

Chapter 24

The Daughter's Career in Family Firms: A Reflection on the Cultural/ Contextual Aspects

Filippo Ferrari

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7509-2320>

Independent Researcher, Italy

ABSTRACT

In spite of the considerable importance of career issues in the field of family business gender studies, current literature shows a lack of attention to careers in family businesses. Due to this theoretical limitation, this chapter aims to investigate quantitatively the second generation's career in a sample of Italian family firms (N=297). Findings suggest that the careers of females and males show different characteristics. This chapter contributes to the limited research on daughter succession. Moreover, it provides a contribution to understanding the daughters' organizational and educational career in small and medium-sized family firms specifically, filling a gap in the current literature. Finally, this chapter prompts a reflection on the cultural/contextual aspects that impact upon entry into the company.

INTRODUCTION

Although family business is a well-developed field of research, scholars are not unanimous in defining a family firm. This chapter follows Chua et al. (1999, p25), by defining a family business as: “a business governed and/or managed with the intention to shape and pursue the vision of the business held by a dominant coalition controlled by members of the same family or a small number of families in a manner that is *potentially sustainable across generations* of the family or families” (italics added for emphasis). However, regarding such sustainability, family firms show a long-term survival problem: approximately 40% make a positive transition to the second generation and only 12% to the third (Bridge et al., 2003). Thus business transmission seems, without doubt, to be the most critical event in a family firm's life

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(Bridge et al., 2003; De Massis et al, 2008). De Massis et al (2008), in their review, summarized the main causes preventing intra-family succession, identifying individual, relational, contextual, financial and even process factors. In general, statistics show (Cabrera-Suarez, 2001; Koiranen, Chirico, 2006; Le Breton-Miller, 2004) that next generation failure can be explained by the scarce knowledge and skill levels of the successor. In addition, literature shows that business transmission process faces major criticism when a daughter is involved (Aldamiz-Echevarría, Idígoras, Vicente-Molina, 2017; Dumas, 1989, 1990, 1992; Curimbaba, 2002; Ferrari, 2017; Vera and Dean, 2005). As a result, in family firms there is a dearth of daughter successors (Overbecke et al., 2013).

Gender differences – i.e. different attitudes and behaviours related to gender - in entrepreneurial activity are well documented in the literature (Carter & Williams, 2003). Literature also shows that, beyond gender differences, gender stereotypes – i.e. widely shared beliefs about characteristics attributed to men and women (Gupta et al., 2009) – have a significant impact on women's educational paths and careers and their ability to accrue social, cultural, human, and financial capital (Gatewood et al., 2003; Marlow & Patton, 2005). In addition, the pervasive family influence on the firm has an impact on a wide range of situations related to individual careers and organizational career systems, such as gender and diversity (Baù et al., forthcoming; Eddleston & Powell, 2008). Moreover, the educational processes before joining the company, and the career undertaken by the children once they have entered the company are so far under-investigated. In spite of the considerable importance of career issues in the field of family business, Campopiano et al., (2017) highlight a lack of attention to careers in family businesses. For instance, glass ceiling, women invisibility, women uninterested in a career in family business are some of the criticalities hitherto neglected by research. Given these considerations, the main purpose of this paper is therefore to investigate the type, the development and the consequences (socio-cognitive, affective and emotive) of the second generation's *educational* and *organizational* career in a sample of family firms, by investigating if and how gender matters in driving different career paths and leading to different outcomes.

Background

A firm's specific knowledge, and the ability to transfer it, is considered a key strategic asset for generating competitive advantages (Spender & Grant, 1996). Knowledge is viewed as the sum of expertise, skills, and abilities applied by individuals in the form of theoretical knowledge and actions taken to solve problems (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). The family members' educational background plays a strategic role in knowledge development, providing at least the basic skills and preparation for a future job(s). Conversely, '*educational mismatch*' means a negative situation characterized by a lack of coherence between the qualification level achieved by a worker and the level required by a firm in order to carry out a specific job (ISFOL, 2006). Literature suggests that females (at least in more traditional countries, such as Italy: Almalaura, 2018) follow highly stereotyped educational paths, attending schools and graduate courses considered typically 'feminine' (e.g.: Humanities, Psychology, Medicine and so on), with a scarce attitude to be enrolled in technical-scientific courses. At the moment, however, the literature lacks specific research that analyzes the scholastic paths of next generations using a gender lens. Given these considerations, it is possible to set the first hypothesis at the base of this research:

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