

The Sustainable Leadership Practices in the Lebanese Family Businesses

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Abstract

This study explores leadership practices within family enterprises in Lebanon and examines their influence on business performance and long-term success. It highlights the connection between leadership approaches and family enterprise performance, specifically among first- and second-generation leaders. The primary objective is to analyze how individual leadership practices such as the practice model the way, the practice encourages the heart, the practice enables others to act, the practice inspires a shared vision, and the practice challenge the process, contribute to the success of family businesses. Additionally, the research investigates key factors that support the continuity of these enterprises. Given that organizational structures differ across businesses, the involvement of family members in leadership, administrative management and the succession stage play a crucial role in ensuring smooth leadership transitions between generations.

Keywords

Business Succession, family-owned enterprises, Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), Leadership, second generation.

INTRODUCTION

The global economy depends on family-owned enterprises [1, 2, 3]. Therefore, this paper touches upon a significant and timely issue; it is suitable for the adaptation knowledge as well as trying out various methods [4, 5]. This study highlights a crucial role that family-owned enterprises in driving economic success, adapting to globalization, and fostering economic growth [6]. Undoubtedly, the legacy determined by family business leaders has been preserved and strengthened over the years, allowing them to perform their responsibilities with confidence and determination. Their commitment ensures the continuity, and business succession across generations [7].

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lebanese Businesses are Typically Small, Operate Discreetly, and Often Evade Taxation.

According to data from the Ministry of Finance, there are 101,595 registered companies recognized by tax authorities. However, over 85% report a yearly business amount of less than 1 billion LBP pounds (approximately \$663,000). Additionally, 79%—equivalent to 80,261 companies—do not disclose any employees. Nearly three-quarters of these businesses operate in sectors such as trade, real estate, construction, automobile repair, and fuel stations.

Income tax evasion on corporate profits is estimated at about one billion dollars annually, according to the estimates contained in the memorandum of the economic team at the Association of Banks in Lebanon, Bank Audi quarterly report, and others. Some consider this estimate to be very conservative and less than it is in reality, as corruption prevails in Lebanon and banking secrecy and the approved accounting systems provide enormous potential for

concealing real profits and manipulating budgets, as well as a wide range of laws, decrees and regulations that allow for a huge amount of tax exemptions, legal or discretionary. It always allows settlements and exemptions from fines that entail huge rewards for tax evaders and encourages them to persist and encroach on public money.

Private enterprises are generally small, vulnerable, and primarily engaged in low-productivity service sectors. They are predominantly family-run or individually owned and frequently exploit legal loopholes. A significant portion of total profession activity is controlled by a few numbers of monopolistic, and powerful firms that benefit from low tax rates and various exemptions. Despite these advantages, many of these companies employ deceptive practices to transfer substantial profits abroad, avoiding tax obligations.

According to statistics and reports from the Ministry of Finance department of Imports Directorate, as of November 2018, there were 101,595 registered Lebanese companies. Among them, only 21,388 active companies reported having employees, indicating that 78.9% of legally registered businesses are either small, family-run enterprises (such as shops or repair workshops), firms that conceal their workforce and wages, or shell companies. These often utilized to avoid taxes and fees linked with property transfers. Notably, 1/2 of the firms that reveal their workforce operate by fewer than five employees, while only reporting 0.6% having more than 100 employees [8, 9]. These statistics are inconsistent with the results of the survey carried out by the Central Administration of Statistics in 2004, which counted 176,279 institutions in Lebanon.

It also does not agree with the statistics of the NSSF, according to the number of companies registered with it in 2014 reached 47,659, more than double the number declared by the Ministry of Finance and about a quarter of the number of institutions according to the Central Statistics Department.

This is an indication of the extent of tampering with companies' permits with the tax departments and the guarantee fund, the absence of mechanisms to control tax evasion, non-declarations, and the spread of informal work, noting that the statistics of the Ministry, the Fund and the Statistics Department agree that more than 85% of companies declare less than 10 workers in each. This means that it is very small and the volume of its business is low, and therefore its failure to comply with the correct declaration is not the primary responsibility for evading the profit tax estimated at one billion dollars, but rather the failure of larger companies to declare their true volume of business and conceal their actual realized profits.

The statistics of companies registered with the Ministry of Finance according to their volume of business for 2016 present a very expressive picture, as 85.4% of all these companies reported a yearly turnover below 1 billion Syrian lira (SYP) (equivalent to 663 thousand US dollars annually or about 55 thousand dollars per month). Note that 77% of them are individual companies that are subject to progressive taxation on income and profits, and 23% of them are money companies that the law provides with various tax exemptions and privileges. On the other hand, these statistics show that 7% of companies declare a volume of business between one billion and 10 billion pounds annually (between 55 thousand and 553 thousand dollars per month), noting that 40% of them are money companies and 60% are individual companies. Whereas only 1.5% of the total companies had their declared turnover exceeding 10 billion pounds annually (over \$ 6.633 million), noting that 65% of them are money companies, compared to 35% of individual companies. It should be noted that 78% of all capital companies (holding, offshore and joint stock) concentrate their activities in the retail and wholesale trade (excluding the car trade and the sale of fuel) and in real estate and rental activities exclusively.

The way and style of management of family-owned businesses can play a crucial role in determining their success, and hold a vital position in the world economy is significant and growing [10]. Based on data collected in 2017 from Family Firm Institute, family-owned enterprises comprise approximately two-thirds of businesses worldwide, one-third of all listed firms; they account for 70-90% of GDP; they support 50-80% of jobs and they also provide capital for 85% of start-ups. As a result, the analysis of family firms has been increasing in recent decades, but this paper has mostly focused on firms in developed countries, and the current research work is therefore filling the gap.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) is a research framework derived & developed by Kouzes and Posner [11, 12, 13]. This framework is designed to assist pioneers with limited resources and is particularly suitable for small organizations. It consists of five key leadership practices. The

1st practice, Modeling the Way, focus attention on leading by example. Pioneers then the practice Inspires a Shared Vision, followed by the practice Challenge the Process, which encourages innovations and taking risks. The fourth practice, Enabling Others to Act, focuses on combination and empowering others. Finally, Encouraging the Heart includes recognizing accomplishments and providing encouragement. Through these practices, family business pioneers can guide their followers to overcome challenges, achieve succession across generation.

Due to the current situation in Lebanon, compounded by the economic crisis that developed before the pandemic, the country has experienced a significant decline in its economic activity. This crisis caused thousands of entrepreneurship to stop operations, and the consecutive impact of the pandemic further exacerbated the situation, leading to a sharp rise in the number of enterprises that permanently stopped their business, as a result of the pandemic and the deep economic crisis in the Lebanese economy.

I utilized data from 21,388 active firms, sourced from the tax departments of the Ministry of Finance, as well as the Lebanese Business Directory published by the Beirut and Mount Lebanon Chamber of Commerce, Industry, and Agriculture.

Therefore, the sample was selected randomly from all the Lebanese regions and across diverse economic sectors. After excluding companies that ceased operations due to the severe economic crisis, the Beirut Port explosion, the impact of COVID-19 [14], and related containment measures [8, 15], a total of 11,808 family-owned companies were identified.

To gather primary data, a quantitative research approach was employed. The **Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)** questionnaire, defined by Kouzes and Posner [11], was distributed to the respondents. Additionally, it was emailed to **300 family-owned business leaders from 11,808 active family-owned enterprises**, representing **1st - and 2nd -generation** leadership, to assess the influence of the leadership practices on generational business transition. The **Leadership Practice Inventory Self-questionnaire** consists of **30 statements** used **5 pt Likert scale**. **267 responses** were received, yielding a **response rate of 89%**.

Tools for data analysis: To classify and investigate the correlation between the dependent and the independent variables, the SPSS software was utilized [16, 17, 18]. Furthermore, the factorial analysis, the reliability, the validity evaluation, the correlation analysis, the model fit assessment, the questionnaire data analysis, and the structural equation modeling (SEM) were all carried out using the AMOS program [19]. The final measurement model was empirically supported utilizing factorial analysis using the Smart PLS program [20]. A straightforward regression analysis using a single independent variable was used to test the hypothesis and investigate the connection and influence between the independent and dependent variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Illustrates a comparison between the Official Government Data and the findings from the Primary Research.

	Sample size n= 21,388	Sample size n=223
Size Classification by the Number of the Employees		
Small-Sized Entreprises < 20	93	81,5
Medium-Sized Entreprises (20-100)	3,5	15
Large Entreprises > 100	3,5	3,5

Source: [21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28].

According to the Appendix related to the M/SMEs in Lebanon, prepared by Johnny M. Matta in 2018 in the statistical department in Ministry of Economy & Trade – Lebanon micro-enterprises and small-sized family businesses represent (93%), (3.5%) represents the Medium-sized SMEs and (3.5%) represents large companies. **Table 1.** Shows the results of my research are similar in percentage to the ministry of trade statistics where the majority of the enterprises (81.5%) were small-sized Entreprises with <20 employees, followed by (15%) of Medium-Size Companies with (20-100 employees), and 3.5% represent the Large-sized

companies with more than 100 employees.

Various Relationships between the Dependent and the Independent Variables

I analyzed the relationships between the variables and identified important differences in nearly 80 cases. All the relationships were statistically significant ($p < 0.005$), but the strength of the correlation (Cramer V) didn't exceed 0.3 in any case. Thus, I have chosen the most relevant cases and shortly express them in the following.

Table 2: Response distribution for the chosen business success questions (n = 223)

Statement	Percentage of agreement (%)				
	1	2	3	4	5
How do you perceive your business's profitability relative to other companies of identical size within your region and industry?	5,40	13,0	43,90	30,0	7,60
How are you satisfied with both your position and your experience as family business leader?	1,80	4,0	15,20	36,8	42,20
How would you evaluate the growth or changes in the size of the staff within your family enterprise?	1,30	-	10,30	51,1	37,20

Source: Results from the authors' own research

The findings in **Table 2.** Indicates that 37,60% of the respondents of the family firms' pioneers who responded to the question How do you perceive your business's profitability relative to other companies of identical size within your region and industry? And who uncertain to answer is 43.90%, thus, we can say it is a high percentage of uncertain. The financial deep recession is probably the main element behind the causes. Furthermore, 43.9% of the respondents were unsure of their response, which shows a significant number of uncertain. The main reason of the issues may be the financial crisis. Additionally, **Table 2** indicates that a significant percentage of respondents (79%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, how are you satisfied with both your position and your experience as family business leader? Although this is positive, it is doubtful that workers share this attitude. Another study on this topic might be conducted in the future. **Table 2** also shows that a significant percentage of respondents (88.3%) agreed or fully agreed with the statement, " How would you evaluate the growth or changes in the size of the staff within your family enterprise? According to the statistics, company leaders are happy with the growth rate and can hire enough

workers from the labour market to maintain operations, despite of the crisis.

Table 3: What are the most important elements influencing your company's success? (n = 223)

Level of engagement (%)	Elements						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	3,1	50,7	1,8	30,5	9,9	2,7	1,3

Elements = 1 (Financial Concern), 2 (Leaders Habits), 3 (Environmental Concern), 4 (Management Concern), 5 (Family values and Concern), 6 (Combined Answers), 7 (Other factors).

Source: Results from the authors' own research

Table 3. indicates that the most elements that leads to the succession of family enterprises is linked to the element Leaders Habits (50.7%) followed by the factor Management concern (30.5%), then the factor of Family values and affairs by (9.9%), 3.1% for the factor financial concern, 2.7% factor of combined answers, followed by 1.8% the factor of environmental concern and 1.3% other factors. Based on the

data, it appears that the factor individual leadership is regarded an important factor. Somewhat surprisingly, the

factor of family values was realized by less than by only 1 in 10 respondents.

Table 4: The relationship between answers to the question “How satisfied are you with your role and experience as the leader of your family firms?” (n = 223)

Expression	Level of involvement (in percentage) with the expression	Level of involvement (in percentage) How are you satisfied with both your position and your experience as family business leader?				
		1	2	3	4	5
I imagine a +ve picture of what our future may hold. (Isv2). (Isv2)	1.0	-	11,1	2,9	-	1,1
	2.0	-	22,2	14,7	2,4	2,1
	3.0	25,0	22,2	14,7	12,2	13,8
	4.0	75,0	44,0	44,1	53,7	45,7
	5.0	-	-	23,5	31,7	37,2
I ask people to share their exciting future dreams and visions. (Isv3)	1.0	-	-	2,9	1,2	1,1
	2.0	-	-	-	6,1	3,2
	3.0	25,0	44,4	29,4	15,9	20,2
	4.0	-	33,3	38,2	48,8	42,6
	5.0	75,0	11,1	29,4	28,0	33,0
I can speak with complete courage concerning the ultimate objective of our activity. (Isv6)	1.0	-	-	5,9	3,7	-
	2.0	-	33,3	2,9	2,4	4,3
	3	25,0	22,2	11,8	22,0	14,9
	4	75,0	33,3	64,7	47,6	41,5
	5	-	11,1	14,7	24,4	39,4

P = 0.3740 Cramer’s V = 0.1870 (Isv2) / p = 0.4190 Cramer’s V = 0.210. (Isv3); p = 0.4120 Cramer’s V = 0.2060 (Isv6)

Source: Results from the authors' own research

The findings in **Table 4.** shows the relationship among ISV and answers to the question: “How are you satisfied with both your position and your experience as family business leader?” A significant number of leaders (45.7%) report high satisfaction with their leadership role and concur with the statement "I imagine a +ve picture of what our future may hold (Isv 2)." Meanwhile, 37.2% are very satisfied with their position and completely agree with the expression Isv 2, followed by 31.75% who are satisfied and fully endorse the expression Isv 2. Moreover, 53.70% of pioneers are satisfied with their leadership role & agree with the expression Isv 2. However, there is an important number of leaders who are undecided is 44.1%, and 23.5% of them are satisfied with the expression Isv 2.

Regarding the statement “I ask people to share their exciting future dreams and visions (Isv3),” the results indicates that 42.6% of satisfied leaders with their leadership role and accepted with the expression Isv3, and (48.80%) who are satisfied with the leadership role & accepted the expression (Isv 3)”, additionally reported 33% being very satisfied and strongly agreed with the expression followed by 28% who are satisfied & strongly accepted with the expression, & the significant number of pioneers who are uncertain is very high 38.20% and 29.40% and accepted with the expression Isv 3.

Regarding the expression “I can speak with complete courage concerning the ultimate objective of our activity (Isv 6),” the findings indicates that 41.50% of Pioneers feel highly satisfied with their leadership role & accepted the expression Isv 6, while (47.6%) who are satisfied with the leadership role & also agree with the expression (Isv6)”, 39.4% of family business leaders are very satisfied with their leadership role and strongly accepted the expression followed by 24.40% who are satisfied with their role & strongly accepted the expression, & the important percentage of leaders who are neutral is 64.7% and 14.7% and also agreed with the expression Isv6.

One of the most significant findings: leaders who are satisfied have strong leadership experience, compute the future & underlying visibility, & eagerly share this visibility & objective to their team and their incumbents.

The adoption of leadership practices is important for SMEs, including family firms, in order to achieve their goals. It affects factors such as the company's performance, profitability, satisfaction, competitiveness, and succession [29, 30, 26, 27, 28]. More precisely, family business leaders of first generation show behaviors such as modeling the way, encourage the heart behavior, & enable others to act behavior, which significantly affects the family firm’s performance. In contrast, 2nd -generation family firms’

leaders show the behavior of model the way, challenge the existing processes, & inspire the shared vision of the team, which has a direct impact on business performance [26, 27, 28].

The family business leaders of 1st generation should equip these procedures, abilities and information are transmitted to the family enterprise leaders of the next generation to pursue, and to be involved in any feasible & coaching programs [26, 27, 28].

CONCLUSION

This research utilizes the leadership practices inventory LPI of Kouzes and Posner [11] to investigate if there are a relationship between the leadership practices and family enterprise performance of the chosen family firm leaders.

The scientific results in **Table 5**. indicates that there is important and positive relationship between the individual leadership practice model the way, the leadership practice encourages the heart, and the leadership practice enable others to act, and family enterprise success of the 1st-generation family enterprise. Additionally, there are important and positive correlations between the leadership practices model the way, the leadership practices encourage the heart, and the leadership practices challenge the process with the family enterprise succession for the 2nd - generation leaders.

The findings shows that the adoption of the leadership practices inventory by the 1st and 2nd - generation of the Lebanese family enterprise leaders, which will have a positive impact on the performance of family business.

Table 5: Comparison of Findings for 1st and 2nd Generation Leaders

1st-generation leaders				2nd-generation leaders			
Hypothesis	B-Coefficient	Par Value	Findings Supported/N ot Supported	Hypothesis	B-Coefficient	Par Value	Findings Supported/N ot Supported
Model the way (H1)	0.8410	0.0010	Yes	H1	0.6440	0.0010	Yes
Inspire a Shared vision (H2)	0.0720	0.2190	No	H2	0.0230	0.7650	No
Challenge the process (H3)	- 0.02510	0.06120	No	H3	0.2260	0.0040	Yes
Enable others to act (H4)	0.1370	0.0120	Yes	H4	0.1070	0.1760	No
Encourage the heart (H5)	0.18	0.0130	Yes	H5	0.3150	0.0	Yes

Source: Results from the authors' own research

The findings also shows that there is a variation among the individual leadership practices of the 1st - generation & the 2nd - generation leaders and it demonstrates that the challenge the process practice has no impact on family firm performance for the 1st – generation family enterprise leaders but it has a +ive & important impact on family enterprise performance for the 2nd- generations' leaders. Moreover, the findings shows that the leadership practice enables others to act has an important & +ive effect on family firm performance for the 1st - generation but it has no impact on family firm performance for the 2nd-generations.

In conclusion, the LPI inventory has been adopted for the first time in Lebanon. So that, the 1st and 2nd generation Lebanese family enterprise leaders could take into account the research results of this paper to adopt the individual leadership practices to enhance the succession and transmission of the family businesses to their inheritors.

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