

# How do women entrepreneurs influence the strategic orientation of family businesses? A typology of Swedish decision-making in Småland community

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper aims to add to the theorization of family dynamics and women's entrepreneurship by examining women's influence on decision-making in family businesses. Business decisions in family firms, in particular, are not free from family influence in terms of goals and strategies, and the role of women in decision-making processes is of particular interest. Consequently, the role of women entrepreneurs in family firms and their influence on business development requires a more fine-grained analysis of the family dynamic within the family and the business.

**Design/methodology/approach** – This study draws on a qualitative study and focuses on the life story narratives of nine women in rural family businesses in rural communities of Småland province in Sweden to empirically examine the decision-making processes. This region is known both for its entrepreneurial culture and traditional gender order. Based on the narrative accounts of women entrepreneurs in family businesses, the data analysis method is thematic, using a Gioia-inspired method.

**Findings** – The complexity of decision-making in rural family firms is further complicated in part due to a closeness with the rural community. Thus, a typology of three decision-making modes in family firms emerges an informal family-oriented mode, a semistructured family/employee consensus mode and a formal board mode with at least one nonfamily member. Moreover, the advantages, disadvantages and strategies that women use to influence decisions within the respective mode are outlined.

**Originality/value** – This work contributes to the study of women's agency and its implications in family business and entrepreneurship in the rural context. The study implies that women's agency shapes the (rural) entrepreneurship context and, likewise, the (rural) entrepreneurship context influences women's agency. Hence, the author challenges the view of women as only caregivers and sheds light on the practices and processes behind the scenes of entrepreneurial family businesses.

**Keywords** Women entrepreneurship, Family firms, Decision-making, Gendering, Strategy, Family business, Strategies, Rural community

**Paper type** Research paper

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## 1. Introduction

Why is it important to study how women entrepreneurs influence decision-making in the family business? Family firms are distinctive ventures incorporating direct involvement of family members and display gender differences in roles within the business (Getz *et al.*, 2004). In contemporary world economies, family businesses are major contributors to development and growth (Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2021; Miroshnychenko *et al.*, 2021; Zellweger, 2017) and constitute 80%–98% of firms worldwide (Poza, 2010). In Europe, between 70% and 80% of firms are family businesses, accounting for 40%–50% of employment opportunities (Mandl, 2008, p. 2). Similarly, family firms are central to the Swedish economy, using over a third of the working population and generating over one-third of Swedish gross domestic product (Andersson *et al.*, 2018). Amid debates about the definition of a family business (Chua *et al.*, 1999; Jaskiewicz and Dyer, 2017; Zellweger, 2017), I adopt the definition as any business venture owned and/or operated by a couple(s) or family (Getz *et al.*, 2004, p. 5). This definition is inclusive and, as such, does not explicitly address issues relating to the size, operation or profitability of the business, ownership, family vision, succession or whether management responsibilities are shared among family members (Getz *et al.*, 2004). Family businesses incorporate the direct involvement of family members (Getz *et al.*, 2004), and “women constitute one-half of family members” (Achtenhagen *et al.*, 2018).

Previous studies suggest that women may not be considered prospective owners or executive leaders by older generations in family firms (Bjursell and Melin, 2011). Women in family firms are described as being in the shadows (Haberman and Danes, 2007), not visible (Cater and Young, 2019; Stead, 2017), and in secondary roles (Frishkoff and Brown, 1993; Danes and Olson, 2003; Cater and Young, 2019). Contemporary studies focus on management succession in family businesses (Barbera *et al.*, 2018; Nordqvist and Zellweger, 2010) and relationships between generations and siblings (Ramírez-Pasillas *et al.*, 2021; Silverstein and Bengtson, 1997). Consequently, the role of women in family firms (Jimenez, 2009; Blondel and Niforos, 2013; Campopiano *et al.*, 2017; Akhmedova, 2020) is understudied (Hamilton, 2006, 2013; Heinonen and Vainio-Korhonen, 2018), particularly in the realm of decision-making (Ratten *et al.*, 2018). Though several studies indicate an increase in the number of women in family businesses versus nonfamily firms (Ramadani *et al.*, 2018; Andersson *et al.*, 2018), their engagement in decision-making remains limited (Cesaroni and Sentuti, 2014; Cole, 1997; Dumas, 1989, 1990; Fitzgerald and Muske, 2002; Ratten *et al.*, 2018; Salganicoff, 1990).

Therefore, women’s roles in decision-making processes are of particular interest (Jimenez, 2009; Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2019), as no business decisions are free from family influence (Chua *et al.*, 1999). The uniqueness of family firms relies on the inclusion of family members in ownership (Ratten *et al.*, 2018), and thus, families influence firm goals and strategies (Chua *et al.*, 1999). Therefore, to fully understand family businesses, women’s roles should be considered more explicitly (Achtenhagen *et al.*, 2018), particularly in the decision-making process (Ratten *et al.*, 2018).

Studies examining the decision-making process in family firms mainly take the succession point of view, with women as potential successors (Overbeke *et al.*, 2013; Ramadani *et al.*, 2018; Xian *et al.*, 2021) or holding ownership shares (Eddleston *et al.*, 2008; Kleve *et al.*, 2020) in the family business. However, women’s influence on decision-making in family businesses remains relatively underexplored (Maseda *et al.*, 2022). The aim of this paper is to explore women’s influence in the strategic orientation of family businesses through decision-making. The research questions explored in this paper are:

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RQ1. How do women entrepreneurs influence the strategic orientation of family businesses through decision-making?

RQ2. What strategies do women use to influence decisions in their family businesses?

In this paper, I adopt the view of decision-making as the process of evaluating and choosing among alternatives (Poole and Van den Ven, 2010), that is, the process “that leads to the choice of goals and means and the way that means are effectively deployed” (Elbanna *et al.*, 2020, p. 43).

Theoretically, I draw upon literature on women’s entrepreneurship and decision-making in family business studies, and thus, this work responds to Maseda *et al.* (2022) suggestion for more qualitative studies to deepen our understanding of women’s involvement in the decision-making process in firms. To capture the decision-making processes empirically, the paper builds on a qualitative analysis of nine life narratives of women entrepreneurs in family businesses in Småland, Sweden’s rural communities. Based on the narrative accounts (Hamilton, 2006, 2013, 2014; Hamilton *et al.*, 2017; Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2021) of women entrepreneurs in family businesses, the data analysis method is thematic, using a Gioia (Gioia *et al.*, 2013; Gehman *et al.*, 2018) inspired method.

The Gioia analysis revealed three modes of decision-making processes: an informal family-oriented mode, a semistructured family/employee consensus mode, and a formal board mode with nonfamily members. Moreover, the advantages, disadvantages and strategies that women use to influence decisions are highlighted within each mode. I found women to be highly involved and influential, particularly in the informal family-oriented and formal board modes. In the informal family-oriented mode, the women have high levels of education and experience and strong support from their spouses, but the disadvantages are considerable, e.g. dependence on family and ambiguity of roles. In the formal board mode, women experience advantages, such as external board members serving as conflict management tools strategically used by the women entrepreneurs to influence decisions.

The context of the study is particularly significant, contributing to a deeper understanding of women’s entrepreneurship and examining this concept in the family business. In Sweden, gender equality is promoted and supported by legislation, policies and institutional frameworks (Griffin and Häyrén, 2022; Goldscheider *et al.*, 2015; Tillmar *et al.*, 2021). However, in rural family firms, women entrepreneurs are still subject to traditional gender norms and hierarchies (Forsberg and Stenbacka, 2013) and use different strategies to navigate between various stakeholders to influence decision-making in their firms.

The paper is structured as follows: I first present an overview of the literature on women’s entrepreneurship and decision-making in family businesses in Section 2. Next, in Section 3, I elaborate on the method used and the emergence of theoretical themes. I deliberate on different modes of decision-making in Section 5, followed by conclusions in Section 6 suggesting that women navigate between different modes trying to balance between family and outside stakeholders to appease all parties involved. I, thus, contribute to the emerging field of family entrepreneurship (Bettinelli *et al.*, 2014; Randerson *et al.*, 2015; Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2021) in the rural context.

## 2. Overview of earlier research

### 2.1 Women’s entrepreneurship in the family business

The intertwining of women’s entrepreneurship and family business studies is becoming increasingly significant in contemporary entrepreneurship and family business research (Ratten *et al.*, 2018). Ratten *et al.* (2018) suggest that understanding the contribution of women entrepreneurs (Ahl, 2006; Tillmar, 2016) in family business leadership provides

insights into diversity in entrepreneurial activity. Family business scholars highlight that historically, subordination of women in family firms has hindered women from perceiving themselves as entrepreneurs and leaders (Akhmedova *et al.*, 2020; Mussolino *et al.*, 2019; Nelson and Constantinidis, 2017). Thus, Sharma (2004) calls for more research to examine the contextual and individual factors that prompt women in leadership positions and decision-making, as well as their performance goals in relation to family and business. Nikina *et al.* (2015) highlight spousal involvement as pivotal to family business success in cases when women establish and run the business. In family firms, decisions are particularly influenced by family desires, needs and by emotional relationships within the family (Carter and Welter, 2016). These women, therefore, link the success of a family business with their personal goals (Marlow *et al.*, 2009), such as expanding social networks and gaining financial independence, as well as taking part in decision-making (Ratten *et al.*, 2018). Social networks are suitable venues for exchanging entrepreneurial ideas, establishing relationships with various stakeholders and discussing challenges that require making various decisions among family business owners (Boers and Henschel, 2021; Palalic *et al.*, 2018). Social relations are pivotal for women in the family business, as they prioritize family in balancing their work-life and engage in educational activities to contribute to the community (Farauddello *et al.*, 2018). Indeed, in family businesses, the intertwinement of the family and the business systems is essential to obtain available resources and competencies that affect entrepreneurial decision-making (Aldrich *et al.*, 2019).

Family norms have implications for entrepreneurial opportunity creation (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015; Daovisan and Chamaratana, 2020), decisions and outcomes (Aldrich *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, family dynamics are more complex in the family business as a result of family relationships (Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2021) that influence business decision-making, with private and public domains inseparable (Hamilton, 2013). Decision-making within these firms, instead of being purely rational, is complicated (Mintzberg and Westley, 2010) by the intermingling of strategic processes and personal biases (Francioni *et al.*, 2015; Carraher and Van Auken, 2013). In her study on the motives and barriers that may push or challenge Arab females to undertake entrepreneurial activities, Bouguerra (2015) implies that there is a strong relationship between female entrepreneurs' motives to start a business and the barriers they encounter. However, women evaluate both motives and barriers (especially those related to gender inequality) before making a decision on whether or not to start and run a family business (Bouguerra, 2015).

### *2.2 Women's decision-making in the family business*

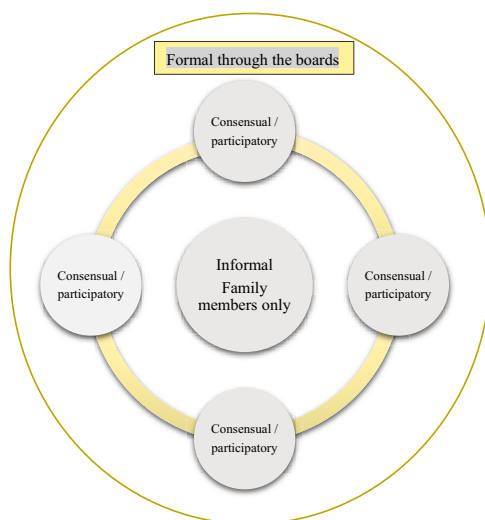
Decision-making is multifaceted in family firms, with the personal and private enmeshed with the public and corporate, and women, in particular, must continuously manage both (Hamilton, 2013). Family business research draws from social psychology on contextual influences such as family norms in decision-making (Carr *et al.*, 2021). However, "little remains known about how decision-maker characteristics influence family firm outcomes" (Carr *et al.*, 2021, p. 42), particularly in rural firms (Tunberg, 2014). Because decision-making differs among individuals (Pohling *et al.*, 2016), revealing how the decision-maker influences the decision-making and outcomes extends the family business literature (Carr *et al.*, 2021, p. 42). In this paper, I focus on women's involvement and strategies to influence the decision-making in their family firms.

Women's involvement in family firms has attracted increased interest during the past decade (Campopiano *et al.*, 2017; Maseda *et al.*, 2022). Campopiano *et al.* (2017, p. 200) define women's involvement in family firms "as any act or process whereby women take part in the life of a family firm". In a bibliometric review on women's involvement in family firms,

Maseda *et al.* (2022) highlight the need for a more fine-grained analysis of the family dynamic to elucidate the role of women entrepreneurs in the family and business, suggesting in particular that researchers should “focus on delving into the potential moderating influence of women in strategic decision-making”, (p. 19). In her study of feminist organizations with decision-making without hierarchy, Iannello (1992) describes the consensual mode of decision-making as the most preferred by all members, characterized by an open, consensual and participatory manner.

Compared to nonfamily firms, family firms are significantly more inclined to employ women in executive decision-making positions who share similar viewpoints that facilitate consensual decision-making with family members in top management (Andersson *et al.*, 2018, p. 307). Similarly, Eddleston *et al.* (2008) found that in family firms, participative decision-making was positively related to cognitive and relationship conflict when ownership was dispersed through generations, including women. Woods *et al.* (2019, p. 147) studied the characteristics of decision-making processes in family businesses “to better understand why certain family businesses make better decisions than others” positively impacting family business performance. The study revealed that families who make business decisions in open, consensual, negotiating ways increase firm performance. Family members’ participation in decision-making fosters a feeling of happiness, inclusion and familial support. The support of family members in business decision-making positively influenced their life at home (Woods *et al.*, 2019). Indeed, the informal decision-making performed by women at the kitchen table (Carter and Welter, 2016) is no less influential than formal decision-making (Hirigoyen and Villeger, 2017).

The use of a participatory decision-making process through family meetings and boards was also indicated in the study on Lebanese family firms (Fahed-Sreih and Djourdourian, 2006). In the studied sample, more than 75% considered female ownership acceptable and more than two-thirds of the firms responded positively to potential female chief executive officers (CEOs) (Fahed-Sreih and Djourdourian, 2006, p. 232). In Figure 1, an overarching model of decision-making in family firms as an outcome of the review of the literature is presented.



**Figure 1.**  
An overarching model of decision-making in family firms (own compilation)

### 3. Methodology

The empirical case in this paper builds on interview material (Patton, 1990) as part of the broader study examining gender dynamics in rural family firms located in Sweden in the region of Småland (see below description of context). In this qualitative study (Dana and Dumez, 2015; Groenland and Dana, 2020), I adopt a narrative approach to gain a holistic and deeper understanding (Dana and Dana, 2005) of women's decision-making of nine women in family firms. Interviews around stories enable researchers to access emotional topics (Labaki *et al.*, 2019), provide a close connection to empirical accounts (Dawson and Hjorth, 2012) and allow us "to learn directly from the research subject" (Dana and Dana, 2005, p. 80). The narrative approach is broadly acknowledged as a source of knowledge for researchers focused on theory building (Larty and Hamilton, 2011; Hamilton, 2014; Gartner, 2007; Gartner, 2010) in entrepreneurship (Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2021). The narrative analysis may lead to interpretations that contribute to a more in-depth understanding of women's agency in various contexts, including in family businesses (Larty and Hamilton, 2011). In family business research, the narration of (life) stories is used to reveal complex family relations (Hamilton, 2006; McAdams, 2008) and shed light on family dynamics.

The sample selection (Yin, 2014) was based on rural family businesses having a woman co-owner/successor jointly working with other family members, with a total of nine women entrepreneurs participating (Tables 1 and 2) who were chosen through snowball sampling (Bryman and Bell, 2003; Bryman, 2016), where initial contact with a woman entrepreneur led to other contacts. Small samples retain richness in terms of description and thus may generate local or regional theories not necessarily to obtain global generalizability (Dana and Dana, 2005).

An overview of the interview participants in the family business is presented in Table 1. All women hold leadership positions within the family firms. There is heterogeneity in terms of family generation, with four women in the second generation, three in the third generation and one in the fifth generation. Four of the family firms operate in manufacturing, two in forestry and two in the service sector and the number of employees varies from three to two hundred and forty. In addition, I gathered archival documents from corporate websites and news articles about the family firms and the families themselves (De Massis and Kotlar, 2014) to corroborate and enhance evidence from supplementary sources.

Data regarding the education and professional background of the respondents, as well as marital status and number of children, are presented in Table 2. I noted additional roles that women held outside the family business, also included in Table 2.

#### 3.1 The research context

This paper is part of a larger longitudinal study on gender dynamics in the family business in the context of the rural Swedish region of Småland. All family businesses in the study are situated in this region, which is well-known for its entrepreneurial culture and low population density (Berglund and Wigren, 2014; Johannisson and Nilsson, 1989; Griffin and Häyrén, 2022; Lundqvist and Middleton, 2010; Ljungkvist and Boers, 2016). In this region, the number of women business owners is higher in rural areas than in urban areas (Sköld *et al.*, 2018). The most profitable women's businesses in Småland [1] are found within the male-dominated manufacturing industry. The study context is important as it contributes to a deeper understanding of a woman's agency (Kumar, 2014; Suchayo *et al.*, 2020) in various contexts, including in the rural setting (Larty and Hamilton, 2011). Though in Sweden, gender equality is typically supported by legislation, policies and institutional frameworks (Griffin and Häyrén, 2022; Goldscheider *et al.*, 2015; Tillmar *et al.*, 2021), traditional gender



Pseudonym	Title	Family firm ownership	Family members in the firm	Education	Establishment of FB	Year of joining the FB	Employee nr.	Industry
Greta	CEO	Parents, third generation	Brother	High school	1937	1998	11	Service
Julia	CEO	Father, third generation	Father, uncle, cousin	University degree	1936	2014	35	Trade and service
Saga	CEO, HR manager	Husband, second generation	Husband, father-in-law	University degree	1985	2019	7	Manufacturing
Maja	CFO, HR manager	Father, second generation	Father, brother, cousin, husband,	High school	1976	1984	75	Manufacturing
Astrid	CEO	Father, second generation	Father, husband	Master's degree	2002	2012	3	Forestry
Elsa	CEO	Father, first and second generation	Father	High school	1995	1995	20	Manufacturing
Alva	Board member	Father, second generation	Father, brothers, husband	High school	1980	2012	240	Manufacturing
Elin	CEO	Father, third generation	Father, uncle, cousin	University degree	1948	2010	90	Service
Cathy	CEO	Husband, fifth generation	Husband	University degree	1927	2019	2	Forestry

**Table 1.**  
Overview of the  
respondent's family  
business

**Table 2.**  
Interviewee's  
educational and  
professional  
background and  
family status

Pseudonym	Educational background	Work experience prior to joining the family firm	Roles outside FB	Age	Marital status	Nr. of children
Greta	High school	None	Trainer	48	Married	2 adults
Julia	University degree	Manager, counselor	Lecturer	44	Married	2 children, small
Saga	University degree	Marketing director	Lecturer	35	Married	2 children, small
Maja	High school	None	Project lead	53	Married	3 adults
Astrid	University degree	Bank teller	Board member	38	Married	3 children, small
Elsa	High school	None	Board member	43	Co-habiting	1 daughter, teen
Alva	High school	Travel attendance	Chairperson	42	Married	2 children, teens
Elin	University degree	Teacher	Board member	43	Married	3 children, small
Cathy	University degree	CEO of a company	Mentor	65	Married	2 adults



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norms and hierarchies (Forsberg and Stenbacka, 2013) remain prevalent in rural areas (Gashi Nulleshi and Kalonaityte, forthcoming).

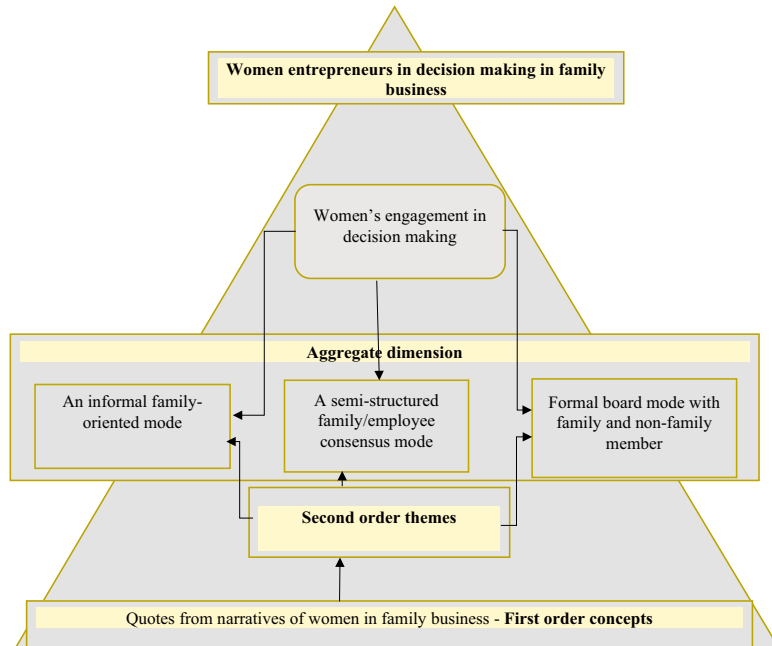
### 3.2 Data collection

The data is gathered from the life narratives of women successfully engaged in their family businesses with more than one other family member in rural Småland. Larty and Hamilton (2011) highlight that narratives are used to theorize about family entrepreneurship. The nine women were interviewed, and follow-up interviews [2] were conducted with five women. The strength of the interview is “its privileged access to the common understanding of subjects, the understanding that provides their worldview and the basis for their actions” (Kvale, 1996, p. 291). Interviews began with a general question on the women’s entrepreneurial journeys in rural family businesses, which prompted vivid insights into their individual experiences and perceptions about the family and firm. This emergent approach is considered beneficial in understanding entrepreneurial families and businesses (Discua Cruz *et al.*, 2021, p. 411). Follow-up interview questions focused on business decision-making, allowing participants to reflect on strategies used to influence decisions in the firm. These interviews enable us to obtain both retrospective and “real-time accounts” from respondents (Gioia *et al.*, 2013, p. 19). The interviews, each 60–90 min in length, are recorded and transcribed. Eight interviews were conducted in English, and one was conducted in Swedish and translated into English. An overview of the interview participants in terms of industry, generation and number of employees in their family businesses is presented in Table 1. Women from diverse age groups and educational backgrounds are included in the sample. In addition, their family life cycle varied, as some had young children while others had adult children. As a precaution to increase the credibility of the data, all interviewees were informed about how the information they contributed is used and will be given the opportunity to take part in our final interpretations. All participating companies and interviewees have been anonymized. Recording and transcribing all interviews have allowed me to use direct quotations. The possibility of conducting seven out of nine interviews face-to-face enabled me to attain reliable information and gain a deeper understanding of participant perceptions.

### 3.3 Data analysis

Inspired by the Gioia methodology (Gehman *et al.*, 2018; Gioia *et al.*, 2013), I developed a typology of decision-making processes induced from the narrative accounts of the interviewees. I began by carefully reading each transcript line by line, seeking to identify the data’s inference (Williams and Shepherd, 2016) and how women made sense of their experiences, starting with their entrepreneurial journey. I illustrate the data analysis process and generation of themes (Patton, 1990; Dana and Dana, 2005) through the three levels of analysis in Figure 2. The direct quotations from women entrepreneurs about their experiences, attitudes and actions contribute to a better understanding of their interaction with the environment (Dana and Dana, 2005).

The sample of quotes is presented in Appendix as “first order concepts” in the Gioia-inspired analysis (Gioia *et al.*, 2013). This initial coding covered a broader interplay with women’s involvement in general in the family firms. Next, I generate the second-order themes relating to the involvement of women in the decision-making process (Appendix). In the last step of the analysis, I focus on abstracting the second-order themes into the aggregate dimension (Gioia *et al.*, 2013), presented in the last column of Appendix. Thus, I identified three modes of the decision-making process: *informal family-oriented decision-making mode*, *semistructured family consensus mode* and *formal board mode with external*



**Figure 2.**  
Generation of themes  
on women's  
engagement in  
decision-making in  
family firms

members. At this point, the aim was to understand the different strategies used by the women entrepreneurs in the decision-making process within their family firms.

In the following section, I present the results from the empirical data induced by using Gioia-inspired analysis (Gioia *et al.*, 2013) within the above-mentioned three modes of decision-making. I aimed for a theory-method fit (Gehman *et al.*, 2018) and focused on pivotal work in the family business and women's entrepreneurship with specific attention to women's involvement in the decision-making process.

#### 4. Results

I structure the results according to three different decision-making modes identified in the empirical material: an informal family-oriented mode, a semistructured family/employee consensus mode and a formal board mode with nonfamily members (see the result of Gioia-analysis in Appendix). Under each of the three modes, I provide empirical examples and describe the advantages and disadvantages from the women's point of view regarding their involvement in the decision-making process and the strategies they use to influence decisions.

##### 4.1 Informal family-oriented decision-making mode

*Introducing the mode.* One means of decision-making is discussion among the family members involved in the business. In these families, separating business from private life is almost impossible. Some have daily discussions until a joint decision is made, whereas others hold regular family meetings for this purpose:

We do it together. I would like to say that we do it as a board meeting but [we do it] as a family meeting. On the big decisions, we do it all together[. . .] 'We have different areas that we are

talking about so somehow I can make decisions that are under my role so somehow we trust each other quite a lot (Alva).

Some family firms prefer to have joint decision-making in weekly family meetings:

We do it together although my father still has a big say. We as leaders [owners] of the company get together every second week where we discuss important decisions (Julia).

#### *Examples (Saga and Julia)*

Saga, Julia, Alva and Astrid highlighted the informal method of decision-making, and therefore, have been categorized as belonging to the informal family-oriented decision-making mode.

After leaving her career in banking, Saga recently joined her husband's family business. Her education is in marketing, and she has long-term experience working in managerial positions. Apart from running the family business created by Saga's father-in-law, Saga and her husband decided to establish a subsidiary of the family business. Saga used her knowledge and experience in marketing, whereas her spouse handles financial issues. Saga explains that she and her husband make decisions jointly and have been exchanging experiences and coaching each other since she was working at the bank:

I was working [at the bank] and met a lot of senior company leaders and such things and everybody I had met, I told their stories [to my spouse] and [he] got inspired by all the stories I shared. And something started to grow that we could make something of our own, step by step and the process has been very long, and I think that is why we are thinking the same way right now, as it was a very long journey. We met when we were 15 years old and always shared things and each other's goals and that's why it is easier for us now (Saga).

Similar to Saga, Julia has joined the family business after her education and experience in various companies, bringing in new perspectives. Decisions in the family firm are undertaken by Julia and other family members:

My father has a big saying, he has a biggest saying and I also have my cousins which I also have to convince of course, but it's definitely easier if I have one more on my side (Julia).

#### *Advantages of informal mode for women's involvement in decision-making*

The advantage of the informal decision-making mode for Saga is that her spouse consults her on a daily basis. She and her spouse can also maintain a work-life balance by deciding who participates in official meetings and who stays with the family:

we had to balance and sometimes is hard but we agree about it as we don't have any other choice [...] because we don't want to be away from our children and we don't want to leave them with anyone else. [...] (Saga).

Julia notes differences in the ways she and her nephew make decisions; she first explains her reasoning to employees, whereas her nephew only conveys the decision itself to them. Julia perceives her way of making decisions as an advantage of the informal decision-making mode:

We take decisions in different ways - I can see that very clear. I involve my colleagues and employees and he [uncle's son] doesn't so much, I would say. [...] That's where he fails. [...] I want to be right from the start and I want them [employees] to accept the decisions I take if they're involved is just' to do the changes, and if you don't and take the decisions first, it can be harder to make it happen (Julia).

*Disadvantages with the informal mode for the women's involvement in decision-making*

For Saga, the disadvantage of the informal mode of making decisions is that it creates spousal dependency. The most obvious example is the decision to quit her job at the bank:

We needed to make a decision, but it was a hard decision. Many times, I thought if I made the right decision and this year [...] I was thinking: "Oh my God, what have I done!". (...) He [spouse] was supporting me and also hoped I will leave the job. So, yes! He has a very big effect in the decision because if it was only for me, I would have not taken this step (Saga).

Julia describes how the ambiguity of her professional role negatively affects her situation. Despite taking on the responsibility of daily decision-making, the decision to formalize her appointment within the company has been postponed for more than a year:

My father hasn't been at work for 1 year. So, I guess that's one answer, why nothing has happened. And maybe also, one answer can be that if you are in a family company the decisions just keep on pushing forwards, you don't take any. [...] I am definitely an informal leader because I don't have any title, but they want me to take decisions. [...] It's harder for the employees when I don't have a clear role. [...] Since I take many decisions, it would be easier for my colleagues to know which decisions I take or I do not take (Julia).

*Strategies used regarding involvement in the informal decision-making mode*

One strategy that Saga uses to affect decisions in the family business is leveraging her experience and knowledge from her banking career. Another strategy to gain legitimacy within the family business is via a consultant. For Saga, an outside consultant provides another perspective on the business, particularly when making decisions in tough circumstances:

[The consultant] helps us in consulting way [...] to explain to all the family members about what's going on and values and costs and to help with [taking] the decisions (Saga).

On one occasion, Saga chose to disengage from the family business for a time since she was needed at home and the business was in a downturn. She emphasizes that the well-being of the family is the reason for taking such actions:

I took a step back and was a little bit more home since we did not have so many customers anyway and perhaps this was good, as we needed a little break and slowing things down and then [the husband] had to take the big part of the company for a while. [...] it has been a hard time and [he] has been the only one at the company for a long time now because the employees have been away, and I was home more than I used to be before, so it has been a hard time in that way [...] Because then we cannot take care of our children so we had to balance and sometimes is hard but we agree about it as we don't have any other choice (Saga).

When Julia fails to gain her family members' agreement, her strategy is to table an idea and include it in the agenda at a later stage (e.g. at the next board meeting). In the meantime, she continues to work discretely with (nonfamily) employees on the feasibility of the idea:

I just [pose] cast the question for the moment and then I put it back on the agenda a little bit later. [...] So, for the moment I just present the new ideas and then I can work with it under the surface and if I'm lucky he [father] changes his mind without noticing. Yeah, just talking about it and hopefully finally, he will see or he will want to invest in time and what it costs to make that change (Julia).

*4.2 A semistructured family/employee consensus decision-making mode*

*Introducing the mode.* Another method is a semistructured employee-oriented decision-making mode. The women entrepreneurs in these family firms highlight the importance of

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their employees' opinions. As illustrated in [Appendix](#), there were two patterns involving nonfamily employees:

- (1) consensus-based decision-making, including nonfamily senior management; and
- (2) decision-making involving nonfamily employees.

In the first pattern, decisions depend on the agreement within the senior management team composed of nonfamily senior managers and family members, and decisions are not undertaken unless the unanimous agreement is reached:

We are a group people like five (5) and most decisions go through that group. They are more in a senior position. [...] The ones in the senior group, we are quite alike so, [...] very often we [...] think the same on decisions. [...] It's nice to have a meeting and everybody thinks the same but for the company it is better sometimes if someone says 'No, I don't think so, I think we should do it like this!' (Elsa).

We make decisions together. [...] You listen to the staff when you make decisions (Greta).

In decision-making involving nonfamily employees (the second pattern), it is important to reach consensual decisions, as the employees are the ones familiar with customer needs, wants and habits. In these family firms, family members prioritize making decisions that employees are comfortable with:

In this type of business, decisions need to be made closer to those who work in the business, so we try to listen and talk to employees when we make a decision. [...] You make sure that the staff is comfortable with the decision (Greta).

#### *Examples (Elsa and Greta)*

Elsa is one of the founders of her family business and has recently been assigned a mentorship program to strengthen the decision-making among senior staff. Advancing the skills and knowledge of senior managers is important to her, as they have been part of the company since its inception:

We are a group of five and we take decisions together where I have a last saying. We discuss how many orders do we have and how many hours are [needed]. [...] Then we take decisions on how many percent we will shorten [the] working time. It's not a one-person decision, we do it together. (Elsa).

Greta and her brother continue the family hairdressing business established by their grandparents. Like Elsa, Greta values the inclusion of employees in decision-making processes, as they are more closely acquainted with customer needs. However, in Greta's business, the employees are consulted in decision-making without a need for consensus:

We try to be very open with the decisions we make. If we have made a decision, we inform that a decision has been made. These are not secret decisions, you go through them at staff meetings about why you made them and what basis you have for those decisions (Greta).

#### *Advantages of semistructured mode for women's involvement in decision-making*

The advantage for Elsa in having a semistructured mode of decision-making is the shared responsibility among senior managers, particularly in difficult decisions. Elsa welcomes their input and inclusion in decision-making:

It's me and all the people here [who] have been working for a long time as a group and I tend to run things with the whole group. I'm not a dictator of the company, (chuckles) (Elsa).

Greta considers one advantage of a semistructured mode of decision-making to be transparency among staff. Another advantage highlighted by Greta is being a third-generation woman leading the family business:

These are not secret decisions, you go through them at staff meetings about why you made them and what basis you have for those decisions[...] It is an advantage that you are a family business, it would have been different if I had been the first female entrepreneur in the family. It would have been more challenging where I might have been told: she can't, she's just a woman (Greta).

*Disadvantage of semistructured mode for women's involvement in decision-making*

The disadvantage of a semistructured decision-making mode, in Elsa's view, is that the senior staff who have been with the company for a long time often think alike, which can present problems, e.g. when trying to implement new changes in production:

Sometimes I can feel it's hard especially when I'm not part of hard parts as I am quite on the side of soft and sometimes its hard for me to do big changes as everybody is like well- Yeah, Yeah and then they work like they used to do anyway, if I try to change something. [...] All of us [the management team], we have been here for so long so, I think it's really hard to do any changes. Everybody says yeah that's perfect and then they go and do as they have always done things (Elsa).

Greta highlights that sometimes it is a disadvantage to have a semistructured decision-making mode because, as a woman, she is expected to explain the reasons behind her decisions in greater detail:

As a woman, you must be able to show that you can do a little more because you are expected not to understand. [...] When you as a woman on a company board have a hard time getting a decision through, it is very much due to you explaining the decision in a way that the board does not understand and then they become hesitant about the decision (Greta).

*Strategies used regarding involvement in the semistructured decision-making mode*

One strategy that Elsa uses to influence the decision-making process with the inclusion of senior staff is a mentorship program. Elsa has two assigned mentors who help develop employee hard skills and business knowledge:

All [employees] have been here for a long time and everything is so familiar with work, and everybody has been doing the same all the time. I started [...] to think of a program enhancing production. We all need it, [...] not because we are bad but because we need to be better and [...], to improve and innovate. I think it's good for me [to have] someone [mentors] who will help me to get it done (Elsa).

Greta's general strategy in the decision-making process is to listen to employees and provide detailed explanations of decisions rather than formally taking decisions to board members who are unfamiliar with customer needs:

You listen to the staff when you make decisions. [...] We did not make decisions in the board because they did not work with the customers and in the business. [...] That is why we make decisions together with employees instead of a board (Greta).

Because Greta is a third-generation woman business owner in a female-dominated industry, she has not encountered any trouble being involved in the decision-making.

*4.3 A formal board with nonfamily members decision-making mode*

*Introducing the mode.* As shown in [Appendix](#), Maja's and Elin's narratives refer to the formal board decision-making mode with members external to both family and business.

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The composition of the board includes family members and nonfamily board members. The outside board members bring an unbiased perspective to business decisions and help family board members focus on strategic decisions rather than discussing daily technical issues. The improvement of the decision-making process by hiring an outside board member broadened the vision of the family firm:

He [the chairman] helped us to have an Eagle eye vision of the company, at the meetings not [to] discuss small things. [...] My father has the tendency to look very way back and he has helped us make him realize that we are not talking about the past but we are discussing the future here (Maja).

"I can take decision myself, but I just don't like it. [...] With hard decisions, of course the board is quite important as well when we take really big decisions. It's good to have discussions with them, as they're good at different things" (Elin).

#### *Examples (Maja and Elin)*

Maja's family business operates in a male-dominated sector, and she struggled to convince her male relatives that outside board members would provide a fresh perspective and positively influence the overall performance of the family firm, yet she remained persistent in her cause.

My father was the chairman of the board and I had to get him on the board to see what I was doing. And he was with me and I was the chairman of the meeting you can say, and I was running the meetings. We started with 6 meetings a year and we changed the whole mindset with the board meetings and I said that with the knowledge I have, I can do this much better but I can't do everything (Maja).

Elin is the CEO of a family business and uses the board, particularly when making difficult decisions. Elin has the disadvantage of being the only woman on the board in a business operating in a male-dominated sector. She includes both family and nonfamily board members in decision-making:

We had a decision today, we talked about education. Our branch is right now very fast developing with the technology and electricity and power. [...] Maybe this year it will be a lot of work with high voltage areas as well. So, we would like to take the time now, [...] to educate ourselves even more. And I together with [uncle] and few more a five people in the company we have been taking that decision together. [...] we have active external board [with] 3 persons outside the company in the board who are helping us with the different qualities, economic, law, and also an old Swedish CEO in our business. They help us and take decisions with us (Elin).

#### *Advantage of formal board decision-making mode for women's involvement in decision-making*

Maja, who enhanced the role of the board by taking specialized courses, benefits from a formal board decision-making mode and uses the chairman of the board to improve the performance of the family business:

I can see somethings much longer ahead. I see things that we need to work with, but I am a little bit more ahead than my brother and husband, so I have to have patience with them. It takes me about 2 years to get them to the same point where I am. I have a lot of patience because they can't see what I can see at the beginning, and I have to work with them and show them ways how to improve (Maja).

For Elin, the advantage of the formal board decision-making mode is a wider perspective. She highlights that her upbringing influences her decision-making:



Well, you can't think away that we've been raising the kids for thousands of years and staying home and doing the householding. So, I think we have another perspective when it comes to decisions therefore, you don't have to be softer because you are a woman and that's not the thing I'm pointing out. I'm pointing out, that I think we take in wider things, perspective when we take decisions. I don't know but I think so and maybe a little bit softer as well, but it doesn't need to be like that, No, more humanity maybe. I think we think different (Elin).

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*Disadvantage of formal board decision-making mode for women's involvement in decision-making*

The disadvantage of the formal board decision-making mode for Maja is not receiving support from family board members in her decisions:

We have a house at the west coast and sometimes when it was very heavy and I couldn't get through to them with the suggestions they had, I had to go down there by myself for a week. And I was writing down everything, I was thinking and how to change my approach to them to get them to understand what I meant and what the outcome can be if they listen to me. Because, I think if I wouldn't had this uphill and if I wasn't this younger sister and a wife. If I had come from outside it would have been easier, I think (Maja).

The disadvantage of the formal board decision-making mode for Elin is being the only woman on the family business board and thus feeling lonely in her role and responsibilities:

As a woman I am quite alone, I feel quite alone, and that is something that I'm working on it right now to start up a female network. [. . .] it can be all kind of women but they need to have some kind of decision-makers that take some decisions in their role in their business. [. . .] You are quite alone when you are a CEO even if you are a male or female and you can't discuss the things with the people who don't have the same role. I'm not saying that to make people feel smaller, that's not why, it's quite tough role that we have. But many different perspectives you have to think about (Elin).

*Strategies used regarding involvement in decisions*

Maja had two ways of strategizing to influence the decision-making in her family firm. The first strategy was to present her ideas to her nephew to discuss with his father, who would then finalize the decisions at the board meetings. This is how Maja persuaded her family to hire an experienced chairman of the board:

All right, I give my suggestions to my brother's son, he is a bit younger and more open minded and then he can get his father to think it's a great idea. You have to use your female 'list' card [chuckles] (Maja).

The second strategy that Maja uses to influence decisions is to convey her ideas to the chairman, who then persuades the other family members on the board. The chairperson helps family members find common ground for making decisions:

We took in an outside chairman in 2015 and he has helped us, helped me guide the others. [. . .] So, that's why the head of the board he has been helping me, so it doesn't have to take 2 years but take short times to understand what I was thinking and how need to be to get us this far (Maja).

He [chairman of the board] helps me how to approach [to family members on decision-making]. I can tell him something and he makes the suggestions and then it's a little bit easier (Maja).

Maja's strategies have resulted in the overall improvement of the performance of the family business, and her persistence is appreciated by family members:

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It takes them [family members] 2 years to see what I see, so that's been challenging. I went down to west coast to just focus and look what I could do differently to get heard. I think that's the problem, sometimes but they see what I have done, and they have been thanking me that I didn't back off and went forward. But they didn't go forward, but I knew that this is the right path and I didn't back off (Maja).

Elin uses a similar strategy of influencing decisions through the chairman of the board. She highlights that her father is the expert in the field of their core family business, and when it comes to strategic decisions, she notices hesitance from family members. Thus, she finds it easier to go through the chairman of the board:

The chairman, he is the one that we have the conversations all the time and he is so good. I really like to take discussions with him but not everyday decisions, it's more like a strategic decision [. . .] I have thoughts how I want it to be, how it should work and what he would help me with. So, I tell him: "Can we do that and that and he would say OK, then we need that and that". So, we have every second week meetings how it could come to a solution around that [decision]. (Elin).

## 5. Discussion

This study investigates how women influence decision-making in rural family firms. The findings show that women influence the decision-making process via three modes: informal decision-making mode, semistructural decision-making mode and formal board mode (including nonfamily board members).

Past research assumes that, in terms of decision-making in family businesses, women tend to work behind the scenes or occupy subordinate roles. However, we find that women are highly influential in family firms, particularly in the informal family-oriented and formal board modes.

### *The informal family-oriented mode*

The findings indicate that in family businesses, (informal) decisions are made via discussions among family members, including at the dinner table (Carter and Welter, 2016). In these families, separating business and private life is almost impossible. Discussions may take place on a daily basis until a joint decision is reached, or family members may hold regular family meetings for making decisions. In this informal family-oriented mode, women have the highest levels of education and experience and receive strong support from their spouses. They bring knowledge and experience from previous jobs. The advantage of the informal decision-making mode is that women are consulted by family members (mainly spouses) on decisions and are thus able to easily influence decision-making in the family business. This facilitates better work-life balance, and the support received from family members in business-related decision-making positively influences their private life at home (Woods *et al.*, 2019). However, the disadvantage of this informal decision-making mode is that women feel excessively dependent on their spouses, which may impede women's voice and autonomy. Therefore, women use strategies to influence decision-making, such as collaborating with like-minded family members and employees behind the scenes and introducing ideas once they have paved the path for their proposed decision.

### *The semistructured decision-making mode*

Scholars tend to agree that family businesses often incorporate women who are not family members in decision-making (Ramadani *et al.*, 2018; Andersson *et al.*, 2018) and make decisions based on consensus, which positively impacts family business performance (Woods *et al.*, 2019). In this study, women entrepreneurs highlighted the importance of

decision-making involving employees at all levels and nonfamily members at the senior management level. The latter corresponds to decision-making without hierarchy (Iannello, 1992), where all family members and senior management teams unanimously agree through consensus and negotiation, which increases the family firm's performance (Woods *et al.*, 2019). However, the women entrepreneurs I interviewed perceived decision-making through consensus or semistructured decision-making mode largely as nonbeneficial for overall firm performance. The long tenure of senior staff within the family firm can generate unvaried viewpoints echoing those of the owners, which hinders the emergence of new, innovative ideas. Moreover, women highlighted having to exhaustively explain the reasoning behind their decisions when discussing with senior management. Women, therefore, use strategies to influence decision-making by assigning mentors to senior staff to enhance their skills for effective decision-making. Furthermore, factors such as belonging to the third generation of women business owners and working in a female-dominated industry play a role in decision-making, as these women have a solid foundation in managing the family business.

#### *The formal board mode*

There is a general assumption among scholars that decision-making using formal boards in larger family businesses is similar to corporations (Block and Wagner, 2014; Ratten *et al.*, 2018), but in family businesses, the board serves as an advisory body (Andersson *et al.*, 2018). Rural businesses are not thought of as growth-oriented but as small, family-owned (cf. Bosworth, 2012), and without board presence. However, my observations of decision-making processes in rural family firms reveal that the utilization of boards is a rather common practice.

From the women's point of view, there are many advantages to the formal board mode. External board members serve as conflict management tools strategically used by women entrepreneurs to influence decisions. Women in this study use a male external board member or a nonfamily consultant (Ramadani and Hoy, 2015; Ratten *et al.*, 2018) to influence the decision-making. These women, particularly those in male-dominated industries, deliberately chose to remain invisible yet indirectly influence the decision-making process.

Some women working in male-dominated industries described a desire to join social networks composed of other female entrepreneurs/business owners. The exchange of experiences and sharing similar challenges had a significant meaning for women to navigate their responsibilities toward family business and community. The women I interviewed balance work, personal life and social networks and contribute to the community as board members, lecturers and mentors educating (Bettinelli *et al.*, 2019; Faraudello *et al.*, 2018) young generations. These women have diverse prior experience, knowledge and educational backgrounds which makes them valuable and respected within the community, and this external prestige enhances their influence on decision-making within the family firm. The results of this study confirm Carter and Welter (2016) finding that decision-making in family businesses is influenced by family needs, desires and by sensitive relationships within the family. Women, therefore, assess and decide whether to influence decision-making in family firms openly or through inconspicuous strategies. Either way, women entrepreneurs influence the strategic orientation of family business through decision-making, which, in turn, influences the rural context. I add to Campopiano *et al.* (2017) theorization on the role of family and nonfamily stakeholders who affect and are affected by women's involvement in family firms pivotal for business success.

## 6. Conclusions and limitations

This paper examines how women influence the strategic orientation of family businesses through decision-making and explores the strategies they use. The study shows that women take direct decision-making power, as well as choose to exert influence through more indirect, unobservable methods. Women assess the advantages and disadvantages of specific decisions in their family business before forming an appropriate influence strategy. Within the family and business structure, the study focuses on the complexity of social relations where managerial experiences such as decision-making in the family business occur. In this study, gender relations, rather than a subordinated social construction of what is feminine, is analyzed. This perspective allows for the simultaneous observation of men's and women's movements in managerial positions, taking into consideration the distinct, specific power held by women without overrating power. The study suggests that women entrepreneurs influence decision-making within family firms, but also that the rural context influences the decision-making of family firms.

Theoretically, this study contributes to women's agency and its implications in the family business (cf. [Campopiano et al., 2017](#)) and entrepreneurship in the rural context. The study implies that women's agency shapes the (rural) entrepreneurship context, and likewise, the (rural) entrepreneurship context influences women's agency. I also add to [Maseda et al. \(2022\)](#) request to examine women's strategic decision-making in family firms.

### *Research limitations*

The study is not without limitations. The study refers to the nine women interviewed that constitute a fairly small sample chosen through snowball sampling in the context of rural Sweden. The small sample size places limits on the generalizability of the findings. Expanding the sample and conducting quantitative studies could address this issue.

The geographical context (rural Sweden) may provide another limitation. The focus of the present research is on Nordic countries, which are well-known for gender equality and therefore offer an interesting perspective in terms of the influence of women entrepreneurs on rural family business decision-making. Accordingly, the results presented may be influenced by country/regional and rural setting cultural effects.

### *Practical implications and future research direction*

A practical implication of the study is that women in family businesses prioritize the well-being of the family, business and community and thus influence decision-making and use strategies as deemed appropriate. The study suggests that women are highly influential in the decision-making process and navigate between different modes as they attempt to balance between family and community stakeholders in rural family firms. Business growth and financial gain were not a priority, and therefore, none of the studied women spoke about income. Future research may focus on the influence of the rural context on family businesses. Examining the influence of a rural context on decision-making in family businesses and ultimately the business development presents an ample avenue for further research, for example, to address the question of how rural context influences decision-making and, ultimately, the business development of family firms.

## Notes

1. Småland lies in the southern part of Sweden and is composed of Jönköping, Kronoberg, Kalmar and Blekinge counties, with approximately 948,120 inhabitants, which is equal to 9.5% of Sweden's population (OECD, 2019).

2. Due to Covid-19 global pandemic, in-person interviews were not possible, and thus, interviews were conducted via zoom.

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Appendix

**Table A1.**  
Themes extracted  
from empirical data

First order concepts	Second order themes	Aggregate dimension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● We do it together. Though, my father still has a big say. He is in his seventies, in the business for 50 years, has been in most of the situations, but world and surroundings have changed. So, we have wild discussions sometimes. We as a leaders (owners) of the company get together every second week where we discuss important decisions. (Julia)</li> <li>● On the big decisions, we do it all together (Alva)</li> <li>● Since we are a small family business we talk about it internally, me and my husband and my father, we talk about it and decide what to do. And I think we are quite different, both me and my father and my husband, we have different views of things and sometimes we talk about it in the family with my siblings too. But, we think in different ways, and I think it is good that we have different view in things, it is good. (Astrid)</li> <li>● We discuss on daily basis and we can sit down and discuss them, we discuss them all the time so that we can come to decision and a solution. Mostly, me and my husband, we discuss also with my husbands' Dad, he is here but me and my husband have the final decision (Saga)</li> <li>● We have two companies, in two cities (one in Kronberg and one in Blekinge). I am responsible completely in one of them, while in the other one I am in charge for marketing and HR, and next week will decided who is going to take the role of CEO. We don't use the titles. (Julia)</li> <li>● When I was working in a bank you needed to do everything correctly, of course that is a good thing. But, it was also having new ideas and how can we solve this, and I am like "Oh, we can do like this, so why do we do all these steps?" I felt like it wasn't that much listened to those suggestion that I had. [Now at the family business] when it is working good it's like actually "I have done this", that's satisfying (Astrid)</li> <li>● On the other hand we have different areas that we are talking about so somehow I can take decision that are under my role. sS somehow we trust each other quite a lot so everyone has their thing they're working with but as now we are actually building a factory down in [small rural town] and that is of course something. My brother he's taking care of you know all the running everyday stuff but on the big decisions we do it all together (Alva)</li> </ul>	<p>Joint decision-making in family meetings</p> <p>Joint decision-making in daily conversations with family members</p>	<p><i>Informal family oriented decision-making mode</i></p>

(continued)

First order concepts	Second order themes	Aggregate dimension
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● We always have been talking a lot between us. We discuss all bigger decisions, not maybe have formal meetings to decide but always talk about it. And also, with the other staff in the office or in the production if it's something concerning them. We talk a lot about it, still do, good and bad sometimes it takes time to make the decision to make sure. My father always and I'm a bit same way but he's worse than me, he wants everybody to like the decision. So, if one or two says No, I'm not sure than he will take the decision until everybody says 'well, OK' so, that's not always so good. We, I never take any hard decisions without talking to anybody else. [...] Not all of them, we are a group people like five (5) and most decisions go through that group. They are more in a senior position. (E/lsa)</li> <li>● Then, we tell us not to do anything but that's not always good as well, because like I said my brother was very much on the opposite side of things and the rest of us were more like, "No, let's stay like this, this is good, we can manage", and he was like "No, you should do this". He did actually push the company quite much forward as well. And like I said before the ones in the senior group, we are quite alike so, it's not very often that we don't think the same on decisions, and that's good in a way. But in one way you can get to streamline sometimes, we pick the same too often I think, not good actually. And then you can discuss (E/lsa)</li> <li>● My brother and I run the company. We make decisions together. How decisions are made depends a bit on the staff and their thoughts and views. You listen to the staff when you make decisions (Greta)</li> <li>● You make sure that the staff is comfortable with the decision and what it will mean. Everyone should feel secure in the change that the decision may have entailed (Greta)</li> <li>● When we had a company board, we did not make the decisions in the board because they did not work with the customers and in the business. The board is above the business so they did not really know how a decision could affect the business. That is why we make decisions together with employees instead of a board (Greta)</li> </ul>	<p>Consensus based decision-making including nonfamily senior management</p>	<p><i>A semistructured family/employee consensus mode</i></p>
<p>(continued)</p>		

Table A1.

Table A1.

First order concepts	Second order themes	Aggregate dimension
<p>• I can see some things much longer ahead[...]. My father was the chairman of the board and I had to get him on the board to see what I was doing and he was with me and I was the chairman of the meeting, you can say, and I was running the meetings. We started with 6 meetings a year and we changed the whole mindset with the board meetings and I said that I can do so much but I can't do everything. So, we took in an outside chairman in 2015 and he has helped us and helped me to guide the others to look up and not to be so operative in, to have an Eagle eye vision at the company, at the meetings not discuss small things. And that had been very good. My father has the tendency to look very way back and he has helped us make him realise that we are not talking about the past but we are discussing the future here. (Maja)</p> <p>• Ok. With hard decisions, of course the board is quite important as well when we take really big decisions. It's good to have discussions with them, as they're good at different things (Elin).</p> <p>• We took in an outside chairman in 2015 and he has helped us [...], to have an Eagle eye vision at the company, at the meetings not discuss small things (Maja).</p> <p>• We have active external board as well, so we have 3 persons outside the company in the board who are helping us with the different qualities, economic, law, and also an old Swedish CEO in our business. They help us and Yes, they take decisions with us (Elin).</p> <p>• So, that's why the head of the board he has been helping me, so it doesn't have to take 2 years but take short times to understand what I was thinking and how need to be to get us this far (Maja).</p>	<p>Joint decision-making including board members from outside family business to facilitate decision-making process. Joint decision-making including board members from outside family business to get an outside strategic viewpoint.</p>	<p><i>Formal board mode with nonfamily members</i></p>