

Antecedents, Managerial Decisions and Outcomes of Business Model Transfer Across Countries

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Abstract

Research on how firms rebuild their business models on entering a foreign market has been built on medium and large enterprises and on registered exporters, leaving thinly evidenced the mechanism by which a very small firm rebuilds what it sells and how it delivers it. This review synthesises that literature within the Antecedents-Decisions-Outcomes framework and follows one variable across all three axes: the founder-detachability of the operating asset, meaning how far the value a firm sells can be produced by someone other than the person who designed it. Twenty-four studies were assembled through a bounded purposive search reported under the SPAR-4-SLR protocol, nine examined in full text. They are read against ten primary documents from three companies the author founded and led in succession, a creative studio in Russia, a children's retail chain in Indonesia and a home-services company in the United States, so that the review traces how one founder's operating practice developed across three rebuilds rather than assessing firms from the outside. Three synthesis matrices and a cross-case comparison show that the corpus measures outcomes the smallest firms cannot use, that its evidence concentrates in Europe and in firms an order of magnitude larger, and that the moves which make a business executable by other people are recorded in contracts, work instructions and specifications rather than in the constructs the literature reports. The managerial instruments behind those moves, and a gap map with the studies that would close it, are the substance of the article.

Keywords: Business model transfer; Small firm internationalization; Founder dependence; ADO framework; Operating model adaptation; Entrepreneurial decision-making

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1. Introduction

A firm that opens in a second country rarely sells the same thing it sold in the first. The product may travel unchanged; the process around it, the documents defining the obligation, the division of labour and the terms on which staff are paid usually do not. The operating model changes, and in a firm of fewer than twenty people that change is not a project handed to a

subsidiary. It is work the founder does personally, alongside the delivery work.

The three companies discussed below were founded and led by the present author: a full-cycle creative studio in Russia from 2016, a children's educational retail chain in Indonesia from 2020, and a home-services and deck construction company operating in Denver since 2024. The contracts, work instructions and specifications examined here are those companies' own records, and the

reading of them draws on direct knowledge of why each system was built as it was, rather than on the reconstruction of another firm's decisions from its paperwork.

Research on internationalization has not been built on firms of that size. The corpus defining the field studies enterprises of up to 250 employees in Europe and 500 in the United States and China (Zahoor et al., 2020), and rests dominantly on secondary data (Du et al., 2023). A firm of fifteen people leaves almost no trace in such data, yet more than 95 % of enterprises worldwide are small and medium enterprises, contributing up to 60 % of employment and up to 40 % of gross domestic product (Dabić, Maley et al., 2020b). Calls to examine the micro-foundations beneath firm-level outcomes have been made from within the field (Vanderstraeten et al., 2020), and entrepreneurship by founders working outside their country of origin has been mapped as a field in its own right (Dabić, Vlačić et al., 2020a).

A second mismatch is sharper. The field's outcome measures are export intensity, foreign sales ratio and performance (Calheiros-Lobo et al., 2023; Hennart et al., 2021), which are meaningful for a firm that already has a product to export. They bear little on the question that decides whether a very small firm's second venture is worth anything: whether its offering can be executed by someone other than the founder. A studio selling its founders' judgement can be profitable and still be unsellable; a shop whose selling method exists in writing can be handed over, valued and sold. That property is termed here the founder-detachability of the operating asset, and it is defined in Section 2.1.

That property is not a new construct. An established literature examines founder effects on venture outcomes and the way founders hand work over as a firm prepares to grow (Van Lancker et al., 2023; Aryadita et al., 2023). It does not, however, treat detachability as an antecedent of *transfer*: something a founder carries into a new country, which then bounds which adaptation decisions are available there.

That gap is the subject here. The ADO framework of Paul and Benito (2018) is adopted as the organising structure, with detachability followed through all three axes and the literature read against the records of the author's three companies. The centre of gravity is Section 3.2: the specific managerial instruments through which a founder moves execution away from himself, written procedures,

allocated roles, incentives tied to a controllable result, contracts and quantified specifications. No prior ADO-framed review treating founder-detachability as an antecedent of cross-country business model transfer in micro and small firms was identified in the reviewed literature.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Analytical lens: business model transfer and the ADO framework

A business model describes how a firm creates value, delivers it and captures part of it (George & Bock, 2011). Treated as a unit of analysis rather than a synonym for strategy, it is the level at which the difference between two national markets becomes concrete: the same strategic intent can require a different sequence of operations, a different contract and a different pay structure in each country (Lanzolla & Markides, 2021). Three terms are used in a fixed sense: **replication** is carrying the model abroad unchanged, **adaptation** is changing parts of it while keeping its logic, and **transfer** covers both. The model itself, rather than the entrepreneur's attributes alone, can be what makes early internationalization possible (Hennart et al., 2021); models carried into retail are embedded in local institutions rather than portable across them (Burt et al., 2016); and the model has been treated as an object of internationalization in its own right (Bohnsack et al., 2021; Evers et al., 2023).

Founder-detachability of the operating asset is defined as the extent to which the value the firm sells can be produced by someone other than the founder, working to instructions the founder does not supervise in person. It is a matter of degree and it is observable: whether the selling method exists in writing, whether a role's pay is attached to an outcome that role controls, whether obligations are specified before work starts.

The ADO framework (Paul & Benito, 2018) is **adopted** here, not devised: it organises a body of research into the drivers of a phenomenon, the decisions actors take, and the outcomes that follow. The framework is not a contribution of this review; it is a published structure, applied here to a body of work it has not been applied to before, as it has been in adjacent applied fields (Pushparaj & Kushwaha, 2024). Detachability is positioned as an antecedent that also conditions the second axis and is itself moved by it (Figure 1).

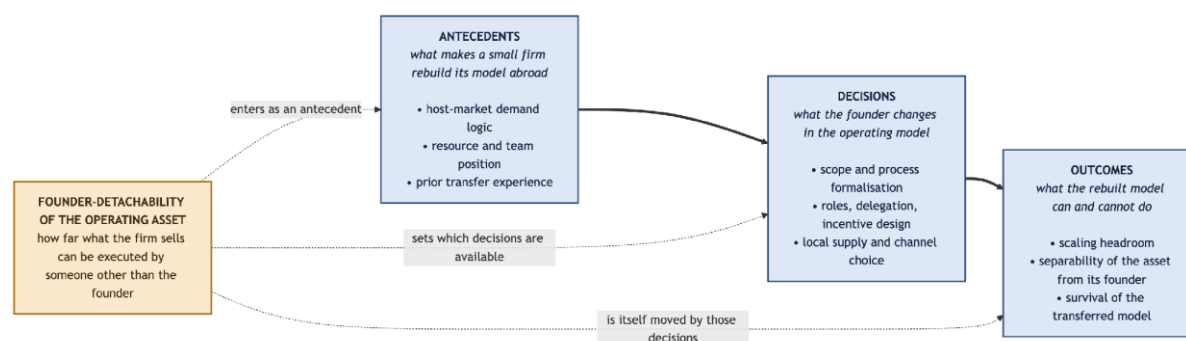


Figure 1. The adopted ADO framework as applied, with founder-detachability running through all three axes.

2.2 Search strategy and corpus assembly

The review process follows the SPAR-4-SLR protocol (Paul et al., 2021), which asks for a transparent account of the process actually followed rather than a claim to have covered the field.

Assembling. The domain was cross-country transfer and adaptation of business models in micro and small firms. Records were retrieved from OpenAlex, which aggregates Crossref, PubMed and other indexes, using seven topical queries built from sub-domains of the question, plus a single probe for prior reviews. Search terms were deliberately not built from the framework's own axes, since "antecedents" and "outcomes" are the language of synthesis rather than of retrieval. The window was 2019–2026, with older anchors admitted individually.

Arranging. Retrieval returned **340** records; deduplication left 340. Hard filters on window, presence of an abstract and document type reduced this to **270**.

Relevance screening against the inclusion criteria (peer-reviewed, addressing business model transfer or micro/small-firm internationalization or founder-dependence limits on scaling, not a purely macroeconomic trade study) retained **57**, of which the **30** most directly relevant were carried forward. The founder-dependence axis was underrepresented at that point, because screening ranked candidates against the full question; a second, narrower retrieval on three queries returned **119** records, from which **7** were added. The working corpus was **37 candidates**. The reference list holds **26 entries: 24 literature sources**, plus the two papers that supply the analytical framework and the reporting protocol, which are cited as apparatus rather than analysed as evidence.

Assessing. Nine sources were obtained in full text and read completely; the remaining fifteen were analysed at the level of their reported results. Every specific number attributed to the literature comes from one of the nine. The corpus is bounded and purposive. Table 1 profiles it.

Table 1. Profile of the 24 literature sources. The framework and protocol papers, which make the reference list up to 26 entries, are apparatus and are excluded from this profile.

Dimension	Distribution
Year	2019–2026: 20; 2011–2018: 3; 2008–2010: 1
Depth of reading	Full text: 9; reported results only: 15
Outlets	<i>J. World Business</i> 3; <i>JIBS</i> 2; <i>J. Business Research</i> 2; <i>Sustainability</i> 2; 16 outlets with one each
Study type	Reviews and bibliometric mappings 9; survey-based 5; qualitative and case-based 4; conceptual 6
Unit of analysis	SMEs 13; new and young ventures 5; founders and teams 4; the business model 2

Geographic focus	Europe-dominant 9; Asia-dominant 4; multi-country or unspecified 11
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2.3 Case evidence base and document evidence classes

Alongside the literature, the review reads ten primary documents from the three companies introduced above: a full-cycle creative studio in Russia (2016–2018), a children's educational retail chain in Indonesia (2020–2024, up to four stores over its life), and a home-services and deck construction company in the United States (2024 to date). The documents are contracts, work instructions and specifications drawn up to run those businesses, not accounts written for this review, and are cited by type, level and date. Table 2 lists them.

Nine of the ten come from the Indonesian and US companies. At the studio nothing of this kind was written down, and not through oversight: the work was built each time around one client's personality and carried by the founders' personal involvement in every project, so there

was no operating system to formalise and no stable object a document could have described. The studio therefore enters the comparison through what it sold and how it was delivered, rather than through paperwork it never needed.

Their evidentiary status is fixed. Values appearing in a contract, such as a salary, a bonus percentage, a deposit, a start window or a quantity of material, are contracted or planned values, not achieved results, and are read only as evidence of the decision taken. A business-sale presentation prepared in 2022 is a marketing document, and no outcome figure from it is used. Operational figures with no primary record behind them, such as a first-year revenue of USD 150,000 for the Denver company, appear only as context for why the question was asked, never as a result.

Table 2. Primary document register. Ten documents, produced by two of the three transfers, cited by type, level and date, never by signatory.

Case	Documents	Content
Creative studio, Russia, 2016–2018	None of this kind	No formalised operating system existed at the time; the work was carried by the founders' personal involvement in each project, and there was nothing stable enough to write down
Children's retail, Indonesia, 2020–2024	Three employment contracts, manager to shopkeeper level (2023); consignment agreement (2022); written selling instruction; sale presentation (2022)	Role-specific incentive design; contractual duty to implement and record a written method; local sourcing on commission; customer base priced as a separate asset
Home services, USA, 2024–	Two signed construction agreements; preliminary estimate; drainage scope of work	Scope, payment and risk fixed before work starts; contingency priced in advance; labour split from materials; deliverable stated in quantities

2.4 Boundaries of the method

Nine sources were examined in full text while the rest were read at the level of their reported results, so the

coding of the latter carries some uncertainty. The three companies are three cases, not a sample; the comparison sets out how each was built and what followed, and claims no causal relation between the two. The

documentary record is uneven for a substantive reason rather than an evidentiary one: as set out in Section 2.3, the studio had no formalised operating system to document, because what it sold could not be separated from the founders who delivered it.

3. Results

3.1 Antecedents of cross-country transfer

The drivers of a rebuild abroad divide into three levels, which the corpus treats unevenly, and the unevenness is itself informative.

At the **individual** level, disposition carries measurable weight: risk-taking predicts the degree of internationalization, and innovativeness and human capital predict service innovation more strongly than proactiveness or creativity (Vuorio et al., 2020). The founder-effects literature reaches the same level differently, grouping determinants into knowledge, experience, competence, characteristics and founding team (Aryadita et al., 2023), and where a firm internationalizes late rather than from birth the leader's own orientation drives the reworking of the model (Colovic, 2022). With a typical founding team of two, consequential decisions sit with one or two people for as long as the model stays personal, whatever the headcount says. Table 3 gives the reported values.

At the **organizational** level the picture shifts. Among 222 firms, those qualifying as born globals differed from the rest less in who ran them than in what they sold (Hennart et al., 2021): the model, not the person, distinguished them. The category also excludes the firms discussed here by construction, since born-global status is operationalised as 25 % foreign sales within three

years and a business whose value proposition cannot leave its founder never reaches that threshold.

At the **environmental** level, network position matters less directly than is often claimed: across 508 firms, entrepreneurial networks influenced sustainable performance mainly through dynamic capabilities rather than directly (Abbas et al., 2019), and earlier work established the same shape for market orientation (Armario et al., 2008).

One pattern runs across all three levels: the antecedents the corpus codes are attributes of a person, a product-market position, or an environment. None is a property of the *operating arrangement itself*. The founder-role literature comes closest, finding that handover holds only where incoming staff reshape the roles they receive (Van Lancker et al., 2023), but it treats this as a stage of growth within one market rather than as something carried across a border.

The three transfers show why the distinction matters, because in each the decisive constraint on arrival was the part of the model that could be handed to someone else. The studio sold immersion in a client's personality and business, rendered as a story and a visual image; each project began that immersion again, there was no stable object to standardise, and the question of transferring the model never became actionable. The Indonesian chain sold a selection method a trained consultant could apply, and within its first years that method was carried into employment contracts and written instructions. The Denver company sells work still largely performed and supervised in person, and its ceiling is not demand but the difficulty of finding subcontractors who can be trusted with part of an object.

Table 3. Antecedents: the corpus's reports, the firm scale behind each, and whether the finding survives translation to a firm of fewer than twenty people.

Antecedent	Level	Evidence	Reported	Transfers to micro scale?	Verdict
Risk-taking	Individual	104 ICT firms (Vuorio et al., 2020)	$\beta = 0.29$ on degree of internationalization	Partly; the instrument assumes a management team	Supported, scale-limited

Innovativeness	Individual	Same	$\beta = 0.35$, strongest individual path	Yes	Supported
Founder human capital	Individual	Same; 74 of 441 articles (Aryadita et al., 2023)	$\beta = 0.25$; five recurring determinant classes	Yes, with greater weight: a team of two carries the decision load	Supported, amplified
Model design over founder attributes	Organizational	222 firms, 38 born globals (Hennart et al., 2021)	Foreign sales 66.1 vs 15.72; 45 % B2C vs 66 %	Untestable as stated: the 25 %-in-3-years threshold excludes founder-bound models by construction	Not transferable as measured
Firm size and resources	Organizational	Same	92.71 vs 50.28	No: an order of magnitude above the cases here	Out of range
Network position	Environmental	508 firms (Abbas et al., 2019)	Direct 0.0232 vs 0.1161 mediated; $R^2 = 0.31$	Partly: the capability converting it is the founder	Supported, mediated
Founder-detachability	Operating arrangement	Not coded as an antecedent; nearest is 18 months of observation of role evolution (Van Lancker et al., 2023)	Studied as a growth stage in one market	Directly, and it binds in all three transfers	Gap: present in the literature, absent as a transfer antecedent

3.2 Managerial decisions in model adaptation

The literature is thinnest on this axis and the documents richest. The corpus reports decisions at the level of constructs such as collaboration, digitalization and channel choice, while the documents record the instruments through which a founder moves work away from himself.

Formalising scope before work starts. The operating position in the US market is that a customer wants to know precisely what is included before committing, and

the agreements are drafted to settle that before any work begins. A resurfacing contract fixes a deposit of 50 % of labour, a start window of 10–14 days, a duration of 8–10 days and a 48-hour window to raise concerns, and allocates weather and material-delivery delay explicitly. A deck construction agreement of 450 sq ft prices a contingency in advance, quoting joist repair at USD 50–100 per unit so that a hidden defect found after demolition becomes a priced decision rather than a renegotiation. A preliminary estimate separates labour from materials line by line. This is the mechanism by which the obligation stops living in one person's head.

Specifying the deliverable in quantities. A drainage scope states 100 linear feet of rock swale at 6 feet wide and 9 inches deep, 15.4 tons of granite, a 25-foot catch drain in 7 sections and 24 bags of concrete. A document written that way can be handed to a crew, checked by someone who was not present when it was agreed, and disputed on facts rather than recollection.

Allocating roles and attaching incentives to what each role controls. The Indonesian chain's three employment contracts, all dated March 2023, are one design rather than three similar papers, and the design is the mechanism. The manager-level contract attaches a bonus of 1 % to *store* sales, because a manager influences the whole floor; it obliges the holder to implement the selling technology, to train each employee individually against an approved training plan, to monitor execution of the seven steps and keep per-employee records of that monitoring, to attend weekly meetings at which the training plan is approved, and to hire, interview and dismiss. The shopkeeper-level contract attaches 2 % to the holder's *individual* sales plan, because an assistant influences their own counter and not the store; it requires the holder to enter their sales daily, after the working day, into a shared spreadsheet, and it carries a separate duty to meet a plan for customer reviews in Google Maps. The manager-assistant contract, covering supplier search, contracting, receiving and inventory, carries a fixed salary and no sales-linked bonus at all, because none of those duties moves the sales figure. Each incentive sits where the holder has control and nowhere else, and each is measured by a record the holder produces rather than by the founder's observation.

Codifying the method so it can be taught. The chain's selling procedure is a written instruction, termed a seven-step technology in the manager's contract: qualification before recommendation, a prepared sequence for handling the objection that nothing suits, and follow-up. On its own that is a document. What turns it into a transferable asset is the pairing with the manager's contractual duty to train against an approved plan and to keep the compliance record, so the method is taught by someone other than the founder, checked by someone other than the founder, and evidenced without the founder in the room.

Binding the arrangement so the asset stays with the firm. Each contract runs one year, sets working time explicitly, and requires 30 days' notice; early departure carries a penalty of two months' wages together with an

obligation to train a successor, and disclosure of confidential information, with customer lists and analytics data named among the protected categories, entitles the employer to reimbursement of its legal and attorney's fees. A method written down and taught is an asset only if those holding it cannot leave with it overnight, and the successor-training clause keeps the codified procedure in the business when a particular person leaves it.

Moving risk outside the firm. A consignment agreement with a local supplier sets a commission of 30 % per product and a one-week collection notice, so unsold inventory sits with the supplier rather than with a founder financing stock out of working capital.

Read together, these are five instruments and none of them is expensive: a written procedure, an allocated role, a bonus attached to a denominator the holder governs, a record the holder keeps, and a contractual term that holds the arrangement in place. None required capital, software or outside advice. All of them are dated, which makes a firm's movement along the detachability scale visible in documents it already holds.

The literature confirms these decisions are consequential without describing them at this resolution. Collaboration is the most-studied class, with 105 papers reviewed, 28 drawing on network theory and 24 on the resource-based view against 6 on the Uppsala model (Zahoor et al., 2020). Digitalization is treated as a route through which small firms address model challenges abroad (Reim et al., 2022; Tolstoy et al., 2021), and channel decisions depend on industry context and prior international experience (Child et al., 2017). Work on founder role evolution comes closest to the mechanism (Van Lancker et al., 2023), and delegation by foreign entrepreneurs outside their home institutions has been examined directly, with relational contracting as the substitute where formal enforcement is weak (Kulchina & Oxley, 2020).

Table 4 sets the corpus and the documentary record side by side. One absence in that record carries as much weight as the documents. The Denver company has no acceptance templates, no formalised checklists, no subcontractor selection criteria and no change-approval forms; such matters are settled in the course of the work and in correspondence with the customer. Read against the signed agreements, which do contain a scope-change clause, this gives a precise reading rather than a

contradiction: the firm has the clause and does not yet have the process behind it. That is a transfer halfway through.

Table 4. Managerial decisions: the corpus against the documentary record.

Decision domain	In the corpus	In the documents	Agreement
Formalising scope	Not a decision class	50 % deposit on labour; 10–14 day start; 8–10 day duration; 48-hour acceptance; weather and delivery delay allocated	Documents only
Pricing contingency	Not addressed	450 sq ft agreement prices joist repair at USD 50–100 per unit	Documents only
Splitting labour from materials	Not addressed	Estimate itemises materials against labour	Documents only
Specifying in quantities	Not addressed	100 LF swale at 6 ft × 9 in; 15.4 t granite; 25 ft catch drain in 7 sections; 24 bags concrete	Documents only
Attaching incentives to control	Not at instrument level	Manager 1 % of store sales; shopkeeper 2 % of individual plan with daily entry; supply role fixed salary, no bonus	Documents only
Codifying the method	Not at instrument level	Seven-step technology in writing; contractual duty to train to plan and record per-employee compliance	Documents only
Retaining a codified method	Not addressed	One-year terms; 30 days' notice; two months' wages plus successor training on early exit; disclosure entitles the employer to reimbursement of legal fees, customer lists and analytics named among protected categories	Documents only
Local sourcing	Context, not decision	Consignment at 30 % commission, one-week collection notice	Documents only

Collaboration and partnering	Most-studied class: 105 papers; 28 network theory, 24 resource-based view, 6 Uppsala (Zahoor et al., 2020)	Consignment and subcontracting, the latter unformalised	Both, at different resolutions
Delegation under weak enforcement	Examined directly, relational contracting as substitute (Kulchina & Oxley, 2020)	Contracts carry formal terms and training obligations	Both
Founder role handover	18 months of observation; holds where joiners reshape roles (Van Lancker et al., 2023)	Manager contract moves training and compliance recording off the founder	Both
Channel and digital route	Digitalization as a route abroad (Reim et al., 2022; Tolstoy et al., 2021); channel choice depends on context and experience (Child et al., 2017)	Written instruction for the online channel	Both

3.3 Outcomes of transfer

The corpus measures outcomes it can observe in secondary data, and that choice bounds its reach. Table 5 records each measure against the scale of firm it was generated on.

Foreign sales intensity and firm size dominate (Hennart et al., 2021); service innovation has been linked to profitability (Vuorio et al., 2020), and networks explain part of the variance in sustainable performance through dynamic capabilities (Abbas et al., 2019). The issue is not their quality but the shape of the question they answer.

The distribution is narrow in four ways at once, all recorded in Table 5: Europe accounts for 61 of 105 collaboration studies (Zahoor et al., 2020), cross-sectional surveys and secondary data prevail, with 71.82 % of one 207-paper corpus resting on sources collected for other purposes, and 62.32 % of that corpus applies a single theory (Du et al., 2023). Volume is not the constraint; its direction is. Of 425 abstracts analysed from 25,303 documents, 359 concerned internationalization theories and 7 dealt with determinants of export performance (Calheiros-Lobo et al., 2023). A second review found the same skew towards

theory-building over the mechanics of firm behaviour (Dabić, Maley et al., 2020b; Debellis et al., 2021).

None of these measures registers the property tracked here. Export intensity presumes a product that travels; performance presumes an entity whose results can be attributed. Neither asks whether the business has become separable from the person who built it, which is the question with consequences for a founder deciding whether to start again in a new country.

All three companies produced outcomes for which the corpus has no measure. The studio closed in 2018, and the reason was the exhaustion of a particular way of doing business rather than absence of demand: the work sold well, and could not be reproduced without the founders who made it. On any measure the field uses, that company simply exits the dataset; on the measure used here it is the clearest case of the three.

The Indonesian chain reached the opposite position. In the presentation prepared for its sale in 2022, the customer base appears as a separately valued line alongside stock, equipment and lease deposits. That a base of customers could be priced at all is the point: the relationships had been recorded in a system rather than held in one person's memory, and the method that

produced them existed in writing, so a third party could value them without the founder. The document is a marketing paper prepared to attract a buyer, and no record in the company's files shows that a sale closed at this or any price; what it evidences is that the asset had been made separable enough to be priced, not that it was sold.

The Denver company sits between the two, with obligations formalised on paper and execution still

largely personal. Its constraint is that the same shortage of reliable subcontractors which creates demand for a dependable contractor also limits growth beyond one person's oversight.

Quantitative measures derived from the Indonesian venture's transaction records are outside the scope of this review and are not reported here; they belong to a separate study of that venture.

Table 5. Outcomes: the corpus's measures, and their reach for a firm of fewer than twenty people.

Outcome	Evidence	Reported	Applicable below 20 staff?	Verdict
Foreign sales ratio	222 firms (Hennart et al., 2021)	66.1 vs 15.72	Only where a product travels	Measurable, often inapplicable
Firm size at internationalization	Same	92.71 vs 50.28	No	Out of range
Service innovation to profitability	104 firms (Vuorio et al., 2020)	Good model fit	Partly; the frame assumes a management layer	Supported, scale-limited
Networks to performance	508 firms (Abbas et al., 2019)	$R^2 = 0.31$; mediated path significant	Partly: mediation runs through capabilities the founder holds	Supported, mediated
Determinants of export performance	425 abstracts from 25,303 documents (Calheiros-Lobo et al., 2023)	7 of 425; 359 on theory	Barely addressed at any scale	Under-evidenced
Geographic spread	105 and 207 papers (Zahoor et al., 2020; Du et al., 2023)	61 of 105 Europe; 39 China vs 24 US	Foreign micro-founders in South-East Asian retail near-absent	Concentrated
Method mix	Same	40 of 105 cross-sectional; 87.44 % quantitative, 71.82 % secondary	Secondary data cannot observe a rebuild	Structurally blind to the mechanism
Theoretical spread	207 papers (Du et al., 2023)	62.32 % single theory	Cross-field phenomena fall between lenses	Concentrated
Volume and recency	(Zahoor et al., 2020; Calheiros-Lobo et al., 2023)	67 % in the last decade; 1,950 papers in 2022	Volume is not the constraint	Expanding, narrowly aimed

Separability from the founder	Not measured in the corpus	none	Directly; it bounds whether the venture can be scaled or sold	Gap
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4. Discussion

4.1 Founder-detachability of the operating asset across the three axes

Placed side by side, the three transfers do not form a progression in skill or in market attractiveness. They form a scale of one property (Table 6).

Table 6. Three transfers on the detachability scale, read across the three axes.

	Studio, Russia (2016–2018)	Retail, Indonesia (2020–2024)	Home services, USA (2024–)
Offering	Immersion in the client's personality or business, rendered as a story and an image	A selection method a trained consultant applies to a parent and child	Work specified in advance and delivered to a standard
Antecedents: transferable on arrival	Nothing; each project began the immersion again	A method that could be taught, applied and checked	Judgement on scope and technical risk, still held personally
Decisions: instruments used	Unformalised operating model (2016–2018)	Three role-specific contracts with differentiated incentives; written seven-step technology; contractual compliance recording; consignment sourcing	Staged scope, priced contingency, labour split from materials, quantified specifications; no templates, criteria or approval forms
Outcomes: trajectory	Closed 2018; recorded as exhaustion of a model, not absence of demand	Customer base priced as a separate asset in the 2022 sale presentation	Obligations formalised, execution still personal; growth bounded by subcontractor availability
Position	Unformalised operating model with absolute founder dependence; value creation non-detachable from founder execution	Asset separable and priceable	In transition: the clause exists, the process does not

Detachability behaves differently on each axis. As an **antecedent** it bounds which adaptation decisions are available at all, which is why the studio could not formalise scope however much its founders might have wanted to. As a **decision variable** it moves only through the instruments set out in Section 3.2, not through intention. As an **outcome** it bounds what a company can

become: the studio could be profitable and could not be handed on; the chain could be priced asset by asset.

Detachability is asymmetric in time as well, slow to build and quick to lose: contracts and compliance records take years to assemble, while a single decision to take on work only the founder can specify pulls a firm back down the scale within one project. The position occupied on arrival

is therefore not a starting condition the new market can be expected to improve; it is a stock the new market draws down first. The scale ranks nothing else. The studio was a working business that sold what it was good at, and the inseparability of its asset is a statement about transferability, not quality; nor does the scale predict market fit, since the US venture's demand is strong precisely because reliable execution is scarce, the same scarcity that limits its delegation.

This reading is consistent with the founder-effects literature rather than opposed to it. That work establishes that founder knowledge, experience and competence shape venture outcomes (Aryadita et al., 2023) and that handover holds where incoming people reshape their roles (Van Lancker et al., 2023). The addition here is direction of travel across borders: the level of detachability reached in one country is an input to the next transfer, and it constrains the second rebuild before any market analysis begins.

4.2 What the corpus does not know: a gap map and the studies that would close it

Six gaps follow from the mismatch between the measures and the decisions. Each is stated with the study that would close it.

G1. The field's "small" is not small. Operative definitions admit firms of up to 250 employees in Europe and 500 in the United States and China (Zahoor et al., 2020); the companies here had teams of up to fifteen, and the corpus does not test whether findings established an order of magnitude higher hold below twenty. *Study: re-test the established findings using size strata rather than one SME category.*

G2. Secondary data cannot see the rebuild. With 71.82 % of studies resting on secondary sources (Du et al., 2023), the field observes registered outcomes rather than the reconstruction producing them, and the instruments of Section 3.2 do not appear in those datasets. *Study: collect the instruments directly. They are shareable, dated, and record decisions rather than recollections, which makes a longitudinal record of formalisation feasible where survey recall is not.*

G3. Geographic concentration. Europe accounts for 61 of 105 collaboration studies (Zahoor et al., 2020), and China and the United States dominate elsewhere (Du et al., 2023), leaving transfers into South-East Asian consumer retail by foreign founders close to absent.

Study: extend the geographic base to South-East Asian and Latin American consumer retail entered by foreign micro-founders.

G4. Single-theory framing. With 62.32 % of studies applying one theory (Du et al., 2023), a decision that is simultaneously a governance choice and an internationalization move falls between the available lenses. *Study: frame incentive design jointly rather than within either literature alone.*

G5. Outcome measures exclude separability. Export intensity and performance are measured; separability from the founder is not, and determinants of export performance themselves appear in only 7 of 425 analysed abstracts (Calheiros-Lobo et al., 2023). *Study: build a detachability measure from the observable features listed in Section 3.2 and validate it against realised sale or transfer.*

G6. Serial transfer is unstudied. The founder-effects literature examines founders of single ventures; a founder rebuilding three times, in three industries and three countries, is not a case the corpus contains. *Study: treat serial founders as within-subject designs, which removes the individual-differences confound, and test whether detachability reached in one country shortens the next rebuild.*

4.3 Implications for founders and advisors

The question before entering a second market is not whether the product will sell but which part of the model can be executed by someone else; the answer bounds what can be attempted. Detachability is moved by instruments rather than intentions, and they are cheap: writing the method down, attaching pay to a controllable outcome, having compliance recorded by someone other than the founder. And a contractual clause is not a process: a signed scope-change provision with no form behind it will hold in a dispute and will not survive delegation.

4.4 Limitations

Three companies built by the same founder are three cases: the shared founder makes the comparison possible and also keeps it from being representative, and nothing here supports a causal claim. The documents record decisions, not execution, and the two can diverge. Operational figures reported for these ventures without primary records behind them are used only as context.

Nine sources were read in full text and fifteen at the level of their reported results, so the coding of the latter carries uncertainty. The corpus is bounded and purposive, drawn from one aggregating index within a defined window.

5. Conclusion

Research on business model transfer measures the behaviour of registered, mid-sized firms after they arrive in a foreign market. It has less to say about the work a founder of a fifteen-person firm does to make arrival possible: rewriting the scope, the roles, the pay and the supply arrangements so the model can be executed by other people. Read through the ADO framework alongside ten primary documents from two of three transfers, detachability of the operating asset acts on all three axes, bounding which decisions are available, being moved by contractual and procedural instruments, and conditioning whether the venture can be scaled or sold.

The review offers a variable that is cheap to observe, absent from the field's outcome measures, and decisive for firms too small to appear in the data the field uses, together with the instruments that move it. The evidence needed to study it further is already written down, in documents such firms already hold.

Declaration of conflicting interests. The companies discussed are the author's own, as stated at the outset of the Introduction; the quantitative claims in this article are therefore drawn from the published literature, while the author's company records are used for the managerial decisions they document. No other competing interests are declared.

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Ethical approval. Not applicable: the study involves no human participants, no personal data and no interviews. The primary documents are corporate records of the author's own firms, used in anonymised form, with no employee or customer name, identity or tax number, address, telephone number or e-mail address appearing in this article.

Data availability. The literature analysed is published and identified by digital object identifier in the reference list. The primary corporate documents are commercially confidential and are not deposited.

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