

Chapter 18

Strategic Orientation of the Managers of a Tunisian Family Group Before and After the Revolution

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ABSTRACT

This chapter studies the strategic orientations of a leader of a group of Tunisian family businesses in a context of uncertainty and transition after the revolution in Tunisia. The specific nature of the family business is that it performs significantly better in terms of sustainability, profitability, and growth when compared to non-family businesses, especially since a majority of Tunisian companies are family businesses. In this respect, authors study the strategic orientations that can ensure the sustainability of family companies through cognitive mapping. The analysis of the cognitive map of the general manager of a group of Tunisian family businesses will help us to compare its entrepreneurial orientations adopted before the revolution and its current orientations allowing the long-term growth of family businesses after the revolution. A discussion of the findings, conclusions, and managerial implications, as well as suggestions of areas for future research, are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Eight years after the revolution, the Tunisians (owner-managers, managers, entrepreneurs, and academics) are engaged in the construction and implementation of the new Tunisia. In this context, it would be interesting to see how Tunisian family business managers are acting strategically to ensure the sustain-

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ability of their companies, taking into account the macroeconomic environment in which they must ensure their development and contribute to the country's growth.

With the significant challenges faced by Tunisian companies in general and family businesses in particular, managers act differently. Some adapt by developing a strong ability to listen and persist despite everything, others make an effort to adapt but do not resist for long if conditions do not improve, some others choose to suspend their activities and sometimes even stop them as soon as they feel disruptions in the course of their business. Therefore, the sustainability of Tunisian family businesses seems to be threatened.

In this light, we have chosen, as part of this exploratory research study, to detect the strategic orientations of Tunisian family business managers in a transition context. The first question to be examined is to see how Tunisian managers perceive the future of their family businesses concerning the current circumstances in Tunisia. Moreover, secondly, it would be interesting to see how they intend to act in an uncertain, threatening, and unpredictable context to perpetuate the family business in a country in transition. Qualitative research using cognitive mapping seems to be the best tool to solve our research questions. This chapter is structured as follows. First, we present the theoretical framework and the context of our research. Next, we describe the methodological framework in more detail. Last, we present the findings from an exploratory study, provide a brief discussion, underline limitations of our research, and suggest areas for future research.

BACKGROUND

Family Businesses in the Transition Period

Research on family businesses in the academic world is not a new area, but this type of business is gaining attention and growing interest in recent years. Given their uniqueness, family firms offer a singular context for researching entrepreneurial orientation (Nordqvist & Melin, 2010) and analyzing how some environmental and organizational characteristics relate to entrepreneurial orientation or its outcomes (Miller, 2011). Indeed, in most developing economies, family businesses account for most industrial output, entrepreneurial activities, corporate growth, economic development, innovation, and employment. Even in Tunisia, the field of the family business is beginning to deal with some other issues (performance, transmission, governance). However, in recent years, a new field has emerged in Tunisia: entrepreneurship in the family context.

Moreover, thanks to the previous research study (Ellouze Karray, 2010), we have shown that entrepreneurship is born within the Tunisian family and develops, among its members active in the family business, entrepreneurial orientations allowing its development and conditions its sustainability. Mignon (2002) distinguishes two leading families of sustainability: the sustainability of power and the sustainability of the project. According to the author, "sustainability of control is ensured when the capital remains in the hands of the same group of shareholders (generally an individual or a family); sustainability of management is achieved when the company's managers are from the same group." On the other hand, "the sustainability of the organization is preserved when the company has been able, throughout its history, to withstand the test of the profound upheavals in its environment and preserve, to this day, the essential part of its identity" (Mignon, 2002).

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