Family Business in Qatar

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Abstract Family businesses are an integral part of most Gulf Cooperation Council countries. As leading families of these countries dominate the public, private, and third sectors, it is crystal clear that they will lead most socio-economic activities. Qatar is a leading country in terms of managing public and private sectors by families. Thus, it is essential to have a clear insight into its situation. Therefore, this chapter investigates the general business ecosystem of the country and then further discusses the dominant families and family businesses in Qatar. It also provides more details about the dynamics of Qatari family businesses, and the chapter concludes with some remarks for policymakers and practitioners. Besides, it suggests some directions for future research about family businesses in Qatar.

1 Introduction

Not many emerging economies have reached the peak in business cycles, while Qatar has been among the leading economies in terms of growth and development. Qatar has always struggled to realise sustainable development goals while creating wealth like other major oil and gas exporting countries (Zain & Kassim, 2012). Despite all the positive characteristics of the country, its growing population coupled with a decreased level of natural resources and mismanagement experiences have led to a set of problems for its economy (Kabbani & Mimoune, 2020). Qatari officials have extensively planned to harness the negative impacts of the "resource curse" and "Dutch disease". Generally, such prosperous countries focus on creating value

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Exhibit 1 The Pearl-Qatar (Source: https://pixabay.com/images/id-3850752). *Note:* Free for commercial use; No attribution required

through investing the oil and gas income in diversified sectors (Welsh & Raven, 2006; Ogidi, 2013).

Thus, Qatari entrepreneurs have designed and produced many innovative and entrepreneurial products that have changed the country's business environment and relevant structures. This fact can be a double-edged sword in various countries. On the one end of the continuum, countries like Qatar, Australia, and Norway have done their best to succeed and create wealth for their nation. On the other end, countries such as Iraq, Zimbabwe, and Libya have suffered from mismanaging their natural resources (Salamzadeh et al., 2013; Tajpour et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2022). It is noteworthy that, back in the 1970s, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries initiated such constructive movements and took advantage of their oil and gas income to improve their socio-economic indexes (Guerrero et al., 2014, 2015; Rochmaedah & Suseno, 2022). The Pearl-Qatar, which is an artificial island, is a symbol of such movements (Exhibit 1).

The country's geopolitical position is of paramount importance, as the Persian Gulf mainly surrounds it, and Qatar is a neighbour to Iran, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE. Its area is almost 11,571 km^2. Qatar gained its independence in 1971, following several oil and gas discoveries and exploitations in the 1960s. Like Bahrain, Qatar's business environment was mainly focused on pearling and fishing before those discoveries (Balaguer, 2016; Palalić et al., 2022). Doha is the densest city and the capital of Qatar. The population is less than three million, according to the latest census. Interestingly, more than 75% of the population are men. Only almost 12% are the local population, and around 88% are immigrants. These made the business environment unique (Shaaban, 2016; Deshingkar et al., 2019).

As a tribal monarchy that is ruled by various tribes, especially the Al-Thani family, the structure of the family business is well contextualised in Qatar. The government centrally manages the oil and gas resources, which has helped them provide a better taxation regime, citizenship services, and high-quality health and educational systems. Then, family businesses are an integral part of the business environment (Costa & Pita, 2020; Al-Khatib & Al-Abdulla, 2001). As reported by Forbes in 2021, five Qatari enterprises were listed among "Forbes' top 100 Arab family businesses".[1] Such a culture could facilitate the operations of the family firms and lead to their success (Miroshnychenko & De Massis, 2022). Thus, this chapter provides more in-depth insights into Qatar's business ecosystem, then explores the family businesses in the country, and concludes with some remarks on the Qatari family businesses and future directions for researchers.

2 Business Ecosystem

Historically, the business ecosystem of Qatar has experienced a significant turn after the oil and gas discoveries and exploitations. The primary businesses were pearl hunting and fishing for many years (Exhibit 2). The major exploitations in the 1940s transformed the whole economy and provided a fertile ground for business development in the country. The standard of living increased significantly, and relevant policies accelerated the movement (Crystal, 1995). The government does not charge any income tax, and the other tax rates are lower than in most countries worldwide. Moreover, other economic indexes, such as a low unemployment rate, reveal the potential of the state's economy. For many years, the country was listed among the top ten countries in terms of its GDP per capita (Jabeen et al., 2015). Qatari officials take advantage of foreign labour forces from various countries, and therefore, people from different countries with distinct backgrounds and knowledge work in this country. The country was listed as the wealthiest country in the world three times (Awadallah, 2020). Some neighbour countries such as Saudi Arabia and UAE have imposed sanctions against Qatar, but those sanctions did not affect the country's economic growth to a great extent. Table 1 summarises the primary indicators of the country (Dana et al., 2021; Ratten et al., 2009). As it is shown in the table, Qatar has significantly improved in terms of its socio-economic indicators, especially during the past decade.

A significant part of the economy is composed of the businesses related to *oil and gas* explorations which have turned the country from a poor to one of the wealthiest countries worldwide. The economy experienced a downturn in the 1980s due to low oil prices (Al-Kubaisi, 1984). Thus, Qatar entered into a recession stage for some

[1] Al Faisal Holding, AlFardan Group, Almana Group, Abu Issa Holding, and Almuftah Group.

Exhibit 2 A ship is waiting to go fishing (Source: https://pixabay.com/photos/ship-doe-qatar-436820/). Note: Free for commercial use; No attribution required

years, but hopefully, the economy recovered in the 1990s. People from various countries immigrated to Qatar accordingly in those years. Based on some projections, the oil fields will be depleted in the next few years, but Qatar still enjoys significant gas reserves for exploration and exploitation. According to the statistics, the country belongs the third-largest gas reserves globally. It is noteworthy that the government reports reveal that offshore oil and gas fields may provide the economy with extra natural resources in the upcoming years. In addition to oil and gas resources, they take advantage of the gas condensate and refined products (Dana et al., 2022).

In addition to the oil and gas industries, Qatari officials and the government have invested extensively in *industrial settings* following a diversification strategy. The oil and gas incomes mainly support these industries, and the industrialisation wave has initiated in the past few decades. The industrial development plans are defined and implemented accordingly. As shown in Table 1, in 2020, industry (including construction) comprises almost 52% of the GDP in terms of the created value added (Exhibit 3). In contrast, exports of goods and services comprised around 48% of the GDP. Besides, construction materials, fertilisers and pharmaceuticals are among the other significant industries in Qatar (Tok et al., 2021).

Qatar is also well-known for its *financial sector* and its key players. Although they experienced severe challenges back in 2008, this section has dramatically grown in the aftermath of the great recession. Qatar’s banking and financial institutions followed the footsteps of the leading financial institutions and created many

Table 1 Country profile

	1990	2000	2010	2020
Population, total (millions)	0.48	0.59	1.86	2.88
Population growth (annual %)	3.1	3.8	11.5	1.7
Surface area (sq. km) (thousands)	11.6	11.6	11.6	11.5
Population density (people per sq. km of land area)	41	51	159.9	250.7
Poverty headcount ratio at national poverty lines (% of the population)	..	..	..	..
Poverty headcount ratio at $1.90 a day (2011 PPP) (% of the population)	..	..	..	..
GNI, Atlas method (current US$) (billions)	..	18.2	118.09	161.3
GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US$)	..	28,400	63,620	55,990
GNI, PPP (current international $) (billions)	..	52.84	219.77	253.73
GNI per capita, PPP (current international $)	..	89,190	118,390	88,070
People				
Income share held by the lowest 20%	..	..	..	..
Life expectancy at birth, total (years)	76	77	79	80
Fertility rate, total (births per woman)	4	3.2	2.1	1.8
Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1000 women aged 15–19)	49	20	13	9
Contraceptive prevalence, any method (% of married women aged 15–49)	32	43	38	..
Births attended by skilled health staff (% of total)	100	100	100	100
Mortality rate, under 5 (per 1000 live births)	21	13	9	6
Prevalence of underweight, weight for age (% of children under 5)	..	..	..	..
Immunisation, measles (% of children aged 12–23 months)	79	91	99	90
Primary completion rate, total (% of relevant age group)	73	94	95	96
School enrollment, primary (% gross)	98.5	105	102.6	103.9
School enrollment, secondary (% gross)	80	91	105	..
School enrollment, primary and secondary (gross), gender parity index (GPI)	1	1	1	..
Prevalence of HIV, total (% of population aged 15–49)	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Environment				
Forest area (sq. km) (thousands)	0	0	0	0
Terrestrial and marine protected areas (% of the total territorial area)	..	..	..	5.8
Annual freshwater withdrawals, total (% of internal resources)	337	333.5	439.4	447.9
Urban population growth (annual %)	3.7	4	11.7	1.8
Energy use (kg of oil equivalent per capita)	13,703	18,432	14,890	..
CO_2 emissions (metric tons per capita)	26.33	36.68	33.54	32.42
Electric power consumption (kWh per capita)	9591	14,348	14,209	..
Economy				
GDP (current US$) (billions)	7.36	17.76	125.12	144.41

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

	1990	2000	2010	2020
GDP growth (annual %)	..	3.9	19.6	−3.6
Inflation, GDP deflator (annual %)	..	−5	7	−15.1
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing, value added (% of GDP)	..	0	0	0
Industry (including construction), value added (% of GDP)	..	..	73	52
Exports of goods and services (% of GDP)	..	67	62	49
Imports of goods and services (% of GDP)	..	22	24	41
Gross capital formation (% of GDP)	..	20	31	44
Revenue, excluding grants (% of GDP)	..	..	..	..
Net lending (+) / net borrowing (−) (% of GDP)	..	..	..	..
States and markets				
Time required to start a business (days)	..	..	11	9
Domestic credit provided by financial sector (% of GDP)	..	..	..	..
Tax revenue (% of GDP)	..	..	..	..
Military expenditure (% of GDP)	10.7	3.9	1.5	..
Mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people)	0.8	20.4	117.8	131.8
Individuals using the Internet (% of population)	0	4.9	69	99.7
High-technology exports (% of manufactured exports)	..	..	0	7
Statistical Capacity Score (overall average) (scale 0–100)	..	..	..	..
Global links				
Merchandise trade (% of GDP)	72	84	78	54
Net barter terms of trade index (2000 = 100)	..	100	183	101
External debt stocks, total (DOD, current US$) (millions)	..	..	..	..
Total debt service (% of exports of goods, services, and primary income)	..	..	..	..
Net migration (thousands)	−10	214	605	200
Personal remittances, received (current US$) (millions)	..	..	0	652
Foreign direct investment, net inflows (BoP, current US$) (millions)	5	252	4670	−2434
Net official development assistance received (current US$) (millions)	3	..	..	..

Source: World Development Indicators database, World Bank

success stories at regional and global levels. In addition, they have been experienced in offering Islamic banking and financial services to their clients. Thus, the Islamic finance sector has added so many initiatives to the financial industry, in general, in the past decades. The capital market is also active and has provided the business ecosystem's players with various opportunities. Venture capitalists actively seek investment opportunities in innovative and technological sectors.

Tourism is another primary industry in Qatar. The government and the Qatar Tourism and Exhibitions Authority defined and implemented various plans to increase the number of tourists, which were successful, especially in the last two

Exhibit 3 Skyscrapers in Doha (Source: https://pixabay.com/images/id-3850732). *Note:* Free for commercial use; No attribution required

decades. They spent billions of dollars to establish new touristic platforms such as hotels, recreation centres, and amusement parks. Infrastructures such as the Hamad International Airport were part of these plans (Theodoropoulou & Alos, 2020). The government focused on cultural tourism to expand the sector and empower the local communities and businesses (Exhibit 4).

Moreover, the *transportation industry* developed exponentially as the population grew during the past decades. Besides, the need for more reliable transportation solutions was highlighted. They invested significantly in roads, railways, airports, marine transportation facilities, and related vehicles and infrastructures. This sector includes both national and international solutions to help the country's continuous socio-economic development (Shaaban & Maher, 2020; Shaaban & Adalbi, 2021).

Then, the general business ecosystem of the country includes oil and gas, industrial, financial, tourism, and transportation sectors. It is noteworthy that the *creative industries* and the startup ecosystem have evolved extensively during the last decade (Kebaili et al., 2015; Salamzadeh, 2018). The Qatar Venture Investment reports, which are published annually, show the existing trends and achievements, including the key stakeholders, the venture investment impact, the evolutionary path of the fundings, the general investment landscape, and the ecosystem map. The interactions between these sectors and the creative industries have changed the shape of doing business in Qatar (Almoli, 2018; Moayedfar & Chafi, 2019; Nawaz & Koç, 2020).

Exhibit 4 Tourism in Qatar (Source: https://pixabay.com/images/id-6977918). *Note:* Free for commercial use; No attribution required

3 Family Business

As mentioned earlier, Qatar, like many other Arab countries in this region, comprises various tribes, clans, and well-known families (Kamrava, 2017). Thus, many leading companies are family businesses in nature. This characteristic is somehow unique and makes the economy not comparable to the rest of the world—except for the Arab world (Al-Balam & Raza, 2009). Family interactions with the government could change many written and unwritten rules of the game and doing business (Ennis, 2015). These businesses contribute significantly to the socio-economic development of the country. Based on some estimations, they create around 60% of the GDP, and more than 80% of the labour force work in these firms. These estimations reveal the importance of these firms (Ramadani et al., 2018). However, the coronavirus pandemic has recently affected many of these firms (Kawamorita et al., 2020; Hameed et al., 2021; Pereira et al., 2021; Salamzadeh & Dana, 2021). It is not much unexpected to witness that most of these companies are managed by male C-level managers and shareholders, while females are marginalised. According to some recent studies, issues such as balancing the business and family expectations, preparing a succession plan, clarifying the corporate governance style, and lack of some soft and hard skills to manage family firms could impact the success or failure of any typical family business in Qatar.

The dynamics of family businesses and their interactions are critical to the general socio-economic development of the country. These dynamics might act as a double-edged sword. While some positive interactions might lead to joint venture agreements, mutual funds, and collaborations, the negative ones might lead to unfair

Table 2 Qatari tribes and family origins

	Purported origins	Families and clans
Ajamis	Persian	Al-Ansari, Al-Fardan, Al-Emadi, Mustafawi
Huwala	Original Sunni Arabs who moved from the Arabian shore to Persia and came back between the 1930s and 1950s	Al-Ansari, Al Darwish, Al Fakhroo, Al-Hammadi, Al Jaber, Al Jaidah, Al-Malki, Al Muftah, Al Jassim, Al Ahmed
Arab tribes	Qatari tribes tracing their origins to the Arabian Peninsula	Al Thani, Al Attiya, Al Bin Ali, Al Buainain*, Al-Humaidi, Al-Kaabi, Al Khater, Al-Kubaisi, Al-Kuwari, Al-Maadeed, Al-Malki, Al-Jahni, Al-Marri, Al-Mohannadi*, Al Mahmood, Al Mana Al-Mannai, Al Misned*, Al-Muraikhi, Al-Noaimi, Al-Sulaiti*, Al-Suwaidi

Source: Kamrava (2017)

competition. Thus, family connections and interactions are vital factors in this business ecosystem. In his seminal work, Kamrava (2017) categorised the families and tribes, which could help us better understand the Qatari society. It is worth mentioning that the starred ones (*) are originally from Bahrain, and Bahraini families were originally Persian. The Table 2 shows the low number of families and tribes. It, in turn, highlights the importance of considering families and tribes as critical institutions (rules of the game).

Besides, Kamrava (2017) enlists the major families and their family firms. These families manage large-scale family businesses that are, in fact, "corporates" with various companies. He has further discussed the ties between families and their interactions. They have histories of collaborations and competitions, some of which are mentioned in Kemrava's (2017) paper. These families are categorised into two major groups:

(i) *Arab tribes*: Al Attiyah [Al Attiya Group (with nine subsidiaries)], Al Faisal (Al Thani) [Al Faisal Holding], Al-Kaabi [Al-Kaabi Contracting & Trading Co.], Al-Kuwari [Al-Kuwari Group], Al Mana [Al-Mana Group (with 13 subsidiaries)], Al-Mannai [Al-Mannai Group (with 29 subsidies)], and Al Misnad [Al Misnad Group].
(ii) *Ajamis or Huwala*: Al-Fardan [Al-Fardan Group], Al Haidar [Sulaiman Al Haj Haider and Sons Co.], Al Jaidah [Jaidah Group (with eight subsidiaries) Jaidah Brothers], Al-Khouri [Taleb Group], Al Muftah [Almuftah Group (with 33 subsidiaries)], and Mustafawi [Al Mustafawi Trading & Engineering].

These family firms, which have already benefited from the previous economic booms, contribute to Qatar's economy. Nevertheless, as the power is concentrated in these families, if some unexpected or sudden crisis happens, the economy might be affected by such incidents. Incidents such as conflicts while running businesses or transitions between different generations of the families could significantly affect the economy. Besides, the lack of defining sound institutional structures could lead to instabilities in these businesses, and therefore, these family businesses might be significantly affected. Some of these family businesses have experienced relevant challenges which affected their profitability and stability.

Qatari family businesses have shown great interest in improving the entrepreneurial talents of their members and those interested in joining their firms. They insist on increasing the loyalty level of their members and the family members through various ceremonies and considering initiatives. Besides, they believe in creating long-term strategic relationships to commit to their members and partners. Qatari family firms stick to their ethical standards and traditions while considering the generally accepted social and commercial values and respecting social responsibilities. The elder members of family firms contribute to transferring their entrepreneurial skills and success factors to the next generations who will manage the firms after them (Salamzadeh et al., 2014; Ramadani et al., 2015, 2017; Toska et al., 2021).

Although family firms have been studied extensively in the literature (Dana & Ramadani, 2015; Tajpour et al., 2021; Chang et al., 2022), a few studies have explored this phenomenon in Qatar (Faisal, 2011; Rabasso et al., 2015). Nevertheless, the findings have revealed that the context matters, and while the questions are the same, the answers are not necessarily similar to the results in the Western contexts. For instance, in Western countries, business succession generally continues until the second generation sells or acquires the company and some of the members or all of them leave the business, while in Qatar, many family businesses have experienced the transition to the third or fourth generations. Also, most family members of the next generations do not leave the company. Another critical point to mention is the presence of women Qatari entrepreneurs in the family businesses, which has changed the competition scene (Faisal, 2013).

4 Concluding Remarks

The family businesses in GCC countries have specific characteristics which make them unique. For instance, due to their Arabic culture, close family relationships and strong family ties, the existence of tribes and clans, and other similar features have created a distinguished context for Qatari family businesses (Hawi et al., 2022). On the one hand, these characteristics highly affect businesses' success or failure. On the other hand, as the number of families is limited, and strong family ties exist in Qatar's business environment, the family business context has become distinguished compared to the rest of the world. Moreover, as family-related issues are culturally entangled with family businesses in Qatar, many cultural and societal factors have affected the business environment. Thus, for instance, friendship or hatred between various family firms directly affects the dynamics of the business ecosystems. In addition, the population diversity and immigrants who work in male-dominant Qatari family firms have added to the complexity of doing business in family businesses. As an integral part of their wealthy nation, Qatari family firms invest in various international and regional projects. Interestingly, family businesses in Qatar do business in multiple sectors, including oil and gas, construction, tourism, transportation, and creative sectors of the economy. Also, the public sector is highly dependent on the family ties of a set of families who are the country's governing officials. It has made the situation more complex and somehow more flexible. In sum, this chapter provides insights into the general business environment and the family businesses in Qatar. Future researchers might focus on more detailed aspects of doing business in family firms in Qatar and their challenges. Besides, the role of female family members in those businesses is overlooked, and therefore, future studies could investigate the gender role. Finally, the family firms' ecosystem dynamics might be explored and studied in future studies.

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