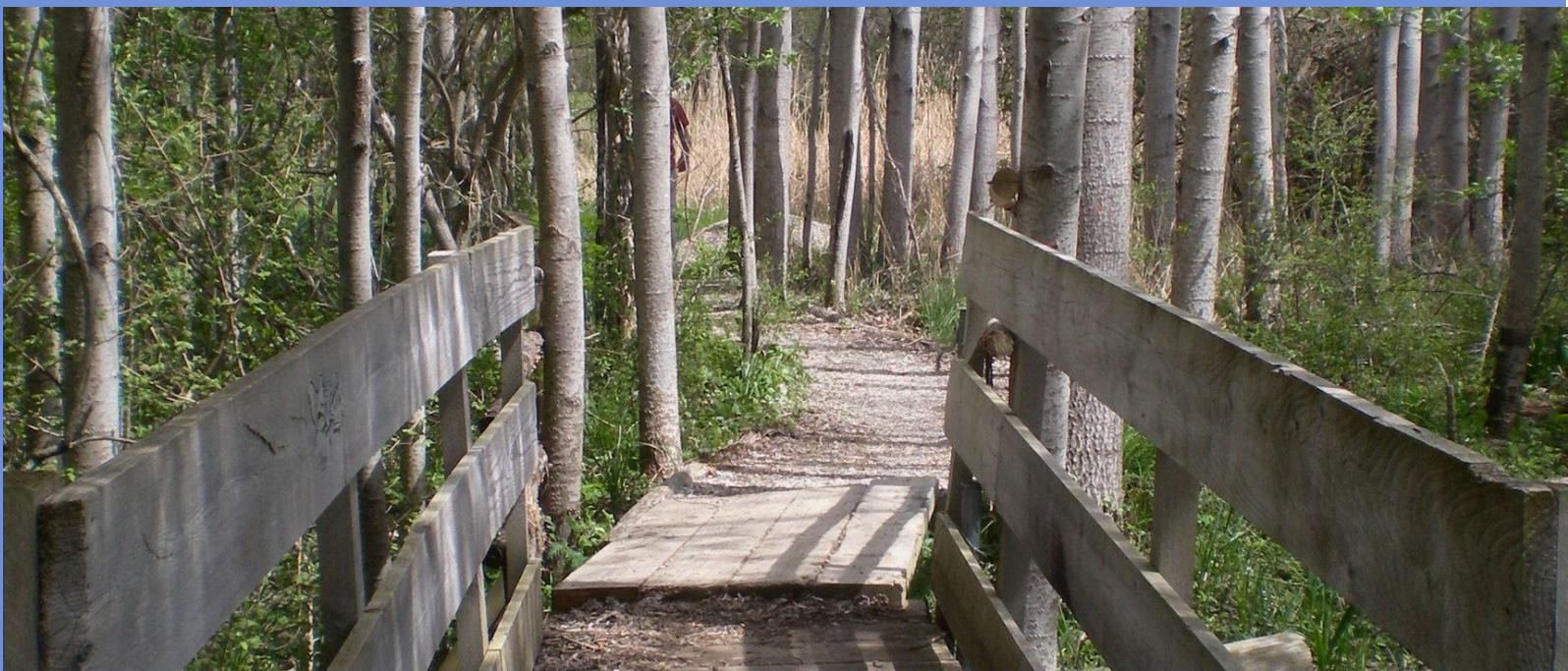# THE GENDER SPECIFIC IMPRINTED CORPORATE CULTURE IN FAMILY FIRMS - AN INVESTIGATION OF ITS SUSTAINABILITY DURING BUSINESS SUCCESSIONS.

Forschungsbericht
Juli 2014

Kira Pfeiffer

Reihe *Studien*

HeurekaNet
Freies Institut für
Bildung, Forschung
und Innovation e.V.

HeurekaNet – Freies Institut für Bildung, Forschung und Innovation e.V.

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The gender specific imprinted corporate culture in family firms –
An investigation of its sustainability during business successions

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Vorwort

Die Fakten liegen schon länger auf dem Tisch: Wie eine repräsentative Befragung der Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung (GfK) im Auftrag des Bundesfamilienministeriums aus dem Jahr 2010 zeigt, ist für 92 Prozent aller Beschäftigten mit Kindern die Vereinbarkeit von Beruf und Familie mindestens genauso wichtig wie das Gehalt. Über ein Viertel der befragten Mütter und Väter haben bereits einmal den Arbeitgeber gewechselt, um Beruf und Familie besser vereinbaren zu können. Und: Auch für Männer in der Familiengründungsphase spielt mit zunehmendem Alter Familienfreundlichkeit eine immer wichtigere Rolle. Für rund 67 Prozent der 35- bis 39-jährigen Männer ist die Familienfreundlichkeit des Arbeitgebers bei der Stellensuche wichtig.

Traditionelle Orientierungen in der Lebens- und Karriereplanung und überkommene Rollenklischees sind also im Umbruch, das weiß auch die Mehrzahl der Unternehmen in Deutschland. Vier bundesweite Erhebungen zur Familienfreundlichkeit der deutschen Wirtschaft, durchgeführt durch das Institut der Wirtschaft Köln, und zwar in den Jahren 2003, 2006, 2009 und 2012 („Unternehmensmonitor Familienfreundlichkeit") haben eine stetig anwachsende Sensibilität für die Bedeutung einer familienbewussten Personalpolitik registriert. Die Sonderauswertung aus dem Jahr 2013 (Institut der deutschen Wirtschaft Köln, 14. März 2013) zeigt zudem, dass die deutschen Unternehmen dem Thema Familienfreundlichkeit auch nach dem „Hype" der letzten Jahre weiterhin einen hohen oder eher hohen Stellenwert beimessen. Nach 46,5% in 2003, 71,7% in 2006 und 79,8% in 2010 konsolidiert sich die Bedeutungszuschreibung mit 80,7% auf hohem Niveau. Knapp 4 von 10 der befragten Unternehmen waren zudem der Ansicht, dass die Bedeutung von Familienfreundlichkeit von Unternehmen in den kommenden fünf Jahren noch zunehmen wird.

Flexible Arbeitszeitmodelle sind für Unternehmen wie auch Beschäftige das zentrale Instrument der Förderung der Vereinbarkeit von Familie und Beruf. Ihre Verbreitung konsolidiert sich ebenfalls auf hohem Niveau. So bieten 73,3% der Unternehmen individuell ausgestaltete Arbeitszeitmodelle an und 51,2% sehen Regelungen zur Vertrauensarbeitszeiten vor. Gesunken ist allerdings die Zahl der Unternehmen mit flexiblen Jahres-/ Lebensarbeitszeiten, und zwar von 28,3% auf 20,4% der Unternehmen.

80% der Unternehmen, die als familienfreundlich bezeichnet werden können, räumen ihren Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern einen großen oder eher großen Einfluss bei der Frage ein, wann und wie lange im konkreten Arbeitsalltag gearbeitet werden soll. Sie unterscheiden sich damit deutlich von Unternehmen, die als nicht familienfreundlich gelten. Bei 30% der familienfreundlichen Unternehmen orientiert sich die Arbeitszeit an den Wünschen der Beschäftigten.

Und weiter: Rund 70% der Unternehmen sehen die Möglichkeit, auf Wünsche ihrer Beschäftigten nach Ausdehnung oder Reduzierung der Arbeitszeit kurzfristig oder nach einer Weile einzugehen.

Die Flexibilität der Arbeitszeit ist in der Praxis wohl zentrale Stellschraube, sie gilt beiden Sozialpartnern als der Ausdruck eines familienfreundlichen Unternehmens. Doch Familienfreundlichkeit ist mehr und in jedem Unternehmen auch anders. Das „audit berufundfamilie" oder das Qualitätssiegel „Familienfreundlicher Arbeitgeber", das unser Institut in den Jahren 2008 bis 2011 federführend mit der Bertelsmann Stiftung entwickelt und erprobt hat, bewerten weitere Aspekte wie Führung und Kommunikation, Service- und Unterstützungsleistungen, Flexibilität des Arbeitsorts u.a.m. Als zentraler Treiber einer nachhaltigen familienbewussten Personalpolitik stellt sich immer wieder die oberste Leitung eines Unternehmens heraus, die – gerade in kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen – die Unternehmenskultur prägt. Alle Maßnahmen oder Artefakte, wie Edgar Schein sagt, sind in die Unternehmenskultur eingebettet und entspringen ihr zugleich, zumindest, wenn sie nachhaltig

angelegt sind. Wir hatten in den letzten Jahren das große Vergnügen, eine ganze Reihe von Unternehmen kennenzulernen, die auch auf dieser Ebene familienfreundlich sind und kein personalpolitisches „window dressing" betreiben.

Was aber, wenn die Akteure in der Führung, die die familienfreundliche Unternehmenskultur prägen, ausscheiden und das Unternehmen übergeben? Geht es weiter mit der familienfreundlichen Unternehmenspolitik? Wie stark konnte sich der Ansatz der Familienfreundlichkeit unternehmenskulturell konsolidieren? Wird vielleicht alles ganz anders?

Der vor Ihnen liegende Forschungsbericht fokussiert genau auf diese Situation, und zwar in drei kleinen und mittleren Unternehmen im Münsterland. Doch damit nicht genug. Es handelt um einen Unternehmensübergang auf die nachfolgende Generation, der zudem in den drei ausgewählten Unternehmen noch durch eine Besonderheit gekennzeichnet ist: Alle drei Unternehmen sind kulturell sehr stark durch Unternehmerinnen geprägt und die Nachfolge wird durch die Söhne angetreten.

Also eine sehr spannende Unternehmenssituation, in deren Betrachtung vielerlei Erkenntnisströme zusammenfließen: zu Familienunternehmen, zum Verhältnis von Familiensystem und Unternehmens- bzw. Managementsystem, zu Gender und Führung, zu Unternehmenskultur und familienfreundlicher Unternehmenspolitik und nicht zuletzt auch zur Unternehmensübergabe an die nächste Generation. Kira Pfeiffer, die ihre Forschung im Rahmen unseres Projekts „FAM²TEC" durchführte, ist es hervorragend gelungen, diese komplexe Situation im Rahmen einer Bachelor-Thesis so aufzuarbeiten, dass sowohl Unternehmen als auch weitere Forschungsarbeiten davon profitieren können.

Die Bachelor-Thesis wurde im englischsprachigen Studiengang „Textilmanagement" an der Hochschule Niederrhein eingereicht und mit der Note 1 bewertet. Gratulation, Kira! Der Forschungsbericht ist gleichfalls in englischer Sprache abgefasst. Wir wünschen eine anregende Lektüre.

Marcus Flachmeyer
Vorstand

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Inhaltsverzeichnis

1. Introduction

The present Research Paper is based on the Bachelor Thesis of Kira Pfeiffer which deals with "The gender specific imprinted corporate culture in family firms – An investigation of its sustainability during business successions". It compiles hypotheses concerning the gendered role of leading women working in these businesses and the sustainability of what they have achieved consciously or unconsciously concerning family-friendly policies and culture itself. These elaborated hypotheses and the possibility for an ongoing research could be a huge advantage for family firms which face the difficulties of a generational transfer and the insecurity of the sustainability of the imprinted culture.

1.1 Intention of the Thesis

The research question serves as the base of the thesis and represents a completely new and complex issue which is not explored yet. The transfer of a business is especially important in family firms which want to ensure the continuation of their company. Therefore it is important to make fiscal considerations, to put hereditarily issues into writing and to find a suitable successor. The one question which will be answered in the course of the thesis and hence the corresponding research paper is: What will happen with aspects that influence the motivation and performance of employees and managers and therefore the economical success of the company which are sometimes not as concrete as a financial statement – hence the corporate culture. The corporate culture of a business can be like an engine for the whole system and employees are used to certain manners, rituals and a corporate thinking.

According to the latter statements, presumptions will be generated stating that female leading managers, as they often work side by side with their husbands in family businesses or even occupy the position of the CEO, have a high influence on the culture and family-friendly policies. Therefore the cultures of companies and the specific influence of business women in family firms on these corporate cultures will be examined, as well as the attitudes of the next generation, the male successors. These attitudes of the sons need to be investigated in order to enunciate statements about the sustainability of the potentially female imprinted cultures. Hence several work hypotheses will be developed and will serve as a research basis for the Bachelor Thesis.

1.2 The cooperation with KommaSystem and HeurekaNet

The incitation for the topic of the outlined thesis was generated during an ongoing internship at the business consultancy KommaSystem in Münster, Germany. As a consultancy they stand for the connection between a functional-pragmatic approach with socio-scientific concepts of the management consultation or organisation development. Moreover they offer advisory service for personnel management related challenges, trainings for employees and leading managers and help to perform a reorganisation of the company for a better cooperation. Marcus Flachmeyer and Andreas Schulte-Hemming, the two business leaders of KommaSystem, founded the "Freies Institut für Bildung, Forschung und Innovation – HeurekaNet" in 2000 which operates in the field of method and instrument development, intermediate trade and practice research for different kinds of systems and their protagonists. Their key activities include for instance compatibility of work and family, life-domain-balance, gender mainstream and diversity. All participating firms in this study are members of the FAM2TEC project generated by HeurekaNet, which intends to encourage young women to decide

in favor of a technical or natural scientific study course or apprenticeship and to enhance the family-friendliness of enterprises in order to attract this target audience.

Owing to the focal points of interests of KommaSystem and HeurekaNet the theme for the thesis was developed and elaborated.

2. Family firms and the Business Transfer

Since the discussed thesis deals with family firms it is important to get to know the difference between a conventionally controlled enterprise and the special characteristics of a business which has been in the hands of a family since generations. The business transfer is also distinctive in family firms compared to a conventional enterprise, due to the high family involvement in the firms and the associated higher emotionality.

2.1 Strengths and weaknesses of Family Firms

Family firms have several advantageous strengths compared to non-family businesses in economics. Often the decision-making authority and the ownership is attributed to one person or a family. This gives the opportunity to consequently execute clear organization and business concepts without the interminable process of discussing every decision with a committee. The guidance of the company therefore emanates reliability which is of high importance for employees and associate partners. In addition the humaneness of the association with each other is strongly supported by the owning family and this attitude often excludes the competitiveness due to climbing the job ladder. Furthermore the staffing policy in family firms can have a competitive advantage compared to non-family businesses due to the fact that they often chase a honest policy of an ´open door´, the parting of permanent controls and the opportunity of learning from mistakes. The result of this is that the firm loyalty is more pronounced which leads to a lower fluctuation and because each employee alternation is associated with costs, it has also a positive effect on the financial balance. In addition to the firm loyalty the identification of the staff and the leading managers result in a high motivation which is not bought at high costs through premiums. Besides further strengths would be the wide scope of action, the efficient and informal communication and the direct contact of associate partners with the name holder or the managing partner (Habig, 2010, PP. 9).

On the other hand family businesses fear several different aspects which are in absent or better manageable anonymous incorporated enterprises. For instance the more difficult initial position concerning the funding and its liquidity in terms of inheritance tax, the transfer of reserves in profitless years for living of the shareholders and others. Apart from this it is often difficult for family businesses to attract qualified staff because they fear that family interests predominate in the end, decisions are not made on objective criteria, the concern about an authoritarian leadership and that top positions are only occupied by family members. But business families can work against these prejudices by establishing clear guidelines for employees and possible applicants.

Also the succession of the business within the family is difficult and sometimes even ineffective, hence every tenth business transfer leading to an insolvency (Habig, 2010, PP. 10). Since 39% of the senior entrepreneurs cannot find an adequate successor (online: Bundesweite Gründerinnenagentur BGA, 2013) it is important for a family business to deal with this problem early and take required adjustments.

In order for weaknesses not to endanger the company in its whole the owner family must consider the relationship of family and firm, as seen in the generation conflict and the succession planning. Secondly the finances and lastly the strategy including staff policy, corporate culture, form of organization, prospected growth and so on.

In summary the strengths and weaknesses can be described as "different sides of the same coin" (Hilburt-Davis et al., 2003, P. 23) because the informal infrastructure can be flexible and innovative and at the same time unclear and confusing. Or the family´s involvement can stand for shared values and a sense of vision but also for a lack of objectivity and emotionally characterized decision making (Hilburt-Davis et al., 2003, PP. 23). Each family business has its unique strengths and weaknesses and it is important to consider these different dimensions while leading a family-owned business.

2.2 The Family Business between the conflicting priorities of Company and Family

As already mentioned family firms face a difficulty which non-family firms do not due to the conflicting priorities of company and family. These two different social systems influence each other, overlap, interact and are interdependent. Firstly the systems consist of unique behavioural patterns, principles, values and norms and each has its own rules of conduct (Lindow, 2013, PP. 14).

John L. Ward states that:

"The very nature of business often seems to contradict the nature of the family. Families tend to be emotional; businesses are objective. Families are protective of their members; businesses, much less so. Families grant acceptance unconditionally. Businesses grant it according to one´s contribution." (Ward, 1987, P. 54)

Secondly businesses and families exist for fundamentally different reasons, as businesses exist to regenerate profits through the distribution of goods and services (external orientation) and family exists to nurture and care for its members (internal orientation). Thirdly both differ in their goals they set. The business system is forced to herald and produce changes to ensure survival of the company, while the family tries to avoid changes to retain family equilibrium. Consequently decisions made in family firms, are reached within a dual system of business and family and explains why the family influence has consequences for issues such as organizational structure and strategy planning (Lindow, 2013, PP.15).

2.3 The topic of gender in Family Businesses

The term ´gender´ was used and discussed more and more during the last decades in business economics. Whether the sociological term of reaching a glass ceiling by well educated women who want to climb the job ladder or differences in leadership style of men and women were topics in management forums or professional articles, the sociological-cultural based term ´gender´ is well known today. Leading manager need to be aware of sometimes even controversial aspects of the literature concerning this theme to be able to manage the company without prejudices or the adaption of clichés concerning the different sexes. Also family businesses can be attached great importance to the gender question due to several different aspects. For instance the social status of the wife of a CEO in family firms and their natural leadership styles or the selection of a successor and the role of gender.

2.3.1 The natural leadership talents of Women and their preference of soft factors

As mentioned before men and women have several different behaviour tendencies which include also the leadership and communication styles. Different studies have shown that some of the leading talents women express more regularly than men (Online: Fisher, n.d.). In general it can be said that female leaders are possessing stronger interpersonal skills such as flexibility, sociability and empathy compared to their male counterparts. As a result of these skills, women in businesses can read situations more accurately and will take in information from different sides. Because of the willingness to see all sides of a given fact their persuasive ability enhances and it allows the female managers to "come at a subject from their audience´s perspective, so that the people they are leading feel more understood, supported and valued."(Online: Caliper, 2014). Consequently they will discuss the decisions through with many more employees than male managers. It includes that women have an open, collegial and consensus-building approach to leading (Online: Caliper, 2014). These networking, inclusion and collaboration aspects are leading to the conclusion that women are willing to share power more easily and regard it "as an egalitarian network of supportive connections." (Online: Fisher, n.d.)

Moreover women possess better negotiating, oral and language skills, like to inspire team members and give them space to develop themselves, have a win-win attitude and focus rather on consideration - than on the use of a punishment or reward system (Online: Chao, 2008).

All these talents belong to the field of the so called soft skills. Scientists often relate the term of "executive social skills" (Online: Fisher, n.d.) to women in businesses, because they use all their conscious and unconscious gathered knowledge about the human being to create a good interpersonal atmosphere.

2.3.2 The social status of the Wife in Family Businesses

The research on the topic of women working in family firms started only a few years ago so the literature concerning this issue is still sparse. Nonetheless a few remarks can be made on the roles of wives in family businesses.

Women and especially wives of the Chief Executive Officer and Business Owner occupy either an invisible, professional or anchor role in their companies. Apart from this they hold often the "second rank or head up one of the business functions, traditionally finance and accounting or sales" (Online: Vadnjal et al., 2009, P. 161). So although female entrepreneurs enhanced their presence in the free economy, the majority of working women in family businesses stay in the background. This frequently happens in husband-and-wife businesses were business partners often bypass the women and want to hear a final decision of their spouses. Often the husband is the last instance and has a more selective and specific role, while his wife needs to consider the different issues concerning family and business. To manage the household, raising the children and at the same time being present, effective and successful in the business is even more complex today. To cope with work and home remains a continual juggling act.

In general it can be assumed that the wives "do not plan a career in their family business, do not aspire to ownership, and see their work as a job, rather than a career." (Online: Cole, 1997, P. 2). Moreover the stereotypes as highlighted by research suggest that women rather fall into a kind of nurturing role in business situations than to be a calculating business manager (Online: Cole, 1997, P. 13). In addition to this other typical skills attributed to women lead them into a position as a conciliator, mediator or adviser (Weller, 2010, P. 16).

Although a number of studies have shown that the female leadership differs from the male ones, these distinctions are no disadvantages in family businesses. Actually it can be proposed that women adopt a complementary role in terms of bringing ´softness´ into the often male characterized management style (Online: Vadnjal et al., 2009, P. 172).

In summary it is important to appreciate and understand the complexity of female managers working in family firms due to the fact that especially wives have an enormous influence on their husbands and on the arrangement of the management style and hence on the corporate culture.

2.4 The Succession as a continual process

The succession of family firms has been identified as one of the most important and difficult decisions that the entrepreneur is forced to make. The European Commission reported in 2008 that nearly 10% of all bankruptcy cases in Small-Medium Enterprises (SMEs) can be traced back to an inadequate succession. Bankruptcy endangers about 30.000 businesses and 300.000 workplaces in Europe each year, an insight which demonstrates the macroeconomic dimension of this issue (Arnaud, 2011, P. 14).

Because the present thesis is a matter of within-family successions, the following aspects deal with the arrangement of generational transfers from parents to offspring.

To avoid a succession failure and to ensure the continuity of the business it is important to look at the succession plan as a long-term project. This offers the possibility to concern oneself with the formulation of goals and how to pursue them. Consequently, it will lead to distinctiveness and continuity of the business development.

In general the transfer to the next generation should be implemented in five stages:

1. Planning of the strategy

2. Selection of the successor

3. Testing the successor

4. Involvement of the successor

5. Handover of responsibility (Habig et al., 2010, PP. 125)

Ideally it should take several years for the five stages to be completed and the planning is not finished with the selection of the successor. It must be permanently reviewed until the final transfer of responsibility because of the changing circumstances during the whole succession process.

Further key points are firstly the awareness that "the change in the top position of the organization can alter the direction and politics of a business" (Online: Cabrera-Suárez, 2005, P. 73), secondly the need to be creative in seeking solutions for new problematic organisational processes, and thirdly the key role of the family, other stakeholders and employees in supporting the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) (Online: Pardo-del-Val, 2008).

But the most important and at the same time most critical factor is the motivation of the potential successor to continue the family-owned business (Online: Griffeth et al., 2006, P. 491). It depends on

him or her and the ability of the predecessor to disengage whether the company is able to survive the transfer successfully or not.

3. Corporate Culture as a factor for success

Businesses consist of several distinctive components, for instance different departments like Accounting, Sales, or personnel division and furthermore the executive departments in crafts enterprises and the level of seniority with a board of directors and so on. These components represent something concrete but one important aspect is missing: The consciously and unconsciously created corporate identity and culture of the company. Nearly all successful businesses in different industrial sectors have a pronounced corporate culture in common. The success factor corporate culture and its significance in family firms is described in the following sub-chapter.
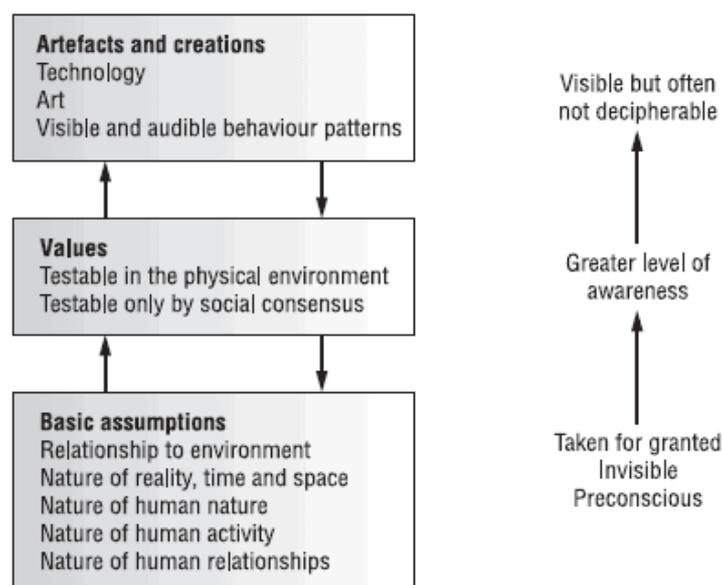
3.1 Definition of Corporate Culture

It is a relatively recent development in literature to consider that organizations have a culture. The concept of ´corporate culture´, coined in the 1970s, was and is largely discussed in the available literature which leads to many differing definitions and approaches (Ihlenfeld, 2007, P. 26).

In general the term corporate culture is a "simple application of culture theory to an organizational context." (Röhm, 2006, P. 23). By using this approach Edgar Schein, one of the co-founders of organization psychology, developed a model which is clearly favoured by the largest part of management literature since it provides a larger number of interfaces for working and acting on the culture process (Röhm, 2006, P. 23). Edgar Schein defines culture as:

"(…) a pattern of basic assumptions – invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaption and internal integration – that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems." (Schein, 2004, P. 17)

The mentioned model includes three different levels illustrated in the following diagram:

Figure 1: Schein´s three levels of culture

The top level is dealing with *Artefacts* which describe the visible attitudes and other physical manifestations of the group. For instance the communication behaviour with and between the employees and customers, the company logo, their language concerning the manner of speaking, their technologies and products, the mission statement but also rituals and myths and stories about the company. This level of culture is easy to observe but difficult to decrypt (Röhm, 2006, PP. 25).

Below this level lie the *Espoused Values* which are contemplated as guidelines by the company. They manifest in the strategical planning, the objectives and the official business philosophy. Therefore they can be described as implications which dictate the behaviour of employees. During the formation phase of a group (a company also representing a group) the values are expressed in proposals about what and how do to something. If these proposals are accepted and good experiences are the outcome the group adopts the value attitude which then gradually enters the unconscious areas and becomes a *Basic assumption*. The latter situated on the lowest level includes the assumptions taken for granted concerning how somebody reacts to his or her environment. The members of the company are not really aware of the fact, that their decisions and behaviour is based on these premises. Deviances are rarely tolerated. The impossibility of challenging aspects of these assumptions is often the reason for cultural conflicts (Online: Landau, 2007).

In conclusion, organisation culture acts as an invisible and pervasive social background influencing individual, group and organisational actions, informal and formal structures, communications, leadership, the conduct of external and internal relationships and the way the organisation represents itself to the community (Online: Greene, 2007). In addition it is important to state that corporate culture is an integrated system and not a number of single aspects.

3.2 Value creation of the first generation in Family Firms

The general definition of corporate culture given in the previous sub-chapter will now be applied to the special organisational structure of family firms. Concerning family businesses, culture is the overlapping of family values and firm´s values.

The soul culture of the family firm is based on the personal characteristics of the founder generation and moreover on the experiences made during the development stage of the business (Online: Atan et al., 2013). Because of the dominant role of the first generation through successive stages and not only during the entrepreneurial period, the specific owner motivations and values are powerful cultural drivers. The founder family wants the business to develop in accordance with their personal idea of achievement, leading to an expression of uniqueness as for instance in leadership style. As a result the founder can be described as the "imperfect embodiment of company culture" (Online: Denison et al., 2004). Because the first generation build up their own business from the very beginning their sometimes contradictory values and opinions are reflected in the established companies. If this cultural uniqueness is understood and nurtured, it can be one of a firm´s greatest advantages. It actually is a duty of the founder to establish an organisation´s identity including its core beliefs, purpose and vision, otherwise the employees and the management board develop no deeper connectedness to the company. The aforementioned connection also to standards of behaviour and time-tested core values is established by the personal involvement of the first generation and the shared identities (Online: Denison et al., 2004). This consciousness of the necessity of a positive culture and a good working atmosphere lead to eventual success.

But it became apparent that large family businesses frequently ignore their greatest strength. "Retaining a connectedness to the past and simultaneously adapting and living the founders´ vision is a tremendous and underexploited asset in family firms." (Online: Denison et al., 2004). Therefore the culture established by the founder plays an important role in ascertaining whether the company continues beyond the first generation (Online: Dyer, 1988). As last-mentioned the endurance of values is an important topic concerning the transfer of a business to the next generation. The owning family transmits values very early, often before they consciously realise. The entrepreneur couple teaches values mainly by living them which has the positive effect that the possible successor often sees given aspects of a company´s culture as self-evident (Aronoff et al., 2011, P. 45).

Referring back to the founder of the family business helps understand the importance of his or her influence on the embedded culture but it should be noted that a culture is dynamic and it evolves through discursive processes involving division and difference and in relationships (Online: Fletcher, 2012).

3.3 Family-friendly staffing policy as a competitive advantage

The behaviour of supervisors is often based on the corporate culture of the company which influences both the level of work-family conflict and the resulting development of family-friendly policies. The latter term lacks a precise definition, it may be "understood as a shorthand for describing the growing variety of policies and programs that organisations are introducing with the aim of facilitating the ability of employees to fulfill their family-based responsibilities" (Online: Rosin, 2013). Companies work with different policies including leave entitlements (career break, parental leave), financial assistance (maternity pay, child care), employees´ hours of work (part-time, flex-time, job sharing) concerning several particular responsibilities, for instance elder care or children (Online: Scheibl, 1998).

There are many examples of firms who have profited from implementing those practices and policies in terms of increasing productivity and employee morale and reducing turnover. For instance by working with work-life policies such as post maternity leave arrangements, day care centers and furthermore, a higher rate of women returning to work after having a child is reported. Moreover backup childcare programs, extensive leave arrangements and other possibilities as mentioned before to support employees lead to a higher level of perceived organisational performance and at the same time meet turnover and fluctuation concerns of the management board (Online: Poelmans, 2004, P. 412). The latter is reflected by the statement of General Mills CEO Steve Sanger:

"It´s far better outcome for someone (in whom the company has invested in recruiting and development) to take a leave than to lose someone who could make a contribution not just next month but 15 or 20 years from now" (Online: Poelmans, 2004, P. 412)

It implies a notion of synergy in the way that family-friendly staffing policy may present benefits both for the family life and for the business. For instance the absenteeism and stress is reduced, and an increased satisfaction, commitment and productivity can be noticed which is beneficial for the company. Moreover a recent study gave evidence that businesses which demonstrate a commitment to work-life balance of their employees have a higher amenity to working parents. 59% of parents in this study reported that the presence of family-friendly policies was an important factor to accept the job offer (Online: Rosin, 2013).

It is a necessity for companies to adapt to several changes due to a constantly shifting business environment. The *Unternehmensmonitore Familienfreundlichkeit* of the *Institut der Deutschen Wirtschaft* proved that stack up against the years of 2003, 2006 and 2009 an extensive increase of the importance plus the extension of family-oriented policy in German businesses were noticed (Gerlach, 2012, P. 11). Besides given a growing prevalence of single-parent and dual-income families, ignoring the work-family conflict of employees can be very risky for firms. Consequently, companies who are engaged with this topic and consciously try to form a supportive culture are establishing a sustainable and effective competitive advantage (Online: Poelmans, 2004, P. 426).

4. Methodology of empirical study

As it has been summarised in the former theoretical part of this thesis, there exist detailed literature concerning corporate culture, family businesses and gender specific leadership styles. The enquiry revealed that there exist some knowledge gaps which should be answered with the research question underlying this thesis. These gaps include the feminine imprint on the culture in family firms, the influence of female managers on family-friendly staffing policy, the attitudes of male successors concerning the existing culture and the sustainability of the mentioned corporate culture during a business succession. In order to fill these research gaps the present research question was developed which led to the creation of presumptions.

To be able to answer the work hypotheses underlying this study, the thesis benefits from empirical social research. The latter is usually perceived as a systematic ascertainment and interpretation of social aspects. The notion of systematic points to the use of specific rules within the empirical research (Atteslander, 2000, P. 5). In the following these rules and the consequently related approach of the underlying research in this thesis will be defined.

4.1 Exploratory research design

The selection of the research design is an important factor in empirical social research because the quality of results is dependent on the choice of the acquisition instrument. On the other side each research question requests its own special method of collecting data.

This thesis concentrates on the subjective view of specific persons in a defined environment, the family firm, which excludes a statistical sampling and consequently the quantitative research (Lamnek, 2005). In turn the qualitative research has less claim to test hypotheses but rather to generate them. The formulation of hypotheses and generation of theories is a typical discipline of qualitative social research (Mayring, 2010, P. 22). The latter is achieved by exploration, meaning an information collection as an extensive, penetrative ascertainment of the research field (Kromrey, 2000, P. 67). The information collection is important for studies where the research field is not really explored and only little literature exists on the specific topic. Especially interviews fulfill the criteria because allow a thorough analysis and traceability of interpretations, which are based on the transliterations (Lamnek, 2005, P. 329).

By means of work hypotheses and presumptions which do not meet the requirements of the hypotheses definition yet, the data should be investigated.

4.2 The research objective

As already mentioned in the introduction and the approach this thesis intends to investigate the gender specific imprint of the corporate culture in a family business and its sustainability during a generational transfer due to a business succession.

The first work hypothesis suggests that female managers, for instance the wife of the director of the family firm, have a higher and more specific influence on the culture of the company due to the already explored differences in leadership style of men and women. The specific influence on the

culture corresponds to the idea that women – due to their natural tendency to soft skills – want to create a good and efficient working atmosphere in which communication plays an important role, which is included in the second presumption. Moreover the third work hypothesis claims that female managers advocate family-friendly policies in their companies and are more likely the driving force for it than their male counterparts. Apart from this the fourth presumption is that the male successors of the company probably will act differently than their mothers and that they will be not so focused on the corporate culture as their mothers were.

This study offers an insight into family businesses, their corporate culture and the gendered role of leading women working in this businesses and the sustainability of what they have achieved consciously or unconsciously concerning family-friendly policies and culture itself. Therefore detailed literature review was executed about family firms and intergenerational successions, typical gender stereotypes, corporate culture and family-friendly policies. Secondly the interview as a method of empirical research was chosen to gain statements of three leading female managers of different companies and the three sons who will or already have inherited the business. Lastly the findings of the qualitative research were evaluated and new final hypotheses generated.

4.3 The Interviewee

The selection of the interviewee has an enormous importance in qualitative social research. To be able to get useable and significant statements in order to work on the research question it is necessary to set some standards for the selection of a suitable interviewee. Therefore the standard setting begins with the rough determination of the environment: The family firm. There is no consensus on a definition of a family business in the literature in general. As a result three criteria for choosing a company were established:

    1. Family ownership and control with a female leading manager (wife of the CEO/ company founder) or a female CEO

    2. The intention to transfer the business to the next generation

    3. More specifically a transfer to a male successor

The aim of this was to ensure that the firms to be studied are characterized by high family involvement in governance and management, as well as in the definition of the company´s corporate culture and vision. More specifically a high involvement of the wife of the CEO or of a female CEO herself.

As already explained in chapter 1.2 Andreas Schulte-Hemming, executive member of the management board of HeurekaNet, facilitated the contact to the three chosen family firms in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. These firms were assigned code names, as well as the female managers and the corresponding successors, the sons working in the company, to affirm the anonymity.

5. Results of the empirical study

After the short explanation of the methodology which is used in the discussed thesis the results of the interviews can be presented. As mentioned before the qualitative interview was chosen to generate hypotheses after having confirmed or not confirmed the predefined presumptions. Therefore the results of the empirical study represent a scope of attitudes and positions which can be used to determine more specific and scientific hypotheses. In the following the results of the interviews and the conducted empirical social research are summarised based on the constructed evaluation table. The latter is based on the formulated presumptions made in the beginning of this study.

5.1 The Corporate Culture and its Sustainability from the viewpoint of the female general managers

To start with, the attitudes concerning corporate culture and how it is executed in their corresponding business will be examined. It is about analysing the way the female managers describe the culture and if there are gender-specific imprints in a certain manner.

The interview with Frau M was the longest one concerning the aspect of time. In the region of Münsterland she is well-known as a business woman who sets a high value on a good corporate culture in businesses and promotes these aspects to improve the working atmosphere. For her, culture is a position which should be embodied and lived by the whole company, based on reliance, trust and appreciation. She is conscious about the importance of being a role model for employees in order to exemplify these values by one´s own behaviour.

In turn Frau L is aware of the work climate in their business but is not as involved in processes which could change or improve certain issues of the culture. All three companies execute the concept of an open door to be addressable when problems occur, even private ones. But Frau L describes that it is the normal case to discuss issues first within the departments. Thereby the leadership style is open but at the same time structured and the communication is slightly hierarchical from one level to the next. As well as Frau P, Frau L acknowledges that time and sometimes financial facilities are needed to improve the culture. Moreover it is a question of willingness to be engaged with this topic.

Frau P needed to cope with other problems since she inherited the business. It was a male dominated, paternalistic culture, operated by a management which could not accept a women as a superior. This was based on the old role models which made it difficult for her to change the culture to a more open-minded and cooperating one. As described in chapter 3.4 a paternalistic culture can succeed when the firm is small and the environment relatively stable. If the company grows the family business must often develop a new culture with a different bias of management. This happened in company 3. Due to the leadership style of Frau P and the ongoing growth of the business it was necessary for her to change the former culture. She was dependent on an open communication and cooperation and succeeded in seeing the employees as trustworthy by giving them responsibility and authority. This process led to a laissez-faire culture, which has some aspects in common with the paternalistic style but is more openly structured with a focus on the competencies of the staff by giving them more responsibility. She decided to establish a management board with 3 directors, one of them was Herr P. All decisions were made together. This collaboration is typical for a laissez-faire culture. It is about sharing responsibility and not concentrating on one charismatic person who is the CEO.

The latter was the case in company 1 whereby the former CEO, the father of Herr M, was described as an all-rounder, doing everything on his own because he was able to do so. Therefore it was more a paternalistic culture but due to the transfer to Herr M, the management structure is changing by distributing responsibility on the different levels and sharing it in the top management. Hence not only one person is responsible and liable for everything. But this is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Also in company 2 the statements of Frau L and Herr L led to the assumption that a changing process takes place due to some aspects of the leadership style. The succession is not yet fully conducted but it can be supposed that the family firm will also adopt a form of a laissez-faire culture in order to stabilize the company for the future.

These cultural patterns are the core of any culture and create a unique belief system. By changing the pattern consciously or unconsciously the top management is able to promote specific attitudes or to show that they are willing to conduct improvements.

After analysing the existing cultures in the three enterprises the attitudes concerning family-friendliness in the businesses of the three leading female managers will be examined.

In general it can be put to record that all of them explained that family related issues and corresponding support of the job-holder is an important factor of their philosophy. As described before Frau M intends to see the whole person with their needs and problems and not only the working employee. Consequently the familiar situation back at home needs to be considered and individual solutions should help support family structures, referring to the assumption that balanced parents perform better at work as well as at home. In an interview for an initiative called "Familienfreundlicher Arbeitgeber" founded by the Bertelsmann Stiftung, Frau M explained a major reason for conducting these policies:

„Wir fördern familienfreundliche Arbeitsbedingungen, weil nur Kinder, die ein harmonisches Familienleben genießen können, sich zu verantwortungsbewussten Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern von morgen entwickeln werden." (Online: Bertelsmann Stiftung – Familienfreundlicher Arbeitgeber, n.d.)

The family-friendliness of the company is also an important factor for Frau L, according to the notion that destinies of employees always have an impact on the company. She is aware of the need to be flexible and supportive as an employer, for instance by offering individual agreements and solutions.

Also Frau P has the same opinion as the other two female managers and offers different possibilities for young parents or even a support for employees who have elder relatives to care for. Probably a major factor influencing her attitudes of family-friendliness in her business is what she had experienced herself during the first years after she took over the business. It was her task to combine the upbringing of her three little sons and the successful continuation of the business. Due to this double burden she acknowledges the importance of a flexible and supporting employer. Moreover it is easier to concentrate on both responsibilities when at ease because of the assured support of the employer.

Hence it can be summarized that the female leading managers have a focus on family-friendliness in their businesses and that sometimes it is related to their own experiences concerning Work-Life Balance, owing to the fact that all of them had little children when they entered the family-firm. This finding corresponds to the third work hypothesis that underly the discussed thesis. It will be compared to the attitudes of their male successors in the next chapter.

Furthermore another interesting point was dissected: it is possible to deal consciously or unconsciously with family-friendliness in the firm. It means that family-friendly policies are sometimes conducted obviously and more concrete by offering home offices, flexible working time and the awareness of possible problems or improvements. The former finding was made in the cases of company 1 and 3, more precisely taking into account the statements of Frau P and Frau M. Both advocate family-friendliness officially, for instance through the participation in different certification processes or the co-creation of a citizen cooperative to cope with the rising problem of an elderly-population in need of care. In turn Frau L concerns herself more unknowingly with this issue, which does not mean that she is less interested in the topic or thinks it is less important. It is best described as a more unconscious way of handling issues relate to the culture in general or family-friendly policies. Hence family-friendliness is rather an implicitness due to which the firm should behave. To be more concrete: it belongs to the company´s responsibility for the staff.

As mentioned before the three business women were asked to estimate their own impact on the corporate culture in their family firms. The result is that all three leading female managers revealed that they think they had a major influence on the constitution of corporate culture in their companies, which confirms the first presumption. This can be concluded from the statements of the interviewee. Frau M, to begin with, believes that she had a significant effect on the culture, due to her own experience that a good togetherness leads to motivation and success. In addition this declaration approves the third presumption that women often promote social aspects in working environments, such as a good Work-Life Balance, because of their own experiences in the past. Moreover she stated that she had some important ideas to support the employees and simultaneously improve the work climate which her husband implemented, but he would not have thought about it without her impulsion. She already contemplated about a reason for this and came to the result that women sometimes use a different way of thinking compared to men. Furthermore she argued that women imply rather a social and emotional approach and try to put themselves in a person´s position more often which corresponds to the second work hypothesis.

The situation of Frau P is the most significant one, because she even states that she has changed the male dominated culture in the family business and replaced it by a more open-minded and communicative culture. Moreover she acknowledges that it is formative if a woman is in a leading position of a company.

On the other hand Frau L included her husband in her answer arguing that they both shaped the culture as an equivalent entrepreneur couple. They built up the whole business and were able to form it as they thought it would benefit the firm and the staff. But Frau L noticed that she has a different role. As cited before she is like a "Mutter für alles hier im Unternehmen" (Interview L1: l. 8f.).

In summary, all these statements confirm two of the work hypotheses. These two are summarised in by stating that female managers in family firms have a high impact on the corporate culture and the work climate because they have some female attributes which support social thinking in another way than their male counterparts. It obviously has a significant impact on a company, if a women occupies in a leading position, and especially in family firms due to a high emotional commitment of the owning family. Whether it is Frau M and Frau P promoting their culture more consciously, or Frau L who unknowingly mentions specific attributes of female managers, even at the point when she includes her husband in her comment. Therefore in addition to their economic education and consolidated knowledge, the answers of the interview show a natural proneness to soft skills. They want to create a good and efficient working atmosphere in which communication plays an important role. The latter is grounded on the second presumption dealing with the female addiction to soft skills. Nonetheless it is important to apply the work hypotheses concerning the significance of communication and an

efficient working atmosphere as well on the answers of the successors, which will be conducted in detail in chapter 5.1.2.

Moreover the major issue of this thesis is whether a female imprinted corporate culture exist and if it endures a business transfer to a male successor. Therefore the business women were asked if they think the embedded culture is secure, hence that their sons will continue what they have established consciously or unconsciously in the past years. To examine this it necessary to have a look at their statements concerning the succession planning.

All three leading female managers stated that it is crucial to execute the transfer as an openly communicated process which takes time and preparation. Furthermore they mentioned to concentrate on competencies and the volition of possible candidates ensuring to choose the most suitable successor. The law of the first born son is too orthodox and they are aware of the importance of finding a skilled businessman or woman to ensure the continuity of the firm. All of them preferred an intergenerational transfer to the own children and announced to be sure of the continuation of the culture. This certainty is based on the fact that the three sons worked in the business for several years and the mothers hope that they got to know the firm well enough to be able to identify the corporate culture as an important factor for its success. Not even in a single a single case the sustainability of the culture was at anytime a point of discussion since the mothers hope, that their sons unknowingly adapt the values and the spirit of the company.

Frau M and Frau P announced to have tried to exemplify important values to the staff through their own behaviour. Of course their attitudes were also communicated within the family and the successors were probably raised in accordance with specific values which probably reflect basic values of the firm philosophy. Referring to the company, in none of the three cases aspects of corporate culture were put into writing. But Frau M and Frau P explain that it could be wise to have some focal points written down to be reminded of their social policies. The latter was done in company 3 by formulating leadership and social conventions, though not particular ones referring to cultural aspects. Frau P acknowledges that she cannot expect others to consciously adopt her behaviour. Furthermore she decided to participate in the advisory board after the transfer to still be informed about changes and to be able to impair if she thinks it is necessary. She was responsible for the employees for over 30 years and this feeling will probably never end. In turn Frau M and Frau L want to withdraw from business matters, therefore giving the new generation the total responsibility to ensure a successful culture.

All in all the female leading managers feel confident about the continuation of the corporate culture in their company, even without explicitly discussing this topic with the successor.

5.2 The Corporate Culture and its Sustainability from the viewpoint of the Successors

To be able to compare the attitudes of the mothers with the corresponding ones of the male successors, their viewpoints are analysed in the following and contrasted with the answers of the female managers.

All in all the successors described the corporate cultures in their firms in the same manner as their mothers did. But if all the interviews would be compared with each other, different stances on the culture in general can be identified.

The successors had the chance to get to know the company, their employees and the long-term objectives over the years, which led to an understanding of the basic vision of the firm. Their parents were in a different position: they established the company or joined it when it was a small enterprise and then built up fast-growing and successful businesses. Hence they started with a small number of employees, with less responsibility and consequently had the chance to evolve into respectable and skilled leaders due to their experience. In contrast the successors had the opportunity to familiarize with the firm´s organizational structure and how it operates. But the major difference is that they were not part of the development process of the culture. The predecessors promoted this process, shaped the culture and internalized it, whereas the sons joint the business as it was already successful including an existing culture which their parents or the mother exemplify.

It can be suggested that for some small-medium enterprises corporate culture is a scientific expression which is not usually used during their everyday life, rather than a topic of discussion. Herr L explains that in company 2 culture is nothing that is planned but rather a permanent development. It is a process of selection and proceeding of unimportant and important aspects – specific behaviours which proved to be proper and advantageous. Therefore a conscious contemplation of the culture does not really exist. The latter is the case in company 2, whereby Herr L and his mother exemplify their business culture by living it, without knowingly thinking about what their intentions are. They do not devote themselves to the term corporate culture, but rather concentrate on a good working climate and atmosphere without consciously shaping it. Therefore the culture can be described as an implicitness. Something which always ´resonates´ in their actions, or more precisely: is reflected in their behaviour. In some respects all interviewee act in this manner, but Frau M, Frau P and Herr P do it more consciously by thinking about improvements, the vision and philosophy.

As mentioned before, the culture and the working climate as described by the successors are pretty alike to the formulations of their mothers, though sometimes more or less detailed. Owing to the question whether cultural improvements are planned for the future, Herr M and Herr L answered that they did not yet think about possible changes whereas Herr P already has an objective he wants to achieve - the introduction of the social fund to financially support his employees if a child is born. The latter objective already belongs to the topic of family-friendliness which is an important issue in all three companies.

The successors describe their firms as family-friendly and open-minded concerning private issues of employees - offering individual solutions, flexible working hours and further more. Though Herr L emphasizes that he never consciously considered the firm to be family-friendly, but rather understands it as a matter of course belonging to the base of a successful business. In turn Herr P explains that his mother showed him how important it is to knowingly deal with this topic to be able to continuously improve the staffing policy concerning family-related issues. The significance of these family-friendly policies is acknowledged and emphasized by Herr M, but he is not as engaged as his mother with this issue, as well as concerning the corporate culture in general. This aspect will be specified in the next paragraph. In conclusion in two of the three cases the female leading managers have a stronger focus on family-friendliness in their firm compared to their sons, which confirms the third presumption.

As previously mentioned, the female leading managers believe they had a major influence on the culture in their firm. They built up the business together with their husbands or even alone. The question is whether their sons have noticed what their mothers have done over decades to establish and foster a good corporate culture. In order to figure this out, the male successors were asked to describe the influence of their mothers on the existing culture. The interesting result is shown in three different answers.

In the case of company 1 Senior M had the operative control of the company until Herr M took over. During the interview Herr M reiteratively explained that his father was the "Unternehmenslenker" (Evaluation Table of the Interview: M2) and he had the most significant impact on the culture. Herr M acknowledged that his mother also influenced it, but not in the way his father did. This stands in contrast to the statements of his mother. Of course they shaped the culture together, but she emphasizes that sometimes she gave her husband important stimuli in order to improve specific aspects of the culture or to implement new ideas. Due to the fact that Frau M did not occupy the official operative role of the CEO, she probably had a little bit more time to promote soft factors in the business. To be more precise, it was one of her tasks to create a good work climate. This important fact was described by her son with the expression of her occupying a motherly role. His focus on Senior M and hence his attribution of the formation of the corporate culture to his father led to the establishment of a new hypothesis. If a male predecessor was the head of the family firm before it was transferred to the son, the male successors feel not confident about the influence of their mothers on the corporate culture. The father is rather a role model, the female manager is ascribed the gender typical motherly role. The focus of the male successor is therefore his male predecessor.

In comparison the male successor of company 3 has a female predecessor, without a husband or another man having equal operative control. Hence Herr P´s role model was his mother, acknowledging that she had built up and developed the business on her own. The interview has shown that Herr P is more engaged in the topic of corporate culture compared to the other male interviewee. This led to the formation of a continuative hypothesis of the previous one: If the female predecessor attaches great importance to the culture of the firm, the male successor adopts this attitude, because he knows that she had shaped the whole culture which helped generate a successful business. Moreover Herr P addresses the differences of male and female leadership by announcing that men are naturally more severe, dominant and rough. Hence his mother had changed the culture through a softer and more feminine leadership style.

In contrast the last interviewee, Herr L, was not as straight as Herr M or Herr P concerning the influence of his mother on the culture which probably can be attributed to the unconsciously dealing with the issue of culture. The aforementioned expression of a motherly role was also used by Herr L in terms of explaining the influence of his mother on the good climate in the business. In addition he describes her role as caring and always being receptive to problems of the employees. This description includes attributes which are often ascribed to female managers and it hence confirms the second presumption, that women have a natural predisposition to soft skills. The latter presumption also implies the female intention to create a good and efficient working atmosphere in which communication plays an important role. But the interviews have shown that this part of the work hypothesis can also be ascribed to the male successors. During their work experience in the family firm, all successors noticed, that communication is of major importance to be economically successful. Consequently the second presumption needs to be paraphrased in order to serve the new findings.

In conclusion Herr M did not really associate the corporate culture with the involvement of his mother, whereas Herr P emphasized that his mother has shaped the culture by 100%. Herr L is not sure of the term corporate culture itself but describes the leadership style of his mother by using feminine attributes, as all of them did.

At last the most important aspect will be analysed: the view of the successors on the sustainability of the corporate culture in their family firm. To be able to do conduct the analysis, some issues concerning the succession planning and the responsibility transfer narrated by the sons will be associated with the perceptions of their mothers.

As described in the previous chapter, the culture and structure of company 1 is evolving into a laissez-faire pattern, owing to the breakdown of responsibilities on each level and the reorganisation from an all-rounder CEO to a team of skilled managers with adequate competencies in terms of a collective liability. This process was fostered by the succeeding generation in form of Herr M.

Generational transfers of businesses often imply a slight change of the organizational structure which is most of the time necessary to carry on the firm and to stay competitive in the market. In all three cases some changes are planned or already have been executed during the process of succession. It turned out that these changes need to be communicated to the staff. Moreover the intention of a transfer of the business to the son has to be announced at an early stage.

In addition the three interviewee attach importance to a familiarization time of a few years in the firm with a transition to a dual leadership with the former CEO. In this way the vision, mission and objectives should be conveyed naturally to the next generation, in order to ensure the sustainability of these values. Therefore the corporate culture also needs to be internalized over the years to be able to continue the firm with its philosophy for the next decades. This internalization is probably the major point for the sustainability of the existing culture. As their mothers the successors commented that the assurance of the culture including family-friendly policies was never an issue of discussion between them and the retiring generation. Nonetheless as aforementioned the female managers are confident about the continuation of what they have achieved, constituting it with the same explanation: They hope their sons have consciously or unconsciously noticed which elements are key to the existing culture and use this knowledge to promote these elements in the future. Consequently the predecessors do not know unerringly that the culture will stay the same.

Therefore the internalization of the corporate culture is the most important but also the awareness of the necessity to promote the implied elements contribute to their sustainability. The latter finding is based on the attitude of Herr P. He expresses directly his intention to ensure the culture his mother has implemented and that he knows he has to resumes a huge task accompanied by a high responsibility. Moreover he explains that there is no coercion to do so, but rather that he internalized during the past years that a healthy work climate serves the whole enterprise. He continues by stating that his mother proved over the last 30 years that their culture is essential for economic success and hence benefits the employee.

All in all the three successors will proceed the existing corporate culture, whether executing it consciously or unconsciously.

6. Discussion of the Own Analysis

After analysing the interviews concerning the research question and thereby the developed presumptions, the results will be summarized in the following paragraphs.

The interviews with the female managers, who occupy different positions and responsibilities in their family firms, have shown that they have a major influence on the corporate culture. Moreover it can be assumed that this behaviour refers to feminine attributes which foster social thinking in a different manner than compared to their male counterparts. This result does not mean that the male successors or in general male managers do not deal with the cultural aspect in the companies, but often women promote it in a more unconscious way because it is their disposition. Nonetheless it is important not to forget that this thesis is based on six interviews, 3 with each sex, meaning that the data is not empirically significant yet. Therefore this thesis serves as a base for advanced qualitative and quantitative research.

Hence the first presumption was confirmed, implying that female managers have a high influence on the culture. In addition the special focus on family-friendly policies was confirmed as well by the statements that they know how difficult it is to combine family and the responsibilities of a job. Due to these own experiences they promote family-friendliness in their firms in order to support the employees which leads to a good working atmosphere as it was stated in the third work hypothesis.

Besides, the descriptions formulated by the sons referring to their mothers included attributes which are often ascribed to female managers, as for example occupying a motherly and caring role, and the answers of the business women themselves approve a natural addiction to soft skills as well. They want to create a good working climate and an efficient communication. But the statements of the interviewee have shown that this part of the work hypothesis can also be ascribed to the male successors. Consequently the second presumption needs to be paraphrased by including the male successors and their intention to foster the same healthy working atmosphere as their mothers would do, in order to cope with the findings.

Apart from these results the appraisal of the fourth presumption led to the formulation of two new hypotheses due to the analysis of the different attitudes. The former fourth presumption implied that the male successors will probably act differently from their mothers and they will not be as focused on the corporate culture as their mothers are. The analysis has shown that this assumption needs to be précised by elaborating two new hypotheses. The first suggests that if a male predecessor was the head of the family firm before it was transferred to the son, the male successors do not feel confident about the influence of their mothers on the corporate culture. It is grounded on the conception to see the father as a role model, because he is the head of the company, whereby the female manager is ascribed the gender typical motherly role. Therefore the focus of the male successor is his male predecessor. This result led to the formation of a continuative hypothesis whereby the predecessor is a women. It therefore consists of the assumption that if the female predecessor attaches great importance to the culture of the firm, the male successor adopts this attitude, because he knows that she had shaped the whole culture which helped to generate a successful business.

In summary the second and fourth presumption were paraphrased and even new hypotheses were developed in order to construct a basic knowledge of this complex topic. The latter is the major function of qualitative research. The present findings in form of a collection of different hypotheses should be investigated in further research. Hence the first and third presumption, the paraphrased second one and the two new hypotheses grounded on the fourth presumption constitute the results

field. Therefore these consolidated assumptions are the foundation for conducting quantitative research to get significant data.

7. Conclusion and prospects

The present Bachelor Thesis intended to investigate the gender specific imprint of the corporate culture in a family business and its sustainability during a generational transfer due to a business succession. Therefore this study offers an insight into family firms, their corporate culture and moreover on the gendered role of leading women working in these businesses and the sustainability of what they have achieved consciously or unconsciously concerning family-friendly policies and the culture itself. It was investigated by means of qualitative social research in family-owned and managed companies which plan or already have executed a generational transfer from an entrepreneur couple or a female director to a male successor.

In conclusion this thesis generated and finalized hypotheses which are based on the results of the conducted interviews. The analysis has shown that the corporate culture is not necessarily something which is within reach or can be explained in detail. Therefore the perception of the existing culture is of crucial importance. It is about the internalization of cultural attributes including attitudes towards the employees or the customer. Hence the acknowledgement of the culture´s power to influence the internal atmosphere and the image of the business. Only if the succeeding generation has internalized the entity a of corporate culture, the sustainability is warranted. For this reason the understanding of the culture does not have to be only striking or superficial – it needs to be appreciated. Therefore the internalization of the corporate culture is most important but also the awareness of the necessity to promote and care of the implied elements contribute to the sustainability.

Moreover the predecessors have to confide the next generation, even though they have a different education and probably a distinctive bond to the family firm compared to their children. In addition the successors need to be fully aware of their responsibility and have to discern the social and economical benefits of a healthy corporate culture.

It can be concluded that the female managers have a high influence on the corporate culture due to their natural addiction to soft skills. They want to ensure this imprinted culture in which they played a fundamental role. But as aforementioned the sustainability can only be ensured if the male successors internalized the attributes of the culture. They do not refer a high impact on the culture to their mothers if their fathers were the former directors. Only if a female CEO was the direct superior, a male predecessor ascribes her the formation of the culture.

These and the other hypotheses developed and finalized during the evaluation of the study could be used to conduct further research which leads to the prospects based on this thesis.

In order to execute advanced qualitative analysis the use of the same type of field manual as developed due to the present thesis is recommended. Then conduct interviews in other family firms which fulfill the compiled criteria. After performing these interviews results have to be processed, compared to the generated hypotheses based on this study and restated, if necessary. These consolidated assumptions facilitate the following quantitative research. The latter could be executed with detailed questionnaires which would be distributed to a large number of suitable family firms. After analysing the generated empirical data, the results will lead to a conclusion on how the corporate culture in family firms is affected by the behaviour of female leading managers and if a consciousness about this topic exist. Moreover the assumption whether the male successors will act differently compared to their mothers after the succession could be either confirmed or redrafted.

Furthermore the sustainability of the implemented culture could be investigated by means of a later conducted interview or questionnaire in the same businesses, after the son had worked a few years as

the head of the company. Subsequently relevant questions could be answered, for instance whether something has changed concerning the culture after the business transfer or if problems occurred due to a different handling of situations by the young generation. In addition an employee attitude survey could be performed to get an overview of possible changes of the culture and the corresponding family-friendly policies, which can be referred to the successor. Moreover their general satisfaction with the process of the business transfer could be examined.

Therefore the thesis developed hypotheses which could be used for further research and these results could help family firms to get aware of possible problems and challenges during a business succession to the next generation. Of course the impact of female managers on the corporate culture is different in each company, but therefore the mentioned questionnaires could figure that out in order to infer from it the right conclusions.

Whether the female imprinted corporate cultures endure over time concerning these three cases, can only be examined in a few years. Slight changes would be natural due to the changing market situations and the adaption of the businesses to these shifts. In summary the corporate culture is an important success factor of family firms and the strong emotional bonds help the female managers to communicate their visions to the succeeding generation.

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