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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN FAMILY BUSINESSES

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ABSTRACT: *The role of women in family businesses is explored in the paper. Although recognised as generally very important players, the role of women is often defined as invisible in business decision-making, supportive in men's traditional business domains and only rarely adequately recognised and rewarded. The paper explores possible differences in the views of men and women who manage small family firms. Their attitudes opposing the traditional business roles of women, different views on managerial, ownership and transition issues and possible gender discrimination are examined. The findings support the paradigm of a different, more feminine style of management, while signs of discrimination are not clearly revealed.*

Key words: *Family business; Women; Gender roles; Discrimination; Feminine managerial style*
UDC: 334.012.32:305
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1. INTRODUCTION

While female entrepreneurship is not adequately developed in Slovenia (considering GEM studies 2003-2006), it is assumed that women play a very important role in family firms, an important segment of the entrepreneurship movement emerging from the transition period. Women in Slovenia have achieved a high level of equality in both education and employment and it may be expected that have also taken on a crucial role in family firms. The demographic situation involving a low number of children should enable them to establish themselves as heirs to family firms as well, which is important since a large share of family firms will be entering the succession process in the near future (Glas et al., 2005). In the article, the role of women in Slovenian family firms is examined considering their role in ownership, managerial positions as well as differences in values, attitudes to family firms, their managerial styles etc. Their real contribution seems to be undervalued due to the conservative tradition in the country and the full

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potential of women is still not well utilised. However, the role of Slovenian women in family firms should be further supported to the benefit of their important economic and social roles, family well-being and the improved prospects of the development of family firms in the next generation.

2. BACKGROUND

The family business literature is sparse on this topic and in the past very few contributions were based on empirical research (Rowe and Hong, 2000; Bowman-Upton and Heck, 1996). Women family members are one category of stakeholders with a vested interest in the viability of the business, next to owners and employees (Davis and Tagiuri, 1991) and they can have an important impact on the business. While women tend to enhance their presence as female entrepreneurs, research on women in family businesses has suggested that the majority of women continued to remain in the background, staying 'invisible' (Cole, 1997; Fitzgerald and Muske, 2002), contradicting the level of feminism. However, for some authors (Dumas, 1998; Lyman et al., 1985) occupying a subdued role has provided them with a unique vantage point allowing a rich understanding of the prevailing issues and relationship dynamics where they might make a highly valuable input to the efficient conduct of the business and the management of relationships among family members. Sharma (2004) even says that, if used astutely, wives' observations, intuition and emotional capital can make a difference between the success or failure of a family firm.

The main motivation to write this paper was to explore some particularities of women's contribution to family businesses through the paradigm of possible different approaches between the two genders regarding managerial styles and ownership issues, including transition questions. The theory on women's involvement and roles in family businesses is built on a literature review. Five propositions emerge based on the theoretical background and extensive anecdotal experience of the researchers. The methodological approach is based on the focused surveying of a sample of family businesses with a certain degree of female involvement. The results are discussed through several blocks covering the managerial role of women, ownership dilemmas and different gender-based roles in family firms. The paper then offers some conclusions and implications.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Poza and Messer (2001) described six different types of roles adopted by spouses of successful family firms: jealous spouse; chief trust officer; partner or copreneur; vice-president; senior advisor; and free agent. Curimbaba (2002) reported that Brazilian women occupied either a professional, invisible or anchor role in their firms. Due to the small convenience samples these studies mainly provide an indication of the varying types of women's roles. However, it is mostly expected that women occupy the second rank or head up one of the business functions, traditionally finance and accounting or sales. Danes and Olson (2003) found 42% of wives as major decision-makers even in family firms owned and managed by men. Fourth, spouses and other female family members are often just paid employees in family firms: Danes and Olson (2003) found 57% of working spouses even in family firms owned by their husbands, with 47% being paid, which may suggest a certain level of discrimination at this point.

Some authors analyse the advantages and disadvantages for women in family firms (Frishkoff and Brown, 1993), including flexible work hours, access to positions in traditionally male-dominated industries, job security, professional challenges, and opportunities for personal growth (Barnett and Barnett, 1988). However, family firms can also involve gender stereotyping and discrimination found in society at large (Jaffee, 1990; Salganicoff, 1990), like the popular view that the male partner is the entrepreneur while the female partner does the bookkeeping in the back room (Dumas, 1998). This attitude leads to the fact that even an important contribution of women to family businesses may not be properly recognised in terms of job titles or salaries (Gillis-Donovan and Moynihan-Brandt, 1990; Lyman et al., 1985). Marshack (1994) found that 80% of male co-owners in husband-wife businesses advocated a stereotypical masculine sex-role orientation and 76% of female business co-owners supported a stereotypical feminine gender-role orientation.

Traditional gender roles are often present in family businesses. Alcorn (1982) suggested the prevalence of the dominant father figure and a subordinate mother figure throughout family businesses. Lyman et al. (1985) stated that the work environment in family businesses displayed cultural traditions that placed women and men in different social positions and different work and family responsibilities. According to Ponthieu and Caudill (1993), these characteristics apply to wives, mothers and daughters. The evaluation of the true contribution to the family's economic well-being therefore encounters a different mix of paid employment and unpaid family work between men and wives (Voydanoff, 1990). A number of wives simultaneously: (1) are also employed somewhere else; (2) manage the household; and (3) work in the family business, thereby juggling three layers of obligation (Rowe and Hong, 2000).

Involvement in a family business means being part of the family business' core makeup: the role of family members in the business, how bonded the members are and how the business defines itself in relation to the outside world (Doherty et al., 1991). Not being adequately recognised and involved in running the business and making business decisions creates tensions out of the dissatisfaction and clashes of values and beliefs about the operation of the business and the involvement, tasks and rewards for family members (Danes and Amarapurkar, 2001; Frishkoff and Brown, 1993). Prolonged and unresolved tensions eventually affect the achievement, health and fellowship of the business (Danes et al., 2002). However, as Danes and Olson (2003) discuss, tensions and conflicts can either foster a constructive climate that focuses resources on targeted goals, leading to growth and/or continued success (Cosier and Harvey, 1998; Danes et al., 1999) or they could create an environment of a lack of trust and fellowship (Danes and Amarapurkar, 2001).

Gender roles in family firms are changing but, when a female chooses a non-traditional role, tensions often surface (Freudenberger et al., 1989; Hollander and Bukowitz, 1996; Lyman et al., 1996). As entrepreneurship has emerged as a career choice for both men and women, that choice has disrupted traditions about how they manage their work lives and negotiates the overlap of their entrepreneurship endeavours and family obligations (Greenhaus and Callanan, 1994). Wicker and Burley (1991) found that wives' influence on the business increases when they work in the family business. That relative influence can be a source of conflicting goals and can create tensions for the family business (Levinson, 1991; Marschak, 1998; Rodriguez et al., 1999). Work-family issues at the intersection of the business and family systems within family businesses are a particularly fertile area for conflict (Harvey and Evans, 1994), with the content of conflict arising from five categories: justice, role, work-family, identity, and succession conflict (Danes et al., 2000; McClendon and Kadis, 1991). The existence of more than one decision-maker in a family business will, over time, create some level of disagreement and tension (Kaye, 1996). This certainly depends on the situation as to whether: (1) spouses are partners so they should have a say in family business decisions; or (2) husbands are in control of the family business and the views of their wives may not be taken seriously (Rosenblatt et al., 1985). According to Danes et al. (2000), men and women use different conflict styles and conflict begins to most easily subside when women try to avoid tensions.

4. METHODOLOGY

A sample of Slovenian family firms was compiled by third-year undergraduate students from different public sources like magazines, public presentations etc. In autumn 2007, students were asked to conduct questionnaire-based interviews as part of their Family Business course obligations. In order to be able to obtain a picture of different gender roles students were advised to interview family firms that met the following criteria: (1) at least five employees; (2) at least two family members employed; (3) have been in business for a minimum of three years to ensure a certain track record and well-established patterns of behaviour. As a matter of definition, the students were encouraged to make their own judgments regarding whether the particular family business they surveyed was a family business or not and, in addition, a student's opinion was confirmed by the surveyed company as to whether they felt they were a family business or not. Thus, it can be stated that a self-definition (Birley, 2001) of a family business was applied in this research to compile the sample.

The students were given thorough guidelines on filling in the quite extensive questionnaire which included the following sections: (a) general data on the family firm; (b) data on the manager; (c) data on the key woman in the firm (in case she was not holding the manager's position; (d) data on the second woman in the firm (if there was one); (e) data on women not yet employed in the family firm (mostly daughters still at school); and (f) data on women not employed in the family firm. Data on the second woman and women not employed were relatively scarce in the whole sample, which is why these data were excluded from the further analysis.

Since this is the first study of the role of women in family firms in Slovenia and it is doubtful that findings from other countries would generally apply due to the different history, culture and tradition in gender issues, five propositions were developed from the overviewed literature survey and some fragmented findings from previous surveys in Slovenia:

P1 – Women rarely act as CEOs in family firms but dominate in second-level managerial positions (Cole, 1997; Fitzgerald and Muske, 2002).
P2 – Women are modestly represented in the ownership structure of family businesses and consider this issue to be fairly unimportant (Lyman et al., 1996; Danes et al., 2002).
P3 – Women's view of transitional issues of their family firms are different from men's views (Danes, 1999; Sharma, 2004).
P4 – Women in family firms exercise a different, 'feminine' style of management due to differences in their values, personal traits and experience (Dumas, 1998; Poza and Messer, 2004).
P5 – While there are differences in the gender roles and rewards in family firms, this situation is not perceived by both sexes as a pressing case of discrimination that would demand immediate action (Danes and Olson, 2003; Rowe and Hong, 2000).

5. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

Family firms are mostly active in trade, but they are also quite well represented in manufacturing and construction. One-third of them indicated that they cover two different activities, chiefly to ensure a more stable flow of revenues. As presented in Table 1, only 15% of the participating companies had been in business for 12 or less years, while the other companies were older.

TABLE 1: *Sample characteristics*

Parameter	Number	Percent	Characteristics
Activity (firms were allowed to list up to two activities, with 34 having two activities)	37	34.5	retail and wholesale trade
	20	18.7	manufacturing
	19	17.8	construction
	12	11.2	transport and communications
	8	7.5	other services
	6	5.6	tourism and restaurants
	3	2.8	financial and other services
	36	33.6	other activities
Legal status	62	57.9	incorporated businesses
	45	42.1	sole proprietors
Number of employees	Average: 12.8		
Number of family members employed	Average: 2.67		55 (51.4%) with two or less, 52 (48.6%) with three and more
Founders	63	58.9	husband
	8	7.5	wife
	23	21.5	spouses as partners
	13	12.1	others (inherited businesses)
Foundation date	41	38.2	before 1989
	50	46.7	during 1990-1994
	16	15.0	after 1995
Family ownership	97	90.7	100% family ownership
	9	8.4	50-81% family ownership
	1	0.9	no family ownership
Gender of the manager	89	83.2	male
	18	16.8	female

Source: own sample, 2007

On average, the participating companies had 12.8 employees. According to EU criteria regarding the number of employees, there were 60 micro-, 45 small- and 2 medium-sized firms. Approximately half the sample (51.4%) employed up to two family members, while others employed at least three relatives. As expected, the vast majority of businesses were in the ownership control of the family, managed mostly by men in CEO positions (83.2%). One particular family business with no family ownership was recently sold to a multinational holding company but family members retained their managerial positions. Some gender-based characteristics of the observed groups within the sample are given in Tables 2 and 3. As can be observed in Table 2, on average the women are younger than the men in the sample. There is no great difference between CEO women and key non-CEO women regarding their age and years of experience. The second woman in a family business is younger and less experienced, which may be interpreted by relying on the assumption that in several cases the second woman is the founder's daughter.

TABLE 2: *Selected data concerning age and experience for key groups of respondents*

Group of respondents	Number of respondents	Average age (in years)	Average work experience (in years)	Work experience in other firms (in years)	Years in the CEO role
Managers: all	107	47.2	25.6	10.2	14.2
- male CEOs	89	48.2	26.8	10.5	14.9
- female CEOs	18	42.6	19.4	8.7	10.3
Key women – all	107	42.2	20.7	9.0	
Key non-CEO women	89	42.1	20.9	9.1	
Second women	25	38.4	16.4	7.5	

Source: own sample, 2007

A possible drawback of Slovenian family firms is the large share of these firms originating in the craft sector which saw intensive development during the 1980s under the then more liberal economic policy. This craft tradition supports a conservative view of some factors of success (Vadnjal and Glas, 2008): education of the managerial staff, market orientation vs. product infatuation, acceptance of modern technology etc. By mostly having first-generation family firms in the sample, there is hardly any difference between the education of the founders and the acting managers as it is often expected in family businesses that the younger generation would have a higher level of formal education. On the other hand, as presented in Table 3, the women in the sample tend to have significantly higher levels of formal education than the men ($\chi^2 = 11.64$; DF = 5; $\alpha = 0.04$).

TABLE 3: *Level of formal education in the sample of family firms*

Education level completed	Founders of family firms (%)	Managers (%)	
		All	Female
Grammar school	1.9	1.9	-
Vocational school	32.7	25.2	16.7
Secondary school	43.0	49.5	50.0
College	10.3	10.3	22.2
University	11.2	12.1	11.0
Other	0.9	0.9	-
Number of persons	107	107	18

Source: own sample, 2007

6. THE BUSINESS AND MANAGERIAL ROLE OF WOMEN

First, the roles the women are occupying in the family firms are indentified. In the start-up phase these firms are mostly a male affair since 58% were established by men, 22% were a joint undertaking of the couple, and only 7% were initiated by women; the rest were established in earlier generations. The major role of men is also confirmed by the fact that 83% of firms have a male CEO, although the figure obtained of 17% of women managers is quite close to the lower estimates of the share of women entrepreneurs in Slovenia (Kotar, 2006).

While only a minor share of women (18%) occupy the CEO position, Slovenian women are far from only playing a supportive role or being 'invisible' in the background. As Table 4 shows, they hold the second managerial rank in a further 46% of firms and 29% are among professional staff with some level of decision-making power. In several cases, these formal ranks only seem to represent a formal designation so as to establish a position towards non-family employees while, on the other hand, men often discuss their decisions and listen to their wives above and beyond their formal status in the firm (Danes and Olson, 2003).

TABLE 4: *The business/managerial role of women in Slovenian family businesses*

Business / managerial role	Key woman in the firm		Second woman in the firm	
	Number	%	Number	%
Manager (CEO)	18	17.8	-	-
Assistant manager	9	8.4	1	4.0
Second-level managerial rank	40	37.4	10	40.0
- 'procurist'*	7	6.5	2	8.0
- production	8	7.5	1	4.0
- finance and accounting	16	14.9	1	4.0
- marketing and sales	9	8.4	6	24.0
Professional staff	31	29.0	12	48.0
Supporting staff	7	6.5	2	8.0
No answer	1	0.9	-	-
Number of respondents	107	100.0	25	100.0

Source: own sample, 2007; * someone authorised to sign on behalf of the company

Considering the Curimbaba (2002) groups, Slovenian women are found in an anchor role (managerial position) in 18% and a weak anchor role (second-level managers) in 46% of all cases, followed by a professional status in 29% and being invisible in their supportive role in 7% of all cases. However, a look at the business functions occupied by women partly downplays this extreme position. It shows that a number of women with a formal managerial role are in fact doing supportive tasks.

TABLE 5: *Business areas occupied by non-CEO women*

Business areas occupied by women	Key non-CEO women		Second woman in the firm	
	Number	%	Number	%
Managerial ranks:	35	39.8	18	72.0
- Finance, investment	16	18.2	5	20.0
- Marketing and sales	12	13.6	11	44.0
- Production	6	6.8	1	4.0
- Human resources	1	1.1	1	4.0
Professional: administration	35	39.8	-	-
Supporting role:	17	19.3	7	28.0
- supporting role	5	5.7	2	8.0
- 'girl Friday'	12	13.6	5	20.0
Other	1	1.1	-	-
Number of respondents	88	100.0	25	100.0

Source: own sample, 2007

While 40% of key women have a well-designated business function (Table 5), mostly in finance, another 40% handle administrative tasks that usually cover everything needed to run a micro business, and 19% are in the supportive role, mostly described as 'a girl Friday'. There seems to be a pattern whereby men take on the CEO position and key women handle finance and accounting. Considering the stereotype that women play the key role in working with employees, these family firms are generally too small to have an HRM department and women take on these tasks mostly as part of their managerial/administrative tasks.

This allocation of business areas is not only a matter of tradition and chance but also relies on an educational background. While the education level is generally low in family firms (Glas, 2003), the second generation is improving (Glas et al., 2006) and women have a higher formal education (see Table 3). However, they differ significantly in the area of education and therefore in their business expertise.

While men are very proficient in technical expertise, only one-tenth of non-CEO women come from this area and the huge majority has a background in business or the social sciences, proving the known gender differences in professional orientations in Slovenia. We also researched some common attitudes to the managerial role of family members asking respondents from different groups to indicate their (dis)agreement with some statements on the behaviour of family firms that were used in some previous research (Vadnjal, 2008). Respondents expressed their attitude on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (completely agree) to 5 (completely disagree). The mean values were computed and t-tests for the differences in mean values were run.

TABLE 6: *Attitudes to the managerial roles of family members*

Statements about managerial roles and succession in family firms	**Groups of respondents from family firms**		
	Managers (CEOs)		
	All	**Men**	**Women**
Children should be introduced to the firm at an early age	2.57	2.43(1)	3.29(1)
Children's education should be geared to the business' needs	2.94	2.79(2)	3.76(2)
Management successors should be chosen from the family	2.47	2.43	2.65
Parents should retire when the children are ready to take over	2.98	2.94	3.18
Sibling rivalry in the business is good for the business	4.32	4.26	4.65
Family members are entitled to different pay arrangements than the rest of the employees	3.64	3.53	4.18
Number of respondents	107	89	18

Note: (1) $t = -2.938$, $p = 0.004$, (2) $t = -3.208$, $p = 0.002$
Source: own sample, 2007

Considering the issues in Table 6, there were significantly different answers between male and female managers regarding the first two statements: women in the CEO position are more liberal as regards children, allowing them to exercise more freedom about joining the firm and choosing their education. They probably better understand the dilemmas of children concerning their future in the family firm since they spend more time with them and might well remember difficult times in developing their own managerial status. While female CEOs are less inclined to have managerial positions monopolised by family members and to apply different rules on rewarding family members, the differences are not statistically significant. These aspects of managerial careers do not have any important gender dimension. They instead seem to be more influenced by their existing role in the company.

Looking at attitudes to the managerial roles of women, male CEOs do not deny but only reluctantly agree that women can be successful CEOs. There is no general opinion that family firms with women in the top jobs are more successful, which could be hard to argue; however, women are significantly more in favour of this view.

The level of agreement was measured by several statements on the characteristics of family firms on a five-point Likert scale with 1 – completely agree to 5 – completely disagree. The differences were detected by a t-test for mean values and the results are presented in Table 7.

TABLE 7: *Attitudes to the managerial roles of women*

Statements about the characteristics of family firms	Managers		
	All	Men	Women
Women should only occupy 'female' areas like accounting, HRM, finance	3.83	3.62	4.89
		t=4.308; P=0.000	
Women can be successful CEOs in family firms	1.72	1.87	1.00
		t=3.390; P=0.001	
Family firms with women in the top jobs are more successful	3.05	3.11	2.72
		t=1.978; P=0.049	
Due to the 'male' tradition, women are often prevented from playing key roles in family firms	2.61	2.65	2.39
Women do not have ambitions to take managerial jobs since they take care of the family	3.79	3.67	4.39
		t=2.567; P=0.012	
Women take better care of the relationships among employees	2.32	2.41	1.89
		t=3.304; P=0.003	
Women are not tough and decisive enough in business	3.92	3.79	4.56
		t=2.942; P=0.004	
Women take fewer risks than men	3.15	3.08	3.50
Women can play a very positive informal role in the firm (e.g. in conflict resolution)	2.14	2.17	2.00
		t=1.821; P=0.070	
Business partners do not take women CEOs as seriously as men CEOs	3.33	3.28	3.56

Source: own sample, 2007

There is a consensus among male and female CEOs that women should not be confined to traditional 'female' functional areas such as accounting, HRM, and finance; however, this view is significantly more shared by women who do not want to be pushed into these activities only but want to have more equal access to all functional areas. Still, stereotypes about their role are quite evident and only a handful of them are in charge of production and R&D areas.

Women usually oppose the view that they should instead take care of the family and children and their husbands are also not pushing for this role. More male CEOs informally acknowledge the mindset that women have fewer ambitions to take on managerial positions due to their family roles. There were no significant differences revealed between men and women in the perception of the 'male' tradition as the key barrier to playing a managerial role in family firms, although this tradition is considered quite important by both genders. The respondents do not agree that women minimise their business contribution on account of doing family chores, although male CEOs are far more inclined to accept this stereotype.
The survey confirmed the proposition that women differ in their managerial style in many aspects, as presented in Table 7, and the majority of them confirmed the following differences with statistical significance:

- they are considered superior in caring for the relationship with employees; however, women are far more convinced about this personal quality;

- a minor share of respondents consider women to be less decisive and tough in business;
- a number of respondents consider women as less risk-taking; however, no significant gender differences were found; and
- women are recognised as playing a very positive informal role which proves that formal roles, even when assigned, might be less important than informal ones and hence comprise a more subtle component of women's actions.

The attitude that business partners might take women CEOs less seriously is viewed in a neutral way.

7. OWNERSHIP ISSUES AND TRANSITION

The ownership structure of family firms is presented by a pattern of first-generation family firms: 96.3% of ownership (calculated as the non-weighted average) belongs to the family and only 3.7% is owned by other people. Men certainly dominate as owners. Interestingly, the attitudes to family ownership are very uniform as there are no statistically significant differences between male and female groups of respondents. Their prevailing views can be presented as follows:
- ownership should stay in the family, which is consistent with other research findings, e.g. Vadnjal (2008) and Glas (2003);
- attitudes to (non)equal shares of children are quite divided; however, no gender differences were assumed, the issue is more on their activity/role in the firm; and
- family firms are quite reluctant to open co-ownership to non-family key employees.

TABLE 8: *Attitudes to some aspects of ownership in family firms*

Statements about some aspects of ownership and ownership transition	Managers (CEOs)		
	All N=107	Men N=89	Women N=19
Children should receive some shares when they join the business	3.32	3.16	3.65
Children who do not join the business should not receive shares	3.21	3.28	2.82
Children should receive shares in the business in equal amounts	2.69	2.67	2.76
Shares should only be transferred to members of the family	2.58	2.54	2.76
If non-family owners enter the business, they will be greedy	3.43	3.44	3.41
Key employees (also non-family) should become co-owners of the firm	3.30	3.30	3.29

Source: own sample, 2007

However, the family members do not consider this structure as highly important since wealth creation and earnings were ranked fifth among the reasons for establishing the firm, having been listed by 19% of firms (with autonomy being by far the most important, listed by 82% of firms as one of three possible reasons, followed by achievement, 44%, dissatisfaction with a previous job, 22% and creating a job opportunity, 20%).

As evident from Table 8, women are significantly more in favour of equal ownership shares for both men and women if they are employed in family firms.

8. GENDER-BASED ROLES IN FAMILY FIRMS: A CASE FOR GENDER DISCRIMINATION?

Men dominate when it comes to occupying the CEO position. This may simply follow from the fact that they were dominating founders who took over the CEO position and women were left with the secondary role. The question asked at this point is how women feel in their role? Do they perceive it as a case of gender discrimination in the family firm? The level of agreement about the characteristics of family firms concerning certain gender aspects was measured by several statements on a five-point Likert scale with 1 – completely agree to 5 – completely disagree. The differences are presented in Table 9 and were explored by a t-test for mean values.

While male CEOs consider their role as very important, women are quite convinced that they hold 'three corners' (paraphrasing a local proverb that usually applies to women holding their place and power in households) even in family firms – this view reflects the fact that they have to handle different issues while men have taken a more specific, selective role.

TABLE 9: *Attitudes about the characteristics of family firms concerning gender aspects*

Statements about the characteristics of family firms	Managers		
	All	**Men**	**Women**
Women hold 'three corners' even in family firms	2.78	2.90	2.22
		t=2.548; P=0.013	
If employed in family firms, women should have equal shares	2.31	2.39	1.89
		t=2.167: P=0.031	
Women should instead care for the family and children	4.11	3.99	4.72
		t=3.090; P=0.003	
Women cannot contribute fully to the firm since they support 'three corners' in households	3.60	3.47	4.25
		t=3.058; P=0.003	
Even women making an equal contribution to the firm do not get a 'discount' in family chores	2.67	2.70	2.56
		t=2.005; P=0.046	
Women are paid less than men for equal work	3.88	3.99	3.33
		t=2.207; P=0.029	
Women do less demanding, responsible and therefore lower paid jobs	3.69	3.72	3.56
Women face a tougher situation than men when it comes to being promoted	3.17	3.26	2.72
		t=2.269; P=0.023	

Source: own sample, 2007

It is quite generally understood that the family/household care is a significant burden on women and women complain about the fact that they miss enough assistance for doing family chores, particularly when they provide an equal contribution in family firm activities. This survey confirmed that the general finding about the asymmetric gender pattern of work-family-leisure activities also extends to family businesses. Women's participation in business has not yet been rewarded by the relaxation of their family role.

While there is no general belief that women are paid less for equal work, women feel the differences in pay significantly more. This issue should be studied more carefully since it might be proposed that women are paid less partly due to their less specific job assignments and less definitive responsibilities. Women also find that they face a tougher situation when it comes to receiving a promotion. However, they are not considered as doing less demanding or responsible work and no gender-specific views were found concerning this traditional comment that seeks to justify their lower salaries.

Although a number of respondents recognise several specific features of female managerial styles, the differences are not considered as a disadvantage that may prevent women from taking top positions in family firms. They would instead propose that women play a complementary role bringing some 'softness' vis-à-vis tough male managers. The female attitudes to equal ownership shares prove that they do not perceive the current dominant male ownership as just and that there is room to improve their satisfaction with their role in family firms.

It is evident that women in family firms perceive their situation in a significantly more critical way than the male CEOs. Large differences were revealed in the views of women who hold different positions in family firms. These differences are probably partly due to their different experiences related to their roles and partly due to the different characteristics of women belonging to different groups. The views of male CEOs may reflect some traditional concepts about women and male CEOs tend to neglect the meaning of the formally equal treatment of women to enhance their satisfaction and motivation. While not complaining intensively, women do perceive their share in management, ownership and rewards as inherently unjust and find their dual role in the family and firm as consistently more demanding in time and energy spent than the role of men. Slovenian women are not inclined to talk about their deprivation, but these perceptions are shared. Some recommendations to change this situation would include:

- enhancing the support for women in their family/household role through a number of provided services, but also promoting the role of men as fathers and partners in sharing different chores;
- ensuring a fairer ownership share of women;
- defining the duties/obligations of women in the firm more concisely, this is also related to the reward and promotion systems; and
- promoting women's education and training in functional areas that are important for the business activity beyond an economics/business education.

To examine the urgency of changes, we asked the women in the survey to indicate whether their position in the business and family should change in order for them to feel equal to men, using a five-point Likert scale with 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Evidently, no radical demands were found. Key women mostly desire to be listened to more carefully in discussions and decision-making, both by family and other company staff and the family burden should be shared more equally between partners. Some literature suggests (Sharma, 2004) that family firms neglect the education of female members. However, women hardly demand a pay increase, even shun more benefits and do not demand a larger share of ownership.

9. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Considering the number of family firms in Slovenia, more women are taking part in the accumulated entrepreneurial potential in these firms than those starting their own businesses. Working with family members and avoiding stress and uncertainty by leaving the leadership role to their male partners seems more attractive to women than facing business challenges as sole owners. On the other side, while the informal role of women on boards and in managerial ranks is often recognised such a role is more pronounced in family firms. In the latter, women are exercising their influence on the decision-making process in the office and during family time. This advantage of interlocking family and business supports our first proposition since the formal role of women in family firms does not reach beyond the role of women in non-family businesses. Therefore, the first proposition can be regarded as supported.

Considering that female family members share the second-rank managerial roles in a large share of family businesses where men dominate as CEOs, their share in ownership certainly understates their role in running the family business. However, women do not seem to oppose the existing situation and often consider their informal influence as powerful enough to provide them with personal satisfaction. They also do not opt for higher salaries and benefits, although this aspect may become important with the reform of the health and pension systems which would increasingly make access to services depend on the voluntary involvement of beneficiaries. Women instead deny these financial aspects are important and this denial is a good cause not to push for changes. All of this is line with the second proposition which can also be regarded as supported.

The 'feminine' style of women in family firms is very important for creating good internal relationships, the overall climate in the business, employees' satisfaction and morale. This aspect is likely to positively contribute to the financial performance of family firms but it has a value in itself for the well-being of employees even if not materialised in improved balance sheets. This contribution by women is often benevolently recognised but not adequately rewarded. Again, women are quite patiently wishing to receive social recognition and the recognition of their family members but they do not intensely pursue their demand. Thus, it can be concluded that data from the study confirm the third proposition which suggests that women often possess different views on transitional issues compared to men. Interestingly, this confirmation is greater with female respondents which may be interpreted as meaning that women are more aware of their feminine-caused managerial roles.

When becoming CEOs, women would introduce a number of changes in the management style whereby they would add their softer feminine approach as a new quality to the existing style. This assumption is very relativistic since the research indicated that female CEOs behave unlike other female family members involved in the firm. It is a question for discussion that women in family firms really need to be tough and superior to their male family members in order to reach the top position. The process of their elevation to the CEO position can neutralise part of their femininity and softness and performing the duties of a CEO seems to develop experiences that harden their approach. Taking all the mentioned findings into account, proposition four can be neither confirmed nor rejected.

The discrimination issue is somewhat controversial. Women consider their role in the family business very differently to male CEOs, which indicates a lack of discussion of these issues. It can be assumed that women are frustrated by the existing formal structure of family firms. However, they seem reluctant to raise these issues in the family and are not radical in demanding the changes. The feminist movement never had deep roots in Slovenia and radicalism has mostly been calmed by legislation that formally supports (full) gender equality, but no mechanisms to ensure this equality have been devised. Thus, the fifth proposition can be confirmed in the first part where it suggests that there are difference in gender roles and rewards. However, as to the second part the data cannot be interpreted in a confirmatory manner.

For the purpose of managing small family firms and also consulting to them, it should be clear that women's role in the family business is often underestimated. Women not only play a traditional supportive and invisible role but can also contribute to a different, more people-oriented managerial style where their feminine style of tackling business issues is applied as an alternative to the more traditionally viewed masculine approach. In diagnostic processes of consulting projects women, although not holding leadership positions, may be invaluable sources of information and complementary opinions. In conflict-resolution programmes, women can play an enormously positive role in reducing the heat which appears mostly among men.

There are many opportunities for further research in the field. Researchers should be encouraged to use more sophisticated analytical approaches; however, they should provide larger samples in order to arrive at reliable assessments. A more multi-disciplinary approach is recommended because the complex family and partnership relationship combined with pressures of day-to-day business activities demands much broader research skills and knowledge than is usually available to and provided by business science researchers.

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