FONDAZIONE ARISTIDE MERLONI

Economia Marche Journal of Applied Economics

Vol. XXXI, No. 2, December 2012

Family and non-family businesses on internal factors of entrepreneurship

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Abstract

Small firms are a major player in development. Thus, entrepreneurship is frequently attached to these firms and it must be present in daily management of factors such as planning and cooperation. We intend to analyze these factors, comparing familiar and non-familiar businesses. This study was conducted in a Portuguese region in the north of Portugal - *Vale do Sousa*. The results allow us to conclude that even with some managerial differences it was not possible to identify distinct patterns between them. The main goal of this paper is to open research lines on important issues to distinguish familiar from non-familiar businesses.

JEL Classification: *L22; M10.*

Keywords: *Family Businesses; Planning; Cooperation.*

Affiliations and acknowledgements

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Suggested citation

Duarte N. and F. Diniz (2012), Family and non-family businesses on internal factors of entrepreneurship, Economia Marche Journal of Applied Economics, XXXI(2): 39-51.

1 Introduction

Entrepreneurship can be analyzed from very different perspectives. Nowadays it is an important subject, not only in the academic research field, but is also relevant for policy makers, local, and central governments. The concept of entrepreneurship is attached to the concept of small businesses, and there are many reasons for that: (1) the number of small businesses present in the economic activity (in Portugal 99.9% excluding financial sector (INE, 2011), 99% in European Union and OECD countries (European Union, 2011; OECD, 2010); (2) their role in economic activity: SMEs play the main role on economic growth and represent the largest percentage of employment (OECD, 2000); (3) they are considered the engines for economy and development (IAPMEI, 2008); and (4) their role on social issues such as employment (75% of total employment in the European Union (2011)).

For all these reasons, as defended by Shanklin and Ryans (1998) these firms should be taken into consideration by governments when it comes to economic stimulus. Nowadays we just need to replace "economic stimulus" by "entrepreneurship". Furthermore, "*small businesses are presumed to be more flexible and therefore better able to adapt to changing market conditions*" (Edmiston, 2004).

According to the European Commission (CEC, 2009) "*new ideas are often put into practice by new firms. These can either be a start-up created by a local entrepreneur or by foreign direct investment. Start-ups are the key to innovation. Innovative new firms can conquer a niche market and grow rapidly (the so-called gazelles)*". In this particular case, it seems that flexibility of existent firms is not so important, since the gazelles are expected to be new firms created by someone embedded in the community, or an outsider. When a firm is created by a local entrepreneur, it presents the embeddedness advantages. However these advantages in the establishment of a new firm may become an obstacle to flexibility in the future (Andersen, 2013). These obstacles might be more difficult to overcome when firms are family-run.

Normally the manager assumes a key role in any firm. This role is of particular relevance in small businesses. There are many competences required from managers (Man *et al.*, 2002). However there's one characteristic that is frequently mentioned: the level of education (Isidoro and Roman, 2012; Simon and Praag, 2012). This level might be relevant for the promotion of entrepreneurship and strategies conducive to entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship depends on factors such as planning, strategy, organizational culture and group relations that may contribute for competitive advantages. These behaviors must be identified in the organizational culture and in the firm's daily actions. But is it possible to have different results if familiar relations are identified?

It is common to find in the literature some arguments in favor of a better performance for family businesses (Martinez *et al.*, 2007; Anderson and Reeb, 2005; Miller *et al.*, 2007). Some others present familiar businesses as more innovative (Simon, 2009); or with a higher propensity to entrepreneurship (Zahra *et al.*, 2004), and more resilient than their counterparts (Chrisman *et al.*, 2011). There are other studies that present familiar businesses as not so effective (La Porta *et al.*, 1997; Morris, 1998; Mork *et al.*, 1988; Shleifer and Vishny, 1997). However, due to the increasing arguments in favor of family businesses they present an increasing research interest in the academic field.

According to Mandl (2008) in a study about family businesses in 33 countries, there is not a single definition of family businesses. What exists is a wide heterogeneity of definitions, even existing in many countries more than one research-based definition of family businesses. "*A very important aspect differentiating family businesses from non-family businesses refers to the* *element of "familiness" or the family culture, i.e., the (social) interrelationship between family and enterprise in economic, management and sociological frameworks. However, this aspect is very intangible and "soft". Consequently, although this element is very important for defining family businesses and contrasting them to non-family businesses it is hardly ever found in the prevalent definitions of family businesses*" (Mandl, 2008, p. 13).

Taking into consideration the different definitions of family businesses it is possible to identify many concepts. However there are a few always present: Ownership, Management, and Employment (of family members). Those concepts are important to identify familiar businesses along this paper.

However, with or without familiar relations, nowadays just a few firms might be able to fight alone. It is easier to succeed within a group. It is safer to compete as network, than as a single firm. In a group, ones weaknesses are offset by others. So if firms are able to cooperate, together they are stronger (Ceci and Lubati, 2012; Brass *et al.*, 2004).

In order to cooperate a firm must in first place be able to plan. Considering planning or strategic planning some studies consider that it is not essential for small businesses (Mintzberg, 1994; Pearce *et al.*, 1987) while some others argue in the opposite way (Miller and Cardinal, 1994; Rudd *et al.*, 2008; Man *et al.*, 2002; Brinckmann *et al.*, 2010; Chwolka and Raith, 2012). In fact, it is not difficult to find firms working without a plan, or just following an informal planning. But are those firms ready to compete? Are those firms prepared to succeed in the long-run? They might be successful in the present but that may not last. Bearing in mind the characteristics that distinguishes a family from a non-family business, but at the same time, that family businesses in and of themselves are not homogeneous (Kellermanns *et al.*, 2012) we will compare some internal factors, such as levels of education, planning and cooperation strategies, that may lead to entrepreneurship strategies.

2 The region

The region where this study was conducted is composed of six *concelhos*[1] (Castelo de Paiva, Felgueiras, Lousada, Paços de Ferreira, Paredes, Penafiel) which together form the Vale do Sousa Urban Community. This region is located in the North of Portugal, and for statistical purposes it is a region within NUT III - Tâmega. According to the last census the population in this region in 2010 is 339,616 inhabitants. That means a population variation of 13% between 1991 and 2001, but only 3.6% between 2001 and 2010 (INE, 2011). Nowadays the main activities in this region are: shoe making, textiles, manufacture of furniture and construction. In four of these *concelhos* it is even possible to identify, some industrial districts (DHVMC, 2004; Bessa, 2004): Felgueiras: Shoes production; Lousada: Textiles; Paços de Ferreira and Paredes: Manufacture of furniture. The existence of a specialization by *concelho* can be a threat to entrepreneurship. As referred in an OECD (2003) report, a strong concentration may be an inhibitor factor for entrepreneurship, and consequently to strategies that lead to a better level of entrepreneurship. Even though being possible to find many activities in each *concelho*, in some of them there is a significant dependence of a major activity.

To describe the entrepreneurial fabric, it was necessary to collect information from different institutions, since the available information varies from source to source. According to data from the Statistics National Institute, this region has 34,049. However, information from CofaceMOPE reveals the existence of 11,973 firms and, according to the Labor Ministry, the

[1] Concelho: Portuguese administrative unit divided into smaller units called *freguesias*.

number of firms is 10,231. After contacts with local entities, it became clear there is no accurate information about the exact number of firms, which led us to believe that the number of firms was close to 12,000. According to the data provided by the above mentioned institutions, this distribution (in relative values) is similar, pointing to retailing, manufacturing and construction being the main activities, representing 75% of the firms in the region.

Nevertheless, it is not easy to analyze the firms' management strategies and their entrepreneurial and innovative actions using a single approach, since they belong to different sectors. The degree and type of entrepreneurship differs from a clothing store to a technology software industry (Schwartz *et al.*, 2007) (even as regards the strategies adopted). In order to find more significant results, it was decided to limit this study to industrial (manufacturing and mining and quarrying firms) and construction businesses. This choice can be justified by the number of firms these activities engage, almost 50% of the total number of firms, and 75% of total employment. According to the data provided by the three institutions, the number of firms engaged in the industrial and construction sectors are around 5,000 (this figure will be used as the total population for the purposes of this study).

3 Resources and methodology

In order to get the necessary results to proceed with this study and considering the alternative options and some experience from past studies, the questionnaire was the best solution. Since questioning the whole of the population (5,000 firms) was out of question, the study was focused on a valid sample. In order to find the minimum sample size we adopted the methodology suggested by Saunders *et al.* (2003) where we need to define:

- Confidence level;
- Error margin;
- Proportion of answers obtained in a particular section.

Following the authors' suggestion was developed a pilot study with 30 observations in order to analyse the proportion of answers that occur relatively to the degree of entrepreneurship. From this initial sample it is possible to do some inferences to the final sample, using the following formula:

$$n = p\% * q\% * [z/e\%]^2 \tag{1}$$

n : minimum sample size required;

p% : proportion belonging to the specified category;

q% : proportion not belonging to the specified category;

z : z value corresponding to the level of confidence required:

e : margin of error required;

According to Saunders, since the population is less than 10,000 a smaller sample can be used without affecting the accuracy. The adjusted formula is:

$$n' = \{n/[1 + (n/N)]\} \tag{2}$$

n' : adjusted minimum sample size;

n : the minimum sample size (as calculated above);

N : total population

According to the pilot study composed by 33 observations, it was possible to find a proportion of 80% - 20% that leads to the following calculations:

$$n = 20\% * 80\% * \left[\frac{1,96}{5\%}\right]^2$$

It is possible to conclude that for a 95% confidence interval we will need 236 observations, in order to guarantee a valid sample. The questionnaire presented to firms included a large number of questions so as to allow the evaluation of different aspects of the firms' management. For the purpose of this paper, the questions regarded only the effect of the above mentioned internal factors on the firms' strategies. The total sample comprises 251 firms.

4 Results and Discussion

In order to classify firms into familiar or non-familiar we followed two main criterions:

- Management Control: those firms with a largest number of managers not belonging to the family were classified as non-family. The results leaded to 11% of non-family businesses, which means that management is largely in the hands of the family members.
- Family Employment: In order to classify a firm as familiar type, at least one of the employees must be a member of the family. The results showed that there are 43% of firms that do not employ any family member.

In a few cases the classification in familiar and non-familiar was different according to the 1^{st} or 2^{nd} criterion. In those cases, since one criterion was respected the firm was classified as familiar. The final results allowed to classify 46.6% as familiar firms, and 53.4% as non-familiar. These figures are not in accordance with some studies that present 60 - 80% (or even more) of family firms (Mandl, 2008; Kellermanns *et al.*, 2012; FFI, 2012). This difference might be due to the nature of the businesses analyzed: Industry and Construction. It is acceptable, that those are businesses where it is not easy to hire family members if they do not have qualifications or willingness to work in these specific businesses. Starting by the educational level, we can verify that family businesses present a higher level of education in their management boards.

From Table 1 it is possible to verify that familiar firms present a higher level of education in their management bodies. Thus, this might be an indicator for a better performance in these firms. According to the literature review, education is a key factor for innovation and risk strategies. Thus, it is a key factor for entrepreneurship. The next one to be analyzed is planning. Even without a consensual result on the importance of planning in small firms, at least some general guidelines are essential for an efficient management. In what regards planning the questionnaire addressed two questions: Market Researches and Stakeholders involvement in firm's new projects.

One of the questions presented in the questionnaire aimed to measure the percentage of firms that started their activities with a business plan. The question was: "*Did you realize a market research/business plan in order to start your business?*" The results were very poor. Only 10%

Table 1: *Levels of education present in management boards by type of businesses*

	Familiar	Non-Familiar
Primary School	23.1%	32.1%
Secondary School	29.1%	38.8%
High School	21.4%	18.7%
Bachelor	21.4%	9.7%
Graduate studies	3.4%	.0%
Total	98.3%	99.3%
Missing	*1.7%*	*.7%*

Table 2: *Preparatory business plan realization*

B. Plan	Familiar	Non-Familiar
No	92.2%	87.3%
Yes	7.8%	12.7%

Table 3: *Realization of studies to recognize customers' needs*

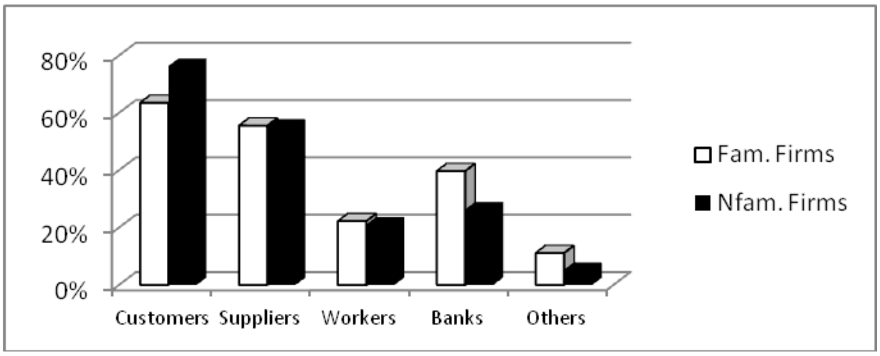
		Familiar	Non-Familiar
Part I	No	96.5%	89.6%
	Yes	3.5%	10.4%
Part II	Considering those with a business plan (Table 2)		
	No	87.5%	41.2%
	Yes	12.5%	58.8%

of firms took at least a market research when initiated their activity. This means, that 90% of firms started operating without a theoretical support to measure whether that could be a good investment. Comparing the results by business type we got results presented in Table 2.

These figures present a mirror of the general results: a lack of planning, but at the same time, it was possible to identify a light tendency of business plans elaboration, higher in non-family firms. This difference is interesting, because it goes on the opposite way of the educational level found by business type (see Table 1). Another question considering planning was about researches on customers' needs. The results were even more disappointing in strategic terms, 92.8% of firms never realized a study about their customers. However it is interesting to note, that from those 10% of firms that realized a business plan, 42.3% have already did some researches about their costumers needs.

Comparing the same results between family and non-family businesses, as we can see in Table 3 the results lead to a confirmation of a lack of planning. However, as it happens in the general analyses, when we considered just the firms that realized a business plan in the beginning of their activity (part II), the results present some evidences that those firms are

Figure 1: *Stakeholder's involvement in firm's decisions*



doing new market researches. As it was verified on planning, non-family businesses are adopting more frequently some theoretical management tools. In order to find a relation between those firms that realized a market research and some factors such as firm age or manager's levels of education some statistical tests could be performed. However some basic requirements were not respected. So, we followed by performing some crosstab tests, with SPPS software, but we just found random distributions, which means that does not exist a characteristic associated to firms that realize market researches and/or business plans. Even without statistical evidences due to assumptions non-compliances, it is possible to say that either firm adopt a planning policy, or does not give importance to this factor.

In what regards stakeholder's involvement in firms' decisions, the questionnaire also presented a direct question: "*Is it common in this firm to get stakeholders opinions in order to plan a new project?*" To this question 55% of firms answered positively. Considering the sample size, it means that 138 firms follow this policy. However, going a bit further we tried to find out what stakeholders were considered to decision making.

The results presented in Figure 1 consider just the cases that mentioned to consult stakeholders. The main idea from these results is that managers consider customers as the most important stakeholder. However, even considering customers an important stakeholder, most of them did not take any customer research (See Table 3 - part I). Workers, are not considered a very important stakeholder in decision making, however the involvement of workers in firm's decisions might promote efficiency and better performances. These stakeholders are those who know the process (process innovation) and being involved in the decision process they would consider themselves as a part of business and/or the solution.

Another important issue on entrepreneurship and management is the relation between cooperation and competition. Considering cooperation it was analyzed at three different levels as presented in Table 4.

The figures are clear. While in some strategies (in a global analysis) we got results of 61% (new equipment) 29% (New products), 28% (management reorganization), the results in cooperation strategies are clear: Firms in this region/sector are reluctant to cooperation. Even on vertical cooperation the results are very poor. Horizontal cooperation is almost inexistent, while vertical cooperation even with better results, still presents very low levels. This might occur due to the large number of competitors identified. On average familiar businesses identified 34 competitors, while non-familiar identified 24. The mode for familiar and non-familiar was 5 and 10, respectively. The results on mode are quiet interesting, because they look closer to the reality, but non-familiar businesses identified twice the number of competitors

Table 4: *Frequencies of cooperation strategies*

	Familiar		Non-Familiar	
	Absolut value (in 117 possible)	%	Absolut value (in 134 possible)	%
Competitors Cooperation	2	1.71	0	0
Suppliers Cooperation	6	5.13	6	4.48
Customers Cooperation	7	5.98	9	6.72

than familiar ones. Since they are operating in the same activity sectors, this difference is a mostly a question of perceptions. Can we consider that the higher levels of education in familiar businesses, promote a clearer vision, and promote, in an almost insignificant value, horizontal cooperation? Considering the type of competitors, there are no differences on the identification from both groups. While familiar businesses identify 73.5% of their competitors as local firms, non-familiar identifies 74.6%. On the identification of familiar businesses as competitors, the figures are 35% (identified by their counterparts) and 32.1% (identified by non-familiar firms), which means, that there is a clear vision of the number of familiar firms in this region.

The lack of horizontal cooperation may also occur, due to the localization of firm's identified competitors.

From Table 5 is clear, that firms (both types) identify their competitors, mainly in the same *concelho*. An overwhelming majority identifies their competitors at most, in the north of Portugal. This competitor's identification may also occur due to the existence of industrial clusters. Since there are many firms from the same sector in the same *concelho*, it might increase the level of competitiveness. Even more if do not exist a cooperation culture. If competition is interesting from a consumer point of view, for a sector, competition may be dangerous, in particular when they are targeting the same markets. In this case, it seems important the role of the businesses associations existent in this region. It seems to be urgent to promote a cooperation culture in order to make the managers of these firms, most of them (87%) small firms, realize that they can get better results if they are able to cooperate. Together they might be able to compete in new and larger markets, promoting like that economic growth in this region. Nowadays these types of policies or behaviors are identified as coopetition. However, in this region it is possible to identify a high level of local competition, and probably due to the nature of the existent businesses (industrial clusters) do not exist a cooperation culture, thus, there still exists a long way to establish networks leading to coopetition.

5 Further Research

Taking into consideration that the goal of this paper was to identify some research lines, this section will present some questions and future research suggestions. Starting by the first results, it seems interesting to find out the reasons for a higher level of education in management boards of family firms. In this study it was not possible to analyse the familiar generations in firm's management, however there might exists a relation between the level of education and the generations in the business.

Table 5: *Location identified of the 3 most important competitors*

	Competitors					
	Familiar			Non-Familiar		
Location	1^{st}	2^{nd}	3^{rd}	1^{st}	2^{nd}	3^{rd}
Same concelho	76.1%	51.3%	47.9%	71.6%	44.0%	36.6%
Another concelho in the same region	7.7%	34.2%	13.7%	2.2%	33.6%	24.6%
Another concelho in the north of Portugal	10.3%	2.6%	24.8%	8.2%	7.5%	19.4%
Another concelho in Portugal	1,7%	6.0%	5.1%	10.4%	8.2%	11.6%
European Union	3.4%	3.4%	2.6%	6.0%	3.7%	1.6%
Other	-	0.9%	1.7%	0.7%	1.5%	3.9%
No answer	0.9%	1.7%	4.3%	0.7%	1.5%	-

It was identified in this region a lack of planning. Is it possible to identify reasons for that? At the same time it was identified a slightly higher propensity of non-family businesses to follow a planning strategy. Is there in fact any relation? Still in regarding planning, only 55% of firms consult their stakeholders for their activity plans. For those that follow this strategy (that is not different between groups) customers assume the main role (probably a B2B strategy). In this factor, workers that are the most important stakeholders on process innovation are in fourth place. This situation occurs both in family and non-family businesses. This lead us to suggest further research in the decision making process. It was expected to find a difference between groups in workers consultation. It was expected to have a higher level of workers consultation in family businesses. So, the question is: Is there a difference in the decision making process from family to non-family businesses? Considering cooperation the results are too poor to perform statistical tests. However, horizontal cooperation only exists in familiar businesses. Vertical cooperation is present in both groups. Since cooperation results are poor, some researches can be done to identify the factors that lead to cooperation. It seems also important to explore, in the field, the perceptions about competition. Firms are identifying their neighbours as their main competitors. Thus, this could be a reason for the absence of horizontal cooperation, and may also affect it in vertical terms. As a final remark, this paper identified some factors that are crucial in entrepreneurship, identifying some issues to consider for future research comparing those issues in family and non-family businesses. These are just a few factors, that can be considered but there are many others that can be considered for future research.

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Fattori interni di imprenditorialit‡ nelle imprese familiari e non

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Sommario

Le piccole imprese rappresentano i protagonisti dello sviluppo. Per questa ragione, l'imprenditorialità è una qualità spesso associata alle piccole imprese e deve essere applicata nella gestione quotidiana di fattori come le strategie di pianificazione e di cooperazione. Il presente articolo analizza questi fattori, operando un confronto tra imprese familiari e non. L'analisi è stata condotta all'interno di una regione settentrionale del Portogallo - *Vale do Sousa*. I risultati mostrano che, seppure con alcune differenze manageriali, non è possibile identificare due modelli distinti. Il principale obiettivo del lavoro è di stimolare ulteriori analisi che si focalizzino sulle differenze esistenti tra imprese familiari e non.

Classificazione JEL: *L22; M10.*

Parole Chiave: *Imprese Familiari; Pianificazione; Cooperazione.*