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**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Succession in family business based on gender in Saudi Arabia**

Do the family put more pressure to follow family business based on

gender in Saudi Arabia?

**Norah Khalid Almaghlouth**

**17213983**

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**LITERATURE REVIEW**

In the current wave of globalisation, global corporations, and broad- dominated corporate elements and multinational forces; it is easy to ignore that fact that a large proportion of the surviving and most successful companies are family businesses which are the most common businesses in both the advanced and developing countries. This implies the positive influence of these businesses in the overall economy as well as the global market. According to Bhaumik and Gregoriou (2010), many companies are family- owned and their ownership structure on a global scale is family- based. Globally, several companies started from the family ownership structure. For instance, American companies such as Ford, Wal-Mart, Bombardier, and Camex; European companies such as Bosch, Peugeot, and IKEA; Asian companies such as Samsung, Tata, and LG started out as family businesses (Saddi, Karlsson, Youssef, & Abdullah, 2009). Therefore, family businesses take an important place in academic literature as evidenced by the large amount of research focusing on it (Gudmundson, Hartman & Tower 1999; Al-Dubai, Ismail & Afza 2012; Bhaumik and Gregoriou 2010).

The literature review chapter reviews and discusses previous studies and research based on the research question and objectives. This chapter gives a brief background of business environment in Saudi Arabia with a special focus on family business and human resource development, empirical studies on the research question, a theoretical approach, and research gap. The main focus of the section is on the Middle East, specifically on Saudi Arabia, and sources are mainly drawn from Family Business Review and Journal of Family Business Strategy. The literature review chapter covers family business, succession in family businesses, gender in family businesses, the Saudi Arabian context, and research gap.

**Family Businesses**

Despite the fact that the definition of family business has stimulated the minds of several scholars in the field of business management and sociology, and has become among the most important elements of family business research, there is no consensus reached regarding its definition. As such, research and scholars have proposed different definitions but there has not been a clear agreed definition (Allouche, Amann, Jaussaud, & Kurashina 2008). Davis, Pitts and Cormier (2000) observed that lack of universally agreed definition, scarcity of government sources, and limited published data on family businesses that can be depended on to conduct such investigations, make the topic abstruse. Therefore, clarifying and defining family businesses is a great contribution for the future studies. For the purposes of this thesis, family business is defined as a commercial organisation whereby multiple generations of a family (related to marriage, blood, or adoption) influence the decision making process (Davis, Pitts & Cormier 2000; Kellermanns, Chan & Liano 2010). The family influences both the vision of the business and the willingness to use the available resources and skills to pursue distinctive goals and objectives.

According to Kellermanns, Chan and Liano (2010), a majority of the Arabian family businesses were established by pioneering merchant families that traded in the strategic ports of the region. Moreover, according the Chairman of the Saudi Law Training Centre Dr. Majed Garoub, approximately 20,000 family businesses in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries invested internally over $750 billion and more than $2 trillion in the global market (Garoshah 2010). Similarly, Warren (2007) discovered that families have influenced the economic performance of the Gulf economies by managing and controlling a lot of wealth. As a result, families drive the economic growth and development of the region and play a critical role in the region’s gross domestic product (GDP). On the other hand, Tiller, Dietze and Glozat (2009) observed that Arab family businesses significantly support the Arab communities through sharing of economic prosperity which is attributed to religious and cultural practices.

**Family Business in Saudi Arabia**

In addition to high dependence on oil production for economic growth and development in the Gulf countries, family business forms a strong economic support in these countries. Basically, 90% of the trading activities carried out in the Gulf region come from the family companies (Davis, Pitts & Cormier 1997). This percentage is relatively higher as compared to other regions in the world which range from 65-80%. Family businesses, in fact, are increasing in Saudi Arabia. According to the recent released statistics by the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA), the total number of family companies are over 0.6214 million constituting of about 95% of the total companies in the country. Although majority of family businesses are considered as small and medium enterprises, about 45% of the largest companies in Saudi Arabia are categorized as family businesses (Al-Yafi 2003). Some of the large family companies are; Ben Ladin Group, Al-Rachid Group, National Commercial Bank, Al-Zamil Group, and Al-Rajhi Group among others (Al-Yafi 2003).

Nicholas Davis- a World Economic Forum scenario expert- observed that Saudi Arabia plays a critical role in the establishment of the Middle East future (Al-Dubai, Ismail & Afza 2012). As a result, the country has received increased attention, especially during the discovery of oil in early 1900, towards driving the global economy. Therefore, the attention by western researchers and scholars towards family businesses in Saudi Arabia is attributed by the strategic significance of the country in economic growth. A Saudi- family business is drawn from the Arab family- owned business approach which, according to literature (Davis, Pitts & Cormier 2000; Al-Dubai, Ismail & Afza 2012; Jorissen, Laveren, Martens & Reheul 2005) comprise of three interrelated systems; Arab, family- owned, and business. The first system describes the Arabic culture which is rooted on the historical tribal system while the second system denotes the ownership approach. This signifies, a business owned by family members or a group of blood related members. The third system signifies the activities conducted by local and international businesses. According to a report by the Saudi Monetary Agency (Achoui 2007), family business ownership is highly regarded in the country and hence about 95% of the total companies in the country are family- owned. Similarly, Falgi (2009) investigated 30 PLCs in Saudi Arabia and concluded that individual private investors and family members owned 11-30% of all the companies listed on the Saudi Stock Exchange. That notwithstanding, these individual private investors were mainly family members hailing from famous family businesses but are sometimes referred as individuals. Recent reports on family businesses indicate that millionaire families across the world own up to 39% of the global wealth with Saudi Arabia topping the list of the highest concentrated country of high net worth families with more than $100 million in earnings (Becerra et al. 2011). These families offer support to communities in various ways such as contributing to the governance development process and playing importance social responsibilities such as sharing their wealth through Awqaf (Becerra et al. 2011).

**Succession in Family Businesses**

Previous studies have shown that succession is more complex in family business as compared to non- family- owned business (Echevarria, Idigoras & Molina 2017; Alrubaishi 2017; Overbeke, Bilimoria & Perelli 2013; Cabrera-Suárez, García-Almeida & De Saá-Pérez 2018). Echevarria, Idigoras and Molina (2017) observed that family businesses are more complex because they involve family and corporate systems which are complex and competing. The authors describe succession as the simultaneous transfer of the managerial responsibilities, family leadership, and the control of ownership. Overbeke, Bilimoria and Perelli (2013) observed that succession is complex in family businesses because of the difficulty in achieving managerial responsibilities, family leadership, and control of ownership of a business. Cabrera-Suárez, García-Almeida and De Saá-Pérez (2018) and Sonfield and Lussier (2004) indicated that succession of family business is more of a process than an event which involves more complex issues than the mere adjustment of responsibilities and roles from one person to another or from one generation to another within a period of time. Succession process is one of the major issues facing family businesses in Saudi Arabia and the world in general. This is because succession is rarely planned hence putting the company at risk (Overbeke, Bilimoria & Perelli 2013). Overbeke, Bilimoria and Perelli (2013) argued that despite that succession of family business is unavoidable; people avoid the succession plan because of a number of reasons: In their study, Echevarria, Idigoras and Molina (2017) revealed that succession raises hostile and unkind family issues. The business head fears losing the direct control of the business and in some extreme cases, the head does not know how to plan for the succession.

As a result of the succession challenges raised above, women are disadvantaged in the process especially in the Arab world owing to cultural traditions and superiority complex of males in the society. However, the current researches on women successors in family business have emphasized the changes that have occurred in the recent years with regards to women increasingly participating and taking up family businesses. Initially, studies focused mainly on the challenges encountered by women when joining family businesses or their lack of recognition in the businesses (Al-Yafi 2003; Davis, Pitts & Cormier 2000; Gudmundson, Hartman & Tower 1999). Nonetheless, the more recent studies have focused on the opportunities women offer to family businesses and the increasing number of women interested and taking up entrepreneurial duties (Alrubaishi 2017; Cabrera-Suárez, García-Almeida & De Saá-Pérez 2018; Chadwick & Dawson 2018). A report released by the World Bank in 2017 indicated that female- owned businesses account for over 34% of all the global businesses (Alrubaishi 2017).

Danish and Smith (2012) studied female entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia and found that the number of women heading family businesses is still very low. The authors noted that although women constitute 49% of administrative and professional job positions, there are only 6.2% of women- led family businesses. Jimenez (2009) investigated women in family businesses and concluded that about 66% of large businesses move from the first to the second generations but only 12% make it to the third generation. Decision making aided by cultural and religious traditions are the major obstacles hindering women from taking up head positions in family businesses. Ignatius and Abdulmohsen (2017) used the socio-cultural theory to explain the complexity of succession plan in family businesses in Saudi Arabia. The authors noted that socio- cultural issues such as conflict of interests, social mistrust, and subservience of women in the society put women at disadvantaged position as compared to men with regards to taking up business leadership positions. Women in Saudi Arabia confront particular challenges operating businesses. Some families are not supportive of women becoming entrepreneurs and business leaders in family businesses and expect them to continue giving care in family. In areas dominated by men, gender stereotypes hinder women from being included in the succession plan. In Saudi Arabia, women’s motivation to manage and hold senor positions in family businesses is impacted by social conditions such as lack of family support mechanisms, corporate resistance, and women’s own disinterest. However, this is not the case with men who are highly favoured by socio- cultural and religious traditions and practices (Chadwick & Dawson 2018; Campopiano, Massis, Rinaldi & Sciascia 2017; Sharma, Chrisman & Chua 2003).

However, Overbeke, Billimoria and Somers (2015) used social cognitive theory to explain the succession of family business by daughters. The authors maintained that unless people believe that they can achieve their targets, goals, and objectives; they do not exert the necessary effort or endure in challenges. As a result, choices and aspirations of women to take up leadership positions in family businesses are influenced by efficacy beliefs. Self- efficacy, as explained in the social cognitive theory is the process of self- evaluation that connects reasoning and conducts. Individuals make judgments of their capabilities to implement activities that are required to achieve their desired goals. The aspect of daughter succeeding their fathers in leadership positions in family businesses is determined by the efforts put by daughters but not the hindrances placed by the society, cultural, or religious practices. Therefore, having very few women heading family businesses in Saudi Arabia is majorly a personal issue but not a social or cultural issue. The self- efficacy idea was supported by Overbeke, Bilimoria and Perelli (2013) in their argument that fathers’ judgment of daughters’ capabilities may inform choices taken and connect reasoning to conduct. Fathers, being the family businesses’ leaders and selectors of successors, are influenced in their decisions by their evaluations of daughters’ capacities to accomplish tasks in order to achieve desired goals. As such fathers choose daughters to be their successors based on the outcome of their evaluations. However, Jorissen, Laveren, Martens and Reheul (2005) and Achoui (2007) presented a different argument. According to the authors, religious and cultural practices and traditions play a central role in choosing a successor on the part of the father as well as the daughter. Achoui (2007) maintained that despite the daughters’ capabilities, they are disadvantaged against sons in succeeding fathers in senior positions in family businesses. The author gave a good example of Saudi Arabia whereby despite increased call by the international world for women to engage in entrepreneurial activities, the number of women- owned businesses in the country is still very low. As a result of gender stereotypes and cultural and religious beliefs in Saudi Arabia, some women have developed low self- esteem, poor self- image, and lack of self- confidence. As a result, some women do not regard themselves as capable of succeeding a male business leader in family business succession plan. Therefore, a review of the previous studies backed by socio-cultural and social cognitive theories indicated that there is a significant impact of gender on the priority of succession of a family business. The reviewed literature indicated that women are disadvantaged to men in succession of family business due to their efficacy and cultural and religious traditions and practices of the Saudi Arabians.

**Gender in Family Businesses**

The aim of this study was to measure whether family members based on gender chose to continue their family business as a personal choice or were forced by emotional, family, or social pressures. Akhmedova, Cavalloti and Marimon (2015) observed that though family businesses seem attractive, they fail to attract women to senior positions. The possible explanations given by previous studies are role incongruity, primogeniture, and daughter invisibility; however, Akhmedova, Cavalloti and Marimon (2015) suggested that these barriers do not statistically explain the existing gap.

Using cognitive theories, Akhmedova, Cavalloti and Marimon (2015) attempted to explain that family members based choose to continue or discontinue their family businesses as a personal choice or social pressure based on their gender. According to the authors, people are self- regulating, self- organising, and proactive agents of their psychological development meaning that they act according to their beliefs, values, and experience. The social component in cognitive theories makes them effective in explaining differences in gender choices. Gilding (2000) supported the social component idea by noting that the differences in self- esteem, attitudes towards abilities, and valuing of tasks are functions of social experience differences. As such male and female have different strength of task- specific motivation due to gender stereotypes. This difference can be best displayed in the wide- spread perception that boys are better in science subjects and girls in verbal tasks that motivate girls to study languages and boys science and perform worse if they do.

Citing expectancy- value theory, Akhmedova, Cavalloti and Marimon (2015) argued that individuals desire to accomplish a given task based on whether they expect to succeed in the task and the degree of value accorded to the success. Therefore, both men and women are willing to continue their family businesses depending on their expectations and the degree of value accorded to the outcome. Davis, Pitts and Cormier (2000) described and discussed the challenges that face family firms in the Gulf region and noted that the Arabic culture is more of masculine than feminism. This implies that there are higher expectations for men to succeed in family businesses as compared to women and therefore, based on the expectancy- value theory, men may choose to continue their family businesses or succeed their fathers due to personal choice, family, social, and emotional pressures. Men are expected not only by the family but by the entire society to be successful in their family businesses. Conversely, the culture does not expect much from women and hence they may choose to continue their family business as a result of personal choice but not mainly from social or family pressures. However, Echevarria, Idigoras and Molina (2017) and Naldi, Nordqvist, Sjober and Wiklund (2007) contrasted the cultural and social aspect of family business leadership and argued that individuals are driven to perform particular duties by their personal choices. The authors gave an example of Saudi Arabian women who have defiled the cultural limitations of their performance of duties in the society and the international job market. As such women choose to continue their family businesses based on their personal choices but not because of family and social hindrances. This argument was supported by Alrubaishi (2017) in a study on succession plan of Saudi Arabian SMEs. The author noted that individuals’ expectations and the value accorded to the expectations drive them to acting in a particular manner. As such women in Saudi Arabia are taking up leadership positions in family businesses (though gradually) because of their expectations and gradual changes experienced in society that motivate women to be engaged in entrepreneurial activities.

Campopiano, Massis, Rinaldi and Sciascia (2017) discussed the drivers of women’s presence in family businesses at the family and individual levels. The authors noted that clear division of labour clarifies the roles and contributions of women in businesses. At the family levels women are mainly prevented from working in family businesses by rigid norms and rules in terms of gender roles. Therefore, the authors shunned the contributions of the motivational theories and the relationship between motivation and performance; but indicated that the presence of women and men in family businesses is determined by cultural and religious traditions and practices. In the western world, the number of women taking up entrepreneurial activities has significantly increased because the culture allows their empowerment. In contrast, Saudi Arabian culture still holds men at advantaged and superior position to women and hence their presence in family business is determined by the rigidity of the family rules and norms regarding gender roles. In this case therefore, women choice to continue family business is not mainly determined by their personal choice and emotional pressures but by social and family pressures (Hoffman, Hoelsher & Sorenson 2006). Men, on the other hand, are preferred over women to head family businesses at the family level and hence their choice to continue family businesses is determined by family and social pressures and personal choice to some of them. Campopiano, Massis, Rinaldi and Sciascia (2017) argued that although some men are given the mandate to head family business due to their family positions, some do not have the necessary skills and experience to take the business to another level and this has led to several businesses failing to reach the third generation.

Education is the main driver of women presence in family business at the individual level. Women in Saudi Arabia among other Arabic countries have been exposed to education as well as the outer world and through their interactions with the outside world they are gradually demanded freedom from male chauvinist cultural values. However, Chadwick and Dawson (2018) and Danish and Smith (2012) observed that it is advantageous for wives and daughters to participate in family businesses if they had been previously employed in other businesses or when the male- head figure is not in good health. The authors argued that gender plays a central role in the operations and management of family businesses with women expected to work in particular areas such as services and sales while men work in managerial and manual jobs.

Campopiano, Massis, Rinaldi and Sciascia (2017) discussed the obstacles and positive effects of gender in family businesses. The authors maintained that gender and social issues favour men in holding senior leadership positions in family businesses. Three main obstacles were discussed by the authors: These obstacles include; primogeniture, women’s invisibility, and traditional roles. Primogeniture system is traced back in the Middle Age but it is still practiced in some cultures. The system dictates that the eldest son takes the inheritance of the family leader thus, freeing the father from comparing and choosing the best person to inherit him between the children. The preference of male successors is very prevalent in masculine cultures where men are regarded as superior to women in the society and hence they are trusted with the family social, legal, business, and political activities among others. Throughout history daughters and wives have not been considered for business succession and to say the least, sons have been favoured over daughters. In some cultures, the eldest son is accorded more respect even than the wife (Overbeke, Billimoria & Somers 2015).

However, Akhmedova, Cavalloti and Marimon (2015) argued that long are gone the days when sons were considered for succession of management positions in family businesses because daughters have increasingly gained education and therefore are trusted for management positions even more than sons in some families. The authors criticized primogeniture system because it dominates the values of family enterprises whereby a son is expected to join or continue family business while the daughter is given a choice and in some case she is not invited regardless of the strength of their credentials unless a critical need is created by a crisis. Akhmedova, Cavalloti and Marimon (2015) further argued that successors chosen through primogeniture may not work hard for the success of the family business and may not appreciate the benefits of working in the business. The idea of primogeniture system in family business has been supported by previous studies. Echevarria, Idigoras and Molina (2017) analysed 5334 successions done in Denmark between 1994 and 2002 and concluded that there was strong correlation between the gender of the first born child and the direction of the decision to appoint a family CEO. The study further indicated that when the first born child was a girl, the frequency of family business transition was less than 29.4% while the frequency was over 40% when the first born child was a boy. In fact some studies (Alrubaishi 2017; Overbeke, Bilimoria & Perelli 2013) found that even when the first born child was a girl, she did not have a chance to manage a family business in a senior position. As such some owners would prefer to adopt an external business leader and even worse sell their businesses rather than having their daughters running them (Overbeke, Bilimoria & Perelli 2013).

**Family Businesses In The Saudi Context**

Although the Saudi Arabian economy is projected to grow significantly due to oil and non-oil productions, the contribution of women to the local economy is underestimated with high unemployment rate (Cabrera-Suárez, García-Almeida & De Saá-Pérez 2018). Gender is a strong determinant of business leader in Saudi Arabia. Although women have increasingly engaged in education, entrepreneurship, and social activities which were unheard off traditionally, they still operate under the dominance of male with regards to leadership in families. Previous studies (Echevarria, Idigoras & Molina 2017; Falgi 2009; Al-Yafi 2003; Davis, Pitts & Cormier 2000) have shown that gender dictates the succession of family businesses in Saudi Arabia with women facing severe gender- cultural constraints. Family plays a very crucial role in shaping Saudi culture as well as in spreading attitudes and values regarding relationships between family members and between family and the rest of the society. The Saudi family is highly patriarchal, whereby father is regarded as the head of the family and has the ultimate power. The mother is required by the law to teach religious and cultural traditions to the family to ensure loyalty and solidarity (Al-Yafi 2003). The Saudi culture is a distinctive blend of Arab traditions and Islam and trade is part of the Arab culture. As such, business operation is supported both by culture and religion.

Ignatius and Abdulmohsen (2017) investigated the succession challenge in Saudi family businesses and found that most family businesses do not have well planned and thought succession plans due to socio- cultural issues. The authors noted that conflict of interests and mistrust between the older and the younger family members contribute significantly to lack of proper succession plans. Further, the general subservience of women in the society was found to contribute towards lack of proper succession plans in family businesses. Ignatius and Abdulmohsen (2017) advised that more attention should be paid to succession planning and strong government in Saudi family businesses because they are both vital to successful business and to achieve sustainable economic growth.

Danish and Smith (2012) studied the opportunities and challenges facing women entrepreneurs in Saudi Arabia by surveying 33 Saudi women in Jeddah. The females investigated were involved in a variety of commercial sectors. The study found that women in Saudi Arabia are increasingly establishing and managing businesses mainly the small and medium sized enterprises. The study further found that women face several challenges in managing businesses but at the same time present numerous opportunities in the economy by providing employment opportunities for themselves and other people in society. The study by Danish and Smith (2012) contrasted other studies such as Ignatius and Abdulmohsen (2017) and Echevarria, Idigoras and Molina (2017) which maintain that women are underestimated in Saudi economic growth and in management of family businesses.

**Research Gap**

A review of the previous literature has revealed that there is a large body of research on gender and family business succession and presence. The reviewed studies focused on both the western and Middle East cultures and there was a common conclusion that gender significantly impact succession of family businesses. However, the literature review did not clearly answer the research questions on whether the family put more pressure to follow family business based on gender in Saudi Arabia. Most of the reviewed studies from Saudi Arabia focused on how socio- cultural and gender- cultural issues influence the succession of family businesses and not whether gender has an impact on the priority of running a family business. Although the reviewed studies such as Sharma, Chrisman and Chua (2003), Danish and Smith (2012), and Overbeke, Billimoria and Somers (2015) among others indicated the role played by gender in family business succession in Saudi Arabia, it was not clear whether there are succession plans which clearly indicate who the successors should be and whether women are totally not considered in the succession plans. With high number of women gaining education and joining the entrepreneurship field in Saudi Arabia, it is evident that the constraints that have held them for long from managing businesses have loosened and hence there is a need to conduct a more updated research on the role of gender in family business succession in the country.

**Summary**

Family business system has gained importance in Saudi Arabia as well as the world at large because of its significant contribution to the economic growth. Family businesses contribute significantly towards the economic growth of Saudi Arabia and they consist of about 95% of all businesses operated in the country. The large number of family businesses in the country is a clear indication of their importance in economic growth. Nonetheless, there are challenges and opportunities associated with the leadership, management, and succession of family businesses. The previous literature has shown that gender plays a critical role in determining the successor with women being disadvantaged to men. Socio- cultural and gender- cultural issues were cited by the literature as the main factors that hinder women presence and succession in family business especially in Saudi Arabia. Though some studies have attempted to contrast the argument of culture and religious issues as the main factors that lead to particular gender preference in the management of family businesses in Saudi Arabia, a lot of support for the argument was drawn from the previous literature. Therefore, it can be stated that gender impact on the priority of running a family business and gender, family, and social attributes influence the individual choice to continue their family businesses.

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