive advantages		
Event 2: Gaining an important customer in Japan (2018-2019)	Gained the order from the Japanese customer	Decreasing product categories	More refined product quality	Authoritarian leadership had changed. Improved quality management system
Event 3: Cooperating with a German company (2018-	Total sales in 2019 reached the highest since the company was	As the European market is relatively stable, the company's	Became an industry leader in three major	Authoritarian leadership had changed. Completed quality

2019)	founded	next goal is to focus on the US market. '3+3 products' strategy	products	management system. Revised the organizational structure

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the within-case findings for five cases that have shown authoritarian leadership. The within-case findings included leadership styles, the influence of authoritarian leadership on organizational learning during three key internationalization events and the outcomes of the impact of leadership in each case. In the next Chapter, the within- cases findings of three cases showing empowering leadership are discussed.

Chapter 6 Within-case findings (empowering leadership cases)

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the within-case findings of a further three cases, all of which highlighted empowering leadership. The structure of this chapter is the same as Chapter 5, with the data from each case being displayed in the context of three key internationalization events from the period 2016-2019, as identified from interviews conducted with individuals from each firm. The leadership styles in each case will be described, as well as the effect of leadership on organizational learning during the firms' internationalization process.

The findings of each case will be presented according to three themes:

A. CEO leadership style

B. How does empowering leadership influence the organizational learning process?

C. Outcomes of the effect of leadership on organizational learning during the internationalization process.

Each case will be analyzed according to the following structure. First, the leadership styles presented in each case, as identified through the responses of the interviewees, will be discussed. Then, the influence of leadership on organizational learning in the internationalization process will be presented in the context three key events related to the internationalization of each firm. These key events will be discussed in chronological order. Finally, the effect of leadership on organizational learning for each key event will be analyzed.

6.2 Empowering leadership: Case F

6.2.1 CEO leadership style

Evidence was gathered from interviews with the CEO, marketing director and international marketing manager. The CEO encouraged employees to express their opinions and ideas and promoted collaborative decision making. Every year, the company made a plan, with every department discussing its departmental plan and making suggestions for the company, as a contribution to the final plan, through departmental meetings. Following these meetings, the CEO met with managers to discuss the feasibility of the departmental plans and formulate the overall plan for the company. Furthermore, the CEO was willing to share power with others. The CEO stated that: "I think a leader who knows how to sharing can take the company further." He thus gave every manager the power to realize their department's vision. The international marketing manager said that: "The CEO will not interfere too much in department management and business. He always gives us enough space to work hard, according to our ideas."

This behavior demonstrates the CEO's empowering leadership, with an emphasis on the delegation of decision making, the provision of autonomy, the encouragement of personal initiative and support for development (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014; Kim & Beehr, 2020). All evidence is presented in Table 6.2.1.

Table 6.2.1 Empowering leadership in Case F

Empowering leadership	Quotations	
	CEO	Managers
Delegation of decision making	"When formulating the company's strategy, I would ask each department to list the problems that existed in the execution of each department, in the past year, and to itemize all the suggestions they thought were feasible." "Every department must participate in the formulation of the strategy. I want every part of the company to recognize the strategy we have developed together"	"Our company has a plan every year. Every department will provide their plans first, and the CEO and other senior staff will only verify whether these plans are reasonable and feasible. Normally, they seldom make changes to our plans" (Marketing director) "The CEO is willing to listen to our suggestions, and he will also discuss with us." (International marketing manager) "If we cannot make a decision, we will ask help from the marketing director first, and then we may discuss it with the CEO together." (International marketing manager)
Providing autonomy	"I hope to separate the roles of CEO and chairman. But it is difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises to do this. The company now has an executive vice president, and I am gradually transferring the responsibility of the CEO to him." "I think the team is very important. My personal strength is very weak. Therefore, I'd like share power with all employees"	"The CEO will not interfere too much in department management and business. He always gives us enough space for us to work hard, according to our ideas." (International marketing manager)
Encouraging personal initiative	"I know that, in most SMEs, the boss explores the market themself. But it may be because of my personality. I have rarely participated in marketing. The marketing team of the company is responsible for that."	
Development support	"I gave some of the shares to the company's management team because I think that a leader who knows how to share can take the company further."	"The CEO is a very humane leader in management; he pays attention to the personal development of each of our employees" (Marketing director)

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher

6.2.2 How does empowering leadership influence the organizational learning process?

Since the company's main products can have a share of the domestic market of up to 40% to 50%, the company's main target for market development in recent years has been overseas markets. The company has a three-step plan for international business. The first step is to enter the Southeast Asia market, because the barriers to entry there are lower than in the domestic market. The second step is to enter the EU and USA markets, with the improvement of the company's product quality. The third step is to ensure that the company's international business sales share exceeds the domestic business sales share. At the time of the interviews, the company had completed the first two steps of this strategy and was working to complete the third step. The influence of leadership on the company's organizational learning during the process of internationalization will be analyzed in the context of the following three key events, as identified from interviews with the CEO and two marketing managers: entering the global procurement system of an important customer in the EU (2010-2016), entering the Iranian market (2018) and expanding the business into the food industry (2018). The following sections discuss the learning process involved with each event and analyze how empowering leadership influenced the learning process in the internationalization events, in chronological order.

6.2.2.1 Event 1: Entering the global procurement system of an important customer in the EU (2010-2016)

The first key event identified by the CEO and international marketing manager was entering the global procurement system of an important customer in the EU. This customer was a top pharmaceutical company. In 2010, the company cooperated with the customer's Chinese subsidiary. During that cooperation, the marketing employees found that the customer had a global procurement system, meaning that, if the company could enter that system, then other subsidiaries of the customer company, in various countries, could order products from them. Otherwise, only the Chinese subsidiary could cooperate with them in the future. Therefore,

in 2010, the company decided to enter into the aforementioned global procurement system.
Organizational learning behavior and leadership in relation to this key event are presented
in Table 6.2.2.

Table 6.2.2 The influence of empowering leadership on the organizational learning process of Company F in relation to Event 1

Learning process		Quotations	Empowering leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market knowledge	"In fact, we know that the European market, especially with such a large company, has very high entry barriers. **I support the marketing department to keep trying, keep trying, it doesn't matter if you don't see results in a short time.** The company invested a lot in the early stages to develop the European market, and a lot of investment was to understand the market and understand the needs of customers" (CEO). "The quality of our products can be said to be indistinguishable from those of European and American companies. Through previous cooperation with overseas customers, we have learned that, for example, the price of one of our products in the European and American markets is four to eight times that of the domestic market. **Therefore, we are determined to enter the global procurement system of this company**" (International marketing manager).	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making.
	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"For a long time, China's pharmaceutical technology has been relatively backward. But, in the past ten years, Chinese pharmaceutical companies have continuously improved their technology and we are now fully capable of making products of the same quality as European and American companies, at lower prices. However, European and American customers have not paid much attention to us." (CEO).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	Employees in marketing department	"I know the marketing department's struggle to get this company as our customer is a tortuous one. Since the company's domestic market is relatively stable, **I have not been involved in the international business of the marketing department**" (CEO).	The CEO provided autonomy
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge	From the employees in marketing department	"After we reported to the marketing director and the CEO, **we began the task of applying to enter the customer's global procurement system**" (International marketing manager).	The CEO provided autonomy and encouraged personal

transfer	to the marketing director to the CEO		initiative
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"It took a lot of effort for the procurement team of the Chinese branch of our client to put us into the procurement system of the Chinese branch. At that time, we thought that, after becoming the supplier of the customer's Chinese branch, we could automatically join the customer's global procurement system. **However, it's not as we thought. So, we adjusted our application work in time**" (International marketing manager).	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"In 2016, when the client's head office came to audit, it audited all our products in accordance with the European pharmaceutical industry standards and found many of our problems. For example, our product production records are not perfect, and the production process is not standardized enough" (International marketing manager).	
Vicarious learning	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"Our customers have made many suggestions for our new plant construction and equipment layout, and we have also imitated many of their practices in production management" (CEO).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	Marketing department and the CEO	"I have always felt that a good company must pay attention to the demands of its customers if it wants to make progress. **So, every time the marketing department reports the demands of customers to me, and there is a need for other departments to cooperate, I always give them support**" (CEO).	The CEO delegated decision making and provided development support
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From the employees in the marketing department to the marketing director to the CEO and other	"We report to the CEO the parts that require the cooperation of other departments, and, with the support of the CEO, **we carry out change actions with other departments**" (International marketing manager).	The CEO provided development support and autonomy

	employees		
Organizational memory			
In non-human bin	New department	"**After discussing with me, the marketing director decided to set up a separate international marketing department in the marketing department**" (CEO).	The CEO delegated decision making and provided development support
	Production management system	"**In accordance with the requirements of our customers and with the support of our CEO**, we have improved our production process and completed production records" (International marketing manager).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

Initially, the company lacked market knowledge and market entry internationalization knowledge. The company was not familiar with the EU market. Moreover, although Company F could provide cost-effective and high-quality products, it was still difficult for the company to open the European market and gain the favor of customers. Therefore, the employees in the marketing department decided to apply to enter the global procurement system of their previous EU customer, to further develop the global market. The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making in the first round of knowledge acquisition. Because the CEO provided autonomy, employees in the marketing department were the key actors in the first round of knowledge interpretation. After reporting to the CEO, the marketing department initiated an application to join the EU customer's procurement system. Therefore, due to the CEO providing autonomy and encouraging personal initiative, knowledge transfer became a bottom-top process, from the employees to the marketing director to the CEO.

Company F previously thought that, if it joined the procurement list of the customer's Chinese branch, it could automatically join the customer's global procurement system, but the company was still required to receive a series of audits from the headquarters of the EU customer. Through experiential learning and vicarious learning, Company F gained international enterprise internationalization knowledge, to meet the requirements of entering the global procurement system. In the second round of the knowledge acquisition process, the CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making to employees in terms of knowledge acquisition. In order to meet the customer's requirements, other departments, such as the production department, needed to participate in this event. Employees in the marketing department received support from the CEO in the knowledge interpretation process, so that these employees and the CEO were key actors in the second round of knowledge interpretation. Due to the CEO providing autonomy, the knowledge transfer process was from employees in the marketing department to the CEO and other employees.

In terms of organizational memory, due to the CEO delegating decision making, the marketing director decided to create an international marketing department to deal with the

company's international business. Moreover, with leadership from the marketing department, the company revised its production management system, based on the customer's demands, and this was inseparable from the support of the CEO.

6.2.2.2 Event 2: Entering the Iranian market (2018)

The second key event identified by the marketing director and international marketing manager was entering the Iranian market. The marketing director stated that: "Because of European and American sanctions on Iran, many Iranian companies cannot find suitable suppliers from Europe and the United States." The company had no plans to develop markets in the Middle East but, in 2018, the Iranian customers found the company at an exhibition and provided large orders. Organizational learning behavior and leadership in relation to this key event are presented in Table 6.2.3.

Table 6.2.3 The influence of empowering leadership on the organizational learning process of Company F in relation to Event 2

Learning process		Quotations	Empowering leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Noticing and searching	Market knowledge	"Last year, an Iranian client came to us at an exhibition in Europe. We learned that, due to the sanctions imposed by many European and American countries on Iran, it is difficult for many Iranian companies to find suitable suppliers in the European and American markets" (Marketing director).	The CEO provided autonomy to marketing department
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	Employees in the international marketing department	"We thought that this is a good opportunity for the company to enter the Iranian market. **Therefore, we established contacts with the Iranian customer**" (International marketing manager).	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making.
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From employees of the international marketing department to the marketing director	**"I only told the marketing director about our decision to expand into the Iranian market"**	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making.
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market knowledge	"In the process of cooperating with customers in Iran, we found that a big problem is foreign exchange settlement. China's foreign exchange settlement in Iran can only be handled by designated banks, and they required many documents, which is not the same as normal foreign exchange settlement. Moreover, the entire settlement cycle is very long. It takes two months for the bank's review cycle alone. We have never encountered such a situation before; we can only try to deal with it" (Marketing director).	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making.

	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"Since the company had just recruited several employees to the international marketing department, and I had just been promoted to become a manager, we were very confused, especially when dealing with the Iran market, which we were very unfamiliar with" (International marketing manager). "Since all the employees in our department are women, it is not very safe for them to visit customers, especially in the Iranian market" (International marketing manager).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	Employees in the international marketing department	"During the first time working with an Iranian company, I was fumbling, with all the staff in our department, to deal with all the problems" (International marketing manager).	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making.
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	Between the employees in international marketing department	"When we encounter problems, colleagues in our department discuss with each other to find solutions" (International marketing manager).	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making.
Organizational memory			
In human bin	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	**Our department has adjusted the management method; each person is responsible for different market areas, and I do not interfere too much in the specific business.** When there is a problem that they can't solve, I will do my best to help them, and if I can't solve it, we will find the marketing director for help" (International marketing manager).	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making.

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

The employees in the international marketing department, while attending an exhibition, noticed that, due to the sanctions imposed by many European and American countries on Iran, it is a good opportunity for the company to expand into the Iranian market. The employees in the marketing department were key actors in the first round of knowledge interpretation. After informing the marketing director, the international marketing department established contact with an Iranian customer. The first round of knowledge transfer was therefore from the employees in the international marketing department to the marketing director.

Due to the lack of market knowledge and international enterprise internationalization knowledge, the company encountered problems during the cooperation. The Iranian foreign exchange settlement process is different from that of other international markets. The international marketing manager stated that: "There is only one bank that can conduct foreign exchange settlement between China and Iran, but this bank requires various documents from both of us in order to carry out this foreign exchange settlement. The entire process was also different from the standard foreign exchange settlement. The Iranian company first needed to put the money on the bank's platform before we shipped goods. After receiving the bill of lading, they went to the bank to apply for the bank to send the money to us. However, the bank needed to conduct an audit first, and the process was very long. The audit process took about two months. Because this was the first time in our cooperation, we did not know the situation and did not prepare funds. Their orders were large, which had a certain impact on the company's cash flow."

Moreover, because the international marketing department had just been established, the manager and employees were dealing with a period of adaption. The company was learning from practice and the key actors in second-round knowledge interpretation were employees in the international marketing department. In the second round of the learning process, knowledge only transferred between employees in the international marketing department. Organizational memory was, therefore, mainly stored within the international marketing department. It was from experience of this event that the international marketing department

developed its management approach. The CEO provided employees with full autonomy and delegated decision making to them for the duration of the event. His empowering leadership meant that the CEO did not participate in this event.

6.2.2.3 Event 3: Expanding the business into the food industry (2018-2019)

The third key event identified by the CEO, marketing director and international marketing manager was the expansion of the business into the food industry. The international marketing manager stated that:

"Some food additives are the same things as the pharmaceutical excipients that we are producing. The demand for food additives is much higher than the demand for pharmaceutical excipients. Therefore, if the company can successfully enter the food industry, the company's international sales will soon reach the goal (50% of total sales)."

Organizational learning behavior and leadership in this key event are presented in Table 6.2.4.

Table 6.2.4 The influence of empowering leadership on the organizational learning process of Company F in relation to Event 3

Learning process		Quotations	Empowering leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Noticing and searching	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"At the beginning, we were inspired by a colleague in the marketing department. When he contacted some pharmaceutical companies, he found that many pharmaceutical companies were also involved in some business in the food industry and veterinary drug industry. We compared our existing products to see if they had applications in international food companies. The food industry's demand for a product is far greater than the pharmaceutical industry's consumption, so our export volume can easily be increased" (International marketing manager) "Because the technical production requirements of food accessories are lower than those of pharmaceutical accessories and the demand for food accessories is far greater than that of pharmaceutical excipients, the company can focus on the food accessories market to open up the European and American markets" (Marketing director). "Our department is already applying for some certifications in accordance with relevant requirements, such as FSSC22000. We have passed the preliminary sample certification" (International marketing manager)	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making.
Experiential learning	Technological knowledge	"The production of food accessories requires some changes to our existing production system and production process" (Marketing director)	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	Employees in the international marketing department	"We thought that it is a perfect opportunity to expand the company's international sales and quickly reach our department goals" (International marketing manager). "**Colleagues in the international market department looked up the relevant requirements for the food department if the company wants to enter the food market.** We need to achieve some new certifications, such as FSSC certification" (Marketing director).	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making.
Knowledge transfer			

Path of knowledge transfer	Form the employees in the international marketing department to managers and the CEO	"They reported their plan to me during the company-wide meeting. I was very pleased with their ideas, so I encouraged them to implement" (CEO).	The CEO provided autonomy and encouraged personal initiative
Organizational memory			
In non-human bin	Production process for food accessories	"We have made some adjustments in production indicators and processes, as required" (CEO).	The CEO supported development

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

The marketing department noticed that many pharmaceutical companies were involved in the food industry and thought this might be an opportunity for the company to rapidly increase overseas sales. The company lacked technological and market entry internationalization knowledge in relation to the food industry. Although product quality standards in the food industry are not as high as those in the pharmaceutical industry, the company did not know the specific production standards of food additives and did not have the product quality certification required by the American market. Through research and experiential learning, employees in the international department gained the required knowledge. Therefore, the main actors in knowledge interpretation were employees in the international marketing department, because the CEO had provided autonomy and had delegated decision making. Due to the CEO's empowering leadership, the knowledge transfer process was from bottom (employees in the international marketing department) to top (CEO). In terms of organizational memory, the company had passed the preliminary sample certification of FSSC22000[2], but this event was not complete at the time of interviewing.

6.2.3 The effect of leadership on organizational learning in the internationalization process

The impact and outcomes of leadership in the context of three key events are listed in Table 6.5. The outcomes have been described in the context of four aspects: performance, strategic decisions, competitive advantages and management style and leadership. With the help of empowering leadership, the aim of the three events was to increase the company's overseas sales, and good results were obtained. However, the first and third events were relatively long-term. It took the company six years to gain entry to the customer's global procurement system and after more than a year the company has still not achieved full FSSC22000 certification.

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[2] FSSC 22000 is a Food Safety Management Certification Scheme, managed by Foundation FSSC 22000 and governed by an independent board of stakeholders that consists of representatives from several sectors of the food industry. FSSC 22000 is used to control food safety risks.

Table 6.2.5 The effect of leadership on organizational learning in the internationalization process (2016-2019).

Outcomes / Events	Performance	Strategic decisions	Competitive advantages	Management and leadership
Event 1: Entering the global procurement system of an important customer in the EU (2010-2016)	The company's three products entered the customer's global procurement system The customer's French, Indian and Pakistani branches had placed orders in every quarter of 2019.	Entering the customer's global procurement system to establish a more stable relationship with customers.	The company's products can reach European and American industry quality standards, at lower prices.	Standardized production process and recording system Built the international marketing department
Event 2: Entering the Iranian market (2018)	Rapid growth of the company's international business, with an annual growth rate of 30%.	The Middle East market may be an opportunity due to the international political situation.		
Event 3: Expanding business into the food industry (2018-2019)	Passed the preliminary sample certification of FSSC22000	Entering the food industry Planning to build overseas subsidiaries		Production process for food accessories

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

6.3 Empowering leadership: Case G

6.3.1 CEO leadership style

According to interviews with the CEO, vice president and marketing manager, the CEO encouraged employees to express their opinions and ideas and share power with other managers and employees. As the marketing manager stated: "The CEO hopes that we, as managers, can provide information to every employee. He believes that everyone's opinions will become important when employees have the same amount of information as us. As managers, we cannot consider all issues."

The CEO was willing to grant autonomy to others. For example, the CEO respected the style of management of foreign employees in an overseas subsidiary and gave them equity incentives. The vice president said that young employees, in particular, need more freedom, to enable them to develop new ideas, and so the company had always tried to give them this freedom. Such behavior demonstrates the CEO's empowering leadership, with an emphasis on delegating decision making, providing autonomy, encouraging personal initiative and supporting development (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014; Kim & Beehr, 2020). All relevant evidence is listed in Table 6.3.1.

Table 6.3.1 Empowering leadership in Case G

Empowering leadership	Quotations	
	CEO	Managers
Delegation of decision making	"I am willing to discuss with my staff, compare everyone's suggestions and draw a conclusion."	"The CEO is willing to listen to our suggestions. We are more willing to encourage them to put forward their ideas." (Vice president)
Providing autonomy	"Regarding the management of overseas teams, I respect their original management model. I will also give them equity incentives." "I think the overseas market is for the overseas team to develop; the mainland team does not need to interfere too much with them"	"Our company is small. What we can provide to our employees is a higher degree of freedom. If the KPI requirements are too strict, it is very easy to cause employees to leave." (Vice president) "Our overseas business is independently responsible through our overseas teams" (Marketing manager)
Encouraging personal initiative	"In fact, all our decisions are based on market demand. I believe that every employee can perceive the market demand. Therefore, I also believe that employees can get their job done in their own way."	"The CEO hopes that we, as managers, can pass information to every employee. This is because we believe that, when employees have the same amount of information as us, everyone's opinions will become important. As managers, we cannot consider all issues." (Marketing manager)
Development support	"I am willing to help employees solve their difficulties, whether in work or life"	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

6.3.2 How does empowering leadership influence the organizational learning process?

Three key events that happened over three years, from 2016 to 2019, were identified from interviews with the CEO, vice president and marketing manager. These were entering the Hong Kong and Southeast Asia markets (2016), establishing an overseas office in North America (2017) and obtaining an overseas export broadband license (2018). The following sections discuss the learning process related to each event and analyze how empowering leadership influences the learning process in relation to internationalization events, in chronological order.

6.3.2.1 Event 1: Entering the Hong Kong and Southeast Asia markets (2016)

The first event, identified by the CEO and marketing manager, was entering the Hong Kong and Southeast Asia markets. When the company began to expand overseas, it chose Hong Kong as its first step. The CEO explained: "Because our industry needs to apply for local operating licenses in different countries and regions. Although Hong Kong also requires a different operating license from the mainland, we chose Hong Kong as the first step. Because the market and culture of Hong Kong are very similar to those of the mainland and Hong Kong has stronger links with foreign markets. The Hong Kong market was a good opportunity for us to start internationalization."

Therefore, the company began to enter the Hong Kong market in 2016. During the company's experimentation, the CEO learned of a team within a Hong Kong company that was very experienced in handling overseas business and R&D. After discussion with the company's shareholders, the CEO acquired the entire team from that Hong Kong company and established a Hong Kong subsidiary. In the same year, the Hong Kong subsidiary led the company's entry into the Southeast Asia market. Organizational learning behavior and leadership in relation to this key event are presented in Table 6.3.2.

Table 6.3.2 The influence of empowering leadership on the organizational learning process of Company G in relation to Event 1

Learning process		Quotations	Empowering leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"None of the top executives in our company had extensive experience in handling overseas business" (CEO) "We were confused at the beginning and didn't know how to expand into an overseas market. Therefore, I set my sights on the Hongkong market, which is a special market closely linked to the mainland market and like overseas markets" (CEO). "When we first tried to enter the foreign market, the whole process was not successful. It was difficult for us to gain the trust of customers in a short period of time" (CEO).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"I think the most important thing for companies, to develop overseas markets, is to find a suitable team" (CEO). "I can feel that, compared with the company on the mainland of China, foreign companies trust the company in Hong Kong more. The company could not give our domestic employees enough time to learn international knowledge and build trust with overseas customers" (CEO).	
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From the CEO to shareholders	"After discussing with shareholders, I acquired the entire team and established a Hong Kong subsidiary" (CEO).	
Knowledge acquisition			
Grafting	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"This Hong Kong team is a mature marketing team and R&D team, and the employees are all foreigners" (Vice president). "**The development of our European and American markets is mainly carried out by the Hong Kong team.** The Hong Kong team not only knows how to develop the market and how to enter the market, but also has a	

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		lot of market resources" (Vice president).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	The Hong Kong team	"In fact, when the company first started to internationalize, I didn't know much about international business. **All decisions were made by the Hong Kong team.**" (Vice president).	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making to the Hong Kong team.
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From the Hongkong team to the CEO	"The Hong Kong team regularly reports their planning and implementation progress to me" (CEO).	The CEO provided autonomy to the Hong Kong team.
Organizational memory			
In human bin	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"The Hong Kong team has systematically introduced to us several related processes of foreign market development, which is also a learning opportunity for our domestic employees" (Vice president).	The CEO provided autonomy to the Hong Kong team
	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"**It is necessary to rely on the Hong Kong team to continue to develop overseas markets and let professional people handle professional matters. The team on the mainland does not need to participate and interfere with the Hong Kong team too much**" (CEO). "**The Hong Kong team has its own manager**, probably because they are all foreign employees, and the relationship between their colleagues is simpler and KPI-oriented. Compared with domestic employees, it is easier to manage" (Vice president)	
In non-human bin	Overseas offices	"The Southeast Asian market is a big market. We have also established offices in Thailand and Singapore under the arrangement of the Hong Kong team" (Marketing manager).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

Initially, the company lacked international knowledge related to market entry and market knowledge about Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. The CEO said:

"When we first tried to enter the foreign market, the whole process was not successful. It was difficult for us to gain the trust of customers in a short period of time. I can feel that, compared with the company on the mainland of China, foreign companies trust the company in Hong Kong more. The company could not give our domestic employees enough time to learn international knowledge and build trust with overseas customers"

Therefore, the CEO acquired the entire foreign operations and R&D team from a Hong Kong company. In the first round of knowledge acquisition/interpretation/transfer, the CEO made unilateral decisions, deciding to enter the Hongkong market first and acquire the Hongkong team, rather than show empowering leadership (see highlighted quotations). The knowledge was only transferred within the board of directors.

The Hong Kong team included approximately 30 foreign employees and all of them had rich experience of international business. The empowering leadership of the CEO had an influence on the second round of knowledge interpretation and transfer. Due to the CEO granting full autonomy to the Hong Kong team, the Hong Kong team played the main role in the second round of knowledge interpretation. Moreover, the knowledge transfer process was bottom-top in nature, specifically from the employees in the Hong Kong team to the CEO. In terms of organizational memory, the Hongkong team led the company into the Southeast Asia market and built an office in Thailand. The company also stored international enterprise and market entry internationalization knowledge in the 'human bin'. Because the CEO provided autonomy, market entry internationalization knowledge resided with not only the CEO, but also all employees.

6.3.2.2 Event 2: Establishing an overseas office in North America (2017)

The second event, identified by the CEO, vice president and marketing manager, was the establishment of the overseas office in North America. With the company having entered the

Hong Kong and Southeast Asia market, the management team had already learnt that hiring a mature overseas marketing team was a good strategy for entering a new market. In order to enter the North American market, the company hired approximately ten local employees to build an overseas office in North America. Organizational learning behavior and leadership in relation to this key event are presented in Table 6.3.3.

Table 6.3.3 The influence of empowering leadership on the organizational learning process of Company G in relation to Event 2

Learning process		Quotations	Empowering leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"Through the acquisition of the Hong Kong team, I am more certain that customers prefer to trust locals" (CEO).	
	Market knowledge	"In terms of network construction technology, our company can reach the top five in the world. Therefore, our company has no shortcomings compared with European and American companies in terms of technology. But we are too unfamiliar with the North American market" (Vice president).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"Due to the different cultural background between us and our customers, we do not have so much time to train our employees and can only find suitable overseas teams to develop and maintain the international market. Therefore, hiring local employees would be a good choice" (CEO).	
Knowledge acquisition			
Grafting	Localization internationalization knowledge	"**The North American team proposed to me that they could establish strategic partnerships with local companies of the same type as ours.** Because our company is an internet company many infrastructures and network lines can be shared, and resources in different regions can also be shared. With the efforts of the North American team, we have established strategic partnerships with six companies in the United States" (CEO).	
Vicarious learning	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"**Our overseas employees also learned a lot from our strategic partners**, such as on judging the future development trend of industry technology from the main direction and learning their business operation model." (Vice president)	The CEO delegated decision making and encouraged personal initiative
Knowledge interpretation			

Actors involved in interpretation	Employees in the North American team	"**Our North American team is responsible for all business in the North American market**" (CEO).	The CEO provided autonomy to the North American team
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From the employees in the North American team to the CEO and domestic employees	"In our weekly meeting, **the North American team always reports on their progress and their experience with domestic employees. They often provided some useful suggestion**, such as registering our own trademark in the overseas market" (Marketing manager).	The CEO encouraged personal initiative
Organizational memory			
In human bin	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"**It is very important for the foreign team to have a sense of belonging**, to ensure the stability of our overseas team. I am also learning in the process" (CEO). "**The CEO has always believed that, if we manage or restrict these foreign employees too strictly, they are likely to leave. Therefore, the CEO has always shown trust in employees.** But, for me, I think the company should have more control over the overseas team" (Vice president).	The CEO provided autonomy and encouraged personal initiative
	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"With the North American team's lead, we have signed strategic partnership agreements with six companies, sharing the cloud network infrastructure, which significantly reduces the company's cost" (Vice president).	
In non-human bin	Registered trademark	"We have registered our own trademark in the North American market" (Marketing manager)	The CEO provided autonomy and development support
	Overseas office	"We built the North American office" (CEO).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

This event is similar to Event 1. In the beginning, the company lacked internationalization and market knowledge. In Event 2, the CEO learnt from entering the Hong Kong market, so he hired approximately ten local employees in North America, who worked in the broadband industry. In the first round of knowledge acquisition/interpretation, the CEO made unilateral decisions, rather than show empowering leadership (see highlighted quotations). After the CEO had built the North American office, however, he provided autonomy and delegated decision making to the North American team, in order to acquire the necessary knowledge. Therefore, the North American team was the main actor in the second round of knowledge interpretation. With the influence of empowering leadership, the direction of the knowledge transfer process was mainly from the North American office to the CEO and domestic employees. In terms of organizational memory, led by the North American office, the company built a strategic partnership with six overseas companies and registered a trademark.

6.3.2.3 Event 3: Obtaining an overseas export broadband license (2016-2018)

The third event, identified by the CEO and marketing manager, was obtaining an overseas export broadband license. the marketing manager stated that: "The Chinese communications market is not an open market. So, if we want to achieve real-time links with foreign networks, the company has to face more government control, not more technical difficulties."

According to the requirements of the Chinese Government, if the company wants to synchronize the domestic cloud network with a foreign cloud network in real-time, the company must apply for an overseas export broadband license. The company was granted the license in 2018. Organizational learning behavior and leadership in relation to this key event are listed in Table 6.3.4.

Table 6.3.4 The influence of empowering leadership on the organizational learning process of Company G in relation to Event 3

Learning process		Quotations	Empowering leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Noticing and searching	Market knowledge	"The Chinese communications market is not an open market. So, if we want to achieve real-time links with foreign networks, the company must face many difficulties from the Government." (Marketing manager) **"We checked the relevant legal documents and found that we need to become a member of the China Cross-border Data Alliance first and obtain the overseas export broadband license before we can realize the link between overseas data and domestic data"** (Marketing manager).	The CEO provided autonomy to the marketing department
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	Marketing department	"In the process of the company's internationalization, our department is not responsible for overseas business. However, due to our industry sensitivity, **our department always pays attention to relevant domestic and foreign policies, laws, and regulations, to ensure that the company conducts business in compliance with laws and regulations**." (Marketing manager).	The CEO provided autonomy to the marketing department
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From employees in the marketing department to the CEO.	**"The relevant knowledge is collected and sorted out by our department first. We make the plan and send the plan to the CEO for confirmation"** (Marketing manager).	The CEO provided autonomy to the marketing department
Organizational memory			
In non-human bin	The overseas export broadband license	"We finally got the overseas export broadband license in 2018, which is a very important thing in the process of the company's internationalization" (Marketing manager).	The CEO provided autonomy to the marketing department

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

The marketing department noticed that the company lacked the market knowledge required to obtain the license when it began internationalization. From 2016 to 2018, the company learnt, from observation and research, the requirements for a license. Due to the CEO providing autonomy, the employees in the marketing department obtained everything required from the Government and received training from the Government. Therefore, the employees in the marketing department were the main actors in knowledge interpretation and the related internationalization knowledge was transferred from bottom (employees in the marketing department) to top (the CEO). For organizational memory, the company successfully achieved the overseas export license with the efforts of employees in marketing department.

6.3.3 The effect of leadership on organizational learning in the internationalization process

Outcomes from the impacts of leadership, in relation to three key events, are listed in Table 6.3.5. The outcomes mainly relate to four aspects: performance, strategic decisions, competitive advantages and management style and leadership. The strategic decisions of Event 1 (entering the Hong Kong and Southeast Asia markets) were used in Event 2 (establishing an overseas office in North America). This can be seen as evidence of an organizational learning effect in the company's internationalization process. Moreover, in Events 1and 2, the CEO made unilateral decisions but after hiring a professional team he adopted an empowering leadership approach.

Table 6.3.5 The effect of leadership on organizational learning in the internationalization process (2016-2019).

Outcomes / Events	Performance	Strategic decisions	Competitive advantages	Management and leadership
Event 1: Entering the Hong Kong and Southeast Asia markets (2016)	Entered the Hong Kong and Southeast Asia markets. Established the Hong Kong subsidiary and	Hiring a mature overseas operations team	Mature international operations and R&D team	Empowering leadership had been changed during the event

	Thailand office			
Event 2: Establishing the overseas office in North America (2017)	Established the North American office. Built a strategic partnership with six companies	Real-time link between domestic cloud network and foreign cloud network. Registered own trademark	A mature overseas marketing team	Empowering leadership had been changed during the event
Event 3: Obtaining overseas export broadband license (2016-2018)	Became a member of the China Data Cross-border Alliance		Qualified to assist Chinese companies in realizing data connection overseas and assisted overseas companies in realizing data connection in China	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

6.4 Empowering leadership: Case H

6.4.1 CEO leadership style

Based on interviews with the CEO, administrative manager and international sales manager, the CEO was willing to encourage employees to share their ideas and was also willing to share power with employees. The CEO stated that he was willing to give employees space in which to be creative and share their ideas. The CEO said:

"Our company emphasizes freedom. The company allows every employee to adopt a challenging attitude. The company didn't have a strict management system, so employees have to be self-motivated. I think that if a company cannot delegate power to employees, there are only two explanations. One is that the employees' ability is insufficient, so that they can merely respond to my request to carry out tasks. The other is that you pay high salaries to retain employees with a good level of ability and let them do what I ask. Our employees are very capable. As a small to medium-sized enterprise, we cannot give them very high salaries. We can only delegate power to them as much as possible and enable them to fulfil their potential."

The CEO also actively promoted some government cooperation projects and provided employees with opportunities to obtain personal honors. Such behavior demonstrates the CEO's empowering leadership, with an emphasis on delegating decision making, providing autonomy, encouraging personal initiative, and supporting development (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014; Kim & Beehr, 2020). Based on the above analysis, the CEO showed empowering leadership. The relevant evidence for this is presented in Table 6.4.1.

Table 6.4.1 Empowering leadership in relation to Case H

Empowering leadership	Quotations	
	CEO	**Managers**
Delegation of decision making	"I think the things we are doing are exciting. What I want to do is educate the market. Therefore, the company provides much space for employees to create their own ideas."	"I will report my decision, or plans, directly to the CEO. All of our offices are fully open, which is convenient for everyone to communicate together and improve everyone's efficiency." (International sales manager)
Providing autonomy	"Our company emphasizes freedom."	"The company's biggest management problem is lacking a management system, which can easily lead to chaos for employees. Employees rely on the volume of the voice of managers to decide the priority of things. However, the CEO is willing to delegate power to employees, and he doesn't think this is a big problem." (Administrative manager)
Encouraging personal initiative	"The company encourages every employee to try what they want to challenge" "The company didn't have a strict management system, so employees have to be self-motivated." "Because everyone thinks that what we are doing now is very interesting, all employees are self-driven."	"I think what we do is interesting, and it also attracts many young people to participate. Everyone works together, with an entrepreneurial mindset." (Administrative manager) "We encourage every employee to work with an entrepreneurial mentality. This is because, if employees need a leader to tell them what to do or a system to constrain them, then they don't want to do anything beyond the boundaries of their work. As leaders, all we must do is hand over a project to a few people and tell them of the timing. How to do it and how to divide the labor needs to be done by the employees." (Administrative manager).
Development support	"We do not have strict commuting hours and employees can allocate their work and living time according to their own situation. We also organize many activities. For example, our whole company went out to play basketball together, last night."	"We have cooperated with the government on many projects in order to allow our employees to obtain a Beijing Hukou[3], obtain technical titles and have a platform on which to publish papers." (Administrative manager) "We give a large part of our profits to our overseas teams, just to make them feel that they are not only employees of the company, but also the owners of the company. We do business together." (Administrative manager)

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

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[3] Hukou is a system of household registration used in mainland China. Hukou is the registration of an individual in the system. A household registration record officially identifies a person as a permanent resident of an area and includes identifying information such as name, parents, spouse and date of birth.

6.4.2 How does empowering leadership influence the organizational learning process?

According to the CEO: "The company aimed at overseas markets when it was first established, because our company is a very 'typical' high-tech company. Domestic buyers are more inclined to buy products that have been accepted by European and American markets, while buyers in European and American markets prefer to try the latest technology. Therefore, it is inevitable for our products to enter more overseas markets."

At the time of the interviews, the company's products had entered the market in more than 40 countries. However, the company did not take sales performance to be the key parameter of overseas markets. The company's goal was to lead market demand through technology. Given this background, three key events that happened in the three-year period from 2016 to 2019 were identified during interviews with the CEO, administrative manager and international sales manager. These were achieving public recognition from a famous American drama production team (2016), entering the Japanese market (2016) and cooperating with top computer software companies (2018). The following sections discuss the learning process in the context of each event and analyze the way in which empowering leadership has influenced the learning process during these internationalization events, in chronological order.

6.4.2.1 Event 1: Achieving public recognition from a famous American drama production team (2016)

The first event identified by the CEO, administrative manager and international sales manager was achieving public recognition from a famous American drama production team. The company sold its products to an American drama production team for the purpose of motion capture to achieve special effects. After the drama won an Emmy Award, in 2016, the drama production team publicly acknowledged the company's products and its technical support during the related interview. After the news reports came out, the company realized it had the opportunity for some publicity. Organizational learning behavior and leadership related to this key event are presented in Table 6.4.2.

Table 6.4.2 The influence of empowering leadership on the organizational learning process of Company H in relation to Event 1

Learning process		Quotations	Empowering leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"In fact, technology is universal, which means that anyone can use it. We can only turn our technology into a tool if we understand the needs of our customers. At that time, an American film and television production company came to us and put forward their demands, hoping to make the special effects in their play more realistic and vivid. So, we developed a set of products according to their requirements and provided follow-up technical guidance services." (CEO). "We didn't know that the company that bought our product used our product to make this TV series. So, when we found out that they thanked us after winning the Emmy Award, our first reaction was to be stunned" (International sales manager).	The CEO provided autonomy to employees in the international sales department
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	Employees in the international sales department	"After an American Film and Television company publicly thanked us, **our marketing staff quickly seized the opportunity to expand the scope of publicity**" (Administrative manager).	The CEO provided autonomy to employees in the international sales department
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From the employees in the international sales department to the CEO and other managers	"**We reported this big news to the CEO and other managers after we had made the publicity plan**" (International sales manager).	The CEO delegated decision making and provided autonomy

Organizational memory			
In human bin	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"As the CEO said, most of our foreign clients find us on their own. We didn't bother to do any publicity. As a company founded by a purely technical team, our sensitivity to the market is relatively weak. **CEOs often feel proud that customers come to us. But, as a senior executive and shareholder of the company, I think we must very urgently attach importance to market development. I've discussed these ideas with the CEO. He encouraged me to try, but I know that he still doesn't care.**" (Administrative manager).	The CEO encouraged personal initiative and provided autonomy

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

This key event was a breaking news for the company. In the beginning, the company lacked market entry internationalization knowledge. Specifically, the company lacked knowledge of how to show its competitive advantages to customers. The international sales manager stated: "We did not know in advance that the production team of this drama bought our equipment, until we saw news reports. We did not know what to do at that time, but we knew that we could not give up this opportunity. Therefore, we formulated a publicity plan, and actively carried out follow-up publicity work immediately."

Because the CEO granted full autonomy to the employees, employees in the international sales department had been able to formulate a publicity plan, and actively implemented it immediately. Therefore, for this event, the employees in the international sales department were the key actors in knowledge interpretation. The knowledge transfer process was from the employees in international sales to the CEO and other managers, indicating a bottom-top process. In terms of organizational memory, the administrative manager, who is also a shareholder and is the board secretary of the company, stated that, from this event, he learnt that the company needed to improve its market sensitivity and strengthen market expansion, instead of waiting for customers. Although the CEO encouraged the administrative manager's idea, as the administrative manager said: "CEOs often feel proud that customers come to us. He does not think this is a big matter. Therefore, it is difficult for me to advance reform of the sales department."

6.4.2.2 Event 2: Entering the Japanese market (2016)

The second event identified by the CEO, administrative manager and international sales manager was entering the Japanese market. Japan's animation industry is well developed and has a high demand for motion capture technology. In the second year after the company had entered the Japanese market (2017), sales in the Japanese market surpassed sales in the U.S. market. Organizational learning behavior and leadership in the context of this key event are presented in Table 6.4.3.

Table 6.4.3 The influence of empowering leadership on the organizational learning process of Company H in relation to Event 2

Learning process		Quotations	Empowering leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Experiential learning	Market knowledge	"The Japanese market is actually a very special market and relatively closed. Especially for our industry, it is difficult for us to register a website in Japan, and we need to apply for many licenses. If our business needs to involve production and sales, it will be more difficult" (International sales manager). "But Japanese customers actually respect their partners very much. For example, once there may have been some technical problems with our product itself. Customers came to us politely to discuss and were willing to pay for us to help them debug" (CEO) "The Japanese market is more difficult for us. In addition to the particularity of the market itself, there are also language problems" (Administrative manager)	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
	Market entry internationalizatio n knowledge	"Due to the closed nature of the Japanese market, **it is difficult for us to directly enter the Japanese market on our own**" (International sales manager).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	Employees in the international sales department and CEO	"**I do not have a clear understanding of specific projects and the expansion of overseas markets, because these things, such as which market to develop into and how to develop, are all determined by themselves**" (CEO). "In fact, the application of VR in Japanese pornography movies has been the most profitable project in recent years. However, the CEO decided that we will never get involved in this part of the business because it is not in line with our company's values" (Administrative manager). "**After some attempts, we decided to enter the Japanese market through agents**" (International sales manager).	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
Knowledge transfer			

Path of knowledge transfer	From the employees in the international sales department to the CEO and other managers	"**We will regularly report our progress in the Japanese market at meetings**" (International sales manager).	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
Organizational memory			
In human bin	Market entry internationalization knowledge	"Our Japanese agent helped us expand into the Japanese market very well. They know the Japanese market better than we do. Without them, it would be difficult for us to enter the Japanese market. **Therefore, we believe that using an agent may be a good way for our company to expand our overseas market**" (International sales manager)	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
	Technological knowledge	"Our customers have given us a lot of feedback on the Japanese market. For example, our sensor housing is difficult to open" (International sales manager). "**All the research and development and improvement of products is actually made by the marketing department and the R&D department together**" (International sales manager).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

As the international sales manager said: "We know that the Japanese market is a huge market for the company, but we did not know how to enter it". The company initially lacked market entry internationalization knowledge and market knowledge. Because the CEO granted the employees autonomy, those in the international sales department decided on the kind of knowledge the company needed to acquire and, on the ways, to acquire such knowledge. The CEO did, however, change his approach to leadership in the knowledge interpretation process (see highlighted quotations). On the one hand, he said:

"The value we hope to pass to employees is not to earn money, but to realize the company's social value: turn technology into a tool and make every employee proud of it."

The CEO therefore unilateral decided that the company's business could not be involved in the porn industry, although this would be a convenient and high profit means for the company to enter the Japanese market. On the other hand, the CEO provided autonomy for employees in the international sales department to enable them to decide how to enter the Japanese market. The international sales manager met the Japanese agent at an exhibition. The company learnt from the agent and from Japanese customers and entered the Japanese market successfully. Because the CEO had empowered employees, the direction of knowledge transfer was from bottom (employees in the international sales department) to top (the CEO and other managers), and organizational memory resided with employees, rather than the CEO.

6.4.2.3 Event 3: Cooperating with top computer software companies (2018)

The third event, identified by the CEO, was cooperating with top computer software companies, in 2018. A top computer software company approached Company H to develop artificial intelligence-related projects. This cooperation gave the CEO inspiration for international company management. The CEO said: "In fact, we have cooperated with many large companies before. At first, we always felt that these giant companies would have more industry insight, more determination, and resources to insist on developing a new direction. However, after much cooperation, we found that these companies are sometimes easier to

sway than us, because they have many departments, and each department has its own performance pressure, so they pay more attention to their own short-term performance. Therefore, I always insist on giving employees a more relaxed working environment and reduce the pressure on performance, so that our company can develop more actively and healthily. However, cooperating with this software company gave me great inspiration. It turns out that a large company with mature management can also have high flexibility and autonomy" (CEO).

Organizational learning behavior and leadership in the context of this key event are listed in Table 6.4.4.

Table 6.4.4 The influence of empowering leadership on the organizational learning process of Company H in relation to Event 3

Learning process		Quotations	Empowering leadership's influence on the learning process
Knowledge acquisition			
Vicarious learning	International enterprise internationalization knowledge	"Cooperating with this client let me see that we can have a closer cooperative relationship with a large enterprise's development department. Giant companies are also very dynamic. Originally, they mainly made PC software, but they are also constantly adjusting their development direction, elevating AR and VR to the current main development direction. I think, as a company with such a large volume, it is a very rare thing to be able to adjust according to the market" (CEO). "In order to solve the confusion of internal management, we imitated the solution of American companies and prioritized all projects. However, there was a problem, and we would have very long meetings debating which project was a higher priority." (Administrative manager).	
Knowledge interpretation			
Actors involved in interpretation	CEO	"I have learned a lot from the American company in terms of internal management and organizational structure" (CEO).	
Knowledge transfer			
Path of knowledge transfer	From the CEO to managers and employees	"After discussing with our managers, we decided to make some changes in management and inform our employees" (CEO).	
Organizational memory			
In human bin	International enterprise	"In cooperation with the customer, I was surprised that, as a large-scale company, it makes flexible responses and adjustments to the market based on a mature management system. This is a tough thing. In order to protect the	

	internationalization knowledge	company's flexibility, our company has not established strict rules and regulations. However, lacking a mature management system also caused many problems. So, I learned a lot about the internal management process and organizational structure from the customer" (CEO).	
In non-human bin	Organizational structure	"We made some adjustment to the organizational structure. Although some employees are not satisfied with the current changes, we are still figuring out how to adjust" (CEO).	
	Management rules	"At this stage, we schedule the time of each employee, to see which tasks he can be responsible for and how much time he has left. All employees still accept multiple leadership but minimize flexible deployment. I know that the pressure on such employees is still relatively high, and we are also actively seeking solutions" (Administrative manager).	

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

In the beginning, the company lacked international enterprise internationalization knowledge. According to the administrative manager: "The CEO is a leader who can delegate authority, so the company's projects are basically the independent responsibility of each team. However, some employees in these teams are overlapped, which leads to the situation where employees often have different projects on their hands. The priority of employees in terms of which project to deal with first depends to a large extent on which team leader wants to be in a hurry and has a loud voice. This leads to confusion in internal management"

On the cooperation with the American software company, the CEO stated: "I was surprised that, as a large-scale company, it makes flexible responses and adjustments to the market, based on a mature management system. This is a tough thing. In order to protect the company's flexibility, our company has not established strict rules and regulations. However, lacking a completed management system also caused many problems. So, I learned a lot about the internal management process and organizational structure from the customer."

Therefore, the CEO, through vicarious learning, tried to imitate the organizational structure and management roles of the software company. The direction of the knowledge transfer process was from the CEO to other managers and employees. During the whole organizational learning process, the CEO showed a strong willingness to adjust the company's management, rather than delegate decision making or provide autonomy for others. Therefore, the CEO was the main actor in knowledge interpretation and the direction of knowledge transfer was from the CEO to other managers and employees. In terms of organizational memory, although some employees were not satisfied with the changes and felt pressure, the CEO nevertheless insisted and tried to make further adjustments.

6.4.3 The effect of leadership on organizational learning in the internationalization process

Outcomes from the impact of leadership during the three key events are listed in Table 6.4.5. The outcomes are assessed according to four aspects: performance, strategic decisions,

competitive advantages and management style and leadership. With reference to Event 1, some changes in the company, such as changing the way of sales, need fully support from the CEO. Although the administrative manager noticed a problem and the CEO empowered to him, the company did not make significant changes on their way of sales, because the CEO did not think this is a big problem for the company. During Event 2, the CEO unilaterally decided that the company could not be involved in the porn industry. He then provided autonomy for employees under his requirement, which showed a change of leadership style. In Event 3, the CEO made decisions and tried, through prevailing over employees, to make adjustments to the company's organizational structure and management rules, which also showed a change of leadership style.

Table 6.4.5 The effect of leadership on organizational learning in relation to the internationalization process (2016-2019).

Outcomes / Events	Performance	Strategic decisions	Competitive advantages	Management and leadership
Event 1: Receiving public recognition from a famous American drama production team (2016)	Cooperated with four film production companies		Cooperation with a top drama production team	
Event 2: Entering the Japanese market (2016)	Sales in the Japanese market exceeded sales in the American market in 2017	Entering the Japanese market relied on agents	The latest technology development trend	Empowering leadership had changed during the event
Event 3: Cooperating with top computer software companies (2018)		The organizational structure and management rules need to be revised		Empowering leadership had changed during the event. Revised organizational structure

Source: Summarized from interviews by the researcher.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented within-case findings for three cases that have demonstrated empowering leadership. The within-case findings have featured leadership styles, the influence of empowering leadership on organizational learning during the internationalization events and the outcomes of the impact of leadership in each case. In the next chapter, the eight cases presented in Chapters 5 and 6 will be analyzed together.

Chapter 7   Cross-case findings

7.1 Introduction

There are two types of companies identified in this research: 1) those with a CEO showing authoritarian leadership; 2) those with a CEO showing empowering leadership. The first group consists of Companies A, B, C, D and E. The second group consists of Companies F, G and H. Cross-case findings from each group and across groups are discussed in this chapter, based on the within-case analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6. Cross-case findings are presented with reference to three issues based on research questions, namely leadership style in the Chinese internationalizing context, the influence of leadership on the international learning process and outcomes from the effect of leadership on the internationalization learning process.

7.2 Case companies with authoritarian leadership

7.2.1 Authoritarian leadership

Based on interviews with the CEOs and key managers, the CEO in Cases A, B, C, D and E showed authoritarian leadership and exhibited behavior such as making unilateral decisions and prevailing over employees. Employees in these companies tended to follow the CEO's decisions. The CEOs in Companies A and B showed benevolence to their employees, thus emphasizing leaders' individualizing and holistic concerning for subordinates (Cheng et al., 2004). The CEO in Company A cared about employees' daily life, especially their personal affairs. Although he always made unilateral decisions, he tried to make employees feel more comfortable through communication with them. The CEO in Company B cared about the development of employees and showed encouragement when they faced difficulties.

The CEOs in Companies C, D, and E showed a high level of benevolence to encourage employees' loyalty and compliance (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). The CEO in Company C

regarded the company as his family and treated employees as family members. Employees also stated that the company had the culture of a family, which made them feel at ease. The CEO in Company D also treated the company as his family, allowing employees to make mistakes and taking care of them and their family. He allowed employees who left to rejoin the company, because he believed they would make the right choice after making a comparison. In return, employees showed trust and respect to the CEO and treated the company as their family. The CEO in Company E tried to protect employees, which was a reason for deciding to terminate a contract with a French company (Event 1 relating to Company E). Employees in Company E believed that the CEO would support their work.

7.2.2 The influence of authoritarian leadership on knowledge acquisition

This section summarizes the types and sources of knowledge found in cases with authoritarian leadership. According to existing research, different categories of knowledge are required by internationalizing companies: technological knowledge, market knowledge, international enterprise internationalization knowledge, localization internationalization knowledge and market entry internationalization knowledge (Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Fletcher et al., 2013). These sources of knowledge are discussed based on Huber's (1991) five ways of sourcing knowledge: congenital learning, experiential learning, vicarious learning, grafting and noticing and searching. The knowledge acquisition process and the ways in which authoritarian leadership influences knowledge acquisition in cases with authoritarian leadership are compared in Table 7.2.1.

With the exception of Event 3 in Case C and Events 1 and 2 in Case D, all cases showed a mixed way to acquire needed knowledge and a mixture of knowledge types. For example, in Event 1 of Case A, the company, through several rounds of knowledge acquisition, used experiential learning, noticing and searching and grafting to acquire market entry internationalization and market knowledge. Moreover, all five of the ways of sourcing knowledge can be seen in five cases' internationalizing events. In Events 1 and 3 in Case C and Event 1 in Case E, the CEO concerned brought his previous experience as a source of congenital learning to the company. Experiential learning was the most popular means of

sourcing, being used in each internationalizing event in the five cases. Grafting was also used by all five case companies. Vicarious learning was only used to acquired one category of knowledge, namely international enterprise internationalization knowledge. In Event 2 of Case A, Event 1 in Case C and Event 3 in Case E, vicarious learning was used to acquire international enterprise internationalization knowledge.

Apart from in Event 3 in Case D and Event 3 in Case E, authoritarian leaders influenced the knowledge acquisition process in internationalization events by making unilateral decisions on both the kind of knowledge that was required, and the means of acquiring needed knowledge. For Event 3 in Case D, the CEO learnt from the failed experience of Event 2 and revised his leadership style to become more empowering, and so did not show authoritarian leadership in the knowledge acquisition process of Event 3. For Event 3 in Case E, after hiring the quality manager, the CEO empowered her to build a quality management system. Therefore, this CEO also did not show authoritarian leadership in knowledge acquisition.

Table 7.2.1 Knowledge acquisition and authoritarian leadership

Case	Event	Sources of knowledge	Types of knowledge	How authoritarian leadership influenced knowledge acquisition
Case A	**Event 1:** Building strategic partnerships with customers in the EU (2016)	Experiential learning	MEIK / MK	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge
		Noticing and searching	MEIK	
		Grafting	MEIK	
	Event 2: Gaining an important customer in America (2017)	Experiential learning	LIK	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge
		Vicarious learning	IEIK	
	Event 3: Establishing a Japanese subsidiary (2019)	Experiential learning	MK / MEIK	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge
		Grafting	MK	
Case B	**Event 1:** Entering the Indian market (2016)	Experiential learning	MEIK	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge
		Noticing and searching	MEIK	
	Event 2: Establishing an overseas office in Latin America (2019)	Experiential learning	MK / MEIK	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge
		Grafting	MEIK	
	Event 3: Cooperating with an American microchip manufacturer to develop new technologies (2019)	Experiential learning	TK / LIK	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge
		Grafting	TK	
Case C	**Event 1:** Cooperating with a top motorcycle company (2016)	Congenital learning	LIK	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge
		Experiential learning	LIK / TK	
		Vicarious learning	IEIK	
	Event 2: Entering the Pakistan market (2017)	Experiential learning	MK / IEIK / MEIK	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge
		Grafting	MK	
		Congenital learning	LIK	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge
		Experiential learning	MK	

	Event 3: Competing with Indian companies in the Southeast Asia market (2016-2019)	Grafting	TK	
Case D	**Event 1:** Gaining the company's first overseas customer in Sudan (2016)	Experiential learning	MEIK	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge
	Event 2: Encountering a scam in the Indonesian market (2018)	Experiential learning	MEIK	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge
	Event 3: Trying to enter the Oman market (2019)	Grafting	MEIK	Due to the CEO changing his leadership style during the internationalization events, authoritarian leadership did not influence knowledge acquisition.
		Experiential learning	MEIK / MK	
Case E	**Event 1:** Terminating cooperation with a French company (2017-2018)	Congenital learning	MEIK	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge
		Experiential learning	IEIK / LIK	
	Event 2: Gaining an important customer in Japan (2018-2019)	Experiential learning	MK	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge
		Noticing and searching	IEIK	
		Grafting	IEIK	
	Event 3: Cooperating with a German company (2018-2019)	Experiential learning	LIK / MEIK	The CEO made unilateral decisions on the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge
		Grafting	LIK	
		Vicarious learning	IEIK	Due to the CEO empowering the quality manager, the quality manager suggested imitating customers' quality management system. Therefore, the authoritarian leadership of the CEO did not influence the company's vicarious learning
IEIK – International enterprise internationalization knowledge; LIK – Localization internationalization knowledge; MEIK – Market entry internationalization knowledge				
MK – Market knowledge				
TK – Technological knowledge				

Source: Developed by the researcher

7.2.3 The influence of authoritarian leadership on knowledge interpretation

The five authoritarian leaders, through making unilateral decisions, had a significant influence on the knowledge interpretation process in each event, except for Event 3 in Case D and Events 2 and 3 in Case E (summarized in Table 7.2.2). Due to the CEO making unilateral decisions without asking others for their opinion, the CEO was the key actor in these events. Moreover, in most events, the CEO played a key role in several rounds of knowledge interpretation. For Event 3 in Case D, the CEO did not show authoritarian leadership. Therefore, the influence of authoritarian leadership was not clear in this event. For Case E, the CEO hired a quality manager during Event 2 and tried to empower her. Therefore, in the second round of knowledge interpretation, on the one hand the authoritarian CEO made the unilateral decision to accept all suggestions from the quality manager, and on the other hand the quality manager joined in the knowledge interpretation process and the CEO showed a mixed leadership style, combining authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership.

Table 7.2.2 Knowledge interpretation and authoritarian leadership

Case	Event	Round of knowledge interpretation	Main actors in knowledge interpretation	How authoritarian leadership influenced knowledge interpretation
Case A	**Event 1:** Building strategic partnerships with customers in the EU (2016)	2	The CEO	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 2: Gaining an important customer in America (2017)	2	The CEO	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 3: Establishing a Japanese subsidiary (2019)	1	The CEO	The CEO made unilateral decisions
Case B	**Event 1:** Entering the Indian market (2016)	1	The CEO	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 2: Establishing the overseas office in Latin America (2019)	1	The CEO	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 3: Cooperating with an American microchip manufacturer to develop new technologies (2019)	1	The CEO	The CEO made unilateral decisions
Case C	**Event 1:** Cooperating with a top motorcycle company (2016)	2	The CEO	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 2: Entering the Pakistan market (2017)	2	The CEO	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 3: Competing with Indian companies in the Southeast Asia market (2016-2019)	2	The CEO	The CEO made unilateral decisions
Case D	**Event 1:** Gaining the company's first overseas customer in Sudan (2016)	1	The CEO	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 2: Encountering a scam in the Indonesian market (2018)	1	The CEO	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 3: Trying to enter the Oman market (2019)	1	The CEO and chief engineer	The CEO changed his leadership style and the chief engineer joined in with the knowledge interpretation process
Case E	**Event 1:** Terminating cooperation with a French company (2017-2018)	2	The CEO	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 2: Gaining an important customer in Japan (2018-2019)	1	The CEO	The CEO made unilateral decisions
		2	The CEO and quality manager	Although the CEO still made the unilateral decision to accept all of the quality manager's suggestions, he empowered the quality

			manager in the knowledge interpretation process
Event 3: Cooperating with a German company (2018-2019)	1	The CEO	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	2	The CEO and quality manager	The CEO empowered the quality manager in the knowledge interpretation process

Source: Developed by the researcher

7.2.4 The influence of authoritarian leadership on knowledge transfer

The influence of authoritarian leadership on knowledge transfer in five cases is summarized in Table 7.2.3. Due to the authoritarian CEO in five cases making unilateral decisions on the knowledge acquisition and interpretation processes, which they transferred to their employees, the direction of knowledge transfer in the five cases was top-down (from the CEO to employees). In Event 3 in Case D and Events 2 and 3 in Case E, although the CEO leadership showed some changes during the events, knowledge transfer was still a top-down process. In Event 3 of Case D, knowledge was transferred from the CEO and chief engineer to employees. In Events 2 and 3 in Case E, knowledge was transferred from the CEO and the quality manager to employees.

Table 7.2.3 Knowledge transfer and authoritarian leadership

Case	Event	Path of knowledge transfer in the domestic company	How authoritarian leadership influenced knowledge transfer
Case A	**Event 1:** Building strategic partnerships with customers in the EU (2016)	From the CEO to domestic managers and employees	The CEO made unilateral decisions and employees followed directions.
	Event 2: Gaining an important customer in America (2017)	From the CEO to domestic employees	The CEO prevailed over employees
	Event 3: Establishing a Japanese subsidiary (2019)	From the CEO to domestic employees	The CEO made unilateral decisions
Case B	**Event 1:** Entering the Indian market (2016)	From the CEO to domestic managers and employees	The CEO made unilateral decisions and employees followed directions.
	Event 2: Establishing the overseas office in Latin America (2019)	From the CEO to managers	Employees followed directions and the CEO prevailed over employees
	Event 3: Cooperating with an American microchip manufacturer to develop new technologies (2019)	From the CEO to domestic managers	The CEO made unilateral decisions
Case C	**Event 1:** Cooperating with a top motorcycle company (2016)	From the CEO to domestic employees	The CEO made unilateral decisions and employees followed directions
	Event 2: Entering the Pakistan market (2017)	From the CEO to employees	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 3: Competing with Indian companies in the Southeast Asia market (2016-2019)	From the CEO to managers	The CEO made unilateral decisions
Case D	**Event 1:** Gaining the company's first overseas customer in Sudan (2016)	From the CEO to domestic managers	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 2: Encountering a scam in the Indonesian market (2018)	From the CEO to the administrative manager	The administrative manager followed the CEO's decisions
	Event 3: Trying to enter the Oman market (2019)	From the CEO and the chief engineer to other employees	The CEO changed his leadership style

Case E	**Event 1:** Terminating cooperation with a French company (2017-2018)	From the CEO to domestic employees	The CEO made unilateral decisions and prevailed over employees.
	Event 2: Gaining an important customer in Japan (2018-2019)	From the CEO and the quality manager to employees	The CEO empowered the quality manager
	Event 3: Cooperating with a German company (2018-2019)	From the CEO and the quality manager to employees	The CEO empowered the quality manager

Source: Developed by the researcher

7.2.5 The influence of authoritarian leadership on organizational memory

Organizational memory can be stored in two types of 'bin' (Tsang, 2018). The human bin includes anything in an individual's mind or memory. The non-human bin exists in many different forms, such as regulations, rules, reports and so on. Table 7.2.4 summarizes organizational memory and the influence of authoritarian leadership in Cases A, B, C, D and E. Because authoritarian leaders tended to make unilateral decisions, the knowledge gained tended to be stored by CEOs, such as in Events 1 and 2 in Case A, Event 3 in Case B, Events 2 and 3 in Case C, Events 1 and 2 in Case D and Events 1, 2 and 3 in Case E. If knowledge needed to be stored by employees, the authoritarian CEO tended to prevail over employees, as seen in Event 2 in Case B and Event 1 in Case C. In terms of the non-human bin, on the one hand, if the company needed to set up a new subsidiary or overseas offices, or to build a new brand, the employees tended to follow the CEO's unilateral decisions, such as in Event 3 in Case A, Event 1 in Case B and Events 1 and 3 in Case C. On the other hand, if the company needed to change rules, the management system or a standard operational procedure, the authoritarian leader not only made unilateral decisions, but also prevailed over employees.

Table 7.2.4 Organizational memory and authoritarian leadership

Case	Event	Organizational memory		How authoritarian leadership influenced organizational memory
Case A	**Event 1:** Building strategic partnerships with customers in the EU (2016)	In human bin	MEIK / IEIK (stored by the CEO and key managers)	The CEO made unilateral decisions
		In non-human bin	New subsidiary / Rules	The CEO prevailed over employees
	Event 2: Gaining an important customer in America (2017)	In human bin	LIK (Stored by the CEO and key managers)	The CEO made unilateral decisions
		In non-human bin	Standard operating procedure	The CEO prevailed over employees
	Event 3: Establishing a Japanese subsidiary (2019)	In human bin	MK / IEIK (Stored by key managers)	Employees followed the CEO's direction
		In non-human bin	New subsidiary	The CEO made unilateral decisions and employees followed his decisions.
Case B	**Event 1:** Entering the Indian market (2016)	In human bin	IEIK (stored by employees in marketing department)	
		In non-human bin	Brand / Production lines / Marketing systems / New department	Employees followed directions
	Event 2: Establishing the overseas office in Latin America (2019)	In human bin	IEIK (stored by all employees) / TK (stored by the CEO)	The CEO prevailed over employees and made unilateral decisions
		In non-human bin	Organizational structure / Management rules for overseas employees	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 3: Cooperating with an American microchip manufacturer to develop new technologies (2019)	In human bin	TK (stored by the CEO)	The event was not finished
		In non-human bin	New products	The event was not finished
Case C	**Event 1:** Cooperating with a top motorcycle company (2016)	In human bin	TK (stored by all employees)	The CEO prevailed over employees in organizational memory

		In non-human bin	Regulatory process	The CEO made unilateral decisions and employees followed directions
	Event 2: Entering the Pakistan market (2017)	In human bin	MEIK (stored by the CEO)	The CEO made unilateral decision
		In non-human bin	New joint venture company and brand in Pakistan	The CEO made unilateral decision
	Event 3: Competing with Indian companies in the Southeast Asia market (2016-2019)	In human bin	TK / IEIK (stored by the CEO)	The CEO made unilateral decisions
		In non-human bin	Mobility policy	The CEO made the unilateral decision and employees followed the decision
Case D	**Event 1:** Gaining the company's first overseas customer in Sudan (2016)	In human bin	MEIK (stored by the CEO)	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 2: Encountering a scam in the Indonesian market (2018)	In human bin	IEIK / MEIK (stored by the CEO)	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 3: Trying to enter the Oman market (2019)	In non-human bin	IEIK / MEIK (stored by employees)	
		In non-human bin	Organizational structure	The CEO made unilateral decisions
Case E	**Event 1:** Terminating cooperation with a French company (2017-2018)	In human bin	IEIK / LIK (stored by the CEO)	The CEO made unilateral decisions
	Event 2: Gaining an important customer in Japan (2018-2019)	In human bin	LIK / IEIK (stored by the CEO)	The CEO made unilateral decisions
		In non-human bin	Qualitative management system / organizational manager	The CEO made unilateral decisions and prevailed over employees
	Event 3: Cooperating with a German company (2018-2019)	In human bin	LIK / IEIK (stored by the CEO)	The CEO made unilateral decisions and prevailed over employees
		In non-human bin	Product categories / increased production equipment / performance appraisal system / quality management system / office environment	The CEO made unilateral decisions and prevailed over employees
IEIK – International enterprise internationalization knowledge; LIK – Localization internationalization knowledge; MEIK – Market entry internationalization knowledge MK – Market knowledge				

| TK – Technological knowledge |

Source: Developed by the researcher

7.2.6 Authoritarian leadership and internationalization outcomes

The outcomes of internationalizing events can be categorized according to five aspects: performance, strategic decisions, competitive advantages, management and leadership. Three outcomes are emphasized here. Firstly, from all 15 events, in addition to four incomplete events (A3, B3, C3 and D3), there were four events in which performance exceed expectations (A2, C2, D1 and E3) and two events (D2 and E1) in which huge losses were incurred by the company because of the CEO making unilateral decisions. Secondly, in terms of management aspects, five companies made adjustments in their management (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C3, D3, E2 and E3). Thirdly, in terms of leadership, the CEO in Cases A, D and E made adjustments to their leadership. In Event 1 in Case A, after the CEO had hired overseas employees and built the subsidiary, he empowered overseas employees, although he still showed authoritarian leadership to domestic employees. In Events 2 and 3 in Case C, after being the victim of a scam in the Indonesian market, the CEO realized that he could not make all decisions by himself and needed to listen to others' suggestions. He tried to let other managers join in the decision process in Event 3 and empower the administrative manager. The administrative manager stated, however, that she was not capable enough to hire professional employees and returned power to the CEO. In Events 2 and 3 of Case E, after the CEO had hired the quality manager, he mixed leadership styles, in that he fully empowered the quality manager to carry out quality management, but he was an authoritarian leader in other contexts. Although the three CEOs had not completely dispensed with authoritarian leadership, or remained authoritarian leaders, in some situations they showed empowering behavior.

Table 7.2.5 Internationalization outcomes

Case	Event	Performance	Strategic decisions	Competitive advantages	Management	Leadership
Case A	Event 1	ME	Y	I	Y	Y
	Event 2	EE	N	I	Y	N
	Event 3	NF	Y	I	N	N
Case B	Event 1	ME	Y	I	Y	N
	Event 2	ME	Y	I	Y	N
	Event 3	NF	Y	I	N	N

Case							
Case C	Event 1	ME	Y	I	Y	N
	Event 2	EE	Y	I	N	N
	Event 3	NF	Y	I	Y	N
Case D	Event 1	EE	Y	N	N	N
	Event 2	HL	Y	N	N	Y
	Event 3	NF	Y	N	Y	Y
Case E	Event 1	HL	Y	N	N	N
	Event 2	ME	Y	Y	Y	Y
	Event 3	EE	Y	Y	Y	Y

EE - Exceeded expectations	I - Increased
ME - Met expectations	D - Decreased
HG - Huge loss	Y – Had changed
NF – Not finished	N – No change

Source: Developed by the researcher

7.3 Case companies with empowering leadership

7.3.1 Empowering leadership

Based on the interviews with the CEOs and key managers, the CEO in Cases F, G and H showed empowering leadership. The CEO in Cases F, G and H displayed behavior such as delegation of decision making, provision of autonomy, encouragement of personal initiative and support for development. Among these behaviors, support for development includes guiding, coaching and supporting subordinates in their work (Kim & Beehr, 2020), which are not related to benevolence.

7.3.2 The influence of empowering leadership on knowledge acquisition

This section summarizes types of knowledge and sources of knowledge in cases where there was empowering leadership. This section is also based on Huber's (1991) five ways of sourcing knowledge and five categories of knowledge required by internationalizing companies (Fletcher & Harris, 2012; Fletcher et al., 2013). The knowledge acquisition process and how empowering leadership influenced knowledge acquisition in cases where there was empowering leadership are compared in Table 7.3.1.

In all nine events, in three cases, experiential learning, vicarious learning, grafting and searching and noticing were used for sourcing knowledge. In most events, case companies used a combination of ways to acquire needed knowledge, such as in Events 1, 2 and 3 in Case F and in Events 1 and 2 in Case G. Moreover, all case companies required a combination of knowledge types for their internationalizing events. Experiential learning was the most popular way to source knowledge. Vicarious learning was only used to acquire international enterprise internationalization knowledge. In terms of leadership, although grafting was used in Events 1 and 2 in Case G, the CEO of Case G did not appear to display empowering leadership when grafting required knowledge. The CEO of Company G unilaterally decided to hire, and was responsible for hiring, the Hong Kong team and employees in North America, in order to graft needed knowledge. Therefore, grafting was not used when leaders showed empowering leadership. In Events 1 and 2 in Case G and in Event 3 in Case H an empowering CEO provided autonomy to employees to enable them to choose a means to acquire needed knowledge. In most events, the CEO also delegated decision making to employees in terms of the kind of knowledge the company required.

Table 7.3.1 Knowledge acquisition and empowering leadership

Case	Event	Sources of knowledge	Types of knowledge	How empowering leadership influenced knowledge acquisition
Case F	**Event 1:** Entering the global procurement system of an important customer in the EU (2010-2016)	Experiential learning	MK / MEIK / IEIK	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
		Vicarious learning	IEIK	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
	Event 2: Entering the Iranian market (2018)	Noticing and searching	MK	The CEO provided autonomy
		Experiential learning	MK	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
	Event 3: Expanding business into the food industry (2018-2019)	Noticing and searching	MEIK	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
		Experiential learning	TK	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
Case G	**Event 1:** Entering the Hong Kong and Southeast Asia markets (2016)	Experiential learning	MEIK	
		Grafting	MEIK	
	Event 2: Establishing an overseas office in North America (2017)	Experiential learning	MEIK / MK	
		Grafting	LIK	
		Vicarious learning	IEIK	The CEO delegated decision making and encouraged personal initiative
	Event 3: Obtaining overseas export broadband license (2016-2018)	Noticing and searching	MK	The CEO provided autonomy
Case H	**Event 1:** Receiving public recognition from a famous American drama production team (2016)	Experiential learning	MEIK	The CEO provided autonomy
	Event 2: Entering the Japanese market (2016)	Experiential learning	MK / MEIK	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
	Event 3: Cooperating with top computer software companies (2018)	Vicarious learning	IEIK	
IEIK – International enterprise internationalization knowledge; LIK – Localization internationalization knowledge; MEIK – Market entry internationalization knowledge MK – Market knowledge				

Source: Developed by the researcher

7.3.3 The influence of empowering leadership on knowledge interpretation

The influence of empowering leadership on knowledge interpretation in three cases is summarized in Table 7.3.2. In most events, companies undertook several rounds of knowledge interpretation. In addition to first-round interpretation in Events 1 and 2 in Case G, and Event 3 in Case H, CEOs provided autonomy, and delegated decision making, to employees for interpreting acquired knowledge, and employees in the relevant department were key actors in the knowledge interpretation process. In Events 1 and 2 in Case G, the CEO made unilateral decisions at the beginning and empowered employees after he acquired a Hong Kong team and hired employees in North America. Therefore, in the first round of knowledge interpretation, the CEO was the key actor and empowering leadership had no influence on knowledge interpretation. For Event 3 in Case H, the CEO made unilateral decisions on knowledge interpretation, instead of showing empowering leadership. Therefore, the CEO was the key actor in knowledge interpretation.

Table 7.3.2 Knowledge interpretation and empowering leadership

Case	Event	Round of knowledge interpretation	Main actors in knowledge interpretation	How empowering leadership influenced knowledge interpretation
Case F	**Event 1:** Entering the global procurement system of an important customer in the EU (2010-2016)	First round	Employees in the marketing department	The CEO provided autonomy
		Second round	Employees in the marketing department and the CEO	The CEO delegated decision making and provided development support
	Event 2: Entering the Iranian market (2018)	First round	Employees in the international marketing department	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
		Second round	Employees in the international marketing department	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
	Event 3: Expanding business into the food industry (2018-2019)	First round	Employees in the international marketing department	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
Case G	**Event 1:** Entering the Hong Kong and Southeast Asia markets (2016)	First round	The CEO	
		Second round	The Hong Kong team	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
	Event 2: Establishing the overseas office in North America (2017)	First round	The CEO	
		Second round	Employees in the North American team	The CEO provided autonomy
	Event 3: Obtaining overseas export broadband license (2016-2018)	First round	Employees in the marketing department	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
Case H	**Event 1:** Receiving public recognition from a famous American drama production team (2016)	First round	Employees in the international sales department	The CEO provided autonomy

	Event 2: Entering the Japanese market (2016)	First round	Employees in the international sales department and the CEO	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
	Event 3: Cooperating with top computer software companies (2018)	First round	The CEO	

Source: Developed by the researcher

7.3.4 The influence of empowering leadership on knowledge transfer

The influence of empowering leadership on knowledge transfer, in three cases, is summarized in Table 7.3.3. Because an empowering CEO had, in three cases, provided autonomy to employees for knowledge acquisition and the interpretation process, the knowledge processes in Events 1 and 2 of Case F and Event 1 in Case G consisted of several rounds. In addition to the first round of knowledge transfer in Event 1 in Case G and Event 3 in Case H, the direction of knowledge transfer was from bottom (employees) to top (managers or the CEO). Although empowering CEOs provided autonomy to employees, employees tended to report their decisions or ideas to their managers or the CEO for confirmation. In the first round of knowledge transfer in Event 1 of Case G, the CEO did not show empowering leadership, so that knowledge transfer only took place between the CEO and shareholders. For Event 3 in Case H, due to the CEO making unilateral decisions for knowledge acquisition and interpretation, the knowledge transfer process was from the CEO to managers and employees.

Table 7.3.3 Knowledge transfer and empowering leadership

Case	Event	Round of knowledge transfer	Path of knowledge transfer	How empowering leadership influenced knowledge transfer
Case F	**Event 1:** Entering the global procurement system of an important customer in the EU (2010-2016)	First round	From employees in the marketing department to the marketing director to the CEO	The CEO provided autonomy and encouraged personal initiative
		Second round	From employees in the marketing department to the marketing director to the CEO and other employees	The CEO provided development support and autonomy
	Event 2: Entering the Iranian market (2018)	First round	From employees in the international marketing department to the marketing director	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
		Second round	Between employees in the international marketing department	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
	Event 3: Expanding business into the food industry (2018-2019)	First round	From employees in the international marketing department to managers and the CEO	The CEO provided autonomy and encouraged personal initiative
Case G	**Event 1:** Entering the Hong Kong and Southeast Asia markets (2016)	First round	From the CEO to shareholders	
		Second round	From the Hong Kong team to the CEO	The CEO provided autonomy
	Event 2: Establishing the overseas office in North America (2017)	First round	From employees in the North American team to the CEO and domestic employees	The CEO encouraged personal initiative
	Event 3: Obtaining overseas export broadband license (2016-2018)	First round	From employees in the marketing department to the CEO	The CEO provided autonomy

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	Event 1: Receiving public recognition from a famous American drama production team (2016)	First round	From employees in the international sales department to the CEO and other managers	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
Case H	**Event 2:** Entering the Japanese market (2016)	First round	From employees in the international sales department to the CEO and other managers	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
	Event 3: Cooperating with top computer software companies (2018)	First round	From the CEO to other managers and employees	

Source: Developed by the researcher

7.3.5 The influence of empowering leadership on organizational memory

Table 7.3.4 summarizes organizational memory issues and the influence of empowering leadership in Cases F, G and H. Because empowering leaders tended to provide autonomy to employees, knowledge obtained was mainly stored by employees. In order to promote employees' storage of knowledge, CEOs also delegated decision making (see F2 and H2) and encouraged personal initiative (see G2 and H1). In terms of the non-human bin, in order to make changes in companies, such as revising the production process in Event 3 of Case F and registering a trademark in Event 2 of Case G, empowering CEOs not only provided autonomy, but also supported employees' work.

Table 7.3.4 Organizational memory and empowering leadership

Case	Event	Organizational memory		How empowering leadership influenced organizational memory
Case F	**Event 1:** Entering the global procurement system of an important customer in the EU (2010-2016)	In non-human bin	New department / Production management system	The CEO delegated decision making and provided development support
	Event 2: Entering the Iranian market (2018)	In human bin	IEIK (stored by employees in the international marketing department)	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making
	Event 3: Expanding business into the food industry (2018-2019)	In non-human bin	Production process for food accessories	The CEO supported development
Case G	**Event 1:** Entering the Hong Kong and Southeast Asia markets (2016)	In human bin	MEIK (stored by the Hong Kong team and domestic employees) / IEIK (stored by the CEO and managers)	The CEO provided autonomy
		In non-human bin	Overseas offices	The CEO provided autonomy
	Event 2: Establishing an overseas office in North America (2017)	In human bin	IEIK (stored by the CEO and managers) / MEIK (stored by the vice president)	The CEO provided autonomy and encouraged personal initiative
		In non-human bin	Registered trademark / Overseas office	The CEO provided autonomy and development support
	Event 3: Obtaining overseas export broadband license (2016-2018)	In non-human bin	The overseas export license	The CEO provided autonomy
Case H	**Event 1:** Receiving public recognition from a famous American drama production team (2016)	In human bin	IEIK (stored by the administrative manager)	The CEO provided autonomy and encouraged personal initiative
	Event 2: Entering the Japanese market (2016)	In human bin	MEIK / TK (stored by employees in international sales department)	The CEO provided autonomy and delegated decision making

| | **Event 3:** Cooperating with top computer software companies (2018) | In human bin | IEIK (stored by the CEO) | |
| | | In non-human bin | Organizational structure / Management rules | |

IEIK – International enterprise internationalization knowledge; LIK – Localization internationalization knowledge; MEIK – Market entry internationalization knowledge

MK – Market knowledge

TK – Technological knowledge

Source: Developed by the researcher

7.3.6 Empowering leadership and internationalization outcomes

The outcomes of internationalizing events can be categorized according to five aspects: performance, strategic decisions, competitive advantages, management and leadership. Three issues have emerged from the analysis. Firstly, in terms of event performance, although some events (F1, F3 and G3) took place over a long period of time, none of the events resulted in a huge loss. Secondly, in terms of management, only three events (F1, F3 and H3) were associated with changes to management practices. Moreover, in Event 3 of Case H, the CEO did not show empowering leadership during the event. Thirdly, the CEO in Cases G and H showed more authoritarian leadership during these events. Although they reverted to empowering leadership as the events developed, they made unilateral decisions during the process.

Table 7.3.5 Internationalizing outcomes

Case	Event	Performance	Strategic decisions	Competitive advantages	Management	Leadership
Case F	Event 1	ME	Y	I	Y	N
	Event 2	ME	Y	N	N	N
	Event 3	NF	Y	N	Y	N
Case G	Event 1	ME	Y	I	N	Y
	Event 2	EE	Y	I	N	Y
	Event 3	ME	N	I	N	N
Case H	Event 1	EE	N	I	N	N
	Event 2	ME	Y	I	N	Y
	Event 3	NF	Y	N	Y	Y
EE - Exceeded expectations			I - Increased			
ME - Met expectations			D - Decreased			
HG - Huge loss			Y – Had changed			
NF – Not finished			N – No change			

Source: Developed by the researcher

7.4 Cross-case analysis featuring the authoritarian leadership group and the empowering leadership group

7.4.1 CEOs' authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership

Compared to CEOs with authoritarian leadership, CEOs with empowering leadership did not show significant benevolence to employees, which highlights individualizing and holistic concern for subordinates (Cheng et al., 2004). CEOs displaying authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership all showed support for employees' work. CEOs with authoritarian leadership, however, showed more concern for employees' personal life.

7.4.2 CEO leadership and the international learning process

This section compares the international learning process in events in which leadership did not showed changes during the internationalizing process. For CEOs showing authoritarian leadership, the international learning process is summarized in Figure 7.4.1. Due to the CEO making unilateral decisions on knowledge acquisition and interpretation, the CEO may experience one or several rounds of knowledge acquisition-interpretation and make final decisions. Authoritarian leaders tended to inform employees of their decisions. Therefore, the knowledge transfer process was from the CEO to employees. For organizational memory, the knowledge mainly resided with the CEO. In terms of the non-human bin, the CEO needed to prevail over employees to accept changes, or employees were willing to follow the CEO's decisions. For example, in Case A's Event 2, the CEO made unilateral decisions on knowledge acquisition and interpretation. Through two rounds of knowledge acquisition/interpretation, the CEO communicated his decisions to employees and prevailed over them to accept them. Details of Case A Event 2 can be found in Section 5.2.2.2.

Figure 7.4.1 The international learning process with authoritarian leaders
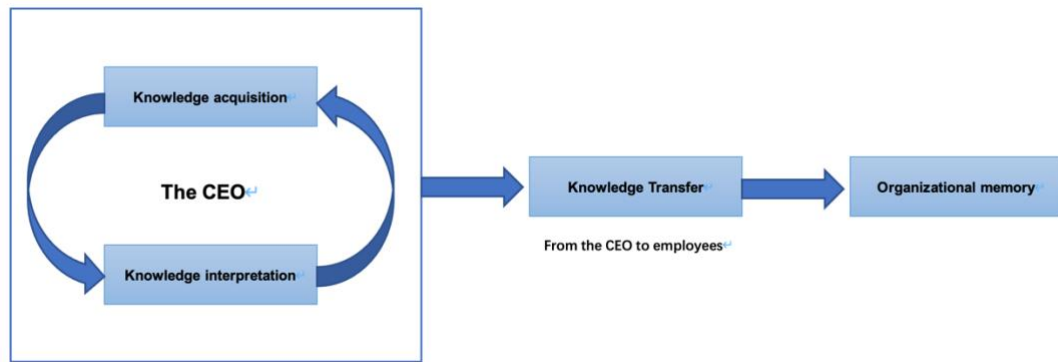
Source: Developed by the researcher

For CEOs displaying empowering leadership, the international learning process is summarized in Figure 7.4.2. Because empowering leaders provided autonomy for employees and delegated decision making, employees in the relevant departments were responsible for knowledge acquisition and interpretation. The knowledge could be transferred between employees, and, in most events, employees tended to report to their managers or the CEO for confirmation. Therefore, knowledge transfer showed a bottom (employees) to top (managers and the CEO) trend. In terms of organizational memory, knowledge gained tended to reside with employees. For the non-human bin, empowering leaders need to support employees in making changes within their company. For example, in Event 1 of Case F, due to the CEO providing autonomy, employees in the marketing department decided on the kind of knowledge the company needed and, on the way, to acquire the needed knowledge. Employees in the marketing department were key factors in knowledge interpretation. Through two rounds of the knowledge acquisition/interpretation/transfer process, the marketing department set up an independent international marketing department and revised the production management system based on customers' demand, with support from the CEO. Details of Case F Event 1 can be found in Section 6.2.2.1.

Figure 7.4.2 International learning process with empowering leaders
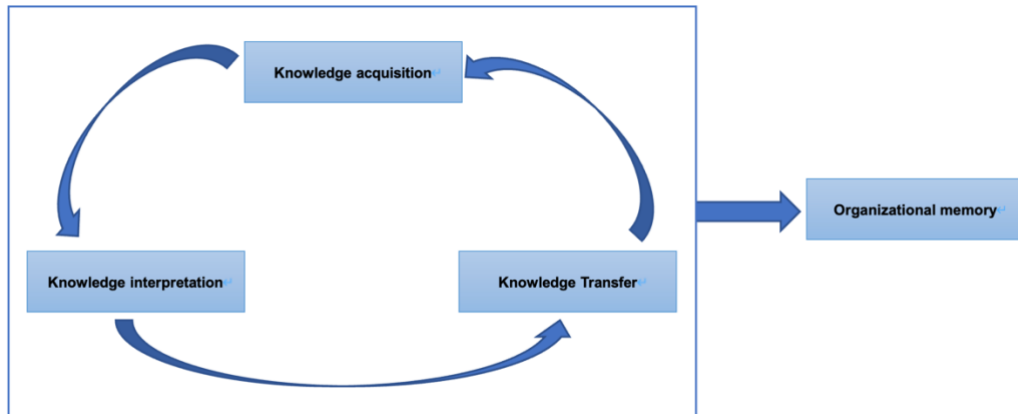
Source: Developed by the researcher

7.4.3 CEO leadership and internationalization outcomes.

This section compares internationalization outcomes between cases with authoritarian leaders and cases with empowering leaders, in the context of three issues: performance, management and leadership. From the performance perspective, in Cases D and E, due CEOs' authoritarian leadership, Companies C and E suffered huge losses. In contrast, in cases with empowering leaders, although several events continued for a long time, no events led to huge losses. From a management perspective, five authoritarian leaders made changes to their management style. In the three cases with empowering leaders, only Company F's leader made an adjustment to management practices based on customers' requirements. From a leadership perspective, the authoritarian CEO in Cases A, D and E made conscious changes to his leadership approach. As Company A continued to expand overseas, the CEO realized that he needed to empower the company's overseas teams, in Event 1. After huge losses for Company C, due to the CEO making unilateral decisions, the CEO decided to involve more employees in the decision-making process and tried to empower other managers, in Events 2 and 3. The CEO in Case E recognized that he was not good at quality management, so he hired a quality manager and consciously empowered her. In contrast, the empowering leaders involved in Cases G and H showed changes in their leadership during internationalizing events, but these changes were rather more unconscious. In Events 1 and 2 of Case G, although the CEO made unilateral decisions to hire professional overseas teams,

once the overseas teams had joined the company, the CEO reverted to an empowering style of leadership and provided full autonomy to employees. In Event 2 of Case H, the CEO made unilateral decisions, deciding that the company could not serve the Japanese porn industry. After he had made this decision, he provided autonomy to employees in the international sales department. In Event 3 of Case H, although the CEO had reflected a great deal on his own management methods and had made some unilateral adjustments to the company's management rules and organizational structure, he did not feel that his leadership, or the way in which he empowered employees, needed to be adjusted. This suggests that changes made by empowering leaders are largely unconscious.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented cross-case findings. Patterns in leadership, the influence of CEO leadership on the internationalization learning process and the effect of CEO leadership on companies' internationalization outcomes have been discussed with reference to eight cases. In the next chapter, observed patterns form this chapter will be theorized into constructs to explain the relationship between leadership and the internationalization learning process.

Chapter 8   Discussion and Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

This closing chapter summarizes the key findings of the research, compared with the initial framework based on existing literature and addresses the research question set out in Chapter 1, which is:

How does leadership influence the organizational learning processes in internationalizing processes?

This chapter also discusses the contributions, implications and limitations of the research and makes suggestions for future research.

8.2 CEO leadership in the Chinese context

This section addresses the first research objective by identifying authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership in the Chinese context. Existing research has highlighted that national culture is a contextual variable that might influence the outcomes of leadership (Atwater et al., 2005; Atwater et al., 2009) and leadership in the Chinese context has clear differences from leadership in the western context (Rui & Qi, 2021). This research also confirms this view.

Authoritarian leadership in the western definition emphasizes leaders making unilateral decisions (Uhl-Bein & Maslyn, 2005) and prevailing over employees (Harms et al., 2018; Pelligrini, Scandura & Jayaraman, 2010) and employees following orders (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün et al., 2021). As pointed out in the previous literature, traditional Chinese values emphasize authority and obedience (Yang, 1989), and family is the basis of social relationships in Chinese society (Wu et al., 2020). Therefore, in the five cases discussed in Chapter 5, employees demonstrated good adaptability to authoritarian leaders and showed good performance with high obedience. Moreover, authoritarian leaders showed more or less benevolence to

employees, which can be reflected in the leaders' concern for employees' personal development and daily lives (Cheng et al., 2004). When CEOs showed a high-level of benevolence, as authoritarian leaders feel obligated to their employees and encourage employee's loyalty and compliance (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008), this kind of father-like role could influence their decision-making in companies' internationalization events. For example, authoritarian leaders could consider terminating the cooperation with the partner company because their employees were rudely treated by the partner companies (see section 5.6.2.1).

Empowering leadership also appears to be inconsistent with the western definitions. In the previous literature, the definition of empowering leadership emphasizes delegating decision making, providing autonomy, encouraging personal initiative, and supporting development (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014; Kim & Beehr, 2020). Although, in three cases discussed in Chapter 6, leaders with empowering leadership did not show significant benevolence to employees. Empowering leaders more cared about employees' work rather than personal development or daily lives. However, Chinese employees still tended to report their work plans or decisions to leaders even leaders fully provided autonomy to them, which did not appear in previous descriptions of empowering leadership. As Chinese society has been dominated by Confucianism (Keller & Kronstedt, 2005), Chinese culture may have an impact on the effectiveness of empowering leadership (Cheong et al., 2019). Therefore, although leaders empower them, they tended to report their decisions to managers or CEOs for psychological comfort or risk reduction. This kind of behavior could also influence the knowledge transfer process in companies' internationalization events.

8.3 The influence of CEO leadership on international learning process

Due to very few of studies have discussed the role of leadership in the organizational learning process in companies' internationalization. Therefore, this research based on RBV and KBV, combined Huber's organizational learning framework (1991), absorptive capacity (Zahra & George, 2002) and Argote's organizational learning framework (2021), tried to build a initial

framework which shows that different leadership styles may impact each organizational learning step and the whole process. Based on the findings reported in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership affected the international learning process in different ways. The following subsections describe how different leadership styles influence the international learning process in the Chinese context.

8.3.1 CEO leadership and knowledge acquisition

Regardless of whether the CEOs adopted authoritarian leadership or empowering leadership, in most internationalizing events, the company experienced more than one round of knowledge acquisition. Both authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership influenced the knowledge acquisition process, especially in terms of adopting the means of knowledge acquisition.

Leaders showing authoritarian leadership by making unilateral decisions determined the kind of knowledge the company needed and the way to acquire needed knowledge. Due to leaders centralizing all power, it is easier for them to adopt various means to acquire needed knowledge, which include congenital learning, experiential learning, vicarious learning, grafting, and searching and noticing (Huber, 1991). Moreover, authoritarian leaders can easily switch between different learning means because the entire process of knowledge acquisition is controlled by the CEO alone.

Leaders exercising empowering leadership by providing autonomy and delegated of decision making to let employees acquire needed knowledge. Employees' power is, however, constrained according to the extent of their responsibility, so it is difficult for them to use means of knowledge acquisition such as congenital learning and grafting. Employees in a marketing department, for example, have some level of autonomy, but they generally have neither the power nor the knowledge to be able to graft knowledge by hiring new professional staff or acquiring a mature team. Not having the option of grafting, which is a

quick means of increasing knowledge (Hilmersson & Johanson, 2020; Johanson et al., 2020), may cause companies to spend more time on knowledge acquisition.

8.3.2 CEO leadership and knowledge interpretation

Acquired knowledge needs to be interpreted before being processed and implemented (Tsang, 2018). People have different interpretations of knowledge, so that knowledge interpretation is important. For example, compared with employees, leaders are more likely to perceive that the company needs to make adjustments in the overall structure or management during specific events in the internationalization process. Leadership directly affects who is the key actor in knowledge interpretation. As with the knowledge acquisition process, authoritarian leaders tended to make unilateral decisions in terms of knowledge interpretation, and so were key actors in knowledge interpretation. In all five cases with authoritarian leadership, unless CEOs made a conscious change in their leadership style, these authoritarian CEOs had always been the key actors in knowledge interpretation. Conversely, in companies with empowering leaders, who gave autonomy to employees and delegated decision making, employees were the key actors in knowledge interpretation. In three cases with empowering leadership, employees of related departments were generally the key actors in knowledge interpretation, such as employees in marketing department or international sales department.

8.3.3 CEO leadership and knowledge transfer

Previous research has examined many factors which can influence knowledge transfer, such as the senders of knowledge, the recipients of knowledge and the organizational context (Szulanski & Lee, 2020). The senders of knowledge and the recipients of knowledge, in a company, can be influenced by the style of leadership adopted by the leader. The current research has considered knowledge transfer within companies and has found that, because authoritarian leaders acquire and interpret knowledge, they become the senders of knowledge in their company. Where leaders made unilateral decisions, employees tended to follow those decisions and became the recipients of knowledge. In companies with an

authoritarian leader, therefore, knowledge transfer was a top-down process, from the leaders to employees. Knowledge is transferred in a unilateral centralized, and hierarchical way (Yu et al., 2022) in cases with authoritarian leadership. Conversely, in companies with an empowering leader, due to the leader providing autonomy to employees to enable them to acquire and interpret knowledge, such employees were knowledge senders. Although employees have autonomy and can make decisions, they tended to report their decisions to their managers or the CEO, which may be due to the influence of Chinese context. As Chinese society has been dominated by Confucianism (Keller & Kronstedt, 2005). Therefore, in companies with an empowering leader, knowledge transfer was a bottom-up process, from employees to managers or the CEO. Knowledge is transferred in a unilateral, decentralized and selforganizing way (Yu et al., 2022) in cases with empowering leadership.

8.3.4 CEO leadership and organizational memory

This research divided organizational memory into two categories: 'human bin' and 'non-human bin' (Tsang, 2018). The human bin includes an individual's mind or memory, and the non-human bin refers to aspects such as rules, organizational charts, reports, and so on (Tsang, 2018). Influences belonging to both bins have been identified. In terms of the human bin, authoritarian leaders tended to make unilateral decisions and were well aware of the knowledge gained from internationalization events, meaning that knowledge mainly resided with the leader. For example, in five cases with authoritarian leadership, knowledge were mainly stored by the CEOs. Conversely, empowering leaders tended to grant autonomy and delegate decision making and encouraged personal initiative in order to promote employees' storage of knowledge. Empowering leaders were not very clear about the knowledge gained from internationalization events, with knowledge mainly residing with employees responsible for the event.

In terms of the non-human bin, in cases with authoritarian leadership, employees tended to follow leaders' decisions, and, in some events, leaders also prevailed over employees because some changes are met with resistance from employees in the short term. For example, in events 2 and 3 of company E, many employees felt that their workload had

increased due to the company's need to establish a high-demand quality management system. Leaders need to advance knowledge storage in non-human bin by prevail over employees. Therefore, it was easier for companies to store knowledge by changing rules, management systems or standard operating procedures with authoritarian leadership. For example, all five authoritarian CEOs in sample companies had led the company to change rules, standards, or management systems. Moreover, in the event 3 of Case H, after the empowering CEO adjusting his leadership style to a more authoritarian style, the company made changes in organizational structure and management rules. In contrast, in cases with empowering leadership, as companies needed to make changes to knowledge stored in the non-human bin, leaders not only provided autonomy to employees but also supported their work, but this support might not be enough to enable adjustments to be made to the company's organizational structure, management system or rules.
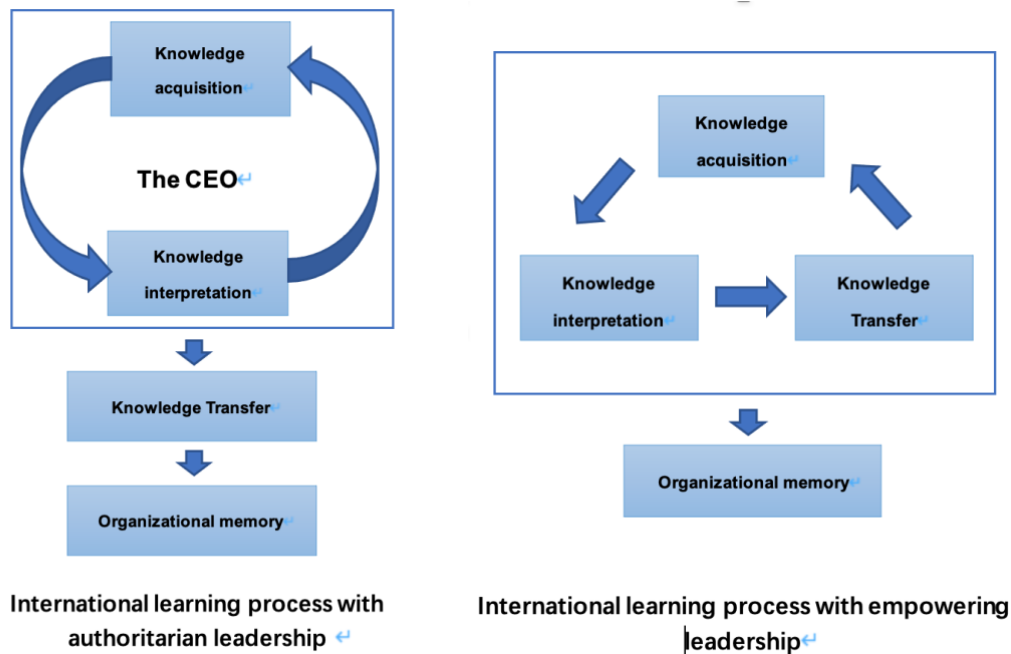
8.3.5 CEO leadership and international learning process

Many scholars treat organizational learning as a holistic framework (Argote, 2021). The current research combines organizational learning processes proposed by Huber (1991), Zahra & George (2002) and Argote et al., (2021). The organizational learning process includes four constructs: knowledge acquisition, interpretation, transfer and organizational memory. Organizational learning is not, however, a simple process from knowledge acquisition to organizational memory. International learning processes are dynamic (Fletcher et al., 2021). The four constructs are interrelated and can be either complementary or interchangeable (Argote et al., 2021). The findings of the current research show that different leadership styles cause different international learning processes (see Figure 8.3.1).

For international companies with authoritarian leadership, because leaders make unilateral decisions, there may be several rounds of knowledge acquisition/interpretation. Knowledge does not begin to transfer within a company until leaders make a final decision that requires the cooperation of employees to implement. In contrast, in companies with empowering leadership, employees are key actors in knowledge acquisition and interpretation, because empowering leaders provide autonomy. Because some of the decisions of employees require

support from leaders, employees tend to report their decisions or plans to leaders. Such companies may go through several rounds of knowledge acquisition/interpretation/transfer before a final decision is made.

Figure 8.3.1 The international learning process with different leadership styles

International learning process with authoritarian leadership

International learning process with empowering leadership

Source: Developed by the researcher

8.4 CEO leadership and internationalizing outcomes

The current research compares internationalization outcomes that result from authoritarian and empowering leadership styles, from five perspectives based on collected data: performance, strategic decisions, competitive advantages, management and leadership. The results have shown differences between companies with authoritarian leaders and empowering leaders in the contexts of performance, management and leadership, which were not expected.

From the performance perspective, in companies with authoritarian leadership, leaders generally make organizational learning decisions faster and achieve results that meet, or exceed, expectations. Authoritarian leadership can, however, cause huge losses for a company due to unilateral decisions made by an authoritarian leader. For example, both the

authoritarian CEOs in company C and E caused huge losses due to their unilateral decisions. Conversely, although empowering leadership may cause slower progress, due to the provision of autonomy to employees, this style of leadership is not associated with huge losses as a result of internationalization events.

From the management perspective, since authoritarian leaders are mostly in charge of internationalizing events, they are more likely to discover management-related problems with internationalization, and to learn from overseas customers or partners. Companies with authoritarian leadership are, therefore, more likely to make changes in management. In all five cases with authoritarian leadership, companies experienced changes on organizational structure, management rules or operational systems. In contrast, because empowering leaders grant autonomy to employees, it is the employees who are the main drivers of internationalizing events. It is difficult for such companies to make management-related changes due to their knowledge or power.

From the leadership perspective, surprisingly, the findings of this research reflect that the CEO leadership may change with the company's internationalization process. As existing research suggests that leadership style should be flexible and should be amended to align with the environment, circumstances, followers, and tasks of the company (Blanchard et al., 1985; Fiedler & Garcia, 1987; Lonati, 2020; Mukherjee & Mula, 2021). In companies with authoritarian leadership, leaders always made unilateral decisions in internationalizing events, which sometimes led to very large losses, and leaders' capabilities could not meet companies' development needs. In such circumstances, authoritarian leaders tended to consciously adjust their leadership style in a more empowering direction. For example, authoritarian leaders empowered professionals after hiring them in Case A and E or tried to include more employees in their company's decision-making process in Case C. In contrast, empowering leaders might have unconsciously adjusted their leadership in a more authoritarian direction when making major decisions, by, for example, acquiring an overseas marketing team and adjusting the company's structure. Some major decisions and adjustments within the company required leaders to move forward, rather than merely support. It is possible that, in the Chinese context, both leaders and employees are more

naturally able to adapt to a more authoritarian leadership style, meaning that such a shift in leadership style is often unconscious, with empowering leaders not being aware of making such a change. For example, in the Case G and H, both empowering CEOs shift their leadership style to a more authoritarian direction unconsciously.

In summary, all discussions are summarized in Figure 8.4.1. Different leadership styles follow different organizational learning processes, and, during internationalizing events, leaders can switch, or mix, leadership styles, which changes the international learning process. The style of leadership also has an impact on the performance, and management, of internationalizing companies.

Figure 8.4.1 Model linking the CEO leadership with international learning process
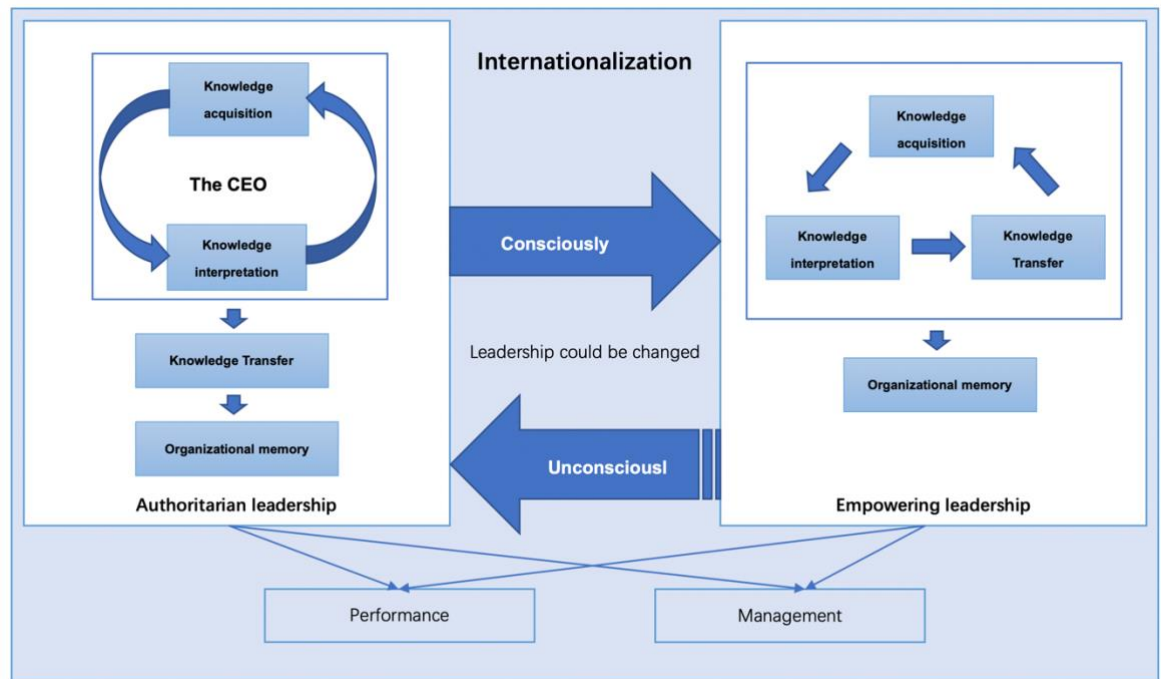
Source: Developed by the researcher

8.5 Contributions of the research

This section synthesizes the main findings and discusses the contributions for the literature.

8.5.1 Contributions for CEO leadership and organizational learning literature

This research contributes to the CEO leadership and organizational learning literature through discussing leadership in the Chinese context

1) The findings suggest that in the Chinese context, authoritarian leadership could include leaders' benevolence which could influence leaders' decisions in international learning process.

2) The findings suggest that in the Chinese context, although empowering leaders provide autonomy and delegate of decision-making to employees, employees still tend to report their decisions or plans to leaders, which may be due to the Chinese traditional philosophy and culture.

This research confirms that leadership in the Chinese context has clear differences from leadership in the Western context (Rui & Qi, 2021). This research does not directly apply leadership theories which is developed in the Western context to the Chinese context (Rousseau & Fried, 2001; Wang et al., 2022). The researcher discusses authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership based on Chinese traditional philosophy, for example, Confucianism Legalism, and Daoism. Both authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership show parts not covered by the Western definition.

Authoritarian leadership, according to the Western definition, emphasizes leaders making unilateral decisions (Uhl-Bein & Maslyn, 2005) and prevailing over employees (Harms et al., 2018; Pelligrini, Scandura & Jayaraman, 2010), and employees following orders (Karakitapoğlu-Aygün et al., 2021). As pointed out in previous literature, traditional Chinese values emphasize authority and obedience (Yang, 1989) and family is the basis of social relationships in Chinese society (Wu et al., 2020). In this research, employees demonstrated good adaptability to authoritarian leaders and showed good performance, with a high level of obedience. Moreover, authoritarian leaders in this research showed some benevolence to employees, reflected in their concern for employees' personal development and daily life (Cheng et al., 2004). When benevolence develops into a high level, because authoritarian

leaders feel an obligation to their employees and encourage employees' loyalty and compliance (Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008), such a relationship might influence their decision making in internationalization process. An authoritarian leader could, for example, consider terminating cooperation with a partner company because of their employees being poorly treated by the partner company (see section 5.6.2.1).

Empowering leadership in the current research also appears to be inconsistent with Western definitions. In existing literature, the definition of empowering leadership emphasizes delegating decision making, providing autonomy, encouraging personal initiative and supporting development (Amundsen & Martinsen, 2014; Kim & Beehr, 2020). In the current research, however, leaders displaying empowering leadership did not show significant benevolence to employees. Empowering leaders cared more about employees' work than their personal development or their daily life. Chinese employees nevertheless tended to report their work plans or decisions to leaders, even to leaders who granted them full autonomy, which has not appeared in previous descriptions of empowering leadership. As Chinese society has been dominated by Confucianism (Keller & Kronstedt, 2005), Chinese culture may have an impact on the effectiveness of empowering leadership (Cheong et al., 2019). This means that, although leaders empower them, employees tended to report their decisions to managers or CEOs, for psychological comfort or risk reduction. This kind of behavior could also influence the knowledge transfer process in companies' internationalization process. Therefore, the current research also confirms that national culture is a contextual variable that can influence the outcomes of leadership (Atwater et al., 2005; Atwater et al., 2009).

This research contributes to the CEO leadership and organizational learning literature through focusing on the influence of leadership on each construct associated with organizational learning.

1) This research suggests that authoritarian leadership could give companies the possibility to use different ways of acquiring knowledge through leaders making unilateral decisions. In contrast, empowering leadership may limit companies' choice of means of

knowledge acquisition by providing employees with autonomy and delegating decision making within their areas of responsibility.

2) This research suggests that authoritarian leadership could cause leaders to become the key actors in knowledge interpretation, due to leaders making unilateral decisions. In contrast, as leaders provide autonomy and delegate decision making to employees, empowering leadership results in employees becoming the key actors in knowledge interpretation.

3) This research suggests that due to leaders making unilateral decisions and employees following their decisions, authoritarian leadership results in a top-down knowledge transfer processes in companies. In contrast, due to leaders providing autonomy, empowering leadership results in a bottom-top knowledge transfer process in companies.

4) This research suggests that as their leaders make unilateral decisions and prevail over employees, companies with authoritarian leadership tend to store knowledge in the leaders' 'human bin' and easily make changes in the 'non-human bin' of organizational memory. In contrast, leaders provide autonomy and support development, companies with empowering leadership tend to store knowledge in employees' human bin and make few substantial changes in the non-human bin of organizational memory.

Existing research have concluded that leaders are the guiding force behind organizational learning (Darwish et al., 2020; Lahteenmaki et al., 2001), but few have discussed the influence of leadership on the organizational learning process. Darwish et al. (2020) pointed out that limited attention had been paid to the relationship between leadership and the different dimensions of organizational learning. This may because most studies related to leadership and organizational learning are quantitative research (e.g., Dzinic, 2015; Khurosani, 2018; Kim & Park, 2019; Vermeulen et al., 2017), which means that they have used leadership and organizational learning as two variables and examined the relationship between them. Therefore, these studies hardly explained how leadership influence the organizational learning process, especially each construct of organizational learning process. The current study has focused, in detail, on how leadership affects each construct associated with organizational learning, rather than treating organizational learning as a discrete entity. Both authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership showed influence on each

construct in organizational learning, including knowledge acquisition, interpretation, transfer, and organizational memory.

This research contributes to the leadership and organizational learning literature through expanding the range of leadership styles withthe lens of power.

Existing research into the relationship between leadership and organizational learning has not involved an extensive list of leadership styles (Xie, 2019). Most studies have focused on transformational leadership (Do & Mai, 2020; Xie, 2019), while others have focused on a limited number of leadership styles, such as transactional leadership, supportive leadership, etc. Leadership and power are intertwined (Ross et al., 2014). However, "puzzling absence of any mention of power in the vast majority of leadership scholarship" (Firth & Carroll, 2017, p.128). This research focused on authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership not only because they can root in the Chinese traditional philosophy, but also, they are related to power distribution: authoritarian leaders tend to control all power, while empowering leaders tend to share all power. This could provide a new thread for future leadership literature, contrasting leadership types by distribution of power. Moreover, the current research compared the influence of authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership on organizational learning, which expands the range of leadership styles in the leadership and organizational learning literature.

8.5.2 Contributions for leadership and internationalization literature

The research contributes to international learning process literature thorough adding leadership as a key factor which can influence the international learning process.

1) This research demonstrates that in companies with authoritarian leadership, the international learning process may consist of several shorter cycles of knowledge acquisition and interpretation prior to the process of knowledge transfer and the accumulation of organizational memory, because leaders make unilateral decisions.

2) This research demonstrates that in companies with empowering leadership, the international learning process may go through several lengthy cycles of knowledge

acquisition, interpretation, and transfer, and then enter organizational memory because leaders provide autonomy to employees.

Previous research has recognized leadership as an important factor in influencing organizational learning (e.g., Liao et al., 2017; Northouse, 2016; Khurosani, 2018; Nyukoron, 2016; Kim & Park, 2019). Other studies have discussed the influence of leaders' cognition (Freixanet & Renart, 2020; Freixanet et al., 2018; Stoian et al., 2018), interpretation (Hsu et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2011; Zander et al., 2015), perception (Hsu et al., 2013; Jones et al., 2011; Zander et al., 2015), decision-making style (Johanson & Vahlne, 1977), entrepreneurship (Johanson & Vahlne, 2009; 2017) and/or knowledge and experience (Freixanet & Renart, 2020; Freixanet et al., 2018; Stoian et al., 2018) on the company's internationalization, especially in terms of the related learning process. Leaders' cognition, interpretation and decision making are common considerations in relation to leadership, but few studies have discussed the influence of leadership on the international learning process. The current research not only suggests that leadership has influence on each construct of international learning process, but also may cause different international learning processes. The companies with authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership show different international learning processes. Therefore, this research contributes to international learning process literature through adding leadership as a key factor with can influence the companies' international learning process.

The research contributes to internationalization literature thorough highlighting the influence of leadership on internationalization outcomes.

1) This research demonstrates that from performance perspective, authoritarian leadership, while enabling internationalizing events to progress quickly, has the potential to cause huge losses for internationalizing companies due to leaders making unilateral decisions. In contrast, empowering leadership, although it may slow down the progress of internationalization events, is less likely to cause significant losses during the company's internationalization due to leaders providing autonomy to employees.

2) This research demonstrates that authoritarian leadership could lead to more changes in the management of companies during internationalizing process due to leaders making

unilateral decisions. In contrast, empowering leadership may lead to fewer changes in the management of companies during internationalizing events due to leaders providing autonomy to employees.

The current study has used organizational learning as a link between leadership and internationalization outcomes. Different outcomes in performance and company management result from different international learning process, which, in turn, are associated with different leadership styles.

The research contributes to leadership and international learning process literature by proposing that leadership could also be changed with the international learning.

1) This research demonstrates that authoritarian leaders may consciously choose to adjust their leadership style in a more empowering direction after causing their company significant losses, or after finding that their capabilities could not meet the companies' development needs.

2) This research demonstrates that empowering leaders may unconsciously adjust their leadership style in a more authoritarian direction when making major decisions.

The current research has also indicated that, during the course of internationalization process, leadership style may change. This research confirms that leadership style could amended to align with environment, circumstances, followers and tasks of the company (Lonati, 2020; Mukherjee & Mula, 2021) by exploring the changing of leadership during internationalization process. Both authoritarian leaders and empowering leaders have changed their leadership styles in order to facing particular conditions. When authoritarian leaders notice that their capabilities could not meet the companies' development needs or after they faced significant losses, they may choose to adjust leadership style in a more empowering direction for adding more people in decision-making process or empowering professionals. In contrast, empowering leaders may adjust their leadership in a more authoritarian direction when making major decisions, for example, acquiring an overseas team or adjusting companies' management rules or organizational structures. Since

leadership may change during international learning, this provides a new closed-loop explanation for the relationship between leadership and international learning process. Therefore, current research therefore contributes to both the leadership and the internationalization literature, thus expanding the boundaries of these research areas.

8.6 Social implication

The findings of this research suggest that different leadership styles of CEOs lead to different organizational learning processes and different internationalizing outcomes. It is therefore important for leaders to recognize that they can adjust their company's international learning process by adjusting their leadership style.

When companies' internationalization needs to be advanced quickly, or the company has problems in international management, leaders can adopt authoritarian leadership as their leadership style. Authoritarian leadership can use a variety of knowledge acquisition methods, such as faster acquisition methods, such as grafting, and reducing knowledge transfer within the company. Moreover, authoritarian leaders can speed up the implementation of decisions by prevailing over employees, but they may face greater risks from making unilateral decisions.

When a company needs to make safer decisions, or when the leader is faced with a task for which he lacks the necessary skills, that leader might adopt a more empowering leadership style. Empowering leadership can involve more people in decision making in organizational learning or give professional people responsibility for things they are good at, which can improve the stability of a company's performance. Conversely, empowering leadership provides fewer ways of acquiring knowledge and increasing knowledge transfer, which could extend the timescale of internationalizing events.

In conclusion, leaders can flexibly blend both types of leadership in internationalization activities to improve the internationalization learning process. Furthermore, although only

two leadership types were discussed in this study, it is foreseeable that other types of leadership may also lead to more diverse organizational learning processes. Therefore, leaders need to recognize the importance of leadership and develop the ability to adjust their leadership style, because they can influence the learning process of the organization by adjusting their leadership style. From the government perspective, when the governments arrange relevant support training for the company's internationalization, they can add leadership courses for CEOs to help companies' internationalization.

8.7 Limitation of the research

Although the research has achieved its objectives, it has a number of limitations. Firstly, due to time constraints, respondents were asked about their companies' internationalization events over a three-year period. Although interviews were conducted with at least three people from each company, to ensure the robustness of the data, interviewees often had only a vague memory of some details of their company's internationalizing events. In addition, the selection of the respondents tended to be biased toward employees who were familiar with the company's international business. In the discussion of organizational memory, a small number of processes are not relevant to international markets, with some changes required from the production department, for example. Due to the lack of interviews with personnel in other departments, this study may lack some details of companies' other learning processes.

Secondly, although this research focuses on high-tech SMEs in the Chinese context, the sample companies are all medium-sized companies, because leadership is easily influenced by company size. Therefore, this research lacks a discussion of small companies. Moreover, this research is deeply rooted in the Chinese context. However, China is a vast multi-ethnic country. The data sampling in this research is mainly concentrated in the Han Chinese settlements in eastern China, which are more influenced by traditional Chinese culture. For example, in Xinjiang, Islam may also have an impact on leadership; in Tibet, Buddhism may

also have an impact on leadership. In other words, the findings from the case studies lack generalizability to companies of SMEs within China.

Thirdly, the interviewees were given the option to speak in the Chinese language, which they felt comfortable using, during the semi-structured interviews. Due to the extensive use of some slang and very Chinese expressions in the interviews, the interview transcripts when translated into English may not always convey exactly the interviewees' meaning.

8.8 Recommendations for the future research

There are several potential directions for future research. The current research focuses on Chinese high-tech SMEs internationalizing companies. Further research could be conducted in other countries similar to the Chinese context, for example, other Asia countries, in order to examine the model proposed in this thesis. Further research may also be conducted in other national contexts different from China, for example, other western countries or Muslim countries, to gain different insights into leadership and to enrich current theory. Different interpretations of authoritarian or empowering leadership may arise in the cultural context of other countries.

Further research could also focus on companies of different sizes. This research only achieves data from medium-sized companies. Organizations of different sizes may have different inclinations toward leadership. Moreover, enterprises of different sizes will also face different types of organizational learning processes due to different resource stocks. Therefore, future research could not only add small companies based on this research to complete the entire research on SMEs, but also explore large companies to extend the model proposed in this thesis.

Further research could also explore more leadership styles. More types of leadership models may emerge in the context of other countries, which is a good opportunity to explore the role of more leadership styles in the international learning process. Furthermore, in this research,

there are four leadership styles that can be compared through thethe lens of power: authoritarian leadership, directive leadership, participative leadership, and empowering leadership. Due to the Chinese context and collected data, this research only compared authoritarian leadership and empowering leadership. Further research could compare the impact of these four leadership styles on the international learning process, which can make this research more complete.

In addition, further research might monitor the internationalization process of companies over a longer period of time. On the one hand, future research can study the company's internationalization process in stages and explore how leadership may have different impacts on organizational learning at different stages of internationalization. On the other hand, this study proposes that the CEO leadership may change with the company's internationalization process. If future research can track the internationalization of companies over a long period, it may be possible to observe the gradual stabilization of CEO leadership.

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Appendix 1 Plain Language Statement and Consent form

Participant Information Sheet

Title of Project: The influence of leadership on organizational learning in internationalizing high-tech companies in China

Name of Researcher:　Fan Wu

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Please take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

This research focuses on exploring the influence of leadership on organizational learning in internationalizing high-tech companies in China. Each interview will last between 60 to 90 minutes. The interview themes include personal information, information of the company (including firm's internationalization details), organizational learning during the internationalization process and leadership views. The interview is expected to be audio-recorded. Participation in this research is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw at any time within a week after the interview, without giving any reason.

Some personal details are needed for this research, for example, your position in the company and the educational background. I confirm that during the research process, all personal details will be kept confidential, and participants will not be identified in any results and outputs of this research. Please note that assurances on confidentiality will be strictly adhered to unless evidence of wrongdoing or potential harm is uncovered. In such cases the University may be obliged to contact relevant statutory bodies/agencies.

The collected data will only be used in my PhD thesis and my re-used in my conference papers, and journal articles in the future. I will store, destroy or keep and re-use all collected data carefully. For data storage, I will keep secure all paper data in a locked room/facility/cabinet and the access to my computer will be password protected to keep secure electronic data. At the end of the research, all participant data will be deleted. I will shred paper documents and use secure removal software to delete electronic files. Other collected data will be kept safety for 10 years by the University of Glasgow Research Guidelines *https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/datamanagement/*. The collected data will not be re-used by other researchers in the future.

I confirm that this project has been considered and approved by the College Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you for reading this.

For further information: Fan Wu, mobile phone number: email:

For further information and pursuing any complaint: the College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, Dr Muir Houston, email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

_____End of Participant Information Sheet_____

Consent Form

Title of Project: The influence of leadership on organizational learning in internationalizing high-tech companies in China

Name of Researcher: Fan Wu

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time within a week after the interview, without giving any reason.

I consent to interviews being audio-recorded.

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by pseudonym.

- All names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised.
- The material will be treated as confidential and kept in secure storage at all times.
- The personal data will be destroyed once the project is complete.
- The research data will be retained in secure storage for use by the researcher of this project in future academic research and will not be available for any other researchers.
- The material may be used in future publications, both print and online.

I agree to take part in this research study   ☐

I do not agree to take part in this research study   ☐

Name of Participant ………………………………………………….

Signature   ………………………………………………….

Date …………………………………

………………… End of consent form ……………………

Appendix 2 The CEO interview questionnaire sample

CEO/Founder Interview Schedule

Research Objectives:

1. To investigate leadership processes in the internationalizing high-tech companies in China.

2. To investigate the influence of leadership on organizational learning in the internationalizing high-tech companies in China.

3. To explore the role of leadership in the internationalization of Chinese high-tech companies.

Interview record:

Company:
Address:
Contact details:
Name of interviewee and position:
Business founder:
Year of foundation and internationalization:
Interviewer/date:

1. Background details
Introduction: In this section, I would like to focus on the background information of yourself and the company

1.1 Please tell me your educational and professional background and current role of CEO	
1.2 a. Number of employees when founded b. Number of employees now	

1.3 Structure of the company (or can I get an organizational structure chart from HR manager?)	

2. Leadership			
Introduction: In this section, I would like to focus on the management and leadership in your company			
2.1 How do you describe your management style?			
2.2 How do you manage your employees abroad? - How do you monitor the performance of the overseas employees? - What can you do to motivate them? - Please give me an example			
2.3 The future goals of the company for the overseas markets. - How did you or your team decide on these goals?			

3 Organizational learning in internationalization & Leadership			
Introduction: In this section, I would like to mainly focus on the important issues in your company's international activities during last three years and the leadership processes.			
3.1 Could you please list three critical events	A.	B.	C.

related to the internationalization happened in the company's the last three years? - Please describe them in detail.			
3.2 What did you do to handle this event? - Did anyone show different opinion of your decision? What did you do to let them accept your decision?			
3.3 Who or which department(s) make the most contributions in this event? - What did they do?			
3.4 What has changed as a result? (Internationalization, organizational learning, leadership)			
3.5 What areas of knowledge were needed to handle this event?			
3.6 Where did the company learn/acquire this?			

3.7 What did you do to acquire the knowledge?			
3.8 What did you do to encourage employees to learn in your company?			
3.9 Who in the business has the expertise for that now?			
3.10 How has this influenced what the firms is capable of doing now/how has this changed from what was before?			

Appendix 3 The manager interview questionnaire sample

Senior manager Interview Questionnaire

Research Objectives:

1. To explore leadership processes in the internationalizing high-tech companies in China.

2. To explore the influence of leadership on organizational learning in the internationalizing high-tech companies in China.

3. To explore the role of leadership in the internationalization process of Chinese high-tech companies.

Interview record:

Company:
Address:
Contact details:
Name of interviewee and position:
Interviewer/date:

1. Background details	
Introduction: In this section, I would like to focus on the background information of yourself, your department, and the company	
1.1 Please tell me your educational and professional background	
1.2 When did you joint the company? Why did you joint the company?	
1.3 Tell me the role of your position. What is your main duties?	
1.4 How many employees in your department?	
1.5 What are the main duties of your department?	

1.6 How is the firm organized today? (Could you please provide me an organization chart) *Just for HR manager	

2. Leadership	
Introduction: In this section, I would like to focus on the management and leadership in your company	
2.1 How do you describe your management style?	
2.2 How do you manage the employees abroad in your department? - How do you monitor the performance of the overseas employees? - What can you do to motivate them? - Please give me an example	
2.3 The future goals of your department for the overseas markets. - How did you or the management team decide on these goals?	
2.4 How do you describe your leader's management style? Please give me an example.	

3 Organizational learning in internationalization & Leadership
Introduction: In this section, I would like to mainly focus on the important issues in your company's

international activities during last three years and the leadership processes.		
3.1 Have there been any changes of your markets/R&D area/technology since last three years Why? Any critical events?		
3.2 Could you please list two critical events related to the internationalization happened in your department in the last three years? - Please describe them in detail.	A.	B.
3.3 What did you do to handle this event? - Did anyone show different opinion of your decision? What did you do to let them accept your decision?		
3.4 Who or which department(s) make the most contributions in this event? - What did they do?		
3.5 What has changed as a result? (Internationalization, organizational learning, leadership)		

3.6 What areas of knowledge were needed to handle this event?		
3.7 Where did your department learn/acquire this?		
3.8 What did you do to acquire the knowledge?		
3.9 What did you do to encourage employees to learn in your department?		
3.10 What did the company do to help your department to learn in this critical issues?		
3.11 Who in the business has the expertise for that now?		
3.12 How has this influenced what the firms is capable of doing now/how has this changed from what was before?		

Appendix 4 Interview transcript sample

Q: I checked the Internet your company's screening time is 2007 or 2010, I see the information on your official website is 2007.

A: When we were founded, this company was in the Zhongguancun Biomedical Park, which was an incubator. At that time, there were only six people. After the expansion, there was no place in that park. At that time, it was very difficult. The company moved here. But anything did not change like the shareholder structure and personnel did not change. I re-registered the company, originally called Baishan Junyi, now called Liuhe Ningyuan. Only the Chinese name has changed, the English name has not been changed. Nothing has changed in the client's information file.

Q: When you were established, you were already internationalized, right? When was the time of internationalization?

A: In 2010, we had colleagues overseas, had offices. There are real branches. We made the two biggest changes from a college student start-up company. One was group development; the other was internationalization. We began to register branches in Shandong's production base in 2013. The R & D center in Shanghai started in 2016, and then the first overseas branch was probably in 2016, the end of 2015.

Q: Where is the first branch?

A: In France.

Q: I heard that you also graduated from Tsinghua University with a Ph.D. Did you start a business after graduation?

A: Yes, I started my own business after graduation.

Q: You are the CEO of the company. How will you describe the CEO position and what are the responsibilities of the position?

A: It is a challenge for me, in the early years of the establishment we did not have work experience, that is when the school came out and began to build the company. At that time, the company experienced rapid growth. In fact, there was no such clear definition of CEO. My role is just to make sure everything is implemented. At that time, everyone had to do everything. Now, the company structure has been gradually completed, with overseas colleagues, more top managers from the top 500 companies, I think my responsibilities can be divided into three points: First, it is certain that I need to find stronger people who meet the needs of company's development to join in our company. Second, I need to deal with the relationships between investors. Third, I need to focus on government relations. Of course, although I am not the one who does these things directly, I still need to pay huge energy on marketing, finance, HRM. I am sure that I have a high degree of participation in marketing issues. In our industry, there are several parts that are very important and must be led by top leaders in a flat organization structure, which are quality, safety, and intellectual property.

Q: There were six people when you started your company. How many people are there now?

A: Less than five hundred.

Q: How would you describe your own management style?

A: In my opinion, whether in a simple way or in any other way, at least with the development of the company, we have formed invisibly cohesion which is related to my personality. However, with the development of the company. It expanded from a local company to a group company and then to an international company. I am facing great challenges. You know that the top 500 companies have developed so many rules to ensure that no matter who leaves the company, the company can operate normally, even without the CEO. At our stage, we have experienced the transformation. This process is also the transformation of myself.

I need to learn a lot and try to find the balance between building the system and strong execution. I don't know the correct answer about when the suitable time is, how to find a good balance and how to slowly reserve this knowledge. Most important is that it is not a good idea to play airborne, like recruiting another professional CEO. However, if our top management team does not change the original management way, I guess that we will still go to a bad result. Therefore, actually, I do not know how to use the appropriate language to evaluate my current work. I am still experiencing pain anyway.

In the beginning, it is very simple. All I need to do is how to make the company survive and how to develop. We are kind of doing service, so the most important thing for us is to complete the project. Therefore, all the rules, goals, and performance appraisal are based on the key point which is whether you can finish your projects. However, we have three entities in China now, which are Beijing, Shanghai, and Shandong. Our Being team is the original team, most of the employees in the Shanghai team have come from the top 500 companies and the Shandong team focuses on manufacturing, so employees in the Shandong team have a low educational background. The transformation in Beijing is easy because the team in Beijing is the original one. The execution of the Beijing team is that any policy will never be put on hold until the next day, everyone will know, will understand, will not ask reasons. However, Shanghai and Shandong teams are not the same. With the joint of the overseas branch, the management becomes more difficult. How do make them recognize the current situation? The competition in our industry is very fierce and we started late.

Q: You mentioned that you have a branch in France. Do you have any offices in other countries?

A: We have a branch in France, the US, Canada, and Japan. We also have an office in the UK.

Q: How do you manage your overseas employees?

A: Overseas employees are mainly engaged in marketing work. Marketing is a good choice for them because most of the customers we serve are the top 500 pharmaceutical companies in the world. There are cultural gaps between us and foreigners. The overseas employees are all from big companies and they are all foreigners. They are very familiar with our industry and the working way of big companies. I don't know whether you know about big companies. Big companies are always inefficient democratic systems, but it's very thorough. It's hard for us to understand, I don't know how to find a breakthrough point. However, they know.

Q: Does your company have any way to supervise them?

A: There must be, KPI, or your performance.

Q: Are there any different policies or methods for managing overseas employees and employees in Shandong, Shanghai?

A: They must be different because there is a cultural difference between foreigners and Chinese. When I manage foreign employees, I am using the implement target management. If they can achieve the goal, as long as they do not violate the company's regulations, I will give them more freedom. Besides, doing a marketing job need more flexibility and I need to be more tolerant. We should give them more time, and foreigners may be more slowly, but they are good with their working way. You can see the result, the market they got is relatively stable. On the Chinese side, because China itself has developed in recent years, the atmosphere of the whole society is relatively impetuous. The goal of the company can only be told to middle and senior levels. For lower-level employees, just to implement. Plans and vision are useless to them.

Q: Do you have some specific incentive policies for foreign staff?

A: They all did marketing work. That's performance orientation.

Q: Does the company have any specific goals for the future in overseas markets, such as goals of three or five years?

A: Basically 80% of our business comes from overseas. We are sure that the research and development of new drugs in China has just started, therefore the main customers are from Europe, America, and Japan. These three regions must be our main markets. Our company is focusing on the chemical synthesis of pharmaceutical R&D services, from animal experiments to clinical trials to commercialization. I definitely want to make a one-stop service platform, and the market must keep up with it. Then, in these three or two years, we have raised 600 million yuan, all of which have been invested in fixed assets. We certainly hope that the output value will reach 1 billion yuan in a short time.

Q: Do you have any plans, for example, to expand into other markets?

A: No, just those three. The rest won't pay off. It's meaningless.

Q: How did you and your team decide on the goal just mentioned?

A: First, it is based on our understanding of the industry and the entire industrial chain. We started from Beijing as a small R&D company, and we know that new drug R&D is the trend. Therefore, I think that goal is organic growth. Second, as I mentioned before, there were already lots of listed companies in the market. However, we still can survive which means that we have made up for a resource that the industry urgently needs for service providers, maybe others have not done a good job, or have not thought about the extension of this scheme, then we have done a good job. Based on this kind of condition, we think our goal is reasonable. Of course, the premise is that we should maintain sufficient market share

Q: Did you set this goal by yourself, or did you discuss it with others?

A: It's determined by our entrepreneurial team.

Q: Can you tell me the three most important things of the company that have happened in the past three years on the international market?

A: The first thing is that we become an international company, at least from this action, we can prove that our company has a certain strength. If a foreign company cooperates with us, he needs to consider reliability. Reliability is whether your company can operate for a long time. Do you have a certain ability to resist risks? This action may be a big change in the image of the company.

The second thing is that we used to communicate with foreign companies by ourselves. However, you know, there are big cultural differences between us. For example, foreigners say good, in fact, it is just so so. Right? Very good may also be fine. Therefore, sometimes we cannot really understand our customers' demands. Now, we have several foreign staffs, our communication with customers can be seamless, then we only need to build trust between us.

The third one you may be able to get together with the second one. In fact, sometimes we think that we work really hard, but our foreign customers cannot understand, because they may not understand the way you express it. Now, we have such a bridge in the middle, which can let customers more understand us.

The fourth thing is that we built our overseas branches. If we don't have our own branches, we can only be opportunistic, which means that we can only establish contacts when they need our products which other companies cannot provide. But there is no way for me to form a real partnership with customers. With our overseas branches, we may be able to establish a relationship between the company and customers. I think one of the most important things in our industry is to form a strategic partnership with your core customers, which is a big promotion for the company. This is the first step to give your company an opportunity for future qualitative change. There can never be absolute equality between the customer and us. At least on the surface, we can have an opportunity to do this, which is a prerequisite for bringing about qualitative change.

Q: Can you give me a specific incident, for example, the process to establish a branch in France.

A: In fact, when our company was first established, our business in Europe was mainly through an intermediary, in fact, we were blocked from customers. We tried to do it directly. And there were always numerous problems in the process. We did not know how to enter into customers' core business. There are two main problems: first, why customer don't want to connect us directly? Second, how to let the customer trust us? After we establish our French branch, our customers began to understand what projects we had done before and we slowly build trust. Now in Europe, we gradually get rid of intermediaries. Then we extended our experience to the US, there is no intermediary in the middle of our US market.

Q: When you decided to set up the French branch, was that your decision or the core team of your business?

A: It's basically my decision.

Q: Is there any disagreement at that time?

A: For a start-up company, I would like to say we have democratic centralism in China. Every decision has risks and no one would go ahead to see the result. The best way is to make up your mind and everyone can trust your decision. Trying is first and if this decision is wrong, next time I will listen to you. In fact, if staff regards every decision as to their own things, they will raise objections and remind you of the risk. That will become interference. We are a private enterprise, not a state-owned enterprise, and there are not so many "mother-in-law" to bother us. Therefore, our company has been forming rules, as long as it is clear, the reasons are basically reasonable. Your different opinions need to be reserved.

Q: When you set up the French branch, which person or department did you think contributed the most to this matter?

A: I don't know which department contributes the most and every department are involved.

Q: After the establishment of the French branch, is there any knowledge you and the company need to get during that process?

A: In fact, in our industry, Chinese companies have the ability to implement all technologies, which means that you can do it and your competitors can also do it. Therefore, the purpose of setting up overseas branches is to solve market problems. What they bring is not an innovation of your technology or new project management experience, which is not. The only way to learn the things you haven't done is to keep trying. Keep a clear mind and adjust the details and tactics.

Q: In terms of international knowledge and market knowledge, who is the best in the company now?

A: Marketing Director.

Q: Does the company have some measures and policies to encourage your employees to learn together?

A: It's useless. When we don't have an overseas branch, all our actions already meet the customer's needs. There is only a cultural difference and translation problem in the middle. Just like when you go to the supermarket, you like to buy, for example, you buy a cup of coffee, you like the brand of coffee, but if you don't have this connection with the supplier, you won't have a new opportunity, and people won't think of you first, right? You can never establish a strategic partnership with them. Just like you always buy this coffee, customers will buy our products like you buy coffee. you may always buy this brand, but you will never have contact with the manufacturer. We're like a supermarket: customers come to buy products and we don't communicate. We may say hello when we see more, that's all. But after we built the overseas branch, we can talk more about the strategic cooperation between

companies, which makes the relationship more solid, and we may become an integral part of the industrial chain.

Q: For example, when you enter the US market and when you enter the French market, are there any differences?

A: No. The Japanese market is particularly different. The Japanese market is hierarchical management. Japanese companies do not have that kind of flexibility, their work has low efficiency. But once he has decided, it is also very difficult for them to change their idea. The Japanese company is the top to the down structure. But the EU and US companies can also recommend some suppliers from the bottom to up.

Q: When you first entered the Japanese market, how did you enter the market.

A: I have something that other people don't have. You do research and development. You must need it. You must have come to us on your own initiative. The Japanese branch has just been established. It was just established on 1st May.

Q: Are the same conditions at the beginning of entering US and French markets?

A: At the beginning, it was the same. The customer came to us first, and then we realized that it would be too tired, so we asked for a change. We learned how our peers do internationalization and we also told our customers, even they are in the lower and middle positions in their companies. We asked them how to increase our corporations. They may say that they cannot make the decision, but they gave us much useful advice. Of course, I admit that we dig lots of customers to become our colleagues.

Q: What do you think is the biggest difference between before and after the internationalization of the company?

A: First, I and the top management team changed a lot during this process. In the beginning, we thought that I did it quickly, well and cheaply, or more cost-effective, why don't you use our products? Then, we found that IP protection is the most important thing in our industry. Therefore, we can only sell exclusively, which means that I can only sell this drug to only one customer. After we begin internationalization, it let me slowly change my concept. In the future, we need to gradually understand the internal system of their pharmaceutical company, and we also need to make some internal adjustments. We need to find the right person to connect with customers equally, and the change of concept should be the biggest. Second, there is a big change in our management system. For the foreign companies, they have their completed system, which means that the boss cannot control everything. In the beginning, we just help the boss to realize their ideas. However, our customer may make decisions with ten or eight people, we must find ten or eight people here. Therefore, our management system needed to be changed at the same time.

Q: Has there been any change in organizational learning?

A: We learn in practice. Like EMBA class, it may be useful to me but will be useless to our staff. We learned from customers, our colleagues. Then we discuss and sort it out internally after learning and thinking about how to make our decision more reasonable. Like our high-tech service industry, you always do the new project, which is R&D orientation. We will always encounter different problems and only continue learning can make us cooperate with customers more and more happily.

Q: In fact, you first understand what the customer needs are, and then you study and discuss them internally, and then digest them. Does the company organize some training regularly?

A: I'm sure every department has meetings and summaries almost every day.