
16 Women in family business: three generations of research

Vipin Gupta and Nancy M. Levenburg

I INTRODUCTION

In the family business context, women often play an important role in leading families and businesses into new business contexts. However, a number of reasons are offered in the literature for the scarcity of women in top leadership positions. These reasons include stereotyping, which leads to resistance to women's leadership, discriminatory treatment that contributes to differential outcomes for men and women, the challenges of dealing with persistent double-binds, and the difficulties associated with work and family integration.

Jimenez (2009) reviewed 48 articles, 23 books and three doctoral dissertations published since 1985 on the involvement of women in family business. She identified two generations of contributions. The first generation of contributions in the 1990s (e.g. Dumas, 1989; Salganicoff, 1990) analyzed 'the difficulties or obstacles that women have found when joining their family firms or on the lack of recognition for their work' (Jimenez, 2009, p. 53). These contributions also highlighted the positive interaction between the family businesses and women. Research pointed to how family businesses may help women gain the confidence and skills necessary for them to assume leadership roles. Some studies showed women were better poised to serve in leadership roles within a family business context than in a non-family business context (Salganicoff, 1990). Cole (1997) found that women were able to achieve high positions in their family firms, and were not held back by the glass ceiling. Family business offered them significant career opportunities, responsibility and respect, and generated a positive self-concept of their careers and a sense of personal fulfillment.

The second generation of contributions over the 2000s (e.g. Rowe and Hong, 2000; Vera and Dean, 2005) discussed 'the opportunities or advantages that family firms can offer women, the pathways that these women take to assume positions of management or leadership in these firms, and their achievements' (Jimenez, 2009, p. 53). Research showed that women enjoyed a supportive and cooperative environment, where they could combine their professional responsibilities with childcare, access sectors traditionally regarded as 'masculine' (e.g. construction), and achieve satisfaction by working for themselves or for their families (Jimenez, 2009). In addition, Vera and Dean's (2005) study underscored the importance of acquiring previous experience outside the family firm for building their self-confidence and credibility in dealing with other family members, employees and outsiders.

In this work, we first review the two generations of research on the obstacles and pathways to leadership for women in family business. Then we rely on the Culturally sensitive Assessment System and Education (CASE) project (Gupta et al., 2008a) to identify a