


Chapter 9

Ludens Familias: Playful Learning for the Entrepreneurial Family

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ABSTRACT

Many business schools and other family business education providers have over the last 15 years been authoritatively criticised for a lack of innovation and adaptability in their pedagogical designs. The increasing economic participation of international family businesses in developed, developing, and emerging markets in the decade after the global financial crisis of 2008/9 has extended this critique. This chapter proposes a play-based response to such criticism and a pathway for 'leaning into' the future demands of family business education (FBE). The authors suggest that a play-based approach re-dresses some of the above imbalances. The chapter draws on the development of an expansive, activity-based framework for playful learning designs. As an example of their approach, the authors use their method-based reconfiguration of traditional (family business) case-studies into live, 'ludic objects' (RETS-MICA), to demonstrate ways in which and play affords MBA, family business learners the opportunity to build their entrepreneurial competencies in-situ.

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INTRODUCTION: THE DEMAND FOR NEW TEACHING METHODS IN FAMILY BUSINESS EDUCATION (FBE)

Globalization, deregulation, intelligent and distributed communication technologies are having enormous effects on family businesses in the 21st Century. Competitive forces are driving new entrepreneurial opportunities for family businesses alongside management buy-ins and buy-outs, rejuvenating established family businesses, enabling emergent family businesses to transcend previous barriers to international opportunities, while existentially threatening multi-generational family business champions with new forms of strategic change.

Scholars have regularly debated the business curriculum, as businesses demand that graduates be adaptive, teachable, and responsive to the above changes (Tierney, 1999). Harvey and Knight, (1996) originally suggested that businesses need young leaders with the skills and knowledge to transform their companies. Burch et al. (2015) go further when interpreting the above changes for family business education (FBE) and curricula:

In most business curriculum instruction, exercises, and assessments are directed toward theories, procedures, or best practices. An example in statistics is students are taught to calculate the standard deviation of a sample, but are probably never instructed, or assessed, on the concepts of variability and central tendency. (p. 280)

Teaching next-generation family members from traditional business curricula ignores the family and ownership systems embedded in family firms. Barbera et al. (2015), for example, suggest that family business education has, to date, predominantly focused on business entity and practitioner-driven teachings. They elaborate on a ‘whole-person’ learning approach to family business education, sharing their interventions in an undergraduate family business program with experiential activities based on personal learning for new members entering the family’s business.

Similarly, Burch et al. (2015) argue for an alternative pedagogic approach to reflect the unique complexities of family business concepts in education. Their conception-focussed curriculum (CFC), suggests that learning occurs when learners integrate two or more concepts. They also argue that educators integrate Lumpkin et al.’s (2008) five dimensions, the five family business lenses (Tagiuri and Davis, 1996) and the three interlocking systems of individual, group, and family business levels (Distelberg and Sorenson, 2009). Gonsalves and Fakoussa (2018) explore problem-based learning, real-case environments and flipped classroom methods for family business education, arguing that dynamic tools that support the complexity of the changing needs in family business education.

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