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# Internationalisation of Family Firm: The Role of Entrepreneurial Orientation, Ownership and Generational Involvement

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## Abstract

This study aims to review research studies on the entrepreneurial organisation of family-controlled and family-owned businesses and the factors for understanding and analysing infrastructures that potentially lead to internationalisation of the family business. Success is dependent on a number of factors, including family relationships, structure of leadership and management infrastructures, the vision and goals for the company, and the level of control by leadership in relation to the rest of the family members. Additionally, national and cultural influences also play a large part in the type of family-controlled businesses that determine whether they will be successful on both the local and the international level.

*Keywords*: Family firms, internationalisation, entrepreneurial orientation, generation involvement.

## Introduction

Family-controlled businesses are making more of an insertion into the global markets as traditional jobs for young people fall by the wayside across world economies. To some degree, this has presented opportunities for younger family members to consider remaining with the family business rather than trying to branch out on their own (Welsh *et al.*, 2013). For those that has been educated in Western universities and colleges, the ability to translate that knowledge of interacting with other cultures while at school, becomes a great asset to the family business when entering the global market (Okoroafo & Koh, 2010). Along with higher education, young people are also skilled in computer and software operations that would help design and upgrade operations for the company. Those who have learned other languages, bring a higher level of communications,

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valuable in working deals on a global level. The global business community presents numerous situations where differing cultures will converge and, accordingly, not all of them culturally align in how they interact with each other. This can also be due to a leadership within these companies which has not taken the time to learn how the other side may relate in differing negotiation styles (Kontinen & Ojala, 2010). Previously, this was viewed with Western powers trying to move into other countries to expand business on a global level. Failures came when Western leaders bypassed learning about the cultural influences on business in different countries, particularly Asian businesses (Chen, 2011).

As the global playing field levels out where small to medium companies anywhere, can now operate the same way as large companies in creating global deals, family business infrastructures are also making their mark on the playing field (Chu, 2011). This means a slightly different manner of operating, as these businesses operate within a relationship parameter of loyalty and trust within their own family group, for the most part. Yet, there can be some discord when the Next X group (NxG), within a rigid family structure, and depending on where they stand in the total business infrastructure, proposes new ways of doing something as opposed to what was done before (Eddleston & Kidwell, 2010). The older, more traditional leadership, or head of the family, may be slow to implement what is not known to them, or to relinquish control to others as well (Graves & Thomas, 2006). Yet, they would be more likely to trust a family member's judgement rather than someone unknown from the outside. Asian family businesses are a perfect example of close-knit infrastructures when it comes aligning towards a common goal of successful business operations (Björnberg & Nicholson, 2012).

## Literature Review and Proposition Development

### *Entrepreneurial Orientation and Family Firms Performance*

For those family-based companies that are Entrepreneurial-Orientated (EO), the interest in operating more aggressively tends to be higher than those that are not entrepreneurial, in that EO companies are willing to take a risk and expand their horizons in the global market (Casillas & Morneno, 2010). The aspect of family involvement was determined to provide differing relationships when considering property and management, and the context of EO, such as innovation, aggression in the marketplace, taking risks, and being proactive. There is also the viewpoint that succeeding generations within the business, according to some research, shows a deterioration of EO, but this may be more reliant on the personalities and characteristics of the individuals involved, such as older family members versus younger ones, and subsequent cultural and generational influences (Dess et al., 2011). The reality is that there may be a number of factors, or variables, which come together, but one change in a variable will provide a completely different result, such as a family-based business which does not have any members who have been educated in the West, or are lacking in technological intuitiveness. Subsequently, there are also differing levels of EO which may be attributed to leadership characteristics and traits, rather than just the environment, infrastructure, and company strategy involved. Ultimately, competitive aggressiveness and proactivity are considered the two most important components of successful EO businesses, as well as a unified vision of capital gains in growth (Casillas et al., 2011).

In the research study by Björnberg and Nicholson (2012), EO also represents emotional ownership and the study of next generation family members within the organizations through social identity, attachment and succession. Certainly, commitment is the primary factor for successful succession and those without motivation or who display dissatisfaction, are considered obstructive to the overall group. There is also the alignment of family members in levels of personal growth as corresponding with the leadership styles of top members in management, whereby a less mature young person exhibits traits unacceptable to leadership principles of operation and goals for the company (Eddleston & Kidwell, 2010). Life cycles, therefore, when not aligned, can cause friction when bounced against each other although, by themselves, they are considered as normal for the individual's current level of maturity (Björnberg & Nicholson, 2012). This is one area of family dynamics which are considered a negative aspect of family-owned businesses when they are misaligned. In some cases, negativity can start at the earliest point of integration into the family business, such as being the one to answer phone calls with not much else to do. Casillas *et al.* (2011), in their study on EO companies in Spain, noted that having the next generation of family members brought in, created a positive effect, particularly when the focus is on creating wealth across generations. In the Björnberg & Nicholson (2012) research study, eight family-owned companies were researched and interviews conducted with the leaders as well as subordinate members, and results showed that the emotional bond was very strong along with seeing one's identity as tied with the family business. Finances were not so much a factor as the emotional bonding theme was. In some families, there were some members who had less bonded ties for a number of reasons such as being female, or because the family member was viewed as a potential threat (Björnberg & Nicholson, 2012). What appeared overall, to be the binding solution was the level of trust, particularly when finance was a factor.

Overall, a significant group (60%) of global companies are family-owned, and potentially in Asian countries, the amount could be as high as 95%. In fact, it is also recognised that family groups even come together to help other family members develop their own lines of business (Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2012). It is not clear what prompts that extension other than the potential for creating income and revenue through different business strings, rather than just one. These are called the Family Entrepreneurial Teams (FETs) whereby a select group of skilled family members devote their expertise and skills to a new family venture, even if some of the team members will not be working that business. In some cases, not only might there be family members, but also friends and, potentially, other members from work with specific skills. Trust is explicit in these groups; however they are set up (Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2012).

As an example, seven companies in Honduras were researched where businesses are predominantly owned by families. As noted in the literature, to rely on Westernized theories of family business and entrepreneurship, creates problems when researching in other cultures such as the Asian or Catholicized environments, where family infrastructures operate and relate a different way. In both cultures, men tend more to be the entrepreneurs in the business organizations (Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2012). Confidentiality was maintained, due to the fact that business details could provide information to those willing to conduct kidnappings and other crimes, presumably for financial gains.

The study showed that FETs had differing levels of ownership and all had 100% equity in their businesses. The overriding principle was to view this as a family venture and legacy to be passed down and, therefore, extended businesses were considered as family-community assets benefiting everyone (Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2012). In a number of cases, these offshoot businesses were conducted or realized by younger family members who had no real interest in being in the main family business. FETs generally were comprised of family members in this study, both male and female. Some of the FETs also excluded family members who either were not interested in the businesses or were perceived as just not willing to put in the same amount of work as everyone else, therefore creating a lack of trust in perpetuating the family vision (Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2012 Eddleston & Kidwell, 2010). The assistance of FETs also solved a problem for those in the family who wanted a business challenge but could not get it because the leadership was not ready to step down at that same time.

Furthermore, performance levels within a family-based EO business are also rather controversial, mainly because there are so many combinations of variables involved (Casillas & Morneno, 2010). This can range from what type of product or service is being offered, what types of financial resources the company has, how centralised the leadership is within the family structure and if it is first-generation or not, and finally, how the family's welfare and survival relate to the EO business for the present and future outlook in growth factors (Casillas & Morneno, 2010). There are also the competence levels of family members as well (Eddleston & Kidwell, 2010). As Cruz and Nordqvist (2012) propose, performance is also tied to the founder of the company who is the entrepreneurial leader, driving the direction through development, the business idea, and the business and market strategies. In this first generation, the founder will tend to have central control but when it comes to the second generation, changes may begin to happen. While this is due to different personalities and leadership traits, there are also the external factors to be considered and moving the company along with the times. Technological innovations are occurring every day and the company needs to know what is happening out there, what tools could be applied to company processes for an upgrade, and projecting forward what impacts will be made with these new introductions into the business (Nordqvist & Melin, 2010). Second generation are more likely to have upper level formal education and degrees, along with developed technological tools and will want to take advantage of those innovations to move the business forward. Social media, for example, is one of the ways that marketing campaigns can be conducted today at a very low cost, compared to the old traditional direct mail packages. Each successive leadership team will be better educated and technology will always have something new that can be tried in the business. As a consequence, the second generation will have holdovers from the original EO entrepreneurial leadership, but successive generations most likely will move away from that (Schjoedt *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, depending on the family infrastructure, there may be managers hired from outside the family to oversee specific programs for which they are highly qualified, rather than having a family member try to learn it when it might take too long before desired implementation. Funding implementations may also change between generations, according to leadership overviews (Molly *et al.* 2011).

There are also notable differences between Western EO businesses and Asian businesses, particularly when run by families. While Western companies have a vast array of resources, Asian companies, such as in China, tend to network more often between other companies and also with government contacts, in order to navigate through potential blockades in government rules and regulations. Western companies tend to operate more by the book, so to speak, in order to remain on the right side of the law. As a consequence, Chinese companies may act like family operations even when they are not composed of a family, perhaps having only two to three members. Chinese companies are also willing to hire employees' family members, while in the United States, unless family-owned, most corporations shy away from hiring relatives, due to a perceived conflict of interest (Dess *et al.*, 2011; Mazzola *et al.*, 2008). As a result, the following proposition emerges: *Proposition 1: Entrepreneurial Orientation is positively related to the family firm performance.*

### *Entrepreneurial Orientation and Internationalisation of Family Firms*

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the best examples for export businesses and studies now look at how family control is retained under such circumstances and what external environments have influences in the directions that SMEs go in, particularly when obtaining financial options for expansion across borders. In looking at an SME family-controlled company, the socioemotional wealth (SEW) might determine that the company would do better not to internationalize, particularly if external matters determine that too much control is given away in the process (Segaro, 2012). This would be determined on where external factors insert themselves into the company should it choose to do so. The company's governance structure, therefore, must be considered first when determining whether external parties should be allowed to enter the business mix (Arregle *et al.* 2012). In moving into the international marketplace, most companies will need adequate financial resources to make such a move. There is also the need to add personnel that know their way around foreign markets, particularly in those places that are deemed a major target for expansion. Therefore, adding such personnel to the board provides advice and know-how; presents certain legitimacy with the addition of big market players; and creates links to other needed resources from other organizations and ways to manoeuvre around international red tape (Sciascia *et al.*, 2013).

With these additions, a certain amount of power is taken from family control, even more so when the family infrastructure is weak in a number of areas. Those areas must then be filled by those who can take care of business, creating a stretch of power distribution. In families where stewardship is the main form of governance, this is usually not a problem as the positivity of adding these external factors far outweigh any negative aspects (Calabro & and Mussolino, 2013; Cerrato & Piva, 2012). When opening up governance to outside factors, so long as they complement the company vision and provide needed skills and contacts, then this can only be viewed as a bonus to the expansion into internationalisation. These additions should also directly aligned with the market environment that the business is moving into, while fulfilling a required internal need for the company as well. The act of internationalising a company means there will be more strain on internal resources which must be revamped to accommodate those expansions, such as rebuilding an internal database system which, up to now, only needed to carry certain information and was programmed to pull reports a certain way, with specific criteria. With the expansion, this database must now accommodate more information, must be reprogrammed to allow for greater search criteria, and may also require a coding system for new inputs that were not needed before (Cerrato & Piva, 2012).

When a family-controlled company is also entrepreneurially based, this means that all members of the family are aiming towards a common goal and outlook for the company. Thus, it is also easier to make the transition to internationalizing the company, particularly if family members are delegated to work with external controlling factors so as to maintain connectedness with the central family through observing outwards. In less entrepreneurially-based companies, this may not happen quite so well and may, in fact, present conflict and divisions where family members are not so aligned. Family infrastructures may need to determine the family cohesiveness before letting family members become partners to external controls. While this would work well with some families, it may not work so well with others. Family traits and characteristics, along with family leadership styles, can make or break how a company moves into the internationalization process (Arregle et al., 2012). It is therefore, *Proposition 2: Entrepreneurial Orientation is positively related to the internationalisation of family firms*.

### *Generational Involvement and Ownership in Family Firms*

When single family-owned/controlled businesses utilize generations of family members, there is less chance of diversification, particularly when members are assigned to strategic decision-making positions and are aligned to the central control and vision (Chung, 2013). As a consequence, the family business maintains the SEW and are also less apt to take on corporate-styled diversification aspects leading towards taking risks. There are differences, however, between those companies in emerging economies and developed economies in what types of risk-taking strategies these companies will take on. Leadership and management styles, accordingly, tend more towards the pyramid design with family members at every level (Chung, 2013). Obviously, this is far more evident in family-owned/controlled businesses outside the United States and is most prevalent in Asian and Latin companies. Outside contacts are made but not necessarily brought into the company, per se, yet accorded a position of importance in consultation when needed or desired and, therefore, this tends towards the agency management style (Roida & Sunarjanto, 2012). The general version of making decisions is then conducted by a small inner circle of family members. Over time, this would have to change if the company wishes to diversify through successive generations, and certainly if it wishes to become internationalised, particularly by bringing competent outsiders in on the governance level (Chung, 2013). Otherwise, this pyramid style of governance is fine for the companies which choose to operate within restrictive growth patterns and low-risk ventures. In this capacity, the pyramid family can also take advantage of opportunities in the market fairly quickly while still collectively small, compact and not overly extended elsewhere.

Generational involvement in family-controlled businesses will also tend to retain corporate earnings rather than making distributions to shareholders, so long as they have enough ownership over the company to retain control. Therefore, family wealth and personal wealth can be closely tied to these earnings, creating somewhat of an undesirable concentration in risk, and families may prefer to cash out dividends (Huang *et al.*, 2012). This is particularly true in Asian family-controlled/owned businesses, such as those found in Taiwan, which were studied by Huang *et al.* (2012). As Taiwan is part of the conglomeration of Confucian-styled thinkers, the loyalty is directly placed with the family and with its leaders. Some families also do include their out-of-family workers who are not part of the family as a way to compensate them for their loyalty to the company. Part of retaining control is to invest in the firm which provides a method of cash control as well, when it comes time for extracting dividends to boost personal wealth (Huang *et al.* 2012). This can create a negative overview of the company when the family cash pay outs are at a moderate or high level as it takes away from the foundation of the company. Thus, *Proposition 3: Generational Involvement is related to the structure of ownership in family firms.*

### *Generational Involvement and Entrepreneurial Orientation in Internationalisation of Family Firms*

While companies must follow the country's regulations in how to operate within the laws instituted, new laws are constantly being made as the global marketplace becomes more common and business must operate within international regulations as well (Zahra, 2003; Tsao & Lien, 2013). While many businesses can choose to remain localized, those which choose to expand their horizons, have a bigger challenge in weeding through not only the national regulations, but those regulations by which other foreign companies must operate, either based on their country or on international regulations.

Surprisingly enough, very few research studies gathered for this study, presented information or data on the level of higher education training that family members might have received before entering into the family business. Yet, this is an essential component of success for any business in that its decision makers have the right education and applicable training to be able to understand what they see in the market place, particularly on the global level. While family members can expect to be trained on how to manage family operations when they first step into their roles, there is far more to management and leadership than just meeting goals and bringing in revenue by building the product. Those family-controlled operations which have not moved beyond that point cannot succeed in an ever-growing complex world of innovative technology which impacts even the most underdeveloped nation in today's world (Mazzola et al., 2008). In many respects, each successive generation that comes into the family business must be encouraged to receive higher education first, and then also study and design ways to bring the company forward from its previous era of operation. This presents a blending of the past and bringing it forward, even while retaining the original company vision and set of goals as previously presented in creating the business in the first place. Therefore, Proposition 4: Generational Involvement moderates the relationship between Entrepreneurial Orientation and internationalisation of family firms.

## Conclusions

Today's business climate presents that many companies now coming into existence are already internationalised by the very fact that the Internet and the business website means that the product or service may very well translate across borders (Fan & Phan, 2007). Only the type of product or service may determine whether it is successful on a global basis or not. While families can be involved in such businesses, it can also be run by one person, depending on the person's business astuteness and comprehension of the global market. Yet, a family can also run an Internet business as well by dividing out various jobs in marketing, conducting research, making face-to-face business contacts and deals, and running the financial books and accounts, along with contact databases. Virtual offices (working from home) also make it easy to work any time of day and still remain in contact with the rest of the family because it is an informal infrastructure of leader and management roles (Welsh *et al.*, 2013). Right now, this is one of the most informal types of entrepreneurial-oriented type of family business in existence with the ability to be very fluid in its operations.

With physical family-controlled/owned SMEs that maintains production lines and incorporates family members within its leadership and management roles, there are many factors to consider when attempting to research how well the family infrastructure operates, what causes it to be successful on a local level, and to also have the ability to internationalize itself when the time is right. As SMEs are the economic backbone of many countries now, the health and wealth of any family-based SME pretty much ensures the country's revenue success in one form or another (Gunasekaren *et al.*, 2011). Some of the components involved in understanding how well a family-based company transitions to internationalisation is dependent on the dimension of internationalisation: pace of the process, scope of the expansion, and the company's rhythm of the process (Lin, 2012). There are also familial factors such as the relational infrastructure, whether it is a tight-knit group or whether it has members who are not so committed, the level of trust involved, and who has the leadership role and how that melds with other family members in lesser roles of management and production. Levels of education and business knowledge, while not researched to any great length in regards to family success, also have an impact on the company's success in navigating the country's rules and regulations on how businesses must conduct themselves, particularly on national and international levels. This would also have an impact on how to comprehend and understand what Western business contacts, for example, mean when giving advice about entering into another country as part of expansion (Lin, 2012).

As noted in the literature research, many of these family-controlled companies bring in outside resources in order to successfully transition into internationalisation. Those who cannot relinquish a certain amount of control do not succeed as well. There are also different entry strategies, again, based on what is being produced and whether it is an export business or engaging in a joint venture with another business to provide services (Claver *et al.*, 2007). Whatever type of business it is, will present different pictures in the types of family management and leadership infrastructure, methods of business and market strategies, and require different types of individual competencies within family members. Cultural and even religious influences in the surrounding base environment, can also change how a business operates, first on a local level, and then on the global level. Another factor to consider is how resilient the family business is in the face of differing disasters, some of which cannot be controlled, whether it is stock markets or a natural disaster (Stafford *et al.*, 2013).

Entrepreneurial family-controlled/owned businesses at the SME level must now look at internationalizing in order to remain solvent as local markets may not provide enough revenue for the product or service being provided (Patel *et al.*, 2012). While some family-based companies have been content to remain restricted, survival, for the most part, dictates moving into the global business community, and as quickly as possible.

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