The Role of Women in Family Businesses: The Case of Slovenia

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1 Introduction

While female entrepreneurship is still not adequately developed in Slovenia (considering GEM studies 2003–2010) and behind its density in most other EU countries, it is assumed that women play a very important role in family firms, which is an extremely important segment of the entrepreneurship movement emerging from the economic transition period. Women in Slovenia have reached a high level of equality in both fields of education and employment and it may be expected that they would be able to grasp a crucial role in family firms, as well. The demographic trends over the last decades with a low number of children should enable them to establish themselves as heiresses of family firms as well, which is important since a large proportion of family firms will be entering the succession process from the founding to the next generation in the near future (Glas et al. 2005). In this chapter, the meaning of women in Slovenian family firms is examined considering their role in the ownership, managerial positions, as well as the differences in values, attitudes towards family firms, their managerial styles, etc. Their real contribution seems to be underestimated and undervalued due to the conservative, more patriarchic tradition and the full potential of women is still not well utilized. However, the role of Slovenian women in family firms should be further supported and enhanced to the benefit of their important economic and social role, the family well-being and improved prospects of the development of family firms into the next generation.

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2 Study Background

The family business literature is sparse on this topic and in the past, very few contributions were based on empirical research (Rowe and Hong 2000; Bowman-Upton and Heck 1996). Women as family members are one category of stakeholders with a vested interest in the viability of the business, next to owners and employees (Davis and Tagiuri 1991) and they usually have an important although often informal impact on the business. While women tend to enhance their presence as female entrepreneurs, research on women in family businesses suggested that a majority of women continued to remain to be anchored in the background, staying "invisible" (Cole 1997; Fitzgerald and Muske 2002), contradicting the feministic understanding of women in the business. Occupying a subdued role, however, to some authors (Dumas 1998; Lyman et al. 1985) provided them with a unique vantage point of a rich understanding of the prevailing issues and relationship dynamics where they might exercise a highly valuable input into the efficient conduct of business and management of relationships among family members. Sharma (2004) even exposes that if used astutely, wives observations, intuition, and emotional capital can make a distinction between the success and failure of a family firm.

The main motivation to write this chapter was to explore some particularities of the contribution of women to family businesses through the paradigm of possible different approaches between the two genders regarding managerial styles and ownership issues including the transition to the next generation of questions and dilemmas. The theory on women's involvement and roles in family businesses is set from the literature review. Based on the theoretical background and extensive anecdotal experience of the researchers (from own family business careers and consulting to family firms), five propositions are pulled together. The methodological approach is based on the focused surveying of the opportunistic sample of family businesses where a certain degree of female involvement was assumed. The results are discussed through several blocks of topics covering the managerial role of women, ownership dilemmas and different gender-based roles in family firms. The chapter ends with conclusions and implications.

3 Literature Review

Poza and Messer (2001) listed six different types of roles adopted by spouses of successful family entrepreneurs: jealous spouse, chief trust officer, partner in a copreneurial venture, vice-president, senior advisor, and free agent. Curimbaba (2002) reported that Brazilian women occupied either a professional, invisible, or anchor role in their firms. Due to the small convenience samples, these studies mainly provide an indication of the varying types of women's roles. However, it is mostly expected from women to occupy the second position or to become head of one of the business functions, traditionally finance and accounting or sales which are usually not formally defined because the discussion is mostly about small businesses. Danes and Olson (2003) reported 42 % of wives are major decision makers even in family firms owned and managed by men. Furthermore, spouses and other female family members are often just paid employees in family firms. Danes and Olson (2003) revealed that of 57 % of working spouses including husbands' owned family firms, 47 % are being paid, which may suggest a certain level of discrimination at this point.

Some authors analyzed the advantages and disadvantages for women in family firms (Frishkoff and Brown 1993), including flexible working hours, access to positions in traditionally male-dominated industries, job security, professional challenges, and opportunities for personal growth (Barnett and Barnett 1988). However, family firms' life can also involve gender stereotyping and discrimination found in society at large (Jaffee 1990; Salganicoff 1990), like a popular cliché that the male partner is the entrepreneur, while the female partner does the bookkeeping in the back room (Dumas 1998). This belief leads to the conclusion, that even important contributions of women to the family businesses would not be properly recognized in terms of job titles or salaries (Gillis-Donovan and Moynihan-Brandt 1990; Lyman et al. 1985). Marshack (1994) found that 80 % of male co-owners in husband-wife businesses advocated a stereotypical masculine gender-role orientation and 76 % of the female business co-owners supported a stereotypical feminine orientation.

Traditional gender roles are often present in family businesses. Alcorn (1982) suggested the prevalence of the dominant father figure and a subordinate mother figure throughout family businesses. Lyman et al. (1985) stated that the work environment in family businesses displayed the cultural traditions that placed women and men in different social positions and different work and family responsibilities. According to Ponthieu and Caudill (1993) these characteristics apply to wives, mothers, and daughters. Evaluation of the real contribution to the family economic well-being therefore faces a different mix of paid employment and unpaid family work between men and wives (Voydanoff 1990). A number of wives simultaneously (a) hold employment somewhere else, (b) manage a household, and (c) work in the family business, balancing three layers of obligation (Rowe and Hong 2000).

Involvement in a family business means being a part of the family business core setting: the role of family members in the business, how bonded the members are and how the business defines itself in relation to the outside world (Doherty et al. 1991). Not being adequately recognized and involved in running the business and making business decisions creates tensions out of the dissatisfaction and clashes of values and beliefs about the operation of the business and the involvement, tasks and rewards for family members (Danes and Amarapurkar 2001; Frishkoff and Brown 1993). Prolonged and unresolved tensions eventually affect the achievement, health, and fellowship of the business (Danes et al. 2002). However, as Danes and Olson (2003) discussed, tensions and conflicts can either foster a constructive climate that focuses resources on targeted goals, leading to growth and/or continued success (Cosier and Harvey 1998; Danes et al. 2002) or they could create an environment of lack of trust and fellowship (Danes and Amarapurkar 2001).

Gender roles in family firms are changing, but when a female chooses a nontraditional role, tensions often come to the surface (Freudenberger et al. 1989; Hollander and Bukowitz 1996; Lyman et al. 1996). As entrepreneurship has emerged as a career choice for both men and women, that choice has disrupted traditions about how they manage their work lives and negotiates the overlap of their entrepreneurship endeavors and their family obligations (Greenhaus and Callanan 1994). Wicker and Burley (1991) proved that wives' influence in the business increases when they work in the family business. That relative influence can be a source of conflicting goals and can create tensions for the family business (Levinson 1991; Marshack 1998; Rodriguez et al. 1999). Work-family issues at the intersection of the business and family systems within family businesses are a particular fertile area for conflict (Harvey and Evans 1994), with the content of conflict arising from five categories: justice, role, work-family, identity, and succession conflict (Danes et al. 2000; McClendon and Kadis 1991). The existence of more than one decision maker in a family business will, at times, create some level of disagreement and tension (Kaye 1996). This certainly depends on the situation, whether (a) spouses are partners so they should have a voice in family business decisions or (b) husbands are in control of the family business and the views which may not be taken seriously (Rosenblatt et al. 1985). According to Danes, Leichtentritt, Metz and Huddleston-Casas (2000) men and women use different conflict styles and the conflict begins most easily to subside when women try to avoid the tensions.

4 Methodology

A sample of Slovenian family firms was compiled by third year undergraduate students. Collection was made from different public sources like popular press, professional magazines, public events, etc. following the criteria that women played certain significant roles in compiled companies for the sample. Students were sent out to make questionnaire-based interviews as a part of their family business course obligations. In order to be able to get a picture of different gender roles, students were advised to interview family firms respecting the following criteria: (a) at least five employees, (b) at least two family members employed, (c) being in business for a minimum of 3 years to have certain track record and quite well established patterns of behavior. As a matter of definition, students were encouraged to make their own decisions regarding the particular family business they surveyed as to whether it was a family business or not. Additionally the students' opinion was confirmed by the surveyed company as to whether or not they thought it was a family business. Thus, it can be stated, that a self-definition (Birley 2001) of family business was applied in this research to compile the sample.

Students were provided thorough guidelines on filing the rather extensive questionnaire which included the following sections: (a) general data on the family firm, (b) data on the manager, (c) data on the key woman in the firm (in case she would not fill the manager's position, (d) data on the second woman in the firm (if there was one), (e) data on women not yet employed in the family firms (mostly daughters still in school), and (f) data on women not employed in the family firm. The data on the second woman and women not employed were relatively scarce, compared to the whole sample, which is the reason that these data were excluded from the further analysis.

Since this was the first study about the role of women in family firms in Slovenia and it can be doubted that findings from other countries would generally be applicable due to the different history, culture and tradition in gender issues, the five propositions were developed from the overviewed literature survey and some fragmented findings from past surveys in Slovenia:

P1: Women usually do not act as CEOs in family firms but dominate in second-level managerial positions (Cole 1997; Fitzgerald and Muske 2002).
P2: Women are modestly represented in the ownership structure of family businesses and consider this issue as fairly unimportant (Lyman et al. 1996; Danes et al. 2002).
P3: Women's views on transitional issues of their family firms are different from men's views (Danes et al. 1999; Sharma 2004).
P4: Women in family firms would exercise a different, "feminine" style of management due to the differences in their values, personal traits and experience (Dumas 1998; Poza and Messer 2001).
P5: While there are differences in the gender roles and rewards in family firms, this situation is not perceived by both genders as an intriguing case of discrimination that would demand an immediate action (Danes and Olson 2003; Rowe and Hong 2000).

5 Sample Characteristics

Family firms are mostly active in trade, but they are also represented in manufacturing and construction businesses. One third of them indicated that they cover two different activities, mostly to ensure more stable flow of revenues. As presented in the Table 1, only 15 % of participating companies were 12 or less years in the business while other companies were older.

On average, participating companies employed 12.8 employees. According to EU criteria taking into account the number of employees, there were 60 micro, 45 small and 2, medium-sized firms. Approximately half of the sample (51.4 %) employed up to two family members while others employed at least three relatives. As expected, the vast majority of businesses were in the ownership control of the family, managed mostly by men on CEO positions (83.2 %). One particular family

Table 1 Sample characteristics

Parameter	Number	Percent	Characteristics
Activity (firms were allowed to list up to two activities, with 34 having two activities)	37	34.5	Retailing and wholesale
	20	18.7	Manufacturing
	19	17.8	Construction
	12	11.2	Transport and communications
	8	7.5	Other services
	6	5.6	Tourism and restaurants
	3	2.8	Financial and other services
	36	33.6	Other activities
Legal status	62	57.9	Incorporated businesses
	45	42.1	Sole proprietors
Number of employees	Average: 12.8		
Number of family members employed	Average: 2.67		55 (51.4 %) with two or less, 52 (48.6 %) with three and more
Founders	63	58.9	Husband
	8	7.5	Wife
	23	21.5	Spouses as partners
	13	12.1	Others (businesses inherited)
Foundation year	41	38.2	Before 1989
	50	46.7	During 1990–1994
	16	15.0	After 1995
Family ownership	97	90.7	100 % family ownership
	9	8.4	50–81 % family ownership
	1	0.9	No family ownership
Gender of the manager	89	83.2	Male
	18	16.8	Female

Source: Own research

business with no family ownership was recently sold to a multinational holding company but family members who agreed with the new owners retained managerial positions. Some gender based characteristics of observed groups within the sample are given in the Tables 2 and 3. As it can be observed in Table 2, women are on average younger than men in the sample. There is no great difference between CEO women and key non-CEO women regarding the age and years of professional experience. The second woman in a family business is younger and less

Table 2 Some age and experience related data on key groups of respondents

Group of respondents	Number of respondents	Average age (years)	Average work experience (years)	Work experience in other firms (years)	Years in the CEO position
Managers: all	107	47.2	25.6	10.2	14.2
Male CEOs	89	48.2	26.8	10.5	14.9
Female CEOs	18	42.6	19.4	8.7	10.3
Key women – all	107	42.2	20.7	9.0	
Key non-CEO women	89	42.1	20.9	9.1	
Second women	25	38.4	16.4	7.5	

Source: Own research

Table 3 Level of formal education in the sample of family firms

		Managers (%)	
School completed	Founders of family firms (%)	All	Female
Grammar school	1.9	1.9	–
Vocational school	32.7	25.2	16.7
Secondary school	43.0	49.5	50.0
College	10.3	10.3	22.2
University	11.2	12.1	11.0
Other	0.9	0.9	–
Number of persons	107	107	18

Source: Own research

experienced which may be interpreted with an assumption that in several cases, the second woman is probably founder's daughter.

A possible drawback of Slovenian family firms is the large share of these firms originating from the crafts sector which had intensive development during the 1980s with a more liberal economic policy. This crafts tradition provides a conservative view on some factors of the success (Vadnjal and Glas 2008): education of the managerial staff, market orientation vs. product infatuation, acceptance of modern technology, etc. Having mostly first generation family firms in the sample, there is hardly any difference between the level of education of founders and the acting managers, as it is often expected in family businesses that younger generations would hold higher levels of formal education. On the other hand, as presented in Table 3, women in the sample tend to hold significantly higher levels of formal education than men ($\chi^2 = 11.64$; DF $= 5$; $\alpha = 0.04$).

Table 4 Business/managerial role of women in Slovenian family businesses

	Key woman in the firm		Second woman in the firm	
Business/managerial role	Number	%	Number	%
Manager (CEO)	18	17.8	–	–
Assistant manager	9	8.4	1	4.0
Second-level managerial rank	40	37.4	10	40.0
Procurist	7	6.5	2	8.0
Production	8	7.5	1	4.0
Finance and accounting	16	14.9	1	4.0
Marketing and sales	9	8.4	6	24.0
Professional staff	31	29.0	12	48.0
Supporting staff	7	6.5	2	8.0
No answer	1	0.9	–	–
Number of respondents	107	100.0	25	100.0

Source: Own research

6 Different Business and Managerial Roles of Women

First, the roles that women are occupying in the family firms are indentified. In the start-up phase these firms are mostly men's affair, since 58 % were established by men, 22 % were the joint undertaking of the couple, and only 7 % were initiated by women; the rest have been established in the earlier generations. The major role of men is also confirmed by the fact that 83 % of firms have men as the CEO, although the 17 % of women managers is quite close to the lower estimates of the share of women entrepreneurs in Slovenia (Vadnjal et al. 2009).

While only a minor part of women (18 %) occupy the CEO position, Slovenian women are far from playing only a supportive role or being "invisible" in the background. As presented in Table 4, they hold the second highest managerial rank in 46 % of firms and 29 % are among professional staff with some level of decision making power. In several cases, these formal ranks only seem to represent a formal designation to establish a position towards non-family employees; on the other hand, men often discuss their decisions and listen to wives beyond their formal status in the firm (Danes and Olson 2003).

Considering the Curimbaba (2002) groups, Slovenian women are present in the anchor role (managerial position) in 18 % and a weaker anchor role (second-level managers) in 46 % of all cases, followed by the professional status in 29 % and invisible in their supportive role in 7 % of all cases. However, a look at the business functions occupied by women partly downplays this extreme position. It shows that a number of women with formal managerial roles are in fact doing supportive tasks.

While 40 % of key women have well designated business functions (Table 5), mostly in finance and accounting, another 40 % handle the administrative tasks that usually cover everything needed to run a micro business, and 19 % are in the supportive role, mostly described as "a girl for all." There seems to be a pattern of behavior that men take the CEO position and key women handle finance and

Table 5 Business areas occupied by non-CEO women

Business areas occupied by women	Key non-CEO woman		Second woman in the firm	
	Number	%	Number	%
Managerial ranks:	35	39.8	18	72.0
Finance, investment	16	18.2	5	20.0
Marketing and sales	12	13.6	11	44.0
Production	6	6.8	1	4.0
Human resources	1	1.1	1	4.0
Professional: administration	35	39.8	–	–
Supporting role:	17	19.3	7	28.0
Supporting role	5	5.7	2	8.0
“girl for all”	12	13.6	5	20.0
Other	1	1.1	–	–
Number of respondents	88	100.0	25	100.0

Source: Own research

accounting. Considering the stereotype that women have the key role in working with employees, these family firms are largely too small to have a HRM department and women take these tasks mostly as a part of their managerial/administrative tasks.

This allocation of business areas is not only a matter of tradition and chance but, it also relies on an educational background. While the level of education is generally low in family firms (Glas 2003), the second generation tends to improve this (Glas et al. 2006), and women have a higher level of formal education (see Table 3). However, they differ significantly in the field of education and consequently in their business expertise area.

While men are very proficient in the technical expertise, only a tenth of non-CEO women possess technical knowledge and skills while the huge majority has the background in business or social sciences, proving the often repeated gender differences in professional orientation in Slovenia. Some common attitudes toward the managerial role of family members were also researched asking respondents from different groups to indicate their (dis)agreement with some statements on the behavior of family firms, used in some previous research (Vadnjal 2008). Respondents expressed their attitude on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (completely agree) to 5 (completely disagree). The mean values were computed and t-tests for the differences in mean values were run.

Considering issues in Table 6, there were significantly different answers between male and female managers regarding the first two statements: women in the CEO position are more liberal towards children, allowing them to exercise more freedom in the decision about joining the firm and choosing their education. They probably understand the dilemmas of children about their future in the family firm better since they spend more time with them and they might well remember their difficult times in developing their own managerial status. While female CEOs are less inclined to have managerial positions monopolized by family members and to apply different rules on rewarding family members, the differences are not

Table 6 Attitudes towards the managerial roles of family members

Statements about the managerial roles and succession in family firms	Groups of respondents from family firms		
	Managers (CEOs)		
	All	Men	Women
Children should be introduced to the firm at an early age	2.57	2.43(1)	3.29(1)
Children's education should be geared towards the business needs	2.94	2.79(2)	3.76(2)
Management successors should be chosen from the family	2.47	2.43	2.65
Parents should retire when children are ready to take over	2.98	2.94	3.18
Sibling rivalry in the business is good for the business	4.32	4.26	4.65
Family members are entitled to different pay arrangements than the rest of the employees	3.64	3.53	4.18
Number of respondents	107	89	18

Source: Own research

Note: (1) $t = -2.938$, $p = 0.004$, (2) $t = -3.208$, $p = 0.002$

statistically significant. These aspects of managerial careers do not have any important gender dimensions. Instead, they seem to be more influenced by their existing roles in the company and in the family.

Looking at the attitudes towards managerial roles of women, male CEOs do not deny but only reluctantly agree that women could be successful CEOs. There is no general opinion that family firms with women in top jobs are more successful, which could be hard to argue, however, women are significantly more in favor of this view.

Level of agreement was measured by several statements on the acting of family firms on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 – completely agree to 5 – completely disagree. The differences were detected by a *t*-test for mean values and the results are presented in the Table 7.

There is a consensus among male and female CEO's that women should not be confined to traditional "female" functional areas such as accounting, HRM, and finance; however, this view is more shared (significantly) by women who do not want to be pushed only into these activities but, they want to have more equal access to all functional areas. Still, stereotypes about their role are quite evident and only a handful of them are in charge of production and R&D areas.

Women usually oppose the view that they should instead care for the family and children. Their husbands are also not expressing interest for this role. More male CEOs informally acknowledge the mind-set that women have fewer ambitions to take managerial positions due to their family roles. There were no significant differences revealed between men and women in the perception of "male" tradition as the key barrier to get a managerial role in family firms, although this tradition is considered quite important by both genders. Respondents do not agree that women minimize their business contribution on the account of doing family chores, although male CEOs are by far more inclined to share this stereotype.

Table 7 Attitudes towards the managerial roles of women

Statements about the characteristics of family firms	Managers		
	All	Men	Women
Women should only occupy "female" areas as accounting, HRM, finance	3.83	3.62	4.89
		t = 4.308; p = 0.000	
Women could be successful CEOs in family firms	1.72	1.87	1.00
		t = 3.390; p = 0.001	
Family firms with women in top jobs are more successful	3.05	3.11	2.72
		t = 1.978; p = 0.049	
Due to the "male" tradition, women are often prevented to take key roles in family firms	2.61	2.65	2.39
Women do not have ambitions to take managerial jobs since they care for family	3.79	3.67	4.39
		t = 2.567; p = 0.012	
Women take better care of the relationships among employees	2.32	2.41	1.89
		t = 3.304; p = 0.003	
Women are not enough tough and decisive in business	3.92	3.79	4.56
		t = 2.942; p = 0.004	
Women are less risk taking than men	3.15	3.08	3.50
Women can play a very positive informal role in the firm (e.g. in conflict resolution)	2.14	2.17	2.00
		t = 1.821; p = 0.070	
Business partners do not take women as seriously as men as CEOs	3.33	3.28	3.56

Source: Own research

The survey confirmed the proposition that women differ in their managerial style in many aspects. Differences are presented in Table 7 and a majority of the differences were statistically significant: (a) they are considered superior in caring for the relationship among employees – however, women are far more convinced about this personal quality; (b) a minor part of respondents consider women as less decisive and tough in business; (c) a number of respondents consider women as less risk taking, however, no significant gender differences were found; (d) women are recognized as playing a very positive informal role, which proves that formal roles, even when assigned, might be less important than informal ones, being a more subtle component of women's actions. The attitude that business partners might take women CEOs less seriously, is viewed in a neutral way.

7 Ownership Issues and Transition of Business to Next Generation

The ownership structure of family firms is presented by a pattern of the first generation family firms: 96.3 % of ownership (calculated as the non-weighted average) belongs to the family and only 3.7 % would be owned by other people. Men certainly dominate as owners. Interestingly, the attitudes towards the family

Table 8 Attitudes towards some aspects of ownership in family firms

Statements about some aspects of ownership and ownership transition	Managers (CEOs)		
	All	Men	Women
	N = 107	N = 89	N = 19
Children should receive some shares when they join the business	3.32	3.16	3.65
Children who do not join the business should not receive shares	3.21	3.28	2.82
Children should receive shares in the business in equal parts	2.69	2.67	2.76
Shares should only be transferred to members of the family	2.58	2.54	2.76
If non-family owners enter the business, they will be greedy	3.43	3.44	3.41
Key employees (also non-family) should become co-owners in the firm	3.30	3.30	3.29

Source: Own research

ownership are highly balanced since there are no statistically significant differences between male and female groups of respondents. Their prevailing views can be presented as follows: (a) ownership should stay in the family, which is consistent with other research findings, e.g., Vadnjal (2008) and Glas (2003); (b) attitudes towards (non)equal shares of children are quite divided, however, no gender differences were assumed, but rather, the issue is more on their activity/role in the firm; and (c) family firms are quite reluctant to open themselves for possible co-ownership and give stake in the company to non-family key employees.

However, the family members do not consider the ownership structure as highly important, since wealth creation and earnings were ranked fifth among reasons for establishing the firm, listed by 19 % of firms. Autonomy was found to be by far the most important, listed by 82 % of firms as one of three possible reasons, followed by achievement, 44 %, dissatisfaction with previous job, 22 %, and creating a job opportunity, 20 %. As evident from Table 8, women are somehow more in favor of equal ownership shares for both men and women if employed in family firms.

8 Gender Based Roles in Family Firms: A Case of Gender Discrimination

Men dominate in occupying the CEO position. This may simply follow from the fact that they were dominating founders that took over the CEO position and women were left with the secondary role. The question asked at this point is how will women feel in their role? Do they perceive it as a case of gender discrimination in the family firm? The level of agreement regarding the characteristics of family firms along certain gender aspects was measured by several statements on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 – completely agree, to 5 – completely disagree. The differences which are presented in the Table 9 were explored by *t*-test for mean values.

While male CEOs admit their role to be very important, women are quite convinced that they leverage "three corners" (usually for households) even in

Table 9 Attitudes about the characteristics of family firms along the gender aspects

	Managers		
Statements about the characteristics of family firms	All	Men	Women
Women hold "three corners" even in family firms	2.78	2.90	2.22
		$t = 2.548$; $p = 0.013$	
Women, if employed in family firms should have equal shares	2.31	2.39	1.89
		$t = 2.167$; $p = 0.031$	
Women should rather care for the family and children	4.11	3.99	4.72
		$t = 3.090$; $p = 0.003$	
Women cannot contribute fully in the firm since they support "three corners" in households	3.60	3.47	4.25
		$t = 3.058$; $p = 0.003$	
Even women giving an equal share in the firm do not get a "discount" in family chores	2.67	2.70	2.56
		$t = 2.005$; $p = 0.046$	
Women are paid less than men for the equal job	3.88	3.99	3.33
		$t = 2.207$; $p = 0.029$	
Women do less demanding, less responsibilities and thus less paid jobs	3.69	3.72	3.56
Women face tougher situations in being promoted than men	3.17	3.26	2.72
		$t = 2.269$; $p = 0.023$	

Source: Own research

family firms – this view follows the fact that they have to handle different issues while men have taken more specified, selective roles.

There seems to be a general understanding that the family/household care is a significant burden on women so they tend to express negative feelings about the fact that they miss enough assistance in doing family chores, particularly when they provide an equal proportion of work in family firm activities. This survey confirmed that the general finding about the asymmetric gender pattern of work – family – leisure activities extend to family businesses as well. Women's participation in business has not yet been rewarded by the relaxation of their family role.

While there is not general understanding that women are paid less for an equal job, women feel the difference in pay significantly more. This issue should be studied more carefully since it can be proposed that women are paid less, partly due to their less specific job assignments and less definitive responsibilities taken. Women also find that they face tougher situations in receiving promotions. However, they are not considered as doing less demanding or responsible work and no gender specific views were found on this traditional comment trying to argue the reasons for lower salaries.

Although a number of respondents recognize several specific features of female managerial styles, the differences are not considered as a disadvantage that may prevent women from achieving top positions in family firms. They would rather propose that women play a complementary role in bringing some "softness" to the tough male managerial styles. The female attitudes towards equal ownership shares prove that they do not perceive the current dominant male ownership as just and there is room to raise their satisfaction with the role in family firms.

It is evident that women in family firms perceive their situation in a significantly more critical way than the male CEOs. Large differences were revealed in views of women that have different positions in family firms. These differences are probably partly due to their different experiences related to their roles and partly due to different characteristics of women belonging to different groups. The views of male CEOs may reflect some traditional concepts about women and male CEOs tend to neglect the meaning of formally equal treatment of women to enhance their satisfaction and motivation. While not arguing intensively, women do perceive their share in management, ownership and rewards as inherently unjust and they find their double role in the family and firm as consistently more demanding in time and energy spent from the role of the spouses. Slovenian women are not inclined to talk about their deprivation, but these perceptions are shared. Some recommendations to change this situation would include: (a) enhancing the support for women in their family/household role through a number of services provided, but also promoting the role of men as fathers and partners in sharing different chores; (b) taking care for more fair ownership share of women; (c) defining the duties/obligations of women in the firm more concisely, also related to the reward and promotion systems; (d) promoting women education and training in functional areas that are important for the business activity, beyond the economic/business education.

To check for the urgency of changes, we asked women in the survey to indicate whether their position in business and family should change in order to feel equal to men, on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Evidently, no radical demands were found. Key women mostly desire to be listened to more carefully in discussions and decision-making, both by family and other company staff and the family burden should be shared more equally between partners. Some other literature suggests (Sharma 2004) that family firms neglect the education of female members. However, women hardly demand pay increases, and even shun from more benefits and they do not demand larger shares in ownership.

9 Conclusions and Implications

Considering the number of family firms in Slovenia, more women are taking part in accumulated entrepreneurial potential in these firms than starting their own businesses. Working with family members and avoiding the stress and uncertainty by leaving the leadership role to their male partners seems more attractive to women than facing business challenges as sole owners. On the other hand, while the informal role of women in boards and managerial ranks is often recognized, such a role is more pronounced in family firms. In the later, women are exercising their influence on the decision-making process in the office and during family time. This advantage of interlocking family and business supports our first proposition since the formal role of women in family firms does not reach beyond the role of women in non-family businesses. Therefore, the first proposition stating that "women usually do not act as CEOs in family firms but dominate in second-level managerial positions" can be regarded as supported.

Considering that female family members share the second-rank managerial roles in a large share of family businesses where men dominate as CEOs, their share in ownership certainly understates their role in running the family business. However, women do not seem to oppose the existing situation, and often consider their informal influence as powerful enough to provide them personal satisfaction. They also do not opt for higher salaries and benefits, although this aspect may become important with the reform of the health and pension systems which would relocate the access to services, increasingly towards the voluntary involvement of beneficiaries. Women deny these financial aspects as important and this denial is a good cause not to push for the changes. All this is supported to the second proposition implying that "women are modestly represented in the ownership structure of family businesses and consider this issue to be fairly unimportant" which can be also regarded as supported.

The "feminine" style of women in family firms is very important for creating good internal relationships, the overall climate in business, employees' satisfaction and morale. This aspect is likely to positively contribute to the financial performance of family firms but it has the value in itself for the well-being of employees even if not materialized in improved balance sheets. This women's contribution is often benevolently recognized but not adequately rewarded. Again, women are quite patient in their wishes to get social recognition and the recognition of their family members but they do not intensely pursue their demand. Thus, it can be concluded that data from the study confirms the third proposition which suggests that women often possess different views on transitional issues when compared to men. Interestingly, this confirmation comes from predominately female respondents which may be interpreted as, women being more aware of their feminine influenced managerial roles.

Women, when becoming CEOs, would introduce a number of changes in the management style where they would add their softer feminine approaches as a new quality to the existing style. This assumption is very relativistic since the research has indicated that female CEOs behave unlike other female family members involved in the firm. It can be discussed that women in family firms need to be really tough and superior to their male siblings in order to get to the top position. The process of their elevation to the CEO position can neutralize part of their femininity and softness and performing the duties of CEOs seem to develop experiences that harden their approach. Taking into account all mentioned findings, the proposition for stating that "women in family firms would exercise a different, 'feminine' style of management due to the differences in their values, personal traits and experience" can be neither confirmed nor rejected.

The issue of discrimination is somewhat controversial. Women consider their role in the family business very differently from male CEOs, which indicates a lack of discussion of these issues. It can be assumed that women are frustrated by the existing formal structure of family firms. However, they seem reluctant to discuss these issues in the family and they are not radical in demanding the changes. The feminist movement has never had deep roots in Slovenia and the radicalism has mostly been calmed by the legislation that formally supports the (full) gender equality, but the mechanisms to ensure this equality are not devised. Thus, the fifth proposition suggesting that "while there are differences in the gender roles and rewards in family firms, this situation is not perceived by both genders as an intriguing case of discrimination that would demand an immediate action" can be confirmed in the first part where it suggests that there are difference in gender roles and rewards. However, in the second part, the data cannot be interpreted in the confirmatory manner.

For the purpose of managing small family firms and also consulting to them, it should be clear that women's role in the family business is often underestimated. Women not only play a traditional supportive and invisible role but can also contribute to a different role, more towards a people oriented managerial style when their feminine style of tackling business issues is applied as an alternative to the more traditionally viewed masculine approach. In a diagnosis process of consulting projects, women although not holding leadership positions, may be invaluable sources of information and, complementary opinions. In conflict resolution programs, women can play enormous positive roles in lowering the temperature which has risen mostly among men.

There are many opportunities for further research in the field. Researchers should be encouraged to use more sophisticated analytical approaches; however, they should provide larger samples in order to arrive at reliable assessments. A more multi-disciplinary approach is recommended because the complex family and partnership relationship combined with pressures of daily business activities demands much broader research skills and knowledge than is usually available and provided by business science researchers.

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