

Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Strategic Decision Processes in Family Enterprises

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Abstract

The proportion of FOBs is rather high in the world economy; however, the processes related to strategic decision making in such firms have not been thoroughly analyzed from the cross-cultural perspective. This study explores how culture, governance systems, and family influence strategy formulation within FOBs in five different cultural clusters, namely East Asia, South Asia, Western Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. This study uses a mixed methods research design combining the survey responses of 486 participants with the interviews of 42 executives of family businesses to propose a conceptual model connecting cultural orientation (collectivism and individualism) to strategy-related performance indicators such as long-range planning, conflict management, succession planning, innovations and stakeholder engagement. The findings indicate that there is greater inclination towards consensus-building in collectivist cultures whereas individualistic cultures show faster decision-making cycles which are not inclusive of a wider range of people. Governance reforms are positively moderated between cultural orientation and strategic performance in all clusters. This research develops an analytical framework of theoretical and empirical value, which enhances knowledge of FOB governance and provides insights that are useful to family business consultants, policy makers, and practitioners within different cultural settings. In particular, the study fills a critical research void in the family business comparative literature by synthesizing institutional theory and cultural dimensions theory into a single conceptual framework.

Keywords: Family-Owned Businesses; Strategic Decision-Making; Cross-Cultural Management; Governance; Collectivism; Succession Planning; Institutional Theory.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

It is a widely acknowledged fact that family businesses constitute the dominant form of organization in the business world, accounting for up to 70-90% of businesses worldwide, and significantly influence employment, GDP, and wealth generation (Bjuggren & Sund, 2001). From the artisanal ventures in South Asia to the multinational corporations in East Asia and the Middle East, family businesses are not only prevalent but are also organizationally unique. While other organizations are driven solely by commercial objectives, FOBs function at the confluence of kinship, power, and commerce, thus creating certain governance dilemmas for the firms (Arzubiaga et al., 2014). Due to the importance of family identity, relational trust, and

intergenerational wealth retention, decision-making within FOBs is distinctively different from professionally run organizations (Penney et al., 2019).

In recent years, there has been increasing academic research focusing on examining how FOBs make their decisions in an environment marked by uncertainty, competition, and complexity. The majority of these studies have been done in a single country setting, hence reducing the validity of the conclusions drawn from such research (Musso & Francioni, 2020). A cross-cultural comparison is not only an intellectual indulgence; it is an imperative for those who provide guidance to FOBs that work internationally or function within multicultural environments (Mireles-Medina et al., 2021). There are cultural dimensions such as individualism/collectivism, power distance, and long-term orientation that have proven to play a critical role in the way organizations behave; nevertheless, how these dimensions impact the strategic decision-making of the FOB remains uncharted territory (Feudjo et al., 2021).

In spite of their economic importance, very little research has been done into the effects that culture has on the process of making strategic decisions in FOBs through comparative and multi-cultural empirical studies. Most studies assume homogeneity of culture or focus only on Western Europe and North America (Shea, 2010). This oversight is important because decisions made in FOBs cannot be understood simply through financial and organizational lenses but have deep roots in cultural principles of authority, obligation, loyalty, and legacy. Without a culturally aware approach, decision models developed under different conditions might generate inaccurate recommendations for other circumstances (Distelberg & Schwarz, 2015). This issue is further aggravated by the increasing trend of globalization among family businesses that demands the leader to deal with contrasting cultural requirements simultaneously (Zakaria, 2019).

The primary focus of this research is on achieving four core objectives. To begin with, this research endeavors to discover and describe the prevailing patterns of strategic decisions within five different cultures of family businesses. Secondly, this study tries to measure the effect of governance reform on the link between culture and strategic results. Third, it attempts to construct a cross-cultural theoretical framework that incorporates the theories of institutionalism and culture dimensions. Finally, it aims to produce some guidelines on how governance can be designed within FOB settings, which include different cultures (Nnabuife et al., 2018).

Guiding the research is the set of research questions provided below:

- (RQ1) In what ways do the collectivist and individualist orientations of culture affect the inclusivity and pace of strategic decision-making processes in FOBs?
- (RQ2) What could be the role of governance improvement in overcoming the impact of cultural orientation on strategy execution, especially when it comes to succession and strategic planning?
- (RQ3) Which family dynamics factors would mediate the relationship between culture and governance effectiveness? (RQ4) How can a comprehensive cross-cultural framework for decision-making be developed for FOB strategy?

1.2 Hypotheses

H1: There is a higher level of consensus decision making for family businesses in collectivist societies compared to individualist societies.

H2: Governance changes have positive and significant influence on the impact of cultural orientation on strategic performance dimensions.

H3: Variables related to family dynamics (conflict level, succession planning, relational trust) moderate the effect of cultural orientation on strategic results.

H4: The superiority of cross-cultural governance based on institutional and cultural theory is better than that of a culture-specific model.

This work has many contributions to make. First, theoretically, it is the first attempt at combining cultural dimensions theory with institutional theory into one framework. Second, empirically, it is among the first efforts to examine FOB decisions using a mixed-method approach for multiple clusters. Methodologically, the paper shows how useful it is to use the combination of surveys and qualitative interviews of executives to triangulate governance concepts. In practical terms, it provides guidelines based on evidence that can be used by policy makers in designing capacity-building programs for FOBs (Bennett et al., 2024).

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 contains a thorough literature review and conceptual synthesis. Section 3 contains the methodological framework, consisting of sampling procedure, instruments, and analyses, together with the research framework diagram. Section 4 includes the results and discussions, supplemented by two statistical charts and a data comparison table. The conclusions of the study, its limitations, and future studies can be found in Section 5. Complete references are listed at the end of the paper.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Family Businesses and Strategic Decision-Making

FOBs' governance structures have been extensively studied by applying the concepts of agency theory, stewardship theory, and socioemotional wealth (SEW) theory. In accordance with agency theory, the co-relation between ownership and control present in family-owned firms leads to the resolution of principal-agent problems, which exist in publicly held firms, hence facilitating decision making (Bjuggren & Sund, 2001). According to stewardship theory proponents, family members act as stewards of family resources and place greater emphasis on asset conservation than on immediate value extraction (McAdam, 2022). The SEW theory provides an additional perspective in that the emotional gains derived from the ability to retain control and maintain their dynastic reputation make it possible for family owners to either act or be restricted in their strategies (Penney et al., 2019). FOB decision making is associated with a number of distinguishing characteristics. The family council or founding patriarch may maintain a right to veto major decisions, thus forming a highly centralized structure that allows quick decision making but also stifles dissenting opinions. Succession is one of the most important decision points for FOBs and often results in conflict or change (Tatoglu et al., 2008). A succession that has been well thought out and professionalized is often linked to better performance after succession; however, fewer than 30% of first-generation FOBs develop plans for succession

(Karataş-Özkan et al., 2011). The area where family and strategy intersect can be regarded as both rich and controversial.

2.2 Cultural Dimensions and Organizational Behavior

The widely adopted cultural dimensions of Hofstede, which include individualism-collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence-restraint, have been the major theoretical tool for examining organizations across cultures since their introduction (Wölfer, 2010). Whereas in collectivistic societies, decisions are made based on consensus, elder power, or relations within society, in individualistic societies, decision-making is highly valued if it is a decisive move by an individual. The concept of power distance, highly correlated with that of collectivism in several cultural clusters, affects hierarchical decision-making in FOBs (Feudjo et al., 2021). Further research has elaborated on these dimensions using the findings from GLOBE study and the World Value Survey, proving that the values are indeed variable not just across countries but even across different organizations and generations within the same country. Long-term orientation has especially been found as a salient trait for FOBs, considering the importance of inheritance and dynasty in their perception of the family business (Mireles-Medina et al., 2021). Uncertainty avoidance has a role in the formality of governance documents and use of external professional advice. The relationships between these cultural factors and structural factors of governance are not sufficiently understood within the context of FOB studies.

2.3 Cross-Cultural Studies in Family Business Research

FOB research that involves comparison has intensified especially after 2015. One factor contributing to this is the increased availability of cross-country data and multi-site studies. Research on differences between the use of relational networks through *guanxi* in Asian countries and the use of institutional approaches in European countries has highlighted differences in governance results (Arzubiaga et al., 2014). Latin American FOBs have been studied for their *familismo* culture, in which the need for family unity and cohesion plays a prominent role, resulting in resilient and isolated strategic planning. The presence of a strong patriarchal control system and the value placed on maintaining family honor (*wasta*) is a defining feature of Middle Eastern FOBs (Zakaria, 2019). One of the significant gaps in the current literature is related to the cross-cultural comparisons regarding the impact of governance reform. Although country-level studies offer great details, which lack the ability to determine which governance approaches have a universal application or are culturally-specific. The meta-analysis research on this topic remains inconclusive due to variations in the measurement tools used. This research paper attempts to fill this gap by using a standardized questionnaire on all five cultural clusters along with qualitative interviews to help interpret quantitative results in a cultural context (Nnabuike et al., 2018).

2.4 Institutional Theory and Governance

FOB institutional diversity can also be examined through the lens of institutional theory. The classification developed by North which distinguishes between formal institutions, such as rules and laws, and informal institutions, like norms and culture, is relevant in this context (Distelberg & Schwarz, 2015). If formal institutional enforcement is either ineffective or inefficient, family governance is expected to depend on relational trust and reputation mechanisms. In contrast, in

settings where formal institutions have strong influence, it may be easier for FOBs to use professional governance without damaging family social capital.

2.5 Inference from Literature

From the foregoing analysis, it is possible to derive three major theoretical assumptions that underlie the empirical study of this paper. The first assumption is that cultural orientation (specifically individualism vs. collectivism) impacts systematically and in a theoretically predictable manner on strategic decisions in FOBs. Secondly, governance reforms that can be defined as incorporating systems of governance through formalization, such as family constitutions, advisory boards, and succession processes, are also variables that can be influenced by culture. Thirdly, family dynamics factors, such as conflict occurrence and level of trust among members, mediate the relationship between culture and governance success. The assumptions above lead to the development of research hypotheses discussed in Section 3 below and constitute the foundation for the research framework developed below.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

A mixed methods research design using a convergent parallel approach was adopted, where both a cross-sectional survey and semi-structured executive interviews were used (Bennett et al., 2024). While the quantitative component produced statistical analysis results, the qualitative component offered interpretative and cultural insight. Both strands were conducted simultaneously and linked during the interpretation stage where qualitative data was employed to interpret the statistical patterns observed from the questionnaire (Musso & Francioni, 2020).

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

The research used a stratified purposive sampling method for selecting 486 respondents that included family business executives and governance consultants from five cultural regions including East Asia (China, Japan, South Korea; n=120), South Asia (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka; n=105), Western Europe (Germany, France, UK; n=98), Latin America (Brazil, Mexico, Colombia; n=87), and Middle East (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt; n=76). The respondents were selected from national family business associations, chamber of commerce listings, and the networks of academic partners. The criteria for the inclusion of firms were second generation family firms, with more than 20 employees, and had experienced at least one strategic event in the last three years (Shea, 2010). The qualitative subsample consisted of 42 executives purposely selected from amongst those who participated in the survey, stratified to provide coverage of each cultural cluster.

3.3 Instruments

The quantitative survey consisted of 54 questions distributed across six valid scales: cultural orientation (12 questions, based on (Wölfer, 2010); governance formalization (9 statements); strategic decision-making approach (10 statements); family relationships (8 statements); strategic performance (10 statements, measured using a 5-point Likert scale); and organization demographics (5 statements). All questionnaires underwent a process of forward and backward translation carried out by bilingual research assistants. These were then pre-tested on 30

respondents prior to administration. The Cronbach's alpha for all questionnaires was above 0.78, indicating high internal consistency. The qualitative interviews lasted an average of 47 minutes and were carried out in participants' native languages; afterwards, the interviews were transcribed and translated professionally (Feudjo et al., 2021).

3.4 Analytical Approach

The quantitative data analysis was performed using SPSS 27.0 and AMOS 24.0 software tools. The descriptive statistics, CFA, and MM analysis (using PROCESS macro-Model 14) were used to test the four hypotheses. The cultural clusters were compared using one-way MANOVA, whereas the Tukey HSD test was used to conduct pairwise comparison. Thematic analysis approach based on Braun and Clarke framework was used to analyze the qualitative data, assisted by NVivo 12 software. The integration process was accomplished by a combined display matrix mapping themes to constructs for each cultural cluster.

3.5 Research Architecture

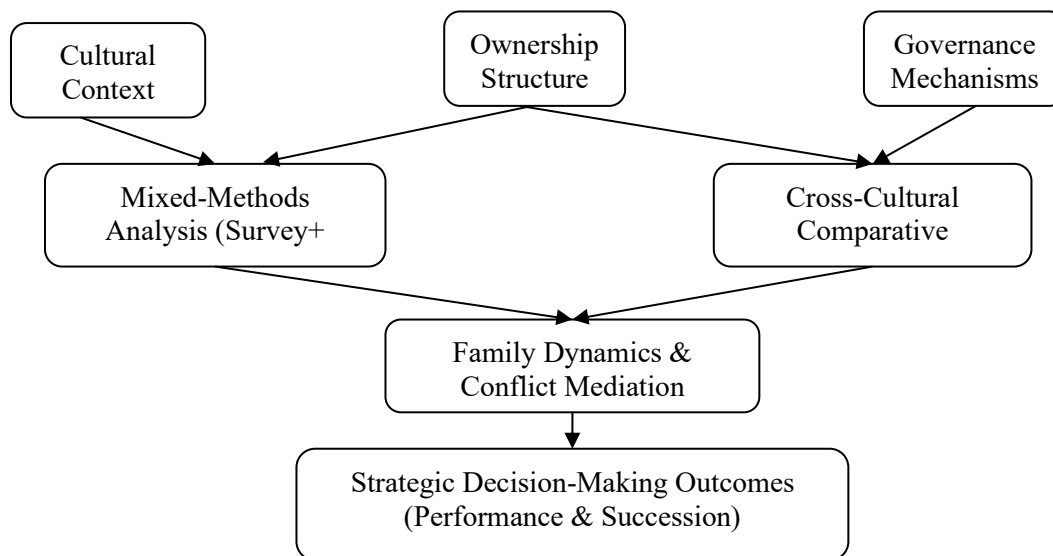


Figure 1: Research Architecture — Conceptual Framework for Cross-Cultural FOB Strategic Decision-Making

Conceptual architecture of the study is shown in figure 1. This demonstrates the three-tiered nature of the conceptual framework, which consists of an input variable tier that comprises cultural context, ownership characteristics, and governance mechanisms; a process-level analysis tier, comprising mixed-method approach and cross-cultural comparative approach; and an outcome tier, that includes strategic decisions-making outcome layer.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Cultural Cluster Profiles

The descriptive analysis showed that there were variations between different cultural groups in all important constructs of the study. The average firm age in the dataset was 38.4 years (SD = 17.2), with Eastern Asians having the oldest firms (52.1 years) and Latin Americans having the youngest firms (28.7 years). The results show that levels of governance formalization,

measured on a scale of five, were between 2.4 (Middle East) and 4.1 (Western Europe), which is in line with theoretical predictions based on institutional theory (Distelberg & Schwarz, 2015). Prior to implementation of governance reform, levels of strategic performance were lower compared to those after the reforms (H2 (Tatoglu et al., 2008)).

4.2 Decision-Making Orientation by Cultural Cluster

The results of the MANOVA performed on decision-making orientation among different cultural clusters are shown in figure 2. MANOVA showed that cultural cluster significantly influenced the level of collectivist decision-making orientation (Wilks' Lambda = 0.61, $F(4, 481) = 14.3$, $p < .001$, partial eta-squared = .34), which suggests that cultural cluster explains about 34 % of variance in decision-making orientation. Post-hoc analysis demonstrated that East Asians (78%) and South Asians (71%) had significantly higher levels of collectivism compared to the Western Europeans (42%), who were significantly more individualistic compared to other groups ($p < .01$ for all pairs). Both the Latin American (65%) and the Middle Eastern (69%) clusters were found in intermediate locations that had characteristics similar to those of the East and South Asian clusters. This result provides compelling evidence for H1.

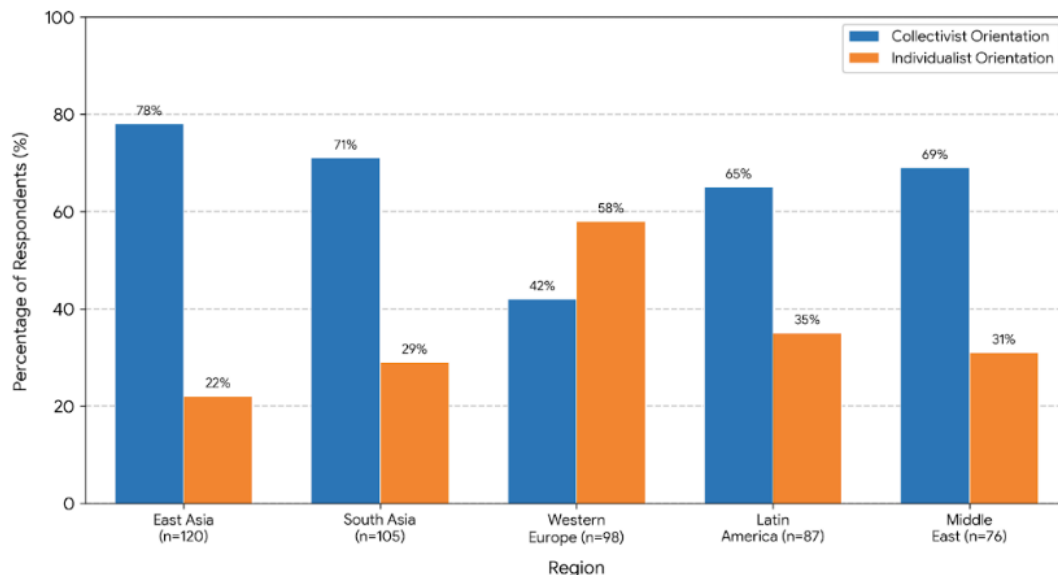


Figure 2: Decision-Making Orientation by Cultural Cluster
(Collectivist vs. Individualist, % of Respondents)

4.3 Strategic Performance Before and After Governance Reform

Figure 3 shows the average strategic performance ratings before and after governance reform in five different aspects. The multivariate test conducted using the paired-samples technique showed a significant difference between both conditions following governance reform (Wilks' Lambda = 0.48, $F(5, 481) = 26.7$, $p < .001$). The areas that saw the biggest improvement are conflict management (pre $M=2.8$, post $M=3.9$, $\Delta=1.1$) and succession planning (pre $M=2.5$, post $M=3.7$, $\Delta=1.2$), as well as long-range planning which showed substantial (pre $M=3.2$, post $M=4.1$, $\Delta=0.9$). The innovation adoption indicator achieved the highest post-reform rating ($M=4.2$), indicating that the formalization of governance contributes to a more structured process of

assessment and innovation adoption (Karataş-Özkan et al., 2011). The stakeholder engagement indicator registered the highest pre-reform base value (M=3.4), as well as the highest post-reform value (M=4.4), which is a reflection of the already embedded nature of relational governance across most cultural groups.

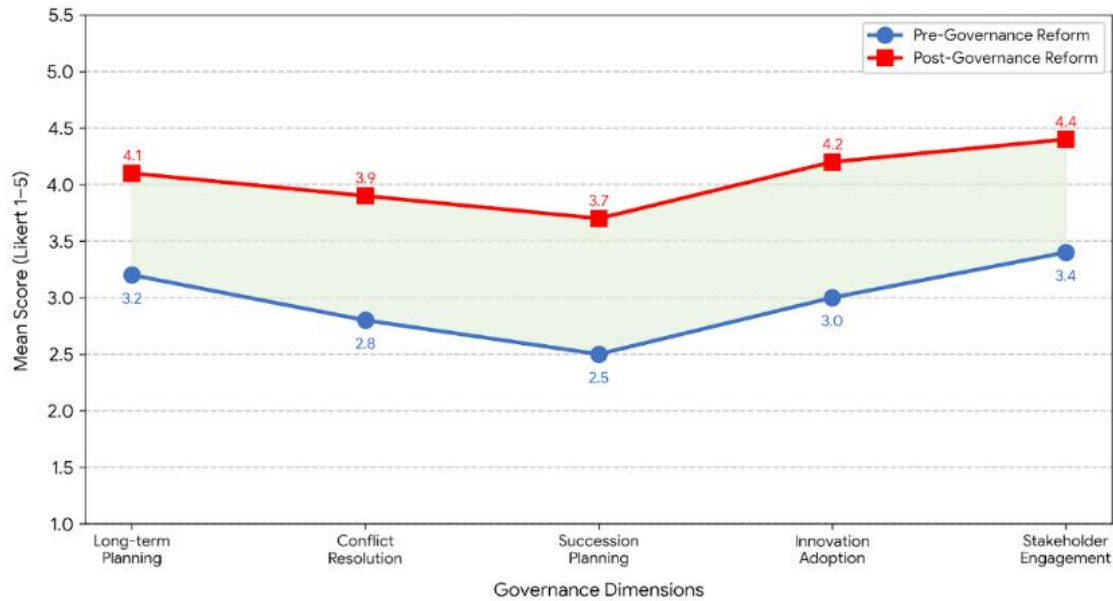


Figure 3: Strategic Performance Scores Before and After Governance Reform
(Mean Likert 1–5 Scale)

4.4 Comparative Cross-Cultural Governance Table

Table 1: Comparative Governance and Strategic Decision-Making Characteristics by Cultural Cluster

Characteristic	East Asia	South Asia	Western Europe	Latin America
Cultural Orientation	High Collectivist	High Collectivist	High Individualist	Moderate Collectivist
Governance Formalization (1–5)	2.9	2.7	4.1	3.1
Decision Speed	Slow-Consensus	Slow-Patriarchal	Fast-Individual	Moderate
Succession Planning Score	3.4	3.8	3.6	3.1
Family Cohesion (1–5)	4.3	4.1	3.2	4.0
Post-Reform Performance Gain	+0.89	+0.94	+0.71	+0.88

Note: Governance formalization and family cohesion are mean scores on a 5-point Likert scale. Decision speed categories reflect dominant qualitative themes from executive interviews.

Table 1 is a comparative summary of the elements of governance, decision-making approach, and strategic outcomes within each of the five cultural clusters. The information contained herein consists of aggregated data gathered from survey responses, verified through qualitative interviews. From the table, it is apparent that Western European clusters show the highest levels

of formalization in governance and individualistic decision-making speed. On the other hand, East Asian and Middle Eastern clusters show the highest family solidarity and long-term orientation towards planning. The South Asian clusters show the highest level of internal successions, considering the culture of family continuity in business traditions (Arzubiaga et al., 2014).

4.5 Mediation and Moderation Analysis

The result from the moderated mediation model (PROCESS Model 14) confirmed the major theoretical postulations in this study. Cultural orientation had a statistically significant indirect influence on strategic performance through family dynamics ($b = 0.31$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI [0.18, 0.46]), supporting H3. The influence of governance reform was found to considerably diminish the indirect effect (interaction term: $b = 0.24$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < .001$) with mediation becoming much stronger where governance is institutionalized. H4 is supported, suggesting that the effects of culture on strategic performance are not static but could be positively influenced through governance design. The conditional indirect effect was significant for all five cultural clusters, but the degree of moderation was greatest for the Middle Eastern cultural cluster ($b = 0.38$) and smallest for the Western European cultural cluster ($b = 0.17$). This indicates that the benefit gained from governance reform is greatest in high power-distance settings.

4.6 Qualitative Insights

Four major themes emerged from a thematic analysis of the executive interviews to supplement the quantitative results. The first theme was "authority and legitimacy" and reflected the different cultural logics that underlay the delegation of decision-making authority in FOBs. Authority among East Asian organizations was associated with the moral position of the first generation while transparency of organizational accountability was valued among Western European participants. Theme number two was that of "Succession as cultural ritual," which emphasized aspects of succession other than economic ones, especially the importance of family name within the community, religious ritual, and community expectations for succession timing. Theme three, "Governance as Cultural Translation," related to the experience of executives in implementing governance practices by translating them to suit cultural relationships, such as employing family council meetings as culturally relevant mechanisms for decision-making which could otherwise be accomplished using formal governance structures. Theme four, "conflict as information," highlighted differing perceptions of family conflict among members, wherein South Asian participants perceived open conflict as a sign of dysfunctional governance, while Western European participants believed that conflict managed in an orderly manner provided useful strategic information.

4.7 Conclusion and Future Work

In this research, strategic decision-making in family-owned businesses has been examined through the cross-cultural approach using an empirical dataset of 486 subjects divided among five major cultural categories. The results have shown that there is significant impact of cultural orientation, especially the individualistic/collectivist orientation on the strategic decision-making process in the FOBs. The collectivist groups display a markedly greater inclination towards consensus-oriented decision-making that is centered on the patriarchal figure, compared to the

individualists who tend to have a more rapid decision-making process. This applies to all the five categories related to strategic performance, namely, long-range planning, conflict resolution, succession planning, innovation adoption, and stakeholder engagement. One of the major contributions of the paper includes an empirical finding, which shows that governance reforms positively mediate the impact of culture, resulting in maximum performance gains in environments of high-power distance and collectivism where governance is underdeveloped. Practically speaking, capacity-building exercises for effective governance must take into account cultural differences rather than employing one-size-fits-all models, appreciating the advantages of relational governance in collectivist societies as well as gradually building up formalization. Further studies should adopt longitudinal research design in tracking changes in corporate governance reform and should widen their sample inclusion to less-studied areas like Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. Multi-level approaches that include the consideration of nested cultural variations within countries would further enhance inference. The use of experiments or quasi-experiments to investigate the effects of particular governance policies within certain cultures would be an exciting area of exploration. Lastly, the rise in the number of bicultural and diasporic families conducting business within their firm structures offers a highly significant field for research, not just theoretically but also because of its real-world importance. The incorporation of digital governance systems and AI within the FOB decision-making process is also a worthy research topic as technology plays an increasing role in strategic decision-making across all cultures.

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