

Piccola Impresa/Small Business

Call for papers – “Innovation in Small Family Firms”



Guest editors

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Family firms can be defined as businesses “governed and/or managed with the intention to shape and pursue the vision of the business held by a dominant coalition controlled by members of the same family or a small number of families in a manner that is potentially sustainable across generations of the family or families” (Chua, Chrisman & Sharma 1999). Although considered less innovative and more reluctant to change, evidence show that the majority of the most innovative firms worldwide are actually family firms (Calabrò et al., 2018; Duran et al., 2016). Scholars have been strongly debating about whether family firms are more or less innovative than their non-family counterparts and the elements that characterize their innovation initiatives (De Massis, Frattini & Lichtenthaler, 2013) such as the influence of the family dynamics (Kellermanns et al., 2012; Rondi, Kotlar & De Massis, 2018).

While a vast stream of research has analyzed innovation input, finding that family firms invest less in R&D than non-family firms (Chrisman & Patel, 2012), the debate about innovation

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processes and outcome has still to be solved (Röd, 2016). Controversial findings emerge: on the one hand, family businesses seem to be less endowed with resources and capabilities necessary to undertake innovation initiatives and their risk aversion undermines the implementation of disruptive change due to specific needs as continuity (König, Kammerlander & Enders, 2013). On the other hand, family businesses act as catalysts of innovation due to their long-term orientation and unique governance (De Massis, Di Minin & Frattini, 2015). Long-term orientation spurs family members to boost innovation in order to ensure the survival of the business, aiming at handing it down to next generations. In managing innovation, family businesses benefit from lower power distance and accountability, leading to faster decision making. Moreover, the historical roots of family firms and their emotional attachment to their tradition act as a double edge sword in relation to innovation. While the past might be a bulk for the progress and implementation of novel initiatives, it might also become a source of ideas and knowledge, whose recombination with new technologies or new meanings leads to unique innovations, hard to imitate (De Massis et al., 2016a).

When the size of family business is small these aspects are accentuated. Despite the liability of smallness (Freeman, Carroll & Hannan 1983), the flexibility of small family business allows them to quickly adapt to fast changing environment by innovating. Moreover, the strong relationships with the local community and business network are crucial in shaping their innovation activities (e.g. Classen et al., 2014). As argued by De Massis et al. (2018), innovation in family firms with smaller size is accompanied by specific challenges to overcome their resource-related weaknesses and turn them into strengths. The influence of family dynamics in small family firms is more prominent, due to the higher overlap between the family and business systems, reciprocally influencing each other (Sciascia et al., 2013). Current research on family business innovation is mostly based on large corporations, and there are only few studies highlighting contingencies to the applicability of such general findings to small-sized firms (e.g. Sciascia et al., 2015). However, a vast majority of the business in current economies worldwide are small and most of them are family owned and/or managed, therefore it is paramount to understand the specificity of innovation in small family businesses (De Massis et al., 2016b).

For this special issue, we invite submissions from various disciplines: we look for empirical and conceptual articles, as well as literature reviews, that can provide a unique perspective using diverse theoretical and methodological approaches. Authors are also encouraged to propose different and novel approaches for examining the family business concept that are particularly suited to capture the peculiarities of small family firms in innovation. Contributions may address, but not limited to, the following questions/topics:

- How do small family firms innovate differently from non-family firms and/or from larger family firms?
- How do family relationships within and outside the family influence the process of innovation in small family firms?
- What kind of innovation practices are likely to be (uniquely) found in small family firms, and why?
- In what ways, and by whom, is the innovation function enacted in small family firms? Is there a difference with small non-family firms?
- How are new projects launched, developed and accomplished in small family firms?
- The role of tradition in small family firm innovation
- The ability and willingness paradox (cfr. Chrisman et al., 2015) in small family firms innovation
- How do small family firms collaboratively innovate by leveraging their networks?
- How do groups of small family firms in industrial districts innovate differently from medium and large firms?

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Timeline and submission information

- Submission of full paper: June, 30 2019
- Notification of acceptance/rejection/revision: September, 30 2019
- Deadline to submit revised version: December 30, 2019
- Notification of final acceptance/rejection: February 28, 2020

Manuscripts are due by the end of June 2019. All articles will be subject to the standard double-blind review process. The Special Issue is scheduled to be published in mid 2020.

Full papers need to be submitted through the online platform <http://www.rivistapiccolaimpresa.it>. The platform can be browsed also in English by using the button “selection language” in top right side of the home page. Authors will be first requested to fill in the section “Registrazione/registration”; then, they will need to click on “Nuova Proposta/New proposal” in the section “Cruscotto/Dashboard” to upload the files related to their submission. All the papers need to strictly adhere to the specific guidelines of the journal that can be found at this link: <http://rivistapiccolaimpresa.uniurb.it/index.php/piccola/about/submissions#authorGuidelines>. The guidelines can be also browsed in English by using the button “selection language” in top right side of the webpage.

About the journal

Piccola Impresa/ Small Business Journal aims to contribute to the study and diffusion of knowledge on small-sized entrepreneurial firms. It is an academic journal with international vocation, dedicated specifically to the investigation and theoretical reflection on the administration and management of small businesses, their role in the economy, as well as the policies and regulations they face.