

Chapter 10

Knowledge Management in Family Firms: Perspectives From Management Research

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Knowledge management has received increasing attention from scholars. However, the understanding of this literature in the context of family firms remains fragmented. Different positions suggest that the inherent features of family businesses indicate the importance of considering the context. In this chapter, the authors aim to extend the understanding of knowledge management in the context of family firms. They achieve this by identifying the intellectual structure and evolution of the knowledge management corpus using bibliometric techniques applied to authors, universities, countries, and supranational regions. The analysis is complemented by the application of distance-based mapping techniques at the level of authors and publishers, enabling exploration of the historical dynamics and knowledge flows among management disciplines. The contribution of this chapter to the management literature lies in the provision of deep insights into this young and fertile stream of research, ultimately building bridges between both fields of research.

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INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is the linchpin for cultivating sustainable competitive advantages within family firms (Bamel & Bamel, 2018). In addition to individual entrepreneurial skills in establishing enduring competitive edges, knowledge management significantly contributes to these organizations in terms of profitability, survival, and growth (Carayannis, Ferreira, & Fernandes, 2021). This is why knowledge management has evolved into the most strategically vital capability for family firms (Hatak & Roessl, 2013). Understanding the intricacies of knowledge management, from its inception to diffusion and effective utilization, has become a cornerstone of business research (Zack, 1999; Shahzad, Qu, Zafar, Rehman & Islam, 2020; Edwards, 2022). Over the years, knowledge management research has burgeoned, with exponential growth since its early beginnings in the early 1990s (Gaviria-Marin, Merigó, & Baier-Fuentes, 2019), resulting in a vast body of academic work (Gaviria-Marin, Merigo, & Popa, 2018). A simple search in the Web of Science database for “knowledge management” within the business and management categories yields around 5,000 academic products.

Researchers across various fields have increasingly turned to bibliometric techniques to categorize and rank extensive volumes of scholarly material and academic knowledge, providing comprehensive insights into diverse subjects (Andrade-Valbuena, Baier-Fuentes, & Gaviria-Marin, 2022). These techniques have been particularly useful in exploring complex research topics where multiple streams of knowledge converge, offering deeper insights into their commonalities (Andrade-Valbuena, Valenzuela-Fernández, & Merigó, 2022b). For instance, Vallaster, Kraus, Lindahl, and Nielsen (2019) delved into the ethical considerations inherent in entrepreneurial decision-making, utilizing performance indicators and statistical patterns to identify influential publications in this area. Lamboglia, Lavorato, Scornavacca, and Za (2021) mapped the conceptual structure of the body of knowledge at the intersection of auditing and technological absorption by examining publications, countries, and authors.

However, a comprehensive study that connects knowledge management and family firms, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of both research streams and their interplay, is conspicuously missing from the literature. While previous bibliometric endeavors have either analyzed knowledge management research (Fares, Chung, & Abbasi, 2021) or delved into family firms (Casillas & Acedo, 2007; Casprini, Dabic, Kotlar, & Pucci, 2020; Cisneros, Ibanescu, Keen, Lobato-Calleros, & Niebla-Zatarain, 2018), none have simultaneously examined both research streams. This chapter seeks to fill this gap by providing an overview of three decades of scientific production (1990-2020) that explores the multifaceted nature of knowledge management in family firms, offering insights into their connections.

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