Cultural values and their implications to family business succession

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A case study of small Chinese-owned family businesses in Bandung, Indonesia

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Abstract

Purpose – The family business is one of the business entities that contribute to the economy of a country. Succession in the family business occupies a strategic position, especially in maintaining the company's sustainability. The Chinese family business has unique characteristics in maintaining and growing its business with the cultural values that underlie how their business. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the cultural values of Chinese ethnic and their implications in the succession process in small family businesses in Bandung. Indonesia.

Design/methodology/approach – This research uses a qualitative method with the in-depth interview method as a data collection technique. The sampling technique uses purposive sampling, while to test the validity of research data using a triangulation technique. A total of four small Chinese-owned family businesses participated as informants in this study. The study will identify the stage of succession process in the Chinese family business.

Findings – There are several stages identified in the succession planning of small Chinese-owned family business in Bandung which include succession antecedents, succession activities and desired outcomes. The results showed that small Chinese-owned family business in Bandung has not applied the rules and procedures in the succession process. Most of the Chinese family business in this research still holds Confucianism culture; they prioritize boys as business successors, who have a greater responsibility rather than successor with other gender.

Practical implications – Several implications are discussed. One of them is the Chinese family business holding cultural values in the process of family business succession.

Originality/value – This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical implications for academics and family companies with similar cases.

Keywords Cultural values, Succession planning, Small family business, Chinese family business, Unique characteristics

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

The family business has been proven to contribute to economic growth both of developed and developing countries, including Indonesia. The low number of family businesses that have survived for generations has been the focus of researchers in recent decades, one of which is the process of succession planning. Based on some data, the family business dominates the number of companies in developed countries, for example in Asia and North



Journal of Family Business Management Vol. 10 No. 4, 2020 pp. 281-292 © Emerald Publishing Limited 2043-6238 DOI 10.1108/JFBM-03-2019-0017 America 90 percent, South America 85 percent, Europe and Africa 70 percent and Australia 65 percent. The data showed that family business is very influential on the economy of a country (Bernard, 2013).

The growth of the family business is inseparable from the process of transformation and transition from generation to generation. In addition, strong leadership, family values, organizational transformation, succession, culture and attracting talent are needed to build longevity from generation to generation and the development of family businesses (CEO Stars, 2016). A strong kinship system represents a prominent feature of Indonesian culture and the main motivation for Indonesians to build a family business (Ramadani et al., 2017). Culture has an important role in shaping the work system within the family enterprise because it can serve as glue that integrates ownership, management and family sub-systems (McCollom, 1988; Tsai, 2011; Karam, 2017). The family values within the company are inseparable from the culture brought and created by the family. Culture will show the values, norms and attitudes prevailing within the company. According to Sorenson (2013), prevailing family business values are usually the basis for reflecting family identity and values. Family companies, which are able to survive and develop, are companies that instill the culture properly in each change so that it can be accepted by the company's stakeholders. Thus, an understanding of the culture within the family business is needed to develop more insight and knowledge in running a family business.

Chinese ethnic typically consist of small minorities in a country and region abroad, yet they play an important role in the economic landscape in their region, such as Southeast Asia. where they hold most of the company's wealth in the region (Chen, 2001; Weidenbaum, 1996; Yeung and Tung, 1996). Cultural values are often seen as important factors in determining the organizational practices and business practices of Chinese business people. Chinese family businesses were significantly influenced by traditional Chinese culture and common characteristics in terms of business operations (Wah, 2001; Yan and Sorenson, 2006). In Chinese society, influenced by Confucianism, the family is the core element of all social relations (Ambrogio, 2017). The family business model was one of the important reasons for the success of Chinese companies (Dana, 1999). The value of Chinese culture is influential in determining a differentiated family business model: familism and three aspects of the family could be described as nepotism, paternalism and family ownership (Wong, 1993). In this type of family company, the majority of key positions are occupied by family members. Chinese culture emphasizes on two important aspects of family enterprise. The first is the gender of successors under parent and child relationships. The second is about business development in industries dominated by men or women. The gender of the successor was considered less important because the priority attention is about the potential ability of successors, such as education and managerial skills (Brockhaus, 2004 in Qin and Wang, 2012).

One phenomenon closely related to family business is succession planning or transition between generations. Based on the survey results of Jakarta Consulting Group (2014) as much as 67.8 percent had prepared the successor through succession planning, while 32.2 percent was not or not yet prepare it. This process is one of the problems in the family business because it affects commercial sustainability, including inaccurate decisions in identifying of future leaders generations. Previous research had highlighted the problematic dynamics that arise in a succession process consisting of the fear of loss of control, preferential treatment by the next generation and social status (de Vries, 1993). An effective succession planning within a family company is in the earliest possible time to involve family members within the company.

Chinese family-owned companies have different and unique succession planning stages, where the company has strong values in every business process, so they are able to maintain their business in several generations of leadership. Many previous studies have discussed the topic of Chinese family business research, but studies of the influence of

cultural factors on leadership succession are still limited. This study tries to fill the gaps that Cultural values occurred in previous research. So, this study aims to analyze cultural values in the succession process of small Chinese-owned families in Bandung, Indonesia. This study is expected to provide theoretical and practical implications for academics and family companies with similar cases.

2. Literature review

2.1 Chinese family business

Various studies have been conducted to analyze the role and contribution of family businesses to the country's economy, and have become an interesting phenomenon for further research. Family business is a business that involves family members of at least two or more family members who oversee company finances (Aronoff et al., 2003) and they influence company policy (Donnelley, 2002). A company is recognized as a family business when there has been a transfer of leadership from one generation to the next (Longenecker et al., 2003). Furthermore, Zubir (2008) enriched that the meaning of family business is a business that is owned and managed jointly by people who have family relationships.

Family business ownership has dominated Chinese companies since the early nineteenth century (Wang, 2008). According to Wah (2001), family in Chinese society is the center of all relationships because of the influence of traditional Confucianism. Thus, it affects the Chinese family business in relation to family, education, employment, social ethics, group conformity and centralized authoritarian values, where the collective good of groups and communities satisfies individual needs (Gatfield and Youseff, 2001). Confucian theories require that boys need to take family responsibilities after their father, especially for the eldest son. The values and norms of traditional culture are usually regarded as the main factors that determine organizational and managerial practices in Chinese family business activities. Zhu and Warner (2004) found that kinship-based ownership structures can facilitate the construction of business networks such as ensuring upstream suppliers and downstream buyers. In general, the most important characteristic of Chinese family business is the power centralization through the dominance of family ownership and control. Managerial practice in Chinese family businesses is influenced by inherent cultural values, this characteristic that distinguishes Chinese managerial systems from others. The unique characteristics of Chinese organizations include highly centralized decision making, low activity setting, paternalistic leadership style, strong emphasis on collectivism and group behavior, and strong family management and ownership. The influence of Chinese cultural values on organizational and managerial practices can be briefly classified into people management, organizational structure, leadership style, and business orientation and strategy (Wah, 2001). This study examines the cultural values embedded in Chinese family businesses that influence their succession process.

2.2 Succession planning

The succession process plays an important role and gives a significant influence in determining the future of the desired family business (Ramadani and Hoy, 2015). Succession planning is a process of leadership transition between generations within a family enterprise as an effort of business sustainability (Ramadani et al., 2015; Aronoff et al., 2003). Thus, succession planning is one of the founder challenges in maintaining and developing the company further. Higginson (2010) suggested important factors in the succession process such as the transfer of knowledge and abilities, building good relationships between generations, and being open to ideas and experiences. McNamara et al. (2009) also found that careful succession planning was proven to have a successor who was able to overcome the problem. In addition, successors can also introduce positive cultural, social and economic changes.

The purpose of succession planning is to achieve the optimal transfer of control and responsibility in family business for the next generation (Kaneff, 2011). The internal succession process for family businesses is a very complex and important issue (Kamei and Dana, 2012; Gashi and Ramadani, 2013). A research conducted by Morris *et al.* (1997) shows that only 30 percent of family businesses survive until the second generation, while the next generation does not succeed in carrying out their functions so the company cannot survive and develop. Dyck *et al.* (2002) highlighted that the succession process can represent strategic opportunities for companies in emerging markets characterized by dynamic change. Duh (2015) found that success in choosing future successors requires knowledge transfer involving: mentoring, training and strategic planning among other elements.

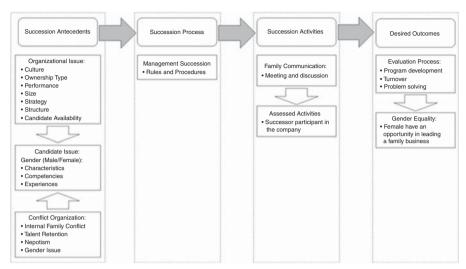
Relevant literature indicates that succession is the most important problem faced by family businesses. The main causes of succession problems in Chinese family businesses are lack of succession plans, successional abilities, internal and external pressure, culture and lack of trust between each other (Chen and Hsu, 2009). The lack of a proper succession plan is the main reason why family business does not continue. Many families ignore the succession plan, they think they only need to train the successor and surrender the business to their successors. Thus, succession is a problem for the majority of family businesses (Handler, 1994). Chinese family business needs to learn the principles of balance between business and family interests by integrating family culture values into business management (Wah, 2001). Previous studies have identified Chinese cultural values as important factors in determining Chinese organizational practices and business practices.

This study examines and explores further the conceptual model of succession planning based on a study conducted by Ramadani *et al.* (2017) model with some modifications to the results of the study, including succession antecedents, succession processes, succession activities and desired results. Succession antecedents are factors that influence consideration in the succession process which includes organizational issues, organizational conflicts and candidate issues. Cultural values are a factor highlighted in this study. According to Eppink (2011), culture is a characteristic of society that contains an overall understanding of social values, social norms, science, social structure, religious, intellectual and artistic. In addition, gender issues are also discussed as part of the value of Chinese culture in the succession process. Gender is one of the factors that affect the performance of a family business. Based on the study by Fèlix and David (2019), it showed that the presence of women in family businesses has a positive impact on business performance compared to family businesses that are only managed by men. The results of other studies also revealed that family businesses controlled by women objectively and subjectively have performance that is no worse than men (Peake and Marshall, 2017).

Succession process is the activity of management in preparing the rules and procedures for selecting future successor. Meanwhile, succession activities consist of family communication and assessment activities. Family communication is an activity where all family members are involved in business meetings and discussions to identify candidates for the next generation. Meanwhile, for assessment activities, some candidates who meet the criteria complete a series of tests to involve them in the company during a certain period. The professional experience gained will complement their insights to manage their business more effectively in the future (Figure 1).

3. Methodology

This research uses a qualitative method with the case study approach. Qualitative methods are used to understand the phenomenon of research holistically in a natural specific context and by utilizing scientific methods (Moleong, 2011). In addition, qualitative research is considered appropriate in exploratory studies because it provides an opportunity to interact directly with research subjects, thus avoiding bias during the interview process (Dana and



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Figure 1.
Succession planning model

Source: Ramadani et al. (2017)

Dana, 2005; Dana and Dumez, 2015). The case study approach is conducted by focusing on intensive and detailed cases (Yin, 2013), so that the results can describe the case comprehensively. This study uses four cases of small Chinese-owned family business in Bandung, Indonesia. According to Yin (2013), the number of literal replication is three to four cases, while for theoretical replication is six to eight cases. A total of four respondents participated in this study. A case study research is conducted to find meaning and is not intended to generalize. This study also tried to describe the problem formulation in the case studied to reveal the social situation thoroughly, extensively and profoundly (Sugiyono, 2014).

This study aims to discuss the cultural values of Chinese ethnic and their implications in the succession process in small family business in Bandung, Indonesia. A purposive sampling technique was used in this study, where the respondents of this study were people who were considered to understand the social situation of the research object. According to Polkinghorne (2005), the purposive sampling technique in qualitative research shows that it does not matter how much data are collected from how many subjects, on the contrary, it is more important to collect precise, accurate and rich data with meaningful information. Several factors explored deeper in this study were taken based on the research conducted by Ramadani *et al.* (2017) consists of succession antecedent (organizational and candidate issue), succession process, succession activities (family communications and assessed activities) and desired outcome. This study uses semi-structured in-depth interview techniques; this allows researchers to explore more deeply when additional information is considered important for research.

The data source of this research consists of primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with research informants; meanwhile, secondary data were obtained from reference sources relevant to the study. The interview process was conducted in a direct face-to-face meeting between the researchers and the informants in the place of each Chinese family business, the average interview time took 1–2h. To avoid the loss of information, the researcher also asked permission to the informant to use the recorder to record the conversation between the informants and the researchers. Prior to the interview, the researchers briefly explained the background description of the research topic. After the interview process, the interview result was changed to an interview script written on the interview form to obtain informed consent that

the data provided were appropriate and applicable to the study, and to ensure the confidentiality of the interview (Kaiser, 2009). Based on the agreement with the informants, the name shown in this study only uses the initials of the name. Each family business is independently studied using multi-case processing techniques comprising data reduction, data viewing and verification of conclusions (Hubberman and Miles, 1994).

4. Finding and discussion

Chinese ethnic in Indonesia spread in various regions of Indonesia. The Chinese community has heterogeneous characteristics where differences are based on origin and socio-economic class, and the level of assimilation (Dana, 2014). Even though Chinese in Indonesia uses Indonesian names, they have never been fully integrated with indigenous people. According to Coppel (2008), based on data from the 2010 population census, the Chinese ethnic population is 1.2 percent of the total population of Indonesia. Coppel noted that about 60 percent of Chinese people speak Indonesian as daily language, and there are a large percentage of additional languages using their local language, such as Javanese or Sundanese. The number of people using various Chinese dialects as daily language is quite small, about 20 percent of the total Chinese ethnicity in Indonesia. Chinese entrepreneurs in Indonesia in 1998 controlled 70 percent of the private sector, it was noted that 5,000 medium businesses and 250,000 small businesses were owned by Chinese entrepreneurs (Dana, 2014).

The results obtained through the depth interview and observations to four small Chinese-owned family businesses. The respondents in this study used the initials name, to keep the confidentiality of the respondents, each of the initial names we used were KB, FS, KM and KF. All respondents in this study are the second generation of Chinese family business with the type of business is a culinary business. Based on interviews of all respondents, we can identify the influence of Chinese cultural values at the succession planning stage in the Chinese family business.

4.1 Succession antecedents

Based on the results of the interviews identified several antecedents in succession planning such as organizational issues, candidate issues and gender issues. Culture is one of the organizational issues in the succession planning in Chinese family business. Chinese ethnic strongly uphold their cultural values. KB states that:

I'm a boy so I have to take care of my mother and continue family business [...].

Based on the interviews that the informants inherited the Chinese culture in the family business where the son as the successor who has an important role as the leader of the company, it makes all members obedient to the rules based on company decisions. Man *et al.* (2016) emphasized the importance of normative factors, especially the sense of obligation and good "quangxi" created as part of the family unit and company during the succession process.

According to Eppink (2013), culture contains of overall social values, social norms, science, social structures, and religious, intellectual and artistic that characterizes society. In addition, Chinese ethnic in Indonesia use certain principles that they have held for a long time. One of them is the principle of "Ching Li Fa" which means "eat first after that we talk business," meaning that before negotiating about business usually Chinese people invite business associates to spend time eating together. It aims to establish intimacy with co-workers, so negotiations are calmer and less tense. The Chinese ethnic are also known for their unlimited hard work.

Furthermore, FS states that:

I worked in the office for less than 2 years, but because I am a boy and the first child, I have to continue my father's business [...].

According to FS, the boys are inherited to continue the family business; a similar thing is Cultural values expressed by KM stating that the business successor in the Chinese culture is the son as the leader of the family business. Gender issues become one of the things that arise in planning succession in Chinese family business. Here are the results of interviews with KB:

I continue my mother's business because I am a boy and have a great responsibility to take care of my mother, if the daughter is not allowed to continue the family business because she has the responsibility to keep her husband and family.

However, cultural shifts seem to have taken place in Chinese family businesses, where other respondents did not consider gender issues. According to FS:

In my family, whether male or female alike, the important thing can be responsible to the family business and able to run the business in accordance with the wishes of parents.

The explanation of FS is not different from KM and KF that men and women can become corporate leaders, the most important thing is to have the ability to run the business and responsible in leading the company in accordance with the wishes of the previous generation.

Based on the results of the study, Chinese ethnic provided an opportunity for all their children to continue the family business because all children both women and men have the same rights in the family business ownership. Regardless of whoever becomes the next leader, the most important as a successor, both men and women, must have strong will, intention and determination, and sufficient ability to take control of the business. However, based on data obtained and supported by observations, four Chinese family businesses from the first generation are predominantly led or controlled by a man, usually the oldest son of the previous generation, while other families occupy positions as managers or other department heads. Gender is related to psychological, social and cultural differences between men and women (Remiswal, 2013).

Here are the results of interviews with KB:

Well maybe like I said before those men are hard workers for family business and women have responsibility to her husband.

Based on the explanation of KB, those who continue their family business must be men because they work harder and are responsible for their work to achieve family business success in the future. Chinese ethnic are more involved in business, both small and large scale. They have the experience of doing business for generations; therefore, Chinese ethnic offspring are also directed not to become employees. Among Chinese people working independently is still seen as more successful than being an employee.

4.2 Succession activities

Several succession activities were also identified in this study. Here are the results of interviews with KB:

Well when a child has often helped mother and was told the compositions used in making martabak and how to make a good batter.

The same is expressed by FS, KM and KF. Here are the results of interviews with respondents:

Since I was a child, I have helped father and taught the process directly. (FS)

Parents always guide how to produce and choose the materials used. (KM)

I've been helping out in the store before, given lessons on how to choose the flour used to make the dough into noodles. (KF)

Early on, all respondents have been involved in business activities. Thus, at this stage it has been done well by previous generations ranging from providing guidance to prospective successors until invite potential candidates to know more about family business by involving potential successors in corporate activities. These things are taught by Chinese parents to their children by involving them in the business and engaging their child in the work their currently exerts. The successor is not only required to understand the theory but in practice is also directly involved, seeing and experiencing. Through this way, the Chinese children learn the business philosophy of their parents. Children who are able to manage the business of their parents will be given the opportunity to develop the business is still under the supervision of their parents. While for children who are considered by their parents less able to manage the business, they tend to be limited only as executors. Policies and decision making remain in the hands of parents, not infrequently even daughters who are authorized if they are considered capable of managing. Based on the results of the study, the authority they have may only be done with the permission of the previous generation.

4.3 Desired outcomes

At this stage, an evaluation of succession activities is performed to determine whether the successor is viable or not to be family business leader. Based on the explanation to four informants, the development programs on family business follow the changing of trend and lifestyle, by utilizing technology and internet network as a bridge between companies and consumers. Based on interview results, KB and FS each have a strategy to overcome employee turnover. According to KB how to cope with high turnover, the company has a strategy to overcome by giving rewards and appreciation in the work and provide bonuses to the employee. Meanwhile, to overcome high employee turnover, self-introspection is needed regarding internal problems that trigger employee turnover. After getting the cause of the problem, the company leader gives motivation to the employee. However, according to KM and KF that the high turnover of employees is not a problem because their business is still relatively small and has not had many employees. Turnover according to Robbins *et al.* (2003) is the act of permanent resignation made by employees either voluntarily or not.

In addition, successors are also evaluated on their strategies for dealing with business competition. Based on FS's explanation, to overcome business competition, the company innovates by opening branches in strategic places and expanding business. Here are the results of interviews with FS:

We always make new innovations in the face of competition so as not to lose compete with similar businesses; we also often hold promos to attract the attention of consumers.

Meanwhile, according to KF:

[...] we better maintain the taste and reasonable price for a bowl of noodles.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

Based on the results of the study, there are several stages identified in succession planning in small Chinese-owned family business which include succession antecedents, succession activities and desired outcomes. In contrast to the study conducted by Ramadani *et al.* (2017), the stages of the succession process were not identified in this study. In addition, the results showed that small Chinese-owned family business in Bandung has not applied the rules and procedures in the succession process. Most of the Chinese family business in this study still holds Confucianism culture, where they prioritize boys as business successors, who have a greater responsibility rather than successor with other gender. It also raises gender issues. However, there are differences opinions among respondents in response to

gender issues, there are several Chinese family businesses that provide equal opportunities Cultural values and rights to their successors regardless of gender. However, they apply specific criteria for business successors including having strong will, intention and determination, and sufficient ability to control the business.

The next stage is a succession activity in which the founder provides an opportunity for their successors to learn business activities, provides guidance and direction to increase the knowledge and motivation of successors in learning to do business. The involvement of future successors in business activities also begins at this stage. In this study, it was identified that the founder did not release directly the authority of the company to the successor but had to prior permission to the previous generation. The next stage is the desired outcomes by carrying out a success evaluation process in succession activities, including the implementation of development programs that have been carried out in an effort to improve the performance of family businesses. In addition, at this stage an evaluation was also conducted regarding internal problems that triggered employee turnover and the problem solving capability of the successors in the face of business competition. This research also identifies that the successor is still experiencing weaknesses in problem solving; they have not been able to solve the problems that occur so that authority cannot be fully given by the founder.

Currently, gender equality has been recognized globally, so gender is not a relevant issue anymore in family business. The family business can provide equal opportunities to future candidates regardless of gender. Collaboration between successors, without differentiating gender, is needed to complement each other in improving family business performance. Family involvement in business processes also needs to be improved in maintaining family position in business. In the development program stage, the next successor can maximize the use of information technology, such as the utilization of social media optimally and consistently by updating information about the products or services offered to develop market share and increase product sales, build good interactions with customers, and display interesting product content so visitors on social media are interested in exploring the products offered.

Research on China's family business is still limited, so governments and business practitioners can provide their perspectives to further understand the role of Chinese family businesses, especially in Indonesia. Ethnic Chinese play an important role in the economy in Indonesia, so the government plays a role in taking policies related to the sustainability of Chinese family businesses. This study can be further developed by conducting a survey that focuses on Chinese family businesses, so as to provide an understanding of business expectations, challenges and obstacles, and efforts to increase business value.

6. Limitation and future research direction

A recent survey of the accounting agency (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2018) showed that the crisis of the succession occurred in Chinese family business and needed better handling soon. The issue of leadership and management remains a concern in succession. The main challenge for family business entrepreneurs according to the PwC survey is innovation and economic environment. This research is focused only on the issue of succession and touches on a little about innovation and economic environment, the next research is expected to be more integrated in exploration so that the results could be more impactful.

This study is limited to focusing only on four small Chinese-owned family businesses in Bandung, even though there are already many Chinese family businesses that have medium-sized enterprises. So, it is necessary to investigate Chinese family business in applying cultural value based on a different scale of enterprises size. In addition, this study also has limited area coverage; further research is expected to expand the scope of study areas such as provinces or national.

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