Qualitative Research in Family Business:

How can we take advantage of the opportunities?

FFI Research & Education Symposium
Date: October 15, 2011 – 3:45 to 5:45

Panelists: Trish Reay, Lloyd Steier (U. Alberta), Pramodita Sharma (U. Vermont), Jill Thomas (U. Adelaide)
Overview of this session

- Setting the stage: Importance & prevalence of qualitative research
  - **Trish Reay** – editorial experience and review of literature
- Perspectives and Suggestions from:
  - **Lloyd Steier** – Director of Centre for Entrepreneurship and Family Enterprise (U. Alberta) & Director, FFI
  - **Jill Thomas** – Active Researcher, Liaison roles between research and practice & Director, FFI.
  - **Pramodita Sharma** – Editor, Family Business Review & STEP
- Working groups to develop new ideas and strategies for encouraging more (high quality) qualitative research in family business
- Close with reporting back from each group.
Why do qualitative research in family business?

- Answer important questions in the field
  - “How” and “Why” questions
    - How do family advisors contribute to positive succession processes?
    - Why do families respect some advisors more than others?
- Develop theory
  - More than testing theory – advancing our theoretical understanding
- Preliminary to large n studies
  - “exploratory” studies
- After large n studies to understand results
  - How can we explain the findings?
- Investigate outliers – why did one or two firms significantly outperform?
Determining the prevalence:

- Based on systematic review of the literature (with help from Zhen Zhang)
  - *Peer-reviewed articles focused on family business*
    - 35 journals (Debicki et al, 2009, FBR) + additional
  - *Empirical studies based on qualitative methodology*
  - *Publication range: 1999 to 2010*
  - *Search terms (electronic) + hand search*
  - *Result: n=76*
    - Family Business Review (40)
    - International Small Business Journal (10)
    - Journal of Family Business Strategy (5)
    - Journal of Business Venturing (4)
    - Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice (2)
    - Others (15)
Articles published/ year

© Family Firm Institute, Inc. 2011
Categorizing articles:


**Research Design**

- Case study design
  - Single case (15) / Multiple cases (51)
- Ethnographic design (1)
- Interpretive / grounded theory design (6)
- Action research design (3)
Data collection

- **Interviews** (73 out of 76 studies)
  - Structured; unstructured; semi-structured
- **Participant observation** (22 studies)
  - Improve knowledge of organizational life
- **Documents & other records** (audio; video)
  - 3 articles exclusively on documents
  - Commonly added to other data – seldom used systematically
- **Narratives**
  - Collecting & analyzing stories
  - Life stories; vignettes (interviews; documents)
  - 4 studies
Analyzing qualitative data

- Systematic analysis is required
  - *Do it, and show it*
- References for qualitative analysis needed and explanations should match with references used
  - *E.g. Eisenhardt vs. Yin vs. Stake (for case studies)*
- Analysis tends to be under-explained
  - *Use of qualitative software?*
  - *How is it systematic?*
  - *How did “abductive” theorizing occur?*
- Better explanations for “mainstream” journals
Writing up findings & Publishing articles

- Crafting an article
- Telling a story
- Contributing to theory
  - *Most of these articles contribute to family business*
  - *Mainstream articles contribute to organizational studies*
My Conclusions (Trish)

- Prevalence of qualitative studies remains low.
- Potential for qualitative research to answer some of the important questions in family business
- “How” and “why” questions remain unanswered
- Contribution to theory beyond family business
  - *Opportunities are there – need to take advantage*
Lloyd Steier

- Congratulations to FFI for 25 years of leadership in family business research!
- A brief history…..
  - Family business research is best described as an emerging field of study.
  - Emerging also connotes a quest for legitimacy.
  - The past 25 years may be characterized as having two distinct phases:
    - Phase 1: 1986-2000
    - Phase 2: 2001-present
Early arguments for studying family business:

- *Worldwide a pervasive—albeit neglected—organizational form.*
- *Rather narrow focus of existing business research.*

Post 2000 there have been remarkable strides in terms of quality and quantity of family business research ...dedicated conferences, quality journals....BUT let's consider the sampling and methods of some of these exemplars...
Some exemplars:


- Miller, Le Breton-Miller & Lester (2010) SMJ: “Family ownership and acquisition behavior in publicly-traded companies” (Fortune 1000)
All of the above programs represent important streams of research; however, it remains important to ponder:

- Is a difference between “private” and “public”?
- Are publicly traded firms something “other” than family firms?
- Does management research continue to focus too much on a rather narrow population?
- In terms of research are we missing opportunities to capture family firms in their “infinite” variety?
- How do we best capture the richness and variety of this organizational form?
Jill Thomas

"A major strength of the qualitative approach is the depth to which explorations are conducted and descriptions are written, usually resulting in sufficient details for the reader to grasp the idiosyncrasies of the situation." (Myers, 2000)

Consider how much more we can glean about family firms through qualitative data collection
Some case examples

- Evaluation instruments
- Study of boards and governance

Open ended ‘exploratory’ enquiry enables increased familiarity with what we consider valuable to research. Provides a better chance of identifying appropriate variables for testing which will in turn help further the field.
Challenges of and opportunities for qualitative research: Myth or reality?

Imperative within academia for research output

- Desk top research less time consuming?
- Qualitative research more time consuming?
- Incentives for quantity over quality?

Opportunities for the future

- Access to data
- FB more private?
- Unwilling to share?
Pramodita (DITA) Sharma: Reflections as Editor, *Family Business Review*

- **Growth continues**
  - 2010 over 230 submissions in FBR (>30 countries)
  - Impact continues to increase – FBR – A Top 20 Journal

- **High expectations of Relevance + Rigor**

- **25th anniversary issue – key messages (Litz et al., March 2012)**
  - Increase family science component (Albert et al, Stewart & Hitt, March 2012)
  - Innovative measures (Pearson – Lumpkin editorial in Dec. 2011)
  - Diverse subjects and samples
  - Longitudinal methods
But those that make it....make a difference

SEPT 2011 issue -

- Parmentier’s – David and Victoria Beckham building a brand – archival historical data, biographies, media reports – 2500+ pages of data content analysed
  - High interest in the article – Press + scholars (May-Aug – 620 accesses)

- Micelotta & Raynard – Content analysis - Brand strategies of 92 of the world’s oldest family firms – all founded prior to 1800
  - .... an exemplar of strong qualitative methods (Reuber & Fischer, 2011)

ON-LINE FIRST -

- Santiago – in-laws in Philippines FBs - 300 interviews (114 w in-laws) in 82 firms - Grounded theory research

- McKenny et al – Espoused goals of 100 largest private Australian firms - Content analysis of websites and media documents

Dawson & Hjorth- Narrative analysis of Tomasso Berger’s (Italian food empire) autobiography
Successful Transgenerational Entrepreneurship Practices

Applied Research Global Project on Entrepreneurial Family Enterprises

Who is involved in STEP?
- 44 Affiliate Universities – 4 Regions of AP, Europe, LA, and NA
- 170+ Scholars
- 75+ Families and completed cases

Activities
- 1 in-depth case study per year, per institution
- 1 Academic Meeting & 1 Summit per year per region
- Global Summit – one every 3 years
- 8 Regional Summits, 1 Global Summit, 25+ Academic Meetings

Output thus far
- 3 books – 33 chapters
- 10+ journal articles, 4 dissertations
- Practitioner reports

© Family Firm Institute, Inc. 2011
SOME EXAMPLES:

  - 1 case, 1 country

- Zellweger & Sieger (SBE, 2010). **EO in long lived family firms.** 3 in-depth Swiss cases. Large firms – 95-100% family owned. 175 – 2000 employees.
  - 3 cases, 3 industries, 1 country

- Seiger, Zellweger, Nason, Clinton (SEJ, in press). **Portfolio Entrepreneurship.** Family ownership – Employees 1600 - 3000
  - 4 cases, 4 countries, Multiple industries in each case

LOTs MORE IN WORKS - we have rich data and networks!

- Elgar deal – STEP Book Series
- Case Research Journal – Special Issue
- FBR – SI on Longitudinal Research – March 2014
Working in Small Groups (4)

• What can we do to improve the quality and quantity of qualitative research studies published?
  
  • What are some short term steps?
  
  • What are some longer term steps?
  
  • What can individuals here do?
  
  • What can others (or other organizations) do?