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Recommended Citation

Bird, Barbara, et al. "Family Business Research: The Evolution of an Academic Field." *Family Business Review* 15.4 (2002): 337-50. Print.

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Family Business Research: The Evolution of an Academic Field

Barbara Bird, Harold Welsch, Joseph H. Astrachan, David Pistrui

The establishment of a field of study or a discipline with academic or professional standing requires, among other things, a body of knowledge that expands understanding of that domain. This paper looks at the literature on establishing a unique field of study, reviews the foundational research in family business (1980s) and four recent years (1997-2001) of published family business research found in several outlets. We find that family business research is becoming increasingly sophisticated and rigorous. This bodes well for the development of an independent field for family business. Recommendations are offered to further the professionalization of family business as an academic and professional domain.

Introduction

For many years, attorneys, accountants, financial planners, insurance agents, management consultants, and therapists have practiced their trade within family businesses with considerable success. Academics have been studying family businesses for decades, often interviewing founders and their successors and recording their responses. These case studies were often archived in the files of professors or graduate students and not shared with the general public. Only in recent times have scholar-practitioners begun to be concerned with cumulating and generalizing these insights through surveys and more sophisticated statistical analysis. As the academic and professional community began to conceive family business as a separate and distinct discipline, it began to be concerned with building the infrastructure of a new academic discipline.

Although the discipline of family business has been of interest to management researchers and writers as a topic of scholarly inquiry since the 1980s, Neubauer and Lank (1998) agree that research has “been largely ignored until the last decade” (p. XV). As a result, the literature on family enterprises is not as voluminous as that in

other management areas, and “there are significant white spots on the map of discovery” (p. XV).

History of the Field

Family businesses long served as the backbone of ancient economies and civilizations, as well as played a significant role in the development of western civilization. The economic activities of Greek civilization were largely family controlled and household based. These circumstances did not change significantly during the time of the Roman Empire and the succeeding Middle Ages and New World discovery periods.

Family-controlled enterprises drove the economic development process in the early phases of the industrialization age (Hall, 1988), as evidenced by the success of the pioneering economic activities of the Vanderbilts, Rockefellers, Astors, Carnegies, and Fords in the United States; the Rothchilds, Zegnas, and Hienekens in Europe; and the Li Ka-Shing, Salim, and Formosa groups in Asia. Individual initiatives driven by opportunity were family rooted in their respective clans.

Owning families continued to exert influence when it came to directing major enterprises,

which had largely separated ownership and management. Even today family members still largely control many large modern corporations with numerous anonymous shareholders, for example, Ford, Hewlett-Packard, and Wal-Mart. In fact, as Neubauer and Lank (1998) note:

...family enterprises were among the most effective locomotives of the economies in which they were located: They created jobs; they were among the few enterprises that were successful enough to pay taxes; and they displayed the agility and flexibility necessary to maneuver successfully in the troubled economic waters of their national economies. (p. XIV)

Although family businesses have been in existence and operating for thousands of years, it wasn't until the 1990s that the field was viewed as a separate academic discipline.¹ For an arena of research and practice to become recognized as a field of social science, it generally must meet certain standards and criteria, which are discussed in the next section. Many of these dimensions involve the process of research. Research moves the field forward, pushes back ignorance and mysteries still plaguing people, enhances legitimacy, and gains recognition and favorable notice resulting from a careful or diligent search. Research is seen as a studious and critical inquiry and examination aimed at the discovery and interpretation of new knowledge. Many view the outcome of research as the basis for the origin of a new academic field.

However, at the end of the 20th century, Wortman (1994) pointed out that family business as a field was 30 years old. Handler (1989) notes that prior to 1975, research in the area of family business was relatively limited. Both Handler and Wortman critique family business research from a methodological point of view. Handler sees an overuse of case studies, with too much research

based on surveys and in-depth interviews, and calls for broadening the range of research methods. Wortman goes further to add that scientific measurement aspects of family business research need improvement. He points out that sample size has tended to be small but, even without that constraint, opportunities exist for simple statistics as well as for more in-depth statistical analysis. By the same token, Dyer and Sanchez (1998) suggest the need for more collaboration between academics and practitioners, with a call for more case studies and cross-cultural work.

Establishing a Discipline. Family business has struggled for an identity in an effort to be recognized and accepted as an intellectually rigorous, independent domain (Lansberg, Perrow, & Rogolsky, 1988; Astrachan, Klein, & Smyrniotis, 2001). In the early years of the struggle, family business had to deal with several problems. First, it had to get past the negative connotations that the "small business" label carried, i.e., "buying a job," lack of growth, lack of innovation, and "ma and pa" image. Second, it had to establish an intellectual rigor beyond the practicalities of transferring assets between generations and among siblings. Third, it had to establish itself as its *own* field—not one under the mantle of small business or entrepreneurship. This involved achieving recognition for the field as an independent discipline even though there were few distinct criteria that made it unique.

In these early years (before 1980), family business fell into the sociology category and later into a small business management category, neither of which allowed the field to become distinctive. That is, family business research utilized "borrowed" or "stolen" principles that were not its own. The process of borrowing is similar to the emergence of entrepreneurship as a discipline of business and management. In fact, the same comments could be made about family business as were made about entrepreneurship in its early stages, i.e., that it was a "tangential activity, academically flaky and lacking in a scholarly body of knowledge" (Vesper, 1985, p. 64) and that "little research goes on and consequently the literature on it remains thin."

¹ Personal communication from the editor of *Family Business Review* states, "Before 1995, there were only a few publications that were even close to being relevant to family business."

To answer the question of when a field becomes recognized as an established discipline, it is necessary to examine the elements by which the field is judged. According to Greenwood (1957), Hall (1968), and Wilensky (1964), it is possible to identify several elements that a field needs to be distinguishable: (a) professional associations with communication sanctions, ethical codes, and culture, (b) career opportunities, and (c) systematic theory and an established body of literature.

Professional associations. More established disciplines are characterized by professional associations that operate through a network of formal and informal groups. The associations possess the power to criticize or to censure, as membership is viewed as a sine qua non of professional success. The associations perform their professional functions through a network of relationships that create its own subculture, with adjustment to it a prerequisite for inclusion and career progress. In recent years, the professionals who serve and study family businesses are developing a professional culture via organizations such as the Family Firm Institute (FFI). This professionalization process generally includes the development of a code of ethics and a willingness to sanction members who fail to practice ethical consulting, research, or teaching (Kerr, VonGlinow, & Schriesheim, 1977).

Occupational career. Another measure of the professionalism of the field is whether it leads to an occupational position and career. To our knowledge, there is no doctoral degree program in family business, and there is no certification process for becoming a family business consultant. There are known career paths to more general careers (e.g., management and psychology), with single graduate courses, postgraduate training programs, and self-directed learning, for those wishing to specialize in family business research, consulting, and teaching.

Systematic theory. There has been an increase in the family business literature in recent years, beginning with *Family Business Review (FBR)*. In addition, other academic journals are

beginning to focus on family business, and several annual conferences (at which research papers are presented) provide outlets for information on family business [e.g., Academy of Management, Babson Research Conference, United States Association for Small Business and Entrepreneurship (USASBE) conference, and the International Council on Small Business (ICSB) conference among others]. In addition, several bibliographies have emerged seeking to cumulate new knowledge on family business. In view of the number of references, it is evident that growth is taking place.

The birth of new academic fields (including sociology, strategic management, and entrepreneurship) seems to follow such a tortuous path. This includes (a) a positive movement toward a common definition of the field and toward the definition of the boundaries of the field (e.g., what differentiates a family business, an entrepreneurial venture, a small business, etc.); (b) categorization of the major forces within the field (e.g., therapy and estate planning); (c) movement toward more sophisticated research designs, research methods, and statistical techniques; (d) a shift toward larger data samples and use of larger databases with greater ability to generalize findings; and (e) movement away from exploratory research toward causal research (Plaschka & Welsch, 1990).

This study is directed to establishing a body of knowledge through systematic, rigorous, peer-reviewed research. Specifically, we want to examine the trends in family business research to determine better the momentum toward a professional field. We suggest that the field of family business has had long enough to show trends over time. One research question is: How does family business research differ in recent years from the earlier and most cited research that served as its foundation? Of specific interest are the topics, samples, and methods of research.

As a field of research expands, new authors, new methods, and new outlets appear for the publication of research. The earliest and most well-recognized outlet for family business research is *FBR*. This journal was initiated as one

Table 1. Sources of Research on Family Business

| | |
|---|------------|
| Family Business Review (most cited) | 21 |
| <i>Family Business Review</i> | 108 |
| <i>Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice</i> | 7 |
| <i>Journal of Business Venturing</i> | 2 |
| <i>Journal of Small Business Management</i> | 10 |
| Total articles reviewed | 148 |

of the cornerstone offerings of a professional association, FFI. Its first issue was published in 1988. Prior to that time, only a smattering of family business-related articles appeared in a variety of academic management journals. One exception stands out—a 1983 issue of the journal *Organizational Dynamics*, which was devoted exclusively to family business topics. Since the launch of *FBR*, family business research articles have appeared in many other outlets. The second research question pertains to the influence of these outlets on the types and quality of research that is published.

Methodology

The editor of *FBR* provided the researchers with the 21 articles most frequently cited in that journal. For the purpose of this study, these are foundation and early era papers. In addition, the authors reviewed articles that pertain to family business from the previous four years of *FBR*, *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice (ETP)*, *Journal of Business Venturing (JBV)*, and *Journal of Small Business Management (JSBM)*, as these are the outlets most relevant for small, family, and entrepreneurial organization research.² Table 1 shows the number of articles from each of these sources.

Even though other journals publish family business research and have had special issues devoted to the topic (e.g., *Organizational Dynamics* and *ETP*), the purpose of this paper is not to provide a comprehensive review, but rather to show historical development in the types of research being published. As a result, we restricted our review to classic (well-cited) papers and recent papers, from 1997 to 2002, from the four major outlets. We read each article to determine the topics, research questions, method used, sample, sampling method, independent and dependent variables, and key results.

Results

The study included 148 articles, 21 (14%) of which were published before 1997 and that are noted as “most cited” by the editor of *FBR*. These constitute the “older era” articles. The remaining 127 articles (86%) were published in the years 1997 to 2002; these constitute the “recent era.” One hundred twenty-nine articles appeared in *FBR*, seven in *ETP*, 10 in *JSBM*, and two in *JBV*.

Table 2 shows the frequencies of topics and variables. Topics included management practice and strategy (42 articles, 28%), succession (28 articles, 19%), distinctiveness of family business (15

² Frontiers of Entrepreneurship Research, the annual proceedings of the Babson College Research conference, was also considered. Closer inspection found that only one-page summaries had been published in the family business area and that these summaries did not provide sufficient information for the comparisons made in this review. Other journals such as *Harvard Business Review*, *Small Business Economics*, and *Journal of Accountancy* produce occasional articles on family business. The frequency was judged to be small and because representational sampling was not the focus here, we did not include them (nor were dissertations or reports by data collection sources such as Mass Mutual and Arthur Andersen, whose databases are used in several of the articles reviewed).

Table 2. Description of Studies Reviewed

| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|---|---------------|-------------------|
| Primary Topics Covered | | |
| Succession | 28 | 19 |
| Distinctiveness | 15 | 10 |
| Conflict | 15 | 10 |
| Management/strategy | 42 | 28 |
| Helping family business | 9 | 6 |
| Macro (economics, policy) | 11 | 7 |
| Women | 13 | 7 |
| Independent Variables ¹ | | |
| Person | 32 | 22 |
| Firm/organization | 37 | 25 |
| Succession | 8 | 5 |
| Family business status (compared to nonfamily) | 24 | 16 |
| Dependent Variables | | |
| Person | 19 | 13 |
| Firm/organization | 44 | 30 |
| Succession | 19 | 13 |
| Family | 13 | 9 |

¹ Many studies had multiple independent and dependent variables.

articles, 10%), conflict in family business (15 articles, 10%), women in family business (13 articles, 7%), helping family business (nine articles, 6%), economics or policy (11 articles, 7%), and other topics, including siblings and methodology (four articles).

Independent and dependent variables were determined for the articles, including some of those that were nonempirical. These tended to be conceptual papers that suggested that one variable set would have consequences for another variable set.

Some articles included multiple independent variables and these are counted in every applicable category. Individual variables included satisfaction, relationships, psychological characteristics, perceptions, and demographic variables of individuals. Firm variables included organiza-

tional culture, strategy, industry, ownership, organizational size and age, organizational growth and change, performance, policies, and financing. Family variables included family activities, whether the business was a family business in comparison with other types, birth order, and issues pertaining to the family-business relationship. Succession variables included circumstances surrounding succession and decisions to join a family business. Other variables were not coded because of the small number of studies using them. These included the attributes of a family business program, research on consulting methodology, historical time, and country differences.

Dependent variables fell into multiple categories and often several variables within one category. At the individual level, these included personal development, individual intentions, type

of entrepreneur, wealth of individuals, and roles of individuals. Firm-level dependent variables included productivity, morale, growth, board of directors, credit uses, profitability, and the like. Succession as a dependent variable refers to the succession process used, progress in succession, success in intergenerational transfer, and intention to join the family business. Family-level

dependent variables included the quality of relationships involving family members, degree of conflict, roles of family members, and childcare. Other dependent variables not coded due to small numbers include differing definitions of family business, quality of family business programs, altruism, chief financial officer (CFO) influence, the general topic of family business issues, the

Table 3. Methods of Studies Reviewed

| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|---|---------------|-------------------|
| Size of Samples | | |
| No sample | 51 | 34 |
| <100 | 42 | 28 |
| >100 | 55 | 37 |
| Sampling Method | | |
| Convenience | 63 | 66 |
| Random/stratified | 29 | 30 |
| Other | 4 | 4 |
| Data Source | | |
| Personal | 10 | 10 |
| Database | 29 | 30 |
| University program | 12 | 12 |
| Membership | 7 | 7 |
| Other | 20 | 21 |
| Unknown | 19 | 20 |
| Data-Gathering Method (Primary) | | |
| Qualitative | 31 | 32 |
| Mailed/delivered survey | 40 | 41 |
| Interview/telephone | 17 | 18 |
| Other | 9 | 9 |
| Unknown | 10 | 14 |
| Data-Reduction Method Used/Statistics (Most Advanced) | | |
| Qualitative | 3 | 4 |
| Descriptive | 12 | 19 |
| Binomial | 7 | 10 |
| Multivariate | 35 | 51 |
| Unknown | 11 | 16 |
| None or single cases | 41 | |

development of an instrument, country of location, and type and size of an individual's network.

Research parameters. Ninety-seven articles (66%) were categorized as empirical, and 51 (34%) were clearly not empirical. Parameters for studies are shown in Table 3. Sample size is coded for samples reported that are small (fewer than 100 observations) and large (more than 100 observations). It is generally thought that multivariate analysis requires 10 observations for each variable considered so that sufficient variance allows reliable and not randomly significant results. A sample of 100 is sufficient for most such analyses. There were small samples in 42 studies (28%) and large samples in 55 studies (37%).

Sampling methods were addressed. Convenience samples were drawn from groups that were "at hand," such as organizational membership, personal contacts, consulting practice, and snowball (with initial respondents asked to refer subsequent respondents). For example, the sample of this paper is one of convenience. Random samples occur when respondents are selected at random from a larger population, such as American households or listings in Dun & Bradstreet. A stratified sample is similar to a random one except that sampling is focused by "strata" in the population. Other sampling methods include theoretical, focused, or purposive, with the researcher seeking out clearly defined sets of business for the purposes of comparison. When there was a question of whether the sample was randomly chosen (i.e., the sampling frame is unknown or clearly not random), the study is categorized as convenience. Of the 97 articles that had some empirical referent, 63 (66%) were convenience and 29 (30%) were random or stratified. Four were otherwise selected and these relied on government sources and, in one case, a search of Lexis/Nexis.

The source of data used for sampling allows a finer grained look at the research. Personal sources of data included snowball samples, university samples, and a consulting practice, among others. Databases included government directories of business, systematic surveys done by governments, Dun & Bradstreet lists, Mass Mu-

tual surveys that were administered to households by Gallup, and large-scale research endeavors that allowed public access to the data. *University program source* refers to family businesses or family members associated with a university-linked program for assisting family business, including those established in partnership with large accounting and insurance firms. Membership data sources included other associations joined by businesses, such as The Executive Committee (TEC) or Chambers of Commerce, and winners of family business contests. The other category here refers to use of secondary data, articles published in *FBR*, other sources, and unknown data sources. It is interesting to note that most data come from databases, but that nearly 20% of articles do not tell the reader the source of the data, making it difficult to assess rigor and relevance independently.

Methods of gathering data include qualitative methods such as clinical or in-depth interviews and content analysis of documents. Mailed or delivered surveys and structured interviews done in person or over the telephone constitute the other major ways that data were gathered. Other methods included field surveys and public information. From the data, we see that written surveys and interviews are primary methods of gathering data, but also of interest are the 10 articles in which data were presented, but the method of data gathering was not mentioned in the article.

Methods of data reduction include qualitative methods (if mentioned) but exclude inferences drawn from cases if no method was discussed. Other methods are statistical and can be ranked in complexity from descriptive (frequencies and means), binomial (T-tests and other paired comparisons), and multivariate (analysis of variance, regression, factor analysis, and their variates). In this case, there was an independent assessment of whether there was any data reduction. In some cases that were classified as empirical, there was no data reduction; this included single case studies. In total, there were 52 empirical articles with no data reduction or where the method of analysis was not

described. In contrast, 35 articles (57% of the articles with data reduction) used some form of multivariate analysis.

Comparisons

In our review, we suggest that the field of family business research may be maturing into one in which research is taken more seriously. From this, we expect that the era of research will show some significant differences. We also posit that research that addresses family business in various outlets may be differently oriented, with articles written for some journals, such *JBV*, being wholly empirical.

Era. A simple chi-square test between era and whether the article presented empirical data shows that there is a marginally significant difference ($p < .06$), with older articles being less empirical than the recent ones. Specifically, older era articles were 50% empirical, whereas 68% of recent era papers were empirical. When we looked at subsequent differences between eras, we looked only at those that are empirical.

There was no significant difference between eras in the size of samples, method of sampling, or method of obtaining data. However, there was

a significant difference found in methods of data reduction (statistical), as seen in Table 4. The prevalence of multivariate analysis clearly defines an important distinction from earlier research. A closer look at the distribution of multivariate studies shows none before 1996, with a peak of 14 such studies in 1999 and a decline since that time.

In those studies that were empirical, there was no difference by era in the source of data used. Researchers in both periods were equally likely to use personal sources as databases. Although this is not statistically significant, there are more studies recently that employ university program membership and other membership groups as a source of data.

Likewise, there is no difference between empirical studies in earlier and in more recent research in the method of gathering data, with equal proportions using qualitative, mailed surveys, and interviews. With 29% of the 1996 and earlier studies and 10% of the 1997 and later studies using qualitative methods, not only is there not a trend toward qualitative methods, as suggested by Dyer and Sanchez (1998), there is a decline, although it is not statistically significant. More recent research shows an opposite trend,

Table 4. Impact of Era on Statistical Methods

| <i>Statistical Method</i> | <i>Older Era Number Percentage of Era</i> | <i>Newer Era Number Percentage of Era</i> |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Qualitative | 3 (43%) | 2 (3%) |
| Descriptive | 1 (14%) | 15 (23%) |
| Binomial | 3 (43%) | 10 (15%) |
| Multivariate (includes ANOVA) | 0 | 38 (57%) |

Chi-square $p < .001$

Table 5. Impact of Journal Outlet on Research Types

| <i>Data-Reduction Tool Used¹</i> | <i>FBR Number % Outlet % Method</i> | <i>JSBM Number % Outlet % Method</i> | <i>ETP Number % Outlet % Method</i> | <i>JBV Number % Outlet % Method</i> |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| Qualitative | 5 9% 100% | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Descriptive | 14 25% 88% | 2 25% 13% | | |
| Bivariate | 11 20% 84% | 2 25% 16% | 0 | 0 |
| Multivariate | 26 46% 68% | 4 50% 11% | 6 100% 16% | 2 100% 5% |

¹Most sophisticated statistic, as many report descriptives along with multivariate. Multivariate includes nonparametric tests, such a chi-square.

with greater use of surveys and databases with multivariate analyses than earlier research.

Era of research had no impact on the frequency with which some topics were published (succession, distinctiveness of family business, and conflict). There was a significant (chi-square $p < .05$) difference in the prevalence of articles on firm strategy and management, with more articles on those subjects published in recent years.

Publication Outlet. Of the 148 articles reviewed, 129 (87%) come from *FBR*. This is not surprising because the historical set of articles was comprised of those *FBR* articles most cited by subsequent authors in that journal. Furthermore, *FBR* publishes only articles on family business. *ETP* published seven articles on family business between 1997 and 2000 (5%); *JSBM* published 10 (7%); and *JBV* published two. For comparisons, we grouped the sources other than *FBR*.

FBR published all of the purely qualitative studies (no quantification from data) and the vast

majority (88%) of descriptive studies (where numbers describe the sample in frequencies, averages, percentages, etc.). At the other end of the statistical continuum, *FBR* published 26 articles employing multivariate analysis (which requires a larger data set); these constitute 46% of the articles with data from *FBR* and 68% of the articles from all sources using multivariate tools (see Table 5).

FBR published most of the studies with a small sample size (38 or 91% of all small sample articles) and fewer large sample size studies (42 or 80% of all large sample articles) (see Table 6). Within the *FBR* portfolio of empirical papers, most have been multivariate (46%), followed by descriptive studies (25%) and bivariate studies (20%). Only two studies were published by *JBV*. These, along with all six studies in *ETP* and four studies in *JSBM* (50% of the empirical papers), were multivariate; however, chi-square analysis was not significant. Thus, other outlets favor multivariate studies of family business, whereas

Table 6. Impact of Journal on Sample Size

| <i>Size of Samples</i> | <i>FBR</i> | <i>JSBM</i> | <i>ETP</i> | <i>JBV</i> |
|------------------------|------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| | % Outlet | % Outlet | % Outlet | % Outlet |
| | % Method | % Method | % Method | % Method |
| < 100 | 38 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| | 48% | 40% | | |
| | 90% | 10% | | |
| >100 | 42 | 6 | 5 | 2 |
| | 52% | 60% | 100% | 100% |
| | 76% | 11% | 9% | 4% |

FBR's portfolio of methodology is more balanced; however, this difference was not statistically significant.

There was a significant difference between *FBR* and other outlets in the source of data used or the method of collecting data, as shown in Table 7. *FBR* publishes proportionately more qualitative methods and fewer mailed or delivered surveys than other sources. There is no difference among outlets in the frequency of topics discussed (succession, distinctiveness of family business, management or strategy, macro topics such as law or tax effects, or helping family business).

Conclusions

On the basis of our research, we can conclude that family business research has become increasingly empirical and more rigorous in recent years, with larger sample sizes, more systematic and fewer convenience samples, more independent and dependent variables, and more use of multivariate statistical tools. Family business research is increasing in sophistication. A key to this is the availability of large sample data sets conducted by private research organizations, such as Mass Mutual, Arthur Andersen,

and Entrepreneurship Research Consortium (ERC). These databases are of critical importance because family businesses are often not noted or underrepresented in other large data sets. Family firm professionals might encourage the continued commitment of these organizations to systematic and longitudinal data collection. Finally, although ERC data and the lists of firms developed by different private and government sources (e.g., winners of awards, lists of privately held firms) may include family businesses, the definition of *family business* needs to be articulated clearly and related limitations of the study duly noted.

Representational sampling is another key consideration in the use of convenience samples. The family-owned firms that join university-sponsored educational associations such as family business forums are likely to be more successful or at least more conscious of the problems of being a successful family business than the myriad of businesses that do not join. Although some research questions can be answered in smaller nonrepresentative and convenience samples, others cannot.

To advance the intellectual development of a separate field or discipline of family business, the reviewers and editors of *FBR* (which is by far

Table 7. Journal Outlet and Data-Gathering Methods

| | <i>Family Business Review</i> | <i>Other Journals</i> |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| | N | N |
| <i>Journal Outlet</i> | % <i>Within Outlet</i> | % <i>Within Outlet</i> |
| <i>Data-Gathering Method</i> | % <i>Within Method</i> | % <i>Within Method</i> |
| Qualitative | 29 | 2 |
| | 36% | 13% |
| | 93% | 7% |
| Mailed/Delivered Survey | 28 | 11 |
| | 35% | 73% |
| | 72% | 28% |
| Interview/Telephone | 16 | 1 |
| | 20% | 7% |
| | 94% | 6% |
| Other | 7 | 1 |
| | 9% | 7% |
| | 88% | 12% |

Chi-square $p < .05$

the most used outlet for research to date) might encourage greater conceptual and empirical rigor. Articles that provide theory should submit to generally understood parameters of theory building (e.g., Dubin, 1978), which would include building on extant theory and empirical studies in relevant disciplines, precise conceptualization, clear statements of boundary conditions, and propositions or hypotheses for future testing. Empirical articles based on very small numbers of observations can be asked to use case-based logic (Yin, 1985) to ensure that they contribute significantly to the body of knowledge. Empirical papers of all types might be required to elaborate sampling frames and methods, response rates, psychometrics (where appropriate), and limits to generalization.

Finally, although not specifically addressed in this study, we wish to raise the issues of temporality and culture. Data, whether derived from clinical observations or surveys, are dated. Families change both individually and in aggregate. That is, what constitutes healthy or normal family functions changes over time. Norms and laws regarding marriage, divorce, who is parent, and mixed families change with society. Individuals who initiate or participate in family-owned business “come of age” in historical time (Braungart & Braungart, 1984; Mannheim, 1952; Sheehy, 1995) and bring with them age cohort worldviews. There is every reason to believe that the field of family business is dynamic and that earlier findings may need to be replicated in more contemporary settings. *FBR* and its reviewers might en-

courage greater attention to these temporal issues.

In addition, much of the research on family business has been based on samples and theorizing from the United States. Although this study did not address the national or ethnic bases of research, international research is an earmark of contemporary academic research in other business disciplines, such as management, marketing, accounting, and finance. We noted but did not measure an apparent increase in international studies of family business (single non-U.S. country or comparative). In many of these, there was a claim for grounded research in a new context rather than efforts to extend and test similarities and differences from historical work. There were also small sample studies with the above-noted variations in conceptual and operational definitions and limitations in information on sample source, data-gathering methods, psychometrics, and data analysis. *FBR* might usefully encourage greater attention to theoretical and measurable international and national culture dimensions while systematically building on what has preceded.

The data in this study suggest that family business is establishing itself as an intellectual field, with greater presence in more journals. It behooves the leadership of family business professional associations and the editors of *FBR* to track articles in other journals as indicators of increasing legitimacy as a field of study. Leading scholars in family business might usefully lobby the Social Science Citation Index to have *FBR* included in journals covered by that service.

Beyond research, the field of family business needs to decide whether and to what extent it can differentiate itself from the disciplines from which it borrows. Is family business merely a context or situation where psychology, sociology, family counseling, leadership succession, wealth planning, and the like are studied? What distinguishes family business from entrepreneurship and small business, on the one hand, or closely held ownership on the other?

The field may consider two strategies. The first is to concentrate on and define a niche outside the mainstream of intellectual disciplines. Scholars and practitioners would be encouraged

to focus their endeavors on audiences in existing family business professional associations and readers of *FBR*. Although this is sensible to practitioners, it is less sensible to scholars who want their work more widely disseminated and who seek tenure with universities.

The second strategy is to infiltrate the mainstream. Encouraging leading family business scholars to submit papers to large, competitive venues for presentation and publication—such as the Academy of Management, the International Business and Corporate Strategy and Planning Congress, the Strategic Management Society, the American Finance Association, and the American Accounting Association—would result (in time) with more articles being published in highly visible, academically top-tier outlets. This is a long-term strategy and along the way, gatekeepers of these mainstream venues would likely look to appoint reviewers from family business, itself a milestone of legitimacy.

Professional associations in family business are characterized by diverse groups representing a wide range of functions, including research, education, and practice. It behooves these associations to turn attention periodically to the professionalization process (Kerr, Von Glinow, & Schreisheim, 1977). For example, how many classes on family business are taught at U.S. colleges and universities? How many are taught in other countries? How many universities have endowed chairs for family business? Is there a large enough, sufficiently distinct body of knowledge to have a specialized advanced academic degree?

Of course professionalization includes other issues that are not the focus of this effort but are discussions and actions within FFI. These include issues pertaining to occupational careers, which include concentrations for baccalaureate and graduate degrees and particularly doctoral work; practitioner certification and issues pertaining to the development and enforcement of ethics; and collegial maintenance of standards. In time, and with the development of metrics, these issues can themselves be researched and reported in scholarly venues.

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