

Sustainability in family business settings: a strategic entrepreneurship perspective

Sustainability
in family
business

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Abstract

Purpose – Family business sustainability is a critical issue. This study considers if adopting a strategic entrepreneurship orientation can support the sustainability of a family business.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative approach is used, in which semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve family business owners. Data collected during the interviews provides insights into understanding, practices, motivations, behaviours and attitudes relating to sustainability.

Findings – Although awareness of sustainability processes and procedures is found to be low, sustainability is important to the family business. However, sustainability is not managed or implemented systematically.

Originality/value – The paper presents a new model to describe the sustainability practices of family businesses. Adoption of strategic entrepreneurship is advocated as mechanism for improving sustainability. Practical and policy implications are suggested to enhance the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives in family business settings.

Keywords Strategic entrepreneurship, Family business, Sustainability, Entrepreneurship

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Soares *et al.* (2021) explain that family businesses display distinctive characteristics as compared with non-family companies and that more research is needed on how to promote their growth and sustainability. The specificities and uniqueness of family businesses derive from their vision, intentions, behaviour and the aptitude of family members to pursue development (Porfírio *et al.*, 2020). The contribution of family businesses to the economy is significant in many countries, as reported by authors including (Miroshnychenko *et al.*, 2021; Ratten, 2023; Schillaci *et al.*, 2013). However, family business has only received limited coverage in the extant literature (King *et al.*, 2022; Jamil *et al.*, 2023; Lyons *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, the development of family business theories is limited, especially for describing the sustainability of the family business by using strategic entrepreneurship. This study strives to bridge the gap between strategic entrepreneurship and the sustainability of family business.

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Cultural and geographical context are important to determine the long-term sustainability of a family business (Stamm and Lubinski, 2011). Unfortunately it has been reported that the sustainability rate of family businesses or small enterprise is low, with only fifty percent of family businesses maintaining for more than five years (Olson *et al.*, 2003; Waqar *et al.*, 2020; Ferreira *et al.*, 2021). King *et al.* (2022, p. 198) explain that to survive and prosper across generations, family firms need to display financial responsibility and actively restructure as both the family and business evolve.

Strategic management research predominantly explores large non-family businesses, and the focus is on strategy as it connects with performance (Astrachan, 2010). As the study of family business has gained interest a small number of scholars have used a strategic entrepreneurship lens in the study of family business (Bruton and Chen, 2022; Lumpkin *et al.*, 2011). There is a significant gap in the theoretical base of family business sustainability in relation to the adoption of a strategic entrepreneurship approach (Gashi Nulleshi, 2022). Strategic entrepreneurship theory also needs empirical validation in family business settings (Kraus *et al.*, 2011). In this context, the purpose of this study is to develop a comprehensive framework for describing the sustainability family business by using a strategic entrepreneurial lens. The strategic entrepreneurship approach presented by Kraus *et al.* (2011), based on six key dimensions is used as the theoretical framework for this study. This study extends the model by proposing sub-dimensions that support an enhanced understanding of sustainability in family business settings. Practical and policy implications are suggested to enhance the effectiveness sustainability initiatives in family business settings.

2. Sustainability in family business settings

Many indicators can be used to assess success in a family business. These include trust, sharing of vision, development of the organisation, confidence in management and human resources (Lobacz *et al.*, 2016; Stephens, 2023). A key success factor for a family business is the creation of a legacy for future generations (Zapata-Cantu *et al.*, 2023). During the last few decades sustainability and sustainable development of organisations has received growing attention from policymakers, industrial organisations and academics (Rantala *et al.*, 2017). Sustainability is a multifaceted concept with many interpretations and dimensions pertaining to multiple fields (Boyer *et al.*, 2016; Waas *et al.*, 2011). Sustainability can also be understood as a (family) business, which has survived a specific duration from the point of start-up (Hegarty *et al.*, 2020; Lüdeke-Freund, 2020; Sarma *et al.*, 2013). Harrington (2016) explains that sustainability is a much broader concept than sustainable development. Sustainability is the capacity to maintain or improve the state and availability of desirable materials or conditions over the long term.

It is not within the scope of this article to present a critique of the novel models of sustainability adoption, especially those dedicated to sustainable business model innovation. But readers may wish to review key articles including (Ghadimi *et al.*, 2012; Boons and Lüdeke-Freund, 2013; Rantala *et al.*, 2017; Ritala *et al.*, 2018; Preghenella and Battistella, 2021). Business sustainability can be attained through different variables, e.g. core competencies, wide-ranging production, opportunities, managing risks, different resources, business growth and many other ways (Sambhanthan *et al.*, 2017). There are many different sustainability factors reported in the literature: long-term orientation, educational background, organisational value and relationship with stakeholders, the involvement of family, value and size of the family firm and environment (Ropega, 2016; Broccardo *et al.*, 2019).

Our starting point is that the literature has struggled to fully comprehend how family business activity is impacted by approaches to *sustainability*. Astrachan (2010) posits that

families and family dynamics are likely to affect the strategy process differently than individuals or non-kinship groups and deserve special consideration. Many issues may hamper the emergence of a sustainability perspective within a family business. These issues can include: internal conflict; socioemotional factors; and owner to owner agency cost (Stafford *et al.*, 2010; Kansikas *et al.*, 2012; Zellweger *et al.*, 2012; Le Breton-Miller and Miller, 2016; Astrachan and Pieper, 2021). There are many problems in managing the family business like children, stressful life and balancing business and life at the same time (Danes and Lee, 2004). The family business is always more focused on long term orientation for the business's sustainability than non-family business ventures (Moss *et al.*, 2014).

Ferreira *et al.* (2021) in their excellent bibliometric study report that the extant literature on this topic falls into four different clusters: family business capital, family business strategy, family business social responsibility and family business succession. The extant literature, proposes that the key sustainability factors in a family business setting are succession planning (Sharma *et al.*, 2003), strategic planning (Danes *et al.*, 2009; Mazzola *et al.*, 2008; Ward, 1988) family capital (Danes *et al.*, 2009) commitment of the family and cohesion (Magrelli *et al.*, 2022) adoption of strategic actions (Zahra *et al.*, 2008). Glover and Reay (2015) identified four strategies for family business sustainability, these are business's diversification, maximising the debt, sacrificing the family needs and compromising. Additionally, the extant literature highlights the critical success factors of sustainability in small enterprises. These include attitude, perception factors, size of the firm, management skills, innovation, motivation, taking risks and financial capital (Broccardo *et al.*, 2019; Ferreira *et al.*, 2021; Glover and Reay, 2015).

3. Adopting a strategic entrepreneurship perspective

Strategic entrepreneurship is a novel concept with its origins in strategic management and entrepreneurship (Boudreaux, 2020). Strategic management is about the long-term planning, strategies, control, administration and sustainability of the processes in the firms (Höglund, 2015). Whereas, Strategic entrepreneurship refers to the "integration of the entrepreneurial (opportunity-seeking behaviour) and a strategic management (advantage-seeking behaviour) perspective" (Hitt *et al.*, 2001; Baker and Pollock, 2007; Ireland *et al.*, 2023). It is a combination that has value added for sustainability in a family business context, because entrepreneurial activity discovers new opportunities and challenges, while strategic management delivers superior efficiencies. At the same time, entrepreneurship focuses on change, innovation, risk-taking and establishing new firms and businesses (Kuratko and Audretsch, 2009). Kyrgidou and Hughes (2010) present some deficiencies in the strategic entrepreneurship model. They posit that it is unclear whether an entrepreneur can benefit from the competitive advantage or benefit from new opportunities or entrepreneurs can use both concepts simultaneously. Hitt *et al.* (2011) agrees, proposing that it is difficult for the firm to balance both concepts due to limited resources. However, through strategies and structure, the balance between competitive advantage and new ideas can be maintained (Keyhani, 2019; Schweiger *et al.*, 2019).

Ibrahim *et al.* (2016) propose that there is a need for empirical studies which explore strategic entrepreneurship practices in family business settings. Strategic entrepreneurship is strongly tied to the sustainability of the family business since it encompasses aspects of both maintaining and improving the firm. Therefore, adopting a strategic entrepreneurship perspective when exploring new business opportunities and improvements, can positively impact the sustainability of all types of businesses (Webb *et al.*, 2010). Strategic entrepreneurship can also help to achieve competitive advantage if the leader of the family business fully understands the dynamics of the organisation (Luu, 2023). It can also enhance the competitiveness of the family business and its capacity for wealth creation (Obeng *et al.*, 2014; Gökce and Arıcıoğlu, 2023).

In this study we adopt a strategic entrepreneurship lens which allows us to deal with multiple aspects of business sustainability, including resources, capabilities, strategy, environment and organisational structure. In doing so we are guided by Kraus *et al.* (2011, p. 59) who propose that a strategic entrepreneurship lens allows us to capture a firm's effort to simultaneously exploit existing competitive advantages while exploring what needs to be done in the future. The model presented by Kraus *et al.* (2011), illustrated in Figure 1, describes six key dimensions, resources, strategy, leadership, capabilities, organisational structure, environment and resources.

The model emphasises the interrelations of all these factors and that business entities of all sizes and ages need to engage in strategic entrepreneurship to develop both opportunity-seeking and advantage-seeking behaviour. The model allows us to understand how resources (tangible and intangible) impact family business growth (Ireland *et al.*, 2003). The model highlights strategy as an essential part of long-term performance and sustainability (Darling *et al.*, 2007; Galpin *et al.*, 2015; Lee *et al.*, 2010). The entrepreneur (as a leader) is characterised principally by innovative behaviour and will employ strategic management practices in the business. Environment refers to the overall economic, socio-cultural and political factors that influence people's willingness and ability to undertake entrepreneurial activities. It also includes external forces like customers, competitors, regulators and government agencies. In addition, the model highlights the relevance of organisational structure, division of the activities and hierarchy of processes and individuals (Ali Ahmady *et al.*, 2016).

4. Methodology

Despite various calls for improvements in the use and communication of qualitative research approaches in family business research qualitative inquiry is still relatively under-realised in published research output (Fletcher *et al.*, 2016, p. 9). The unit of analysis in this study is an individual who is a full-time entrepreneur and who manages a family business. The phenomenon of interest is their knowledge and awareness of sustainability processes and procedures. We propose the label of family business entrepreneur as an appropriate

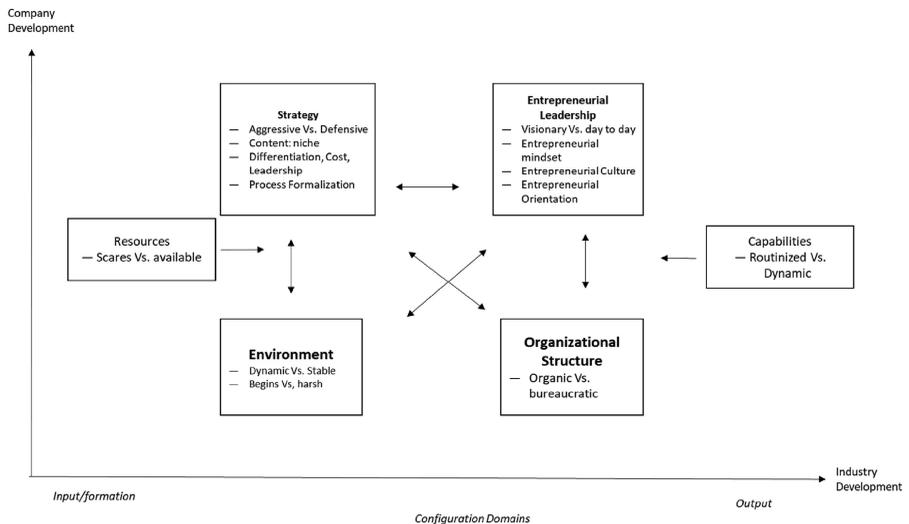


Figure 1. Model of strategic entrepreneurship

Source(s): Kraus *et al.*, 2011, p. 64

descriptor for the main actors in our study. This study draws on qualitative data collected in Pakistan. In Pakistan, the family business structure is pervasive and plays an essential role in the economy. Around 80% of the industry consists of the family business, and these family businesses provide employment to approximately 80% of people in Pakistan (Chang *et al.*, 2021; Hussain and Safdar, 2018; Muhammad *et al.*, 2022; Sikandar and Mahmood, 2018).

After selecting the research strategy, we focused on analysing what, who, where should be chosen for the interview (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). Purposive sampling was used due to the lack of published data and statistics on family business sustainability. In consultation with family business academics and consultants, we were able to identify twenty-five prominent family business entrepreneurs. Ethical approval for this study was received from the research ethics committee of the lead author's university. Participants were contacted via email and twelve agreed to take part in semi-structured interviews and to share their experiences and journey of sustainability of family business. Table 1 provides a profile of the participants.

Data collection took place, face-to-face between June and August 2022. Interviews lasted for between 45 and 60 min and were audio recorded. The collection of data ended when the point of saturation was reached, and the same answers received. Detailed notes and reflections were also used to capture the emergent narrative.

The design of the interview schedule (appendix) was guided by the model proposed by Kraus *et al.* (2011). The dimensions of the model were used as "*a priori*" constructs (Anderson *et al.*, 2019; de Oliveira *et al.*, 2019; Ferreira and Fernandes, 2017; Stephens and Miller, 2022) in order to probe if approaches sustainability in entrepreneurship align with the principles of strategic entrepreneurship. We also adopted a critical incident approach to encourage and this allowed us to elicit a sequence of events from narrative accounts (Van de Ven and Engleman, 2004; Bott and Tourish, 2016; Yin and Campbell, 2018).

Prior research (Muñoz and Cohen, 2018; Kelliher *et al.*, 2020; Patten and Stephens, 2023; Radu-Lefebvre *et al.*, 2022) highlights the need to explore the entrepreneurial narrative in order to enhance our understanding of entrepreneurship in different contexts. Narrative structuring (Kvale, 2016) was utilised to create a coherent story of the sustainability of an entrepreneurial family business. This approach requires the presentation of raw data and extracts from the interviews in order to understand the lived experiences of the entrepreneurs. The emergent themes are then presented as a new model (see, Figure 2). This approach has been used previously by (Stephens and Miller, 2022; Altman *et al.*, 2023; Walsh *et al.*, 2023) and is an alternative to presenting cross-case themes in tabular form.

5. Findings

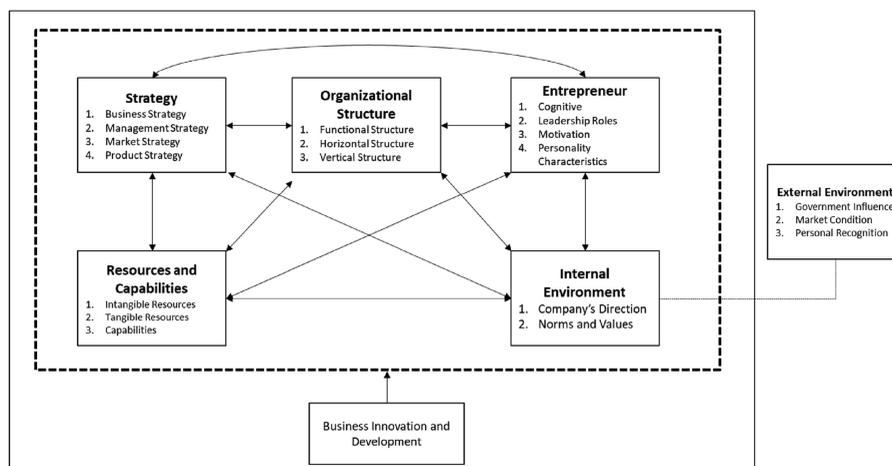
The findings are discussed using key power quotes (Pratt, 2009) in order to understand the different dimensions which are important to understand the context in which sustainability is conceptualised, planned and implemented. Findings were initially grouped into the different *a priori* constructs of the six dimensions proposed by Kraus *et al.* (2011) and then regrouped interpreted and regrouped to support the development of a Figure 2 a new Model of Family Business Sustainability. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected as the data analysis framework because it allows the analysis of meanings of phenomena and human experiences in specific situations (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Tindall *et al.*, 2009; Arslan *et al.*, 2022; Sengupta *et al.*, 2022).

5.1 Resources and capabilities

Identifying and securing the necessary resources and capabilities play a vital role in the sustainability of any business. In a family business these resources are invariably drawn

Table 1.
Participants

Entrepreneur (P)	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female
Age (years)	31	32	65	31	38	40	27	35	40	38	49	26
Generation	Second	Second	Third	Second	Second	Third	Fourth	Fourth	Second	Second	Second	Third
Education	Master Degree	Master Degree	Master Degree	Master Degree	Master Degree	Master Degree	Master Degree	Master Degree	Master Degree	Master Degree	Master Degree	Master Degree
Location	Lahore	Faisalabad	Sialkot	Lahore	Gujranwala	Lahore	Sialkot	Multan	Lahore	Sheikhupura	Peshawar	Sialkot
Product	Spare parts of vehicles	Textiles	Sports	Water Gates	Home Appliance	Plastic Bags	Surgical Instruments	Leather Products	Dental Hospital	SP Steel Products	Plastic Pipe	Leather Shoes
Year of Establishment	1983	1986	1952	1998	1972	1970	1961	1935	1989	1950	1999	1960
Number of Workers	259	3,000	4,000	550	700	1,000	290	1,100	330	1800	260	450
Source(s):	Authors own work											



Source(s): Authors own work

Figure 2.
Revised model of
family business
sustainability

from within the extended family (Poza *et al.*, 2004; Toska *et al.*, 2022; Stephens, 2023). This can be limiting, and impact on the potential for development, innovation and sustainability. A sustainable business needs human resources with expertise to support the company's ability to work strategically:

Firstly, we hired professional and skilled people for our family business and also gave them responsibilities by empowering them. If we have skilled people and professionals in our business, then nobody can stop us from sustaining the business. P10

Finance is a multi-faceted challenge for any business. There are the interrelated tasks connected to budgeting, transaction management, sourcing and debt repayment. Challenges with access to sustainable finance streams can contribute to challenges in accessing technology, infrastructure and information. P2 and P12 highlighted the importance of financial resources:

Without finances, you cannot sustain your business because competition is brutal. P2

Obviously, the main issues are financial resources and human resources without them, we cannot move. P12

P1 proposes that family businesses usually access finance from within their extended families.

Families have enough finances to give to the next generation. The point is if a family business is sustained, it is due to finances, which they already have. P1

P1 believe that this is one of the reasons that they are successful, a view open to debate. Capabilities in relation to products and service expertise often combine to develop a business model that can be shared between family members and passed on to new generations.

We are the only producer of automotive aviation leather. Nobody sells to Boeing directly in Pakistan, but we do! P8

This is likely to be in the form of tacit knowledge rather than a structured knowledge management system.

5.2 Strategy

Strategy is an essential factor in a business's long-term success. The informality of planning, communication and working patterns that often characterise a family business can create challenges for strategy formulation and implementation (Astrachan, 2010; Webb *et al.*, 2010; Kansikas *et al.*, 2012). Good strategy sets targets and achieves goals linked to the optimal usage of resources. It may be short or long-term, but businesses with no plans and strategies cannot be successful.

Defensive or aggressive strategy any way you have to have a strategy otherwise you will experience failure. P2

I have never seen any business which is sustainable that does not have a business plan. Without a business plan, you cannot run your business because, to achieve your goals, you must have some plans. If you do not have a plan, then you do not have your goals, and it is the reality that your business will fail soon. P7

Further evidence was provided by P1, P10, P11 and P12. They are concerned about their capacity for strategy development and operational planning. Like many other businesses they focus on documentation often without operational planning capacity (Galpin *et al.*, 2015; Ferreira and Fernandes, 2017; de Oliveira *et al.*, 2019).

I have all the strategies and plans with me at my office table to remind me that what I have to do next. We also have a quarter board meeting regarding our strategies and implementation and remind all staff members that we make our plan not only for formalities but for implementation. P10

Again! Very much! Because you can grow your business through your strategy, your strategies must be accurate, and you have to see worldwide the trends in the market and the world. You will make your strategy according to this because technology is gradually changing for improvement. P6

P5 emphasised the importance of having a strong, clear vision. A shared vision for the business will to some extent reflect leadership effectiveness (Taylor *et al.*, 2014) especially in a family business setting (Boyatzis and Soler, 2012).

You must see your vision; it must be clear for you. If you are clear in your vision and mission, then it is not difficult for you to sustain your business. But if you are weak to identify your vision, then you cannot reach your destination. P5

This quote resonates with the next set of interview extracts, where the focus is on the participants approach to leadership.

5.3 Entrepreneur as a leader

To understand the development, performance and sustainability of a family business we must have an insight into the leadership style (Sorenson, 2000). The leader takes the initiative and the responsibility to sustain the family business. Leadership styles and values are considered a key source of organisational culture, creating internal integration among organisational members (Efferin and Hartono, 2015). The leader plays an important role in defining an organisation, thus influencing the organisations success. The effectiveness of their decision-making ability will impact business sustainability.

Obviously! Obviously! There is a relation of good decision making of an entrepreneur with family business sustainability. P2

Decision-making ability is essential for the business's success because decisions are reflected in the success or failure of the business. P5

Yeah . . . Actually, I am a democratic leader. At a certain point, democratic leadership is necessary for the business and its sustainability because you give a chance to your employees to participate in

decisions and get awesome results. I strongly recommend the democratic leadership in any business to make it more successful and sustainable. P5

Being consistent in the practice of leadership will help sustain a consistent culture and there is substantial evidence of the importance of stable organisational culture in family businesses (Ainsworth and Cox, 2003; Brice and Richardson, 2009). P6 emphasises the importance of creating a good culture:

See! Culture always impacts the performance of the organisation. If you have a good culture in your organisation, you will automatically receive a good outcome. I always tried to maintain a good culture for my organisation because if I give a good culture to my employees, they will give good outcome to my organisation and me. P6

The next set of quotes explores the external business environment and the influence it has on business operation and performance.

5.4 Environment

The sustainability of a family business will be shaped by key issues in the business environment, including regulation, competition and increased production cost. The family businesses must be attuned to their environment within which government policy and regulation can be critical to sustainability.

We are in the business of polythene bags, but the government is moving to ban these bags. Changes in Government policy plays a very important role in the sustainability of the family business. P6

Prevailing economic conditions will influence the majority of business activities and family businesses frequently operate in economies where uncertainty dominates.

It has a direct link with business sustainability. At the moment so my customers not buying ladies clothes, fabrics, this and that. So, suddenly a bad impact came on our business. P2

Businesses are exposed to a constant risk including external shocks and a complex range of internal issues. Family businesses generally have limited ability to influence external factors but must select appropriate strategies and actions to mitigate against potential risks.

5.5 Organisational structure

The organisational structure involves the family leaders span of control linked to governance. But family dynamics may often blur the connection between family status and the organisational structure.

Until tasks are divided, and the right person for the right job is selected, all is in the blender. Every person cant do every task. The departments division is very affected because you can see a clear picture. Through departments, you can see the performance of teams. P5

Sometimes, the next generation encourages decentralisation of tasks:

In the first generation, the parents are doing everything, often literally by hand, like my father, but I prefer a horizontal structure in the business now. P2

Alternatively, a vertical structure is viewed as best:

You have to face everything, you have to see labour, finances, and other projects; then you have use vertical structure. P1

There are significant differences between prevailing models and practices in organisational design and how organisational structures emerge organically within family businesses.

Family businesses operate with constrained resources and management teams who are often focused on day-to-day survival, rather than the development of an organisational structure (Suárez and Santana-Martín, 2004; Arteaga and Escribá-Esteve, 2021).

5.6 Business innovation and development

The participants want to maintain and/or grow their market share through business innovation and development. Business innovation and development as reported in the interviews cover a wide range of activities related to new technology, research and development, innovation and business change.

If we are leading in making the washing machines, the reason for leading is that we are doing a lot of research and development in making washing machines. We can make many different types of washing machines, at different costs. P5

If you do not use business research, you do not know where you stand and where the world stands? Which improvements are necessary? How to fulfil the shortcomings? If you want to be sustainable you must increase your research. P9

Advances in technology and equipment play a vital role in the progress of the family business:

There must be a new type of machinery or technological development. These are very important to sustain and refresh the business. P1

We are introducing new machines to help with manufacturing surgical equipment which decreases our labour costs. P7

Erdogan *et al.* (2020, p. 21) explain that family businesses are endowed with a bundle of beliefs and practices that constitute their tradition. However, to remain competitive, they need to renew their approach to business, including their products and production processes:

Every day, you need a new technological innovation. It helps to stay in the market for longer. P7

There is only one way to sustain the business. Make changes and innovation in your product because every day you need something new, something better that you are offering. P2

Innovation supports enhancements and changes to products and services, which customers demand over time. But it is also important to refresh the business to offset the potential for sustainability threatening inertia:

It is very important to refresh the business. So, development and new tricks can be more helpful to sustain your business. Otherwise, the old things or products will not sell much as a new one. P1

In the next section we present enhancements and a new model of Family Business Sustainability. The use of “*a priori*” constructs based on the dimensions proposed by Kraus *et al.* (2011) was an important step in structuring the insights from the participants about how their approaches to sustainability align with the principles of strategic entrepreneurship. As we searched for common meaning across the constructs similarities and differences emerged. Although the words used as labels by the participants might be different what they represented was sufficiently similar in content to inform the development of a new model. Indeed, as Patten and Stephens (2023) explain similar experiences can be expressed in different ways by entrepreneurs.

6. A model of family business sustainability

Anecdotal evidence, observation and previous studies (Astner, 2020; Boyer *et al.*, 2016; Sambhanthan *et al.*, 2017; Schaltegger and Wagner, 2011; Woodfield *et al.*, 2017) indicate that there are many potential barriers to the development and management of sustainability.

These include limited capacity; focus on operations; operational focus; management style/structure; a lack of qualified personnel; financial pressures; and inadequate information. This is why adopting a strategic entrepreneurship perspective can improve the capacity for sustainability. The Strategic Entrepreneurship approach presented by [Kraus et al. \(2011\)](#) is based on six key dimensions. This study extends the model, modifying the naming and description of the dimensions and by proposing sub-dimensions that support an enhanced understanding of sustainability in family business settings.

The study's findings show that resources and capabilities are essential to the sustainability of a family business. Three key sub-dimensions emerge: intangible resources, tangible resources and social capabilities. Intangible resources are internal family support, human capital and social capital. Tangible resources have financial capital, human resources and equipment. Social capabilities include core competencies, internal leadership, organisational culture and supplier and customer relationships. In addition, four sub-strategies are identified. These are leadership strategies, operational strategies, market strategies and product strategies. Leadership strategy includes, decision making, hierarchy, external relationships and workplace culture. Operational strategy includes production, innovation, succession planning and training. Market strategies consist of aggressive and/or defensive strategy. Simultaneously, product strategies involve a mix of continuous improvement, customer feedback and diversification in the product, innovation and quality.

The study highlights four key entrepreneurial characteristics. These are cognitive skills, leadership style, decision-making and personality traits. Leadership roles include democratic leadership, transactional leadership and transformational leadership. In addition, personality traits manifest in terms of attitudes to innovation, staff treatment, risk-taking propensity and versatility. In terms of environment this includes both external and internal factors. The external environment involves government influence, economic conditions, competitor and supplier dynamics. The internal environment includes strategic direction, finances, culture and family dynamics and succession planning. In terms of organisational structure, a mix of approaches including functional structure, horizontal structure and vertical structure are in evidence.

6.1 Managerial and policy implications

There have been calls for researchers to explore the position of sustainability in relation to the activities and performance of family businesses ([Nordqvist et al., 2008](#); [Glover and Reay, 2015](#); [Le Breton-Miller and Miller, 2016](#); [Broccardo et al., 2019](#)). There is evidence in the literature, that although smaller businesses, like many family businesses, face constraints and challenges that they can achieve tangible and intangible benefits from sustainability planning. Our findings and their contribution to the development of a *Revised Model of Family Business Sustainability* contributes to ongoing work to develop family business theory. The results can help shape policy interventions that may provide better conditions for family business improve sustainability. Through a qualitative methodology this study has illustrated how activity related to: resources and capabilities; strategy; environment; entrepreneur as a leader; organisational structure; and business innovation can enhance sustainability in a family business setting. We extend the literature by providing new insights into how adopting a strategic entrepreneurship perspective can make an important contribution to sustainability. In addition, we provide practical and policy implications to enhance the effectiveness of supports for family businesses.

A distinguishing characteristic of a family business is that they derive many of the human and social capital resources from within the family structure with implications for the business ability to respond to key challenges, like sustainability. Support agencies should consider direct engagement and tailored supports with family businesses to assess specific needs and

opportunities. Planning for sustainability has significant implications for family businesses because it changes the nature of internal family relationships. Support agencies need to innovate in terms of their services. Agencies who engage in business development activities should consider how their support services are delivered and to whom. Delivery to individual employees may not be suitable, and instead delivery needs to be group based and family unit centric. Sustainability needs to be simplified. The family businesses regard sustainability as a complicated activity. Therefore, sustainability needs to be presented by researchers and support organisations in a way that clearly demonstrates the practical benefits. The revised model provides a structure within which the family business management team can conduct periodic reviews of their performance. The family businesses can identify which of the dimensions, or combination of dimensions they need to prioritise to improve sustainability.

7. Conclusion

Considerable public funding and supports are being directed towards business start-up initiatives. However, there needs to be a (re)evaluation of the support that are needed to achieve sustainability, especially in resource constrained enterprise settings like family businesses. Sustainability should be an important issue for every family business stakeholder considering the emphasis of these organisations on transgenerational control intentions (Mahto *et al.*, 2020). Although awareness of sustainability processes and procedures is found to be low, sustainability is important to the family business. However, sustainability is not managed or implemented systematically. The paper presents a new model to describe the sustainability practices of family businesses. Adoption of strategic entrepreneurship is advocated as mechanism for improving sustainability. The findings of our study have important practical implications for and family businesses and the ecosystems within which they are situated.

This research has a number of limitations which helps inform an agenda for future research. First, this research was qualitative, and this can potentially result in retrospective bias. However, if the interview structure and delivery was designed to encourage reflection and identification of key critical incidents and actions this will reduce the potential for bias in future studies. Future research would benefit from longitudinal studies which analyse relationships between the six dimensions of the proposed model of family business sustainability. This research focused on family business settings which are a particular type of enterprise, with their own inherent culture, dynamics and characteristics. Future research should explore different types of business settings to provide insights and further validate the model proposed in this paper. Furthermore, quantitative studies which analyse relationships between the dimensions over time would provide rich insights. This research focused on family businesses in one jurisdiction, future research should work with participants in different jurisdictions, businesses from different sectors and businesses of different sizes.

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Appendix

Interview guide

<i>Resources</i>	1. What are the resources which contribute to the sustainability of a business?
<i>Capabilities</i>	2. What are the capabilities which contribute to the sustainability of a business?
	3. What role do tangible resources play in sustaining a business?
	4. What role do intangible resources play in sustaining a business?
<i>Strategy</i>	1. What are the strategies which contribute to the sustainability of a business?
	2. How important is the overall strategy to the sustainability of a business?
	3. What strategies do you use for growth, R&D, innovation etc?
	4. Please specify any other strategies that the company should include for sustainability of business
<i>Entrepreneurial Leadership Strategy</i>	1. What are the characteristics required by a Leader to achieve sustainability?
	2. What type of personality is required in your business?
	3. Did you take risks in your business?
	4. How is does your leadership impact the sustainability of your business?
<i>Environment Capabilities</i>	1. What environmental factors impact the sustainability of your business?
	2. Does the market situation impact the sustainability of your business?
	3. Does government policy impact the sustainability of your business?
	4. Is there any community which helped you to sustain your business?
<i>Org Structure</i>	1. What is the structure of your organisation?
	2. What type of organisation structure is required for the sustainability in family business?
	3. Which structure is appropriate for the sustainability of the firm?

Source(s): Authors own work

Table A1.
Interview Guide

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