Understanding the adoption of sustainable development practices in family businesses: An exploratory case study

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Abstract

The topic of sustainable development is becoming increasingly important for companies, both at the strategic and managerial levels, with important implications for reporting and disclosure. This is also true for family businesses, which represent the most common form of business organization in the world economy. This article aims to explore the influence of the high and long-standing family involvement in ownership and management on the adoption of sustainable development practices. To this aim, a qualitative methodology was employed through an in-depth single case study of a large family business located in central Italy.

The findings highlight the importance of a potential conflict of interest that may arise in family businesses, namely conflict between different generations of the same family. The decision-making process is typically centralized in such firms, and it is strongly influenced by the strategic orientation of the family members in control, whose approach toward sustainability is often shaped by generational traits such as age or tenure in their role. In the case study, the first-generation entrepreneur prioritized economic and financial sustainability, while the second generation demonstrated a greater focus on reputation management and responsiveness to stakeholder demands.

The case study also indicates that firm size facilitates the adoption of sustainable development practices, as large family businesses have greater financial capacity to invest in social and environmental initiatives as well as to engage external consultants to support the relative implementation process and the internal capacity building on sustainability-related issues.

Keywords: Family Business, Sustainable Development, Sustainability Disclosure, Exploratory Case Study

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1. Introduction

Sustainability, as a concept, has been defined in many different ways over time. In a broad sense, it is rooted in the principle of meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own, as stated in the Brundtland Report (United Nations, 1987). This principle underscores the importance of integrating sustainability into the strategic and operational frameworks of organizations (Hristov *et al.*, 2022). For this reason, the sustainable development practices, which encompasses the implementation, measurement, and communication of initiatives aimed at addressing environmental, social and economic challenges, has gained significant attention from scholars and professionals (Garzella and Capurro, 2024; Rupo *et al.*, 2024; Balluchi *et al.*, 2024).

The growing focus on sustainability is evidenced by various global initiatives such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015) and the European Union's Green Deal (European Commission, 2019). The latter also led to the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), EU Directive n. 2022/2464, which requires companies above a certain size to disclose information on the environmental and social impact of their activities and on risks and opportunities for the companies arising from social and environmental issues, according to a double materiality approach including both impact materiality (inside-out) and financial materiality (outside-in).

Although on February 26, 2025, the European Commission initiated a simplification process through the 'Omnibus' package, intended to reduce compliance complexity and alleviate excessive burdens on businesses, the emphasis on sustainability remains substantive, as regulatory attention is specifically focused on those companies whose activities have the most significant environmental and social impacts.

Sustainable development practices are critical for all types of organizations, both public and private (Marchi, 2020). However, family businesses (FBs) hold particular relevance due to their predominant role in the global economy, representing the most common form of business organization worldwide (La Porta *et al.*, 1999; D'Onza, 2017; Rovelli *et al.*, 2022). In Italy, for instance, FBs constitute approximately 85% of all companies, according to the 2022 AUB Observatory report by AIDAF (Italian Association of Family Businesses) of Unicredit bank and Bocconi University.

The context of FBs has been recognized in the literature as a distinct field of research due to the heterogeneity of the organizations involved (Corbetta, 1995; Daspit *et al.*, 2021). This characteristic largely stems from the fact that the family and the business are not separate entities, but rather interdependent subsystems that mutually influence each other (Tagiuri and Davis, 1996; McCollom, 1988; Howorth and Ali, 2001). The specific configuration of this interconnection is reflected in the differences observed among FBs in terms of values, goals and behaviors, as well as in the degree of family involvement in ownership, board membership, management, and generational dynamics, to name a few examples, as documented by numerous studies over the years (Santulli *et al.*, 2019; Memili and Dibrell, 2018; Jaskiewicz and Dyer, 2017; Gómez-Mejía *et al.*, 2007).

Such heterogeneity is likely to underlie the conflicting results found in existing literature regarding the influence of the family nature of the business on the adoption of sustainability practices. To clarify this complexity, it is crucial to understand the impact of individual key factors of heterogeneity, thereby enhancing the precision of empirical studies and supporting more robust theory development (Chua *et al.*, 2012). Recent studies suggest that the multiple dimensions of heterogeneity can be classified according to two main criteria, namely the family-centered focus, more versus less centered, and temporal nature, shorter versus longer term (Daspit *et al.*, 2021). This article focuses on the motivational drivers that lead a highly family-centered business, with a long-standing market presence, to adopt sustainability practices, highlighting the role of this specific factor - long-term family-centered involvement in both ownership and management - and thus helping to shed light on the divergent findings in the literature.

The research field concerning large FBs with high family involvement in ownership and management remains underexplored, since most studies focus on small-medium FBs; for this reason, this study analyzes a large unlisted FB, as the few studies focused on large ones often refer to listed companies, usually characterized by the separation of ownership and control.

The research questions emerging from the identified gaps in the literature, namely lack of clarity of results and poor coverage of this specific research area, are:

- What are the motivational drivers leading large, highly family-centered businesses to adopt sustainability practices?
- How does long-term family involvement in ownership and management influence these drivers?

This article seeks to contribute to answering these questions through an exploratory case study of a large Italian FB that is a market leader in the furniture industry.

The structure of this article is as follows: Section 2 reviews the scientific literature on the topic, Section 3 describes the research context and methodology, Section 4 presents the findings from the case study, and Section 5 concludes with discussion, implications and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

In recent years several studies addressed some profiles of the environmental behavior of FBs, operating in different sectors and countries, but they show two main divergent findings regarding the influence of family ownership and family involvement in management on the adoption and realization of sustainable development activities and practices (Memili *et al.*, 2017; Doluca *et al.*, 2018; Sun *et al.*, 2024).

On the one hand, these characteristics are often associated with a stronger commitment to socio-environmental goals, driven by a desire to preserve the reputation and image of both the business and the family, as well as to ensure enterprise's longevity for future generations (Dyer and Whetten, 2006; Sharma and Sharma, 2011; Campopiano *et al.*, 2014; De Massis *et al.*, 2014). This perspective aligns with the socio-emotional wealth (SEW) framework, which emphasizes how the nonfinancial aspects of a business can meet the family's affective needs (Berrone *et al.*, 2010). SEW framework suggests that FBs exhibit a strong motivation to pursue non-economic objectives and maintain legitimacy within the local community, which may drive them toward proactive sustainability efforts (Le Breton-Miller and Miller, 2016; Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 2011). For example, when family employees hold executive positions, the desire of preserving and enhancing their social-emotional wealth may push them to take financially risky decisions of social-environmental initiatives (Garengo and Bititci, 2007; Hristov *et al.*, 2022). In contrast, when external investors are incorporated into the ownership structure and non-family executives occupy key management positions, research suggests a tendency toward short-term profit maximization (Le Breton-Miller and Miller, 2016; Bingham *et al.*, 2011; Santos *et al.*, 2016). This inclination may stem from the focus of new investors on purely economic objectives, as well as the lack of succession opportunities for non-family managers within the company. Consequently, a gap may emerge between the business's financial goals and the family's non-economic values, potentially hindering the development of long-term sustainability strategies and limiting the allocation of resources to socio-environmental initiatives (Anderson and Reeb, 2004; Bingham *et al.*, 2011).

On the other hand, some studies have pointed out that family managers may act opportunistically to prioritize their personal interests or those of their own family, potentially leading to both intra and inter-family conflicts, i.e., between different generations or members of the same family (Schulze *et al.*, 2001). Such opportunistic behavior also often causes conflicts among family managers regarding the allocation and prioritization of resources (Le Breton-Miller and Miller, 2016). Moreover, in FBs there may be a tendency to recruit family employees as family members, regardless of meritocratic considerations (Chrisman *et al.*, 2014; Kidwell *et al.*, 2012). This may lead to a deficiency of professionalism in decision making, as these family employees may exhibit a preference for preserving financial resources within their control, seeking to avoid the financial risks associated with investing in socio-environmental activities (Kim *et al.*, 2016, Le Breton-Miller and Miller, 2016). Both of these dynamics can undermine the motivation to pursue sustainable development practices (Campopiano *et al.*, 2014; Le Breton-Miller and Miller, 2016). In addition, it has been recognized that the absence of typical agency costs (i.e., conflicts of interest between owners and managers) reduces the motivation to adopt formal reporting tools and thus also sustainability reporting (Speckbacher and Wentges, 2012; Moilanen, 2008; Stergiou *et al.*, 2013). Conversely, according to Connelly *et al.* (2010), external investors included as a part of the ownership or involved in management are more inclined to pursue long-term sustainability strategies rather than prioritize short-term financial goals. In these cases, there may be a tendency to use a professional management system to improve long-term business performance and consequently a greater motivation to also disclose the sustainability initiatives adopted (Bushee, 2001).

In summary, the literature reveals conflicting findings regarding the role of family ownership and family involvement in management in the adoption of sustainability practices. These inconsistencies likely stem from the different configurations that the interconnection between the systems of family and business can assume, an issue that several theoretical frameworks have sought to explain, including SEW theory (Gomez-Mejia *et al.*, 2007), the three-circle model (Tagiuri and Davis, 1996), and systems theory (Davis *et al.*, 1997) among others. These configurations of FB interdependence represent a structural source of heterogeneity that is reflected in the diversity of strategies and behaviors observed across family firms, including those related to sustainability.

Moreover, the literature review highlights an additional gap, as the majority of studies on sustainability practices in FBs focus on small and medium-sized enterprises (Ferenhof *et al.*, 2014; Kotlar and De Massis, 2013;

De Massis and Kotlar, 2014). Studies dealing with large FBs are less frequent and these often refer to listed companies that, sometimes, are characterized by the separation of ownership and control (Jiang and Peng, 2011; Le Breton-Miller and Miller, 2006). In contrast, the analysis of large FBs characterized by both family ownership and control, especially referring to the sustainability issues, is rather limited. Furthermore, in larger FBs the often-remarkable availability of resources allows larger FBs to consider the opportunity to implement environmental and social initiative, exploiting the available human, technological and financial resources (Chrisman *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, it is in these larger companies that the voluntariness of prioritizing sustainability in strategic decisions by the management can be observed.

Table 1 - Some contradictory findings from the extant literature

Factor	**Impact**	**Motivation**	**Some related papers**
Absolute family ownership; Family involvement in managerial roles	Trigger	Concern to preserve the reputation and image of both business and family, and to transfer a well-reputed, sustainable business to future generations Interest to preserve socio-emotional wealth Attention to legitimacy within the community	Dyer and Whetten (2006) Sharma and Sharma (2011) Campopiano *et al.* (2014) De Massis *et al.* (2014) Berrone *et al.* (2010) Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2016) Garengo and Bititci (2007) Gomez -Mejia *et al.* (2011) Hristov *et al.*(2022)
	Barrier	Interest to preserve financial resources within family hands and to avoid possible financial risk of investing in socio-environmental activities Lack of professionalism in decision making, which leads to lesser availability of resources invested in socio-environmental activities Less motivation for the application of formal management tools	Chrisman *et al.* (2014) Kidwell *et al.* (2012) Kim *et al.* (2017) Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2016) Campopiano *et al.* (2014) Speckbacher and Wentges (2012) Moilanen (2008) Stergiou *et al.* (2013)

Outside investors in ownership; Non-family employees in executive positions	Trigger	Propensity to pursue long-term sustainability strategies instead of engaging in short-term profit maximization More intensive use of professional management systems and greater motivation to communicate the sustainable initiatives adopted	Connelly *et al.* (2010) Bushee (2001)
	Barrier	Inclination towards short-term profits that compresses the interest in investing resources in socio-environmental activities	Le Breton-Miller and Miller (2016) Bingham *et al.* (2011) Santos *et al.* (2016) Anderson and Reeb (2004)

This highlights the need for further qualitative research to deepen the understanding of the influence of family involvement in ownership and management on the adoption of sustainability practices in large FBs which, although less investigated in literature than smaller ones, are more affected by recent regulatory provisions on sustainability, such as the CSRD and recent proposal for its amendments.

3. Methodology and research setting

To investigate the phenomenon of the sustainability practices in large FBs, a case study methodology was adopted. It was deemed appropriate in light of the often-conflicting findings in the available literature on the topic, which predominantly examines small and medium-sized FBs. For these reasons, an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon was necessary by closely analyzing a single company (Yin, 2014). The case study offers a detailed understanding of managerial practices by linking scientific research to real-world company activities (Dal Mas *et al.*, 2022).

To address the research questions, a company was selected that met the following criteria: being a large FB with strong and long-standing family involvement in both ownership and management. With a turnover of 300 million euros and 750 employees, the company qualifies as a "large" enterprise, under the EU classification. Active for nearly 60 years, it is a leader in the furniture market at national level. The company is located in the Marche region of Italy. Both the industry and the geographic area in which the company operates are particularly significant and lend contextual relevance to the study. In fact, the Marche region is an important industrial district that makes a substantial part of Italian furniture production, a key sector of the "Made in Italy". In order to better understand the family's involvement in the business, a brief overview of the company's history is provided below.

Company background

The company was established in 1967 in a small town in the Marche region of Italy, through the initiative of two founding partners: a skilled carpenter and a craftsman who owned a local small business. The area where the company was founded was already an industrial district specializing in furniture production. Drawing on the region's strong manufacturing tradition, the firm evolved from a small entrepreneurial venture into a significantly sized enterprise within a few years.

From the outset, the company focused on customer satisfaction, offering an excellent quality-price ratio and fast, efficient after-sales services. These characteristics were supported by a lean organizational structure with flexible, non-formalized processes. The operational management was strongly influenced by the active involvement of the founding carpenter.

In 1974, following rapid expansion, the company became a joint-stock corporation. Two new shareholders joined the ownership structure, including the carpenter's brother-in-law, an accountant who would soon take on the role of CEO. During this phase, a new production facility was inaugurated to meet growing product demand, and a more extensive sales network was developed to cover the national market. In the early 1990s, the company's brand gained prominence and became one of the leading names in the sector.

The year 2003 marked a turning point: the founding carpenter and his brother-in-law (the CEO) acquired full ownership of the company, thereby securing its long-term future. This transition initiated the integration of the next generation into the organizational structure, signaling a strong commitment to continuity. One son of the founding carpenter and three sons of the CEO assumed important roles within the company. Among them, the carpenter's son and the eldest son of the CEO were identified as successors in management responsibilities, with one entrusted with the technical and production division, and the other with management control operations.

To date, the generational transition has not been fully completed, as first-generation members, particularly the CEO, continue to exercise control over the company. Nevertheless, there is a strong sense of familial cohesion, with the younger generation showing a deep connection to the current leadership and a shared commitment to the long-term continuity of the company.

Data collection

Data collection primarily involved face-to-face, semi-structured interviews, a widely used method in qualitative research due to its flexibility and ability to elicit detailed responses (Qu and Dumay, 2011). This method enables researchers to explore specific themes in depth while adapting to the interviewees' perspectives. The interviews, carried out in 2023, involved three key executives from two generations of the family: the CEO (a first-generation family member), the General Manager (CEO's son), and the Chief R&D Officer (CEO's nephew).

Questions, reported in appendix 1, were intentionally broad, leaving space for the interviewees to make spontaneous references to the more specific and relevant issues. Questions allowed exploring several topics, including the executives' perspectives on sustainable development practices, the importance of such practices to the company, the specific sustainability initiatives adopted, and the motivations for their implementation. Additionally, interviewees were asked about the perceived reputational benefits of the fulfillment and communication of sustainability initiatives, the relevance of implementation costs, and whether the company has sufficient internal resources for sustainability efforts or requires external consultants (specifying the activities for which external expertise is sought). The interviews were recorded, and all collected information was systematically organized by the authors into detailed reports, subsequently shared with the interviewees to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the contents.

Supplementary sources, such as the company's website and documents related to its environmental and social certifications were also consulted, to triangulate data and enhance the validity of the results. Indeed, these materials provided additional insights into the context and supported the findings derived from the interviews, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the company's sustainability practices.

4. Results

The initial set of questions addressed the importance attributed to sustainable development practices. The CEO appeared more focused on policies ensuring the company's long-term economic sustainability rather than environmental sustainability practices.

> *"During economic crises, companies prioritize survival, such as addressing declining consumption levels, and thus pay only marginal attention to environmental sustainability" (CEO).*

As regards the environmental perspective, the CEO believes that given the company's role in the supply chain, it cannot directly affect the sustainability level of the products. In fact, the company assembles components made by its suppliers, many of which are large enterprises consistently engaged in product innovation. As such, according to the CEO, these suppliers bear the primary responsibility for minimizing the environmental impact of the products. Whereas, for the social aspect, he appeared more interested in undertaking initiatives to support the community of reference. Of a not distant opinion was the General Manager, who emphasized that the company's resources and efforts should focus on factors that most significantly influence competitiveness, among which environmental sustainability plays a minor role.

> *"Currently, sustainability holds limited competitive value. The company should allocate the majority of its resources and efforts to other areas deemed more critical by its target market" (General Manager).*

The opinion of the Chief R&D Officer was different as he recognized the substantial importance of environmental sustainability, noting that consumers are becoming increasingly sensitive to environmental issues and financial institutions will progressively incorporate environmental sustainability practices into creditworthiness assessments of companies in the near future.

Interviewees were then asked to illustrate the most significant sustainable development practices adopted by the company and the motivations driving their implementation. The Chief R&D Officer highlighted the creation of a new corporate role in 2018, dedicated exclusively to product certifications, many of which pertain to environmental sustainability aspects. The aim was to systematize the processes necessary for obtaining environmental certifications, moving beyond a reactive approach dictated by market contingencies. According to the Chief R&D Officer, the introduction of this role marked a shift toward a more proactive stance on sustainability practices. Notably, the company was the first in its industry in Italy to achieve GREENGUARD Certification in 2020, which ensures low chemical emissions

(VOCs) in materials used, and among the first to obtain FSC certification in 2022, which guarantees the use of wood from responsibly managed forests. These certifications enhanced the company's competitiveness by enabling access to foreign markets otherwise inaccessible and adding value to its product offerings.

The General Manager underscored that the company holds ISO 14001 environmental certification, which has encouraged the establishment of objectives and action plans for reducing environmental impacts and the adoption of procedures for managing the most environmentally critical phases of the production process. Additionally, he emphasized that the company focuses on energy savings and the use of renewable energy, exemplified by the installation of a 40,800 m^2 photovoltaic system, which reduces approximately 13,870 tons of CO_2 annually. According to the General Manager, fiscal incentives and economic benefits (e.g., lower energy costs, reduced insurance premiums, etc.) played a significant role in driving the company's adoption of these initiatives, as did the need to comply with current regulations and avoid substantial penalties.

The CEO emphasized the company's social responsibility, by citing its contribution to the construction of a multifunctional center combining sports and cultural activities, aimed at fostering the personal growth of local youth. The company employs a workforce primarily residing in the area surrounding its main operational headquarters, and the CEO believes this initiative positively impacts the well-being of employees with children and, more broadly, the local community to which the company maintains strong ties.

A further series of questions explored the perceived reputational benefits of communicating environmental and social sustainability initiatives. Responses revealed differing perspectives among family members regarding the sources of competitive advantage and the role of sustainability communication in maintaining and enhancing such advantage. The CEO considered sustainability communication of limited value, arguing that being recognized as a sustainable company does not constitute a significant differentiator in the market. Since all competitors must comply with the same environmental standards, the CEO believed competition is centered on other dimensions deemed more relevant by consumers. The General Manager largely concurred but acknowledged the existence of a niche market more sensitive to sustainability issues, which could be attracted by the company's socio-environmental initiatives. In contrast, the Chief R&D Officer viewed sustainability communication as essential for maintaining competitive advantage, particularly against smaller companies unable to bear the high costs of obtaining environmental and social certifications such as ISO 14001 and ISO 45001.

> *"Our competitors are increasingly communicating their environmental and social initiatives. If we fail to do the same, we risk reputational damage. By prioritizing sustainability communication, we can also strengthen our competitive advantage over companies that cannot afford the costs of certifications, which enhance corporate image at both national and international levels" (Chief R&D Officer).*

Subsequently interviewees were asked about the significance of implementation costs as a barrier to adopting sustainable development practices and their alignment with expected benefits. The CEO expressed concerns that the additional costs of sustainability practices risk reducing the competitiveness of Italian and European companies, particularly compared to Chinese manufacturers, who are not subject to equivalent standards, for instance about the environmental impact of business activities.

> *"Companies compete in global markets, so sustainability regulations should be applied worldwide. Otherwise, the effect will further disadvantage Italian companies, which already face higher costs, such as wages" (CEO).*

The General Manager suggested that the implementation costs of sustainable development practices will be more justifiable only if consumers become sensitive enough to penalize companies that do not adopt sustainable behaviors by ceasing to purchase their products. Conversely, the Chief R&D Officer argued that mapping and analyzing business processes, required for implementing sustainability practices, can uncover inefficiencies, whose elimination generates significant cost savings and positively affects profitability. Moreover, investing in sustainable development practices can enhance efficiency by creating new revenue streams from sustainability-conscious customers. Thus, from the Chief R&D Officer's perspective, the implementation costs of sustainable practices can be offset by the benefits they generate.

Finally, the interviews explored whether the company has internal resources to fully manage the implementation of sustainability practices or would need to rely on external consultants. The CEO expressed a preference for delegating as much as possible the implementation of sustainability practices to external compliance experts already working with the company. The General Manager reiterated that the company had acquired substantial expertise through obtaining environmental and social certifications, and that continuous improvement will be ensured with the support of consultants. The Chief R&D Officer emphasized the crucial role of consultants in training internal staff to systematically manage the processes required for implementing sustainability practices.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The case study presented in this research offers interesting insights into the dynamics that can foster the adoption of sustainable development practices in large FBs. Specifically, the study focused on the effect of a key heterogeneity factor within FBs, that is strong and long-standing family involvement in both ownership and management. The findings indicate that the strategic orientation, including its approach to sustainability, is significantly shaped by the family members who hold control of the company. In this regard, the case study suggests the importance of a potential conflict of interest that may arise in FBs, namely conflict between different generations of the same family (Schulze *et al.*, 2001). Intergenerational differences on the competitive value of environmental and social sustainability can have a significant influence on the effective implementation of sustainable development practices. For example, in the company analyzed, while the leadership of the first generation of the family prioritizes long-term economic sustainability and compliance-oriented approaches, putting environmental sustainability on the back burner, the second generation places more attention on the reputational benefits of adopting and communicating sustainable practices, which could attract more sustainability-conscious consumers. These intergenerational discrepancies may become particularly relevant as long as the succession process is not fully completed, underscoring the importance of strategic vision of the family member in controlling sources of competitive advantage and, thus, determining the adoption of a reactive or proactive approach to sustainability.

This divergence in approach is also evident in how different generations perceive sustainability regulations and the associated reporting costs. Members of the second generation view regulatory compliance as a means to prevent image damage, which could arise either from falling behind competitors in sustainability communication or from incurring penalties for non-compliance. In contrast, the first-generation leadership, prioritizing economic sustainability, emphasizes that global competitive pressures and the disparity in environmental regulatory frameworks across regions pose significant challenges, especially for European companies, as they face higher compliance costs. These latter reflections recall the reasons that led the European Commission to propose the "Ominibus" package. In this regard, with the aim to boost competitiveness and unleash growth, the EU seems to want to turn back on the constraints to avoid companies from being stifled by excessive regulatory burdens. According to the European Commission, this could unlock investments and enable companies to embrace the transition to a sustainable economy in a more effective and pragmatic way, ultimately meeting climate and other sustainability goals.

Additionally, the case study highlights that the size of the FB plays an important role in the adoption of sustainable development practices, because naturally large FBs possess more resources to plan and implement certain social and environmental initiatives and, no less important, to systematically engage external compliance consultants; they can oversee the implementation process of sustainable development practices while simultaneously supporting and training internal staff in managing sustainability-related issues.

The practical implications of the study concern the opportunity to reflect on the existing body of knowledge on the adoption and communication of sustainable development practices in large FBs, from the perspective of the scholar and the practitioner involved in managing these companies. As for the former, the results can hopefully inform future theoretical and empirical studies on this topic, scholars may be encouraged to delve deeper into the key elements of this analysis, particularly the motivational drivers across generations, with a focus on cultural and psychological dimensions. As for the latter, practitioners can be encouraged to become more aware of the different drivers and barriers characterizing their management experience; by questioning more established practices, they can formulate more informed and effective decision-making processes.

The study’s limitation lies in its reliance on a single case, offering preliminary insights that warrant further exploration. Future research could extend this analysis to FBs of varying sectors across different geographical contexts, to assess how these factors influence the approach to sustainability. Moreover, a deeper examination of cultural factors – particularly generational characteristics, such as age or educational background – could provide valuable contributions to understanding the FBs approach toward sustainability.

This research underscores the complexity of sustainability in FBs and highlights the interplay between internal generational dynamics, external pressures, and strategic vision in shaping sustainable development practices.

Appendix

Questions of semi structured interviews

- How much importance do you attribute to corporate sustainable development practices?
- Which are the main sustainability activities and practices adopted by your firm?
- How are the perceived reputational benefits of communicating environmental and social sustainability initiatives?
- How significant are the implementation costs? Can they be considered barriers to adopt sustainable development practices? Are they aligned with expected benefits?
- Does the company have adequate resources to fully manage the implementation of sustainability practices? Does it need to rely on external consultants?

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