

Advancing research on creativity in family firms

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Abstract:

To survive, firms need to be able to regenerate/renew themselves: creativity is key to firms' enduring competitiveness (Gong et al., 2009). This is of particular importance for family businesses, where transgenerational continuity is at the core of family owners' preoccupations, leading to family firms' long-term orientation (e.g. Le Breton Miller and Miller, 2006). Research has well established the link between firms' performance and creativity (Gong et al., 2009), as creativity – defined as the production, by an individual or a collective, of new and useful ideas (Amabile, 1988) – is key in developing new methods or products (Hauser et al., 2006) that enable the firm to renew itself. For this reason, exploring creativity should be included in family business scholars' agenda in the upcoming years. Indeed, while innovation in family business is well documented (Calabrò et al., 2019), creativity has received little attention in family business research. This chapter identifies the possible paths for creativity in family businesses: Do family businesses represent organizational contexts likely to encourage creativity?

Keywords: family business | creativity | Positive Organizational Behavior | Psychological Capital

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To survive, firms need to be able to regenerate/renew themselves: creativity is key to firms' enduring competitiveness (Gong et al., 2009). This is of particular importance for family businesses, where transgenerational continuity is at the core of family owners' preoccupations, leading to family firms' long-term orientation (e.g. Le Breton Miller and Miller, 2006). Research has well established the link between firms' performance and creativity (Gong et al., 2009), as creativity – defined as the production, by an individual or a collective, of new and useful ideas (Amabile, 1988) – is key in developing new methods or products (Hauser et al., 2006) that enable the firm to renew itself. For this reason, exploring creativity should be included in family business scholars' agenda in the upcoming years. Indeed, while innovation in family business is well documented (Calabrò et al., 2019), creativity has received little attention in family business

research. This chapter identifies the possible paths for creativity in family businesses: Do family businesses represent organizational contexts likely to encourage creativity?

To answer this question, this chapter is structured as follows. First, we define creativity. Second, we advance the need for developing a creativity perspective on family businesses. We suggest avenues for studying creativity phenomena in family firms by underlying these firms' specific characteristics that could affect their propensity to be creative places and which should be looked at with a creativity prism. We point to avenues that could be followed for measuring creativity of family firms, by presenting Psychological Capital and showing how it could be used in future research on family businesses' creativity.

Defining and introducing creativity

Creativity is “the ability to produce work that is both novel (i.e., original, unexpected) and appropriate (i.e., useful, adaptive concerning task constraints)” (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999, p. 3). In organizations, creativity has been defined as “coming up with fresh ideas for changing products, services, and processes so as to better achieve the organization's goals” (Amabile et al., 2005, p. 367). Thus, creativity can be analysed at the individual, group and organizational levels (Dampérat et al., 2016; Woodman et al., 1993).

In the business context, creativity is associated with competitiveness as it is known for being a source of innovation (Amabile et al., 1996). While innovation includes concrete applications of new ideas, methods or processes of production, creativity situates at the step of generating new ideas and is described as what precedes or generates innovation (Amabile, 1988; Hauser et al., 2006).

Researchers have identified various antecedents to creativity. At the individual level, creativity is associated with *self-efficacy*, defined as individuals' beliefs that they will succeed in accomplishing their task. Self-efficacy plays a crucial role in the generation of new ideas (Ford, 1996) and some researchers have developed the concept of *creative self-efficacy* to define an individual's belief that he or she is capable of producing creative results (Tierney and Farmer, 2002); at the collective level, it refers to an individual's belief that the group/organization is capable of producing creative results.

Research has shown that individual, group and organizational determinants interact to foster or hinder individual and collective creativity (Amabile, 1988; Dampérat et al., 2016; Hennessey and Amabile, 2010; Woodman et al., 1993). Scholars stress the role of determinants such as intrinsic motivation, organizational encouragement, system of rewards, efficient processes of idea collection, a shared and clear vision of organizational goals, openness to new ideas, a strong commitment to work, encouragement from hierarchical superiors, a climate of trust and perceptions of social proximity (i.e. “perception of being psychologically close to other individuals ... with whom you think you share references and codes” (Dampérat et al., 2016, p. 4).

Due to the interaction of the family and business systems, family firms present specificities – for example, long-term orientation (Le Breton Miller and Miller, 2006), non-financial goals

(Zellweger et al., 2011), strong social capital (Arrègle et al., 2007) and strong identity (Vincent Ponroy et al., 2019) – that could make them organizational contexts favoring or harming creativity. This chapter points out some of these firms' characteristics likely to affect their propensity to be creative places and on which future research should focus.

Towards a creativity perspective on family businesses

There is a connection and dependency between creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship. Scholars have primarily focused on innovation (Calabrò et al., 2019; Rondi et al., 2019). The role that the CEO plays in the equation is often overlooked (Kraiczy et al., 2015) as well as ownership dispersion (Kellermanns et al., 2012). Since family firms face and overcome adversity, they are often more flexible and this helps innovation (Veider and Matzler, 2016). Collaboration often contributes to higher innovation and assists with resource constrained environments (Feranita et al., 2017) but family firms are less likely to cooperate than non-family firms (Pittino and Visintin, 2011). Studies have focused on innovation in large and publicly traded family firms (Chrisman and Patel, 2012; Munoz-Bullón and Sanchez-Bueno, 2011; Patel and Chrisman, 2014), as well as innovation in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Classen et al., 2014). Technological innovation appears to be influenced by family management (De Massis et al., 2013), while process innovation also has been shown to be influenced in terms of the conversion rate of inputs to outcomes by family management (Diéguez-Soto et al., 2018).

As creativity is critical for innovation (Amabile et al., 1996), future research is needed to identify the family businesses' characteristics that might affect individual and organizational creativity. Before pointing out future directions, this chapter will be divided into two main sections. First, we will point to family businesses' characteristics that are likely to impact these firms' creativity. Second, we will propose a path for measuring creativity in family firms through Psychological Capital (PsyCap).

Family businesses' characteristics that can hinder/foster creativity

Organizational features affecting idea collection and clarity of organizational goals

At the organizational level, family firms may present characteristics that impact their propensity to be collectively creative. Among them, in this chapter we focus on family firms' features that can affect idea collection as well as the clarity of organizational goals.

First, collective creativity, at the organizational level, partially depends on the existence of processes for collecting new ideas. Family firms may be reluctant to implement formalized processes due to their culture based on traditions and informality (Hall and Nordqvist, 2008). Such a lack of systematic procedures for identifying new ideas could hinder family firms' propensity to be collectively creative. On the other side, this low level of formalism is enabled by strong social capital in its structural, cognitive and relational dimensions (Arrègle et al., 2007; Hoffman et al., 2006; Salvato and Melin, 2008): family firms benefit from a high level of informal communication among organizational members, especially among family members (Pearson et al., 2008). The existence of strong interdependencies leads to a high level of reciprocal expectations and obligations and to a set of common norms (Hoffman et al., 2006),

which facilitate the information flow and can compensate or replace the lack of formal procedures. Hoffman et al. (2006) suggest that the richness and density of the structural dimensions of family businesses' social capital could facilitate the creation of knowledge. Family firms are often marked by centralization around the founder (Kelly et al., 2000). While both the culture of informality and the centralization around the founder might not threaten informational flows when the firm is still small/medium size, it could become problematic as it grows and/or becomes international. Thus, future research should look at the processes of idea collection in family firms in order to see how their social capital, degree of centralization and size might affect their collective creativity.

A shared and clear vision of organizational goals is underlined as being a source of organizational creativity (Dampérat et al., 2016). In family firms, two contradictory trends can be observed with regards to goal clarity. Family firms are long-term oriented (Le Breton Miller and Miller, 2006), which means that the goals are likely to be stable over time and thus quite clear for organizational members. Moreover, in family firms, organizational members tend to stay longer than non-family ones: research suggests that they *may* exhibit lower levels of turnover depending on the situation. For example, Sharma and Irving (2005) identify “imperative commitment,” which means that family employees may stay because of not having other opportunities or out of necessity. In contrast, normative commitment occurs when family employees stay because of their investment or stake in the company compared to finding another opportunity elsewhere (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Meyer and Allen, 1991). However, family firms can be marked by amorality, such as in the case of the “self-interested families” described by Dyer (2006). In such cases, organizational goals – specifically non-financial ones (Zellweger et al., 2011) or family ones – may not be clearly shared and understood by organizational members who are not part of the family. This could threaten organizational creativity as organizational goals could be thus less clear than in non-family companies. We believe that future research should connect family firms' propensity to be organizationally creative with the way organizational goals are shared within these firms.

Inter-individual and individual dimensions affecting family firms' creativeness: trust, conflicts, commitment and management

At the inter-individual and individual levels, family firms present characteristics that can affect positively and negatively both the collective and individual creativity in family businesses. At the inter-individual level, the nature of relationships in family firms can lead to exceptional levels of trust and of conflicts which, in turn, affect their propensity to be collectively creative. Additionally, at the individual level, family firms can be marked by strong commitment and by specific managerial styles that can impact individual creativeness.

At the inter-individual level, research has stressed the positive impact of trust on creativity. These organizations can exhibit exceptionally high levels of trust, because of the nature of family links and because of the development of a strong identity (Hoffman et al., 2006; Vincent Ponroy et al., 2019). Thus, family firms are likely to favor the development of “resilient trust” (Leana and Van Buren, 1999) – a form of trust having the potential to generate durable cooperation – as opposed to “fragile trust” – a form of trust that is more punctual, related to a specific exchange. The cooperation and harmony characterizing its members' reciprocal relationships might partly

explain why they present a unique propensity to conduct efficient collective actions (Allouche and Amann, 1998) but could also be regarded as an antecedent to creativity. However, the family nature of inter-individual relationships can also lead to conflicts that can be overarching and may hurt the firm's propensity to be creative. Inter-individual conflicts can occur between family members and non-family members, thus nurturing tensions (Van der Heyden et al., 2005). But they can also manifest among family members who have personal sources of restlessness. Such conflicts can become even more salient during periods of change. Scholars have shown that the planification of succession, and the existence of formal and informal governing structures and documents where family members can share and align their visions, can limit the risk and escalation of conflicts (Neubauer and Lank, 1998). However, this risk remains higher for family firms due to the overlap of family and business relationships. High levels of trust can positively impact collective creativity but conflicts can seriously harm creativity. As family firms are places exposed to both high levels of trust and conflict, future research should investigate these dimensions.

At the individual level, scholars have emphasized, in relation to one's work, the role of intrinsic motivation, commitment and, from the perceptions of management, feelings of acknowledgement and encouragement from superiors as being antecedents to creativity (Dampérat et al., 2016). Research has established that family firms benefit from high levels of commitment to work. Family members, as well as non-family members, can be "psychological owners" of the firm (Bernhard and O'Driscoll, 2011) and act as if the company was their own company. On the managerial side, family firms, especially in the early stages, can be marked by a paternalistic management style exhibiting benevolence towards employees. As it leads to feelings of acknowledgement and encouragement, such paternalistic managerial behaviors could be antecedents to creativity. However, this type of management can also be associated with traditions and a certain level of conservatism that might limit openness needed for new idea generation. Family businesses' peculiarities in terms of organizational members' relationships to work and the role of managerial styles must be addressed when it comes to assessing these firms' creativeness.

In the current section, among the dimensions that have been stressed by family business scholars, we have selected those that could impact these firms' propensity to be creative. In doing so, we have pointed to directions that should be followed for addressing questions of creativity in family businesses. The following section is dedicated to presenting Psychological Capital and to setting the stage for analysing and measuring creativity in family firms. To do so, we offer a theoretical development about Psychological Capital and explain how it can be connected to both creativity and family businesses.

Measuring family businesses' creativity with PsyCap

Positivity in family business

Applied to the workplace, Positive Organizational Behavior (POB) (Luthans, 2002) and Psychological Capital (Luthans and Youssef, 2004) have emerged in the positivity movement. POB is defined as the "study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for

performance improvement in today's workplace" (Luthans, 2002, p. 698). POB can be measured through Psychological Capital (PsyCap), a construct that is valid and reliable at the individual, team and organizational levels (Dawkins et al., 2015; Harms et al., 2018). PsyCap consists of four components: Hope (goals), Efficacy (can-do), Resilience (bounce back from adversity) and Optimism (positive attitude towards achieving goals), or the "HERO within" (Luthans and Youssef, 2004). Avey et al. (2011) and Kong et al. (2018) both conducted a meta-analysis and found PsyCap in employees contributes to favorable attitudes, behaviors and performance and contributes unfavorably to employee attitudes such as cynicism, turnover intentions, job stress and undesirable employee behaviors.

Family businesses, due to the nature of the family and the business interface, do not always have a healthy work environment. This oftentimes manifests itself in family-work conflict personally that has negative consequences on job satisfaction (Zhao and Namasivayam, 2012), performance (e.g. Karatepe, 2013), turnover (e.g. Karatepe and Uludag, 2008) and customer satisfaction (e.g. Zhao and Mattila, 2013). Positivity in family business leaders is integral to overcoming this natural tendency for conflict because of the inherent challenges of merging the family with the business. The "juxtaposition of family and business in their organizational structure makes family businesses different from their nonfamily counterparts" (Caspersz and Thomas, 2015, p. 60). When family businesses show personalistic tendencies, PsyCap in the organizational context may be even more important for family businesses than non-family businesses.

Creativity and PsyCap

The relationship between PsyCap and creativity has been established. Sweetman et al. (2011) proposed that PsyCap can explain and predict creativity through idea generation. They hypothesize that all the individual components of PsyCap significantly impact creative performance, and that collective PsyCap relates more positively than any of its individual components to creative performance. In a study of working adults using the Psychological Capital questionnaire and an exercise called "unusual uses" focusing on ideation to measure creativity (Harrison et al., 2003), all individual measures of PsyCap were significant and positively related to creative performance. A recent study looked at the mediating role of PsyCap in the relationship between creativity and learning goal orientation in team learning settings and found that when the team situation is less positive, learning goal orientation team members can draw from PsyCap to be creative (Huang and Luthans, 2015).

Measuring family firms' creativity with PsyCap

PsyCap has only begun to be applied to the family business context by Welsh and colleagues with articles that put forth theoretical propositions to be tested in the following areas: corporate social responsibility (Memili and Welsh, 2014); leader-member exchange (Memili et al., 2014); and collective commitment to family goals that may influence both economic and non-economic performance (Memili et al., 2013).

Currently, there are two experimental studies applying positivity. Caspersz and Thomas (2015) completed an experimental study applying positivity in a group family business leadership intervention. In a recent study, we measure creativity in family firms by applying PsyCap as

proxy. In a highly creative family firm, Organizational PsyCap (OPC) has been recently found to be linked to trust and overall family firm member positivity (Welsh et al., in press).

While PsyCap may be a link to greater creativity in family firms, it has not been explored in multiple generations to see if it can be passed on. Individual, group and organizational family firm PsyCap may be a key to multi-generational creativity and innovation that needs to be further explored.

Conclusion and future research directions

The future of creativity in family firms shows much promise. By pointing to organizational, inter-individual and individual dimensions that can characterize family businesses and that might be relevant for assessing family firms' creativeness, we have given numerous research directions that may hold the key to unlocking how family firms can be creative places in the short and long term. We have elevated PsyCap as a significant construct worth exploring further at multiple levels of family firms that may give us early clues to the connection between creativity and family firms. Future research directions are summarized in Table 10.1. We hope that this chapter will set the stage for the development of future research on creativity in family businesses that is of the utmost importance for understanding family firms' enduring competitiveness.

Table 10.1. Future research directions for family firms

Research Direction	Topic/Main Theme	Research Question(s)
1	Characteristics	Which family firms' (FFs) characteristics enhance/hinder creativity?
2	Individual/Group/Organization	How do individual and collective creativity develop in FFs?
3	Measurement	How is creativity best measured? Antecedents?
4	Succession	How is creativity passed on through generations and maintained in FFs?
5	Context	How does the FF context impact individual, group and organizational creativity?
6	Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	What is the connection between PsyCap creativity, innovation and productivity in FFs? Motivation?
7	Learning	Can creativity be learned? What is the connection between creativity and innovation in FFs?

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