The Finnish Way to SaaS Scaling: A Qualitative Study

About

This paper investigates how software-as-a-service (SaaS) startups in Finland successfully scale their operations. Through a qualitative multiple-case study of six Finnish companies, the research develops an integrated model that examines the interplay between business, organizational, and engineering choices. The study identifies a coherent scaling strategy suited for companies operating in smaller, digitally advanced economies with limited domestic markets.

Problem

Scaling is a critical phase where many software startups fail, and existing research predominantly focuses on large, capital-rich ecosystems like Silicon Valley. This creates a knowledge gap regarding how startups navigate growth in smaller markets, such as Finland, which require early internationalization. The study addresses how these companies must integrate commercial, organizational, and technical strategies to achieve durable, global growth.

Study Outcome

- Finnish SaaS startups pursue early internationalization with lightweight local hubs due to the small domestic market.
- Growth is driven by a capital-efficient, product-led growth (PLG) and inbound marketing model, with outbound sales added selectively for larger customers.
- Companies maintain a disciplined single-product focus, using one codebase for all clients to ensure maintainability and scalability.
- Technical debt is managed pragmatically, with teams prioritizing and fixing issues only when they become direct bottlenecks to business growth.
- Operations rely on distributed, remote-first teams that use lean planning, persistent experimentation, and data-driven management.
- External funding is typically used to accelerate proven growth strategies, not to initiate the scaling process.

Keywords

SaaS • Software Startups • Scaling • Finland • Product-Led Growth • Internationalization • Qualitative Study