The Importance of Creating an Owner Strategy in Family Firms – An Intergenerational Perspective

Isabella Wrede

Department of Economics

Hanken School of Economics

Helsinki

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HANKEN SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

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Abstract: In family firms, long-term strategic planning is strongly intertwined with the owning-family's vision for the company. Strategic planning in family firms can hence be divided into two categories: the development of an owner strategy and the development of a company strategy. Research focused on the creation of an owner strategy is, however, scarce and the aim of this thesis is thus to contribute to research on strategic planning in family businesses by examining how the creation of an owner strategy benefits the business-owning family and the family firm.

The owner strategy is in its essence a tool for ownership management and strategic planning. It optimizes ownership and family interaction both within the family as well as with the family business by functioning as a clearly formulated and communicated plan setting out the objectives, rules and guidelines regarding ownership and the different elements it entails. The creation of an owner strategy is especially important in family-owned companies due to the dynamic relationship between the different interdependent subsystems; family, business, and ownership. These subsystems develop over time, which requires appropriate structures and plans to guide the development.

The theoretical framework of this paper examines the distinctive characteristics of family ownership and strategic planning in family firms before presenting a review of previous literature on the topic of owner strategy. By understanding how family ownership and family control affects the firm, its needs, and how it operates one can better understand why ownership management and strategic planning is important in family firms and, consequently, why the development and implementation of an owner strategy is essential for both the business-owning family and the family firm.

The research question for this thesis is answered by collecting qualitative data through interviews with respondents from four multigenerational Finnish family firms. The intergenerational perspective of this study is provided by interviewing both a respondent from the current and next generation of owners from each family firm.

Comparative analysis across cases led to the categorization of the main benefits of creating an owner strategy into eight categories. The owner strategy was found to benefit the family by initiating and improving communication, increasing the knowledge and commitment of the next generation, by improving the feeling of family unity, and by preventing conflicts and misunderstandings. The creation of an owner strategy was found to further benefit the family firm by defining a shared owner's vision, facilitating decision-making, initiating the succession process as well by having concrete strategic implications. The findings from this research increase the understanding of the importance of creating an owner strategy in family firms and provide insight into why the next generation should be included in the process.

Keywords: Family firms, owner strategy, strategic planning, ownership management, family governance, corporate governance, intergenerational perspective, family unity, next generation

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1 INTRODUCTION

We are currently living in a period of transition as the large age groups in our country are soon to retire and consequently pass on their businesses and wealth. In Finland, the size of the age group older than the current retirement age is one of the largest in Europe, as every fifth person is now at least 65 years old (Statistics Finland, 2016). Since family firms dominate the economic landscape of most nations and account in Finland for 20 % of the GDP, (Finnish Family Firms Association, 2017) the coming intergenerational transfer of wealth will likely be one of the biggest our modern economy has experienced (Family Business Survey, 2016). Hence, in order to ensure business continuity and safeguard the economy, effective strategic planning and preparing for the coming transitions of ownership should be a top priority for the whole family business sector.

In family firms, long-term strategic planning is strongly intertwined with the owning-family's vision for the company. Strategic planning in family firms can, thus, be divided into two categories: the development of an owner strategy and the development of a company strategy (Ward, 1988, May, 2008; Carlock & Ward, 2001). This division of the strategy process in family firms into both owner strategy and company strategy is a relatively new approach when discussing strategic planning in conventional management theory but has gained ground among family business scholars (Ward, 1988; May, 2008).

The owner strategy is in its essence an ownership management and strategic planning tool for optimizing ownership and family interaction both within the family as well as with the family business (Poza et al., 2014). It is in practice a clearly formulated and communicated plan setting out the objectives, rules and guidelines for the family regarding ownership and the different elements it entails (Lainema, 1998).

The creation of an owner strategy is essential for family firms due to the distinctive characteristics that family firms possess. Family firms are unique as they sit at the intersection of business and family and thus need to balance the different needs of the distinct but interdependent entities. Family influence is nevertheless what essentially differentiates family firms from non-family firms. The business-owning family and the relationship with their business can be a major contributing factor to business success but it can also lead to some major challenges. Ultimately the inability to govern the relationship between the family and the business can even undermine the whole enterprise (Poza and Daugherty, 2004). It is hence of utmost importance to develop and implement an owner strategy in family firms as part of effective ownership management to safeguard the firm from its family-based hazards, and additionally make effective use of the family as a source for competitive advantage.

Despite a rapid increase in family business research during the last decade, strategy research devoted to family firms is still scarce (Harris et al., 1994; Nordqvist & Melin, 2010). Studies on long-term strategic planning in family firms have mainly focused on the succession planning process (Sharma, 2004) whilst little research has yet been conducted on the topic of creating an owner strategy in family firms. The importance of taking the owner perspective into consideration in strategic planning in family firms to a higher degree than before has, however, gained ground among family business scholars recently (Carlock & Ward, 2001; Moores, 2009; Nordqvist & Melin, 2010). There is thus a recognized need for empirical findings on how strategic planning is practiced in family firms and how the process of creating an owner strategy can benefit both the business-owning family and the family firm. This study aims to bridge that gap in research and increase the understanding among practitioners and family-business owners alike on the importance of creating an owner strategy and how it can benefit both the business-owning family and the family firm. This study further provides an intergenerational owners' perspective on owner strategy in family businesses and elaborates on why the creation of an owner strategy in collaboration by both the current and next generation of owners is valuable.

1.1 Aim of paper and research approach

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the importance of creating an owner strategy in family firms by studying how the creation and implementation of an owner strategy in family firms can benefit both the business-owning family and the family firm. Hence, my primary research question is: How does creating an owner strategy in family firms benefit the business-owning family and the family firm?

Additionally, this thesis aims to broaden the understanding of how including the next generation of owners in the process of creating an owner strategy can benefit the family and their business. This study provides information on the importance of developing an owner strategy from an owner's viewpoint and contributes to the family business literature both in terms of effective strategic planning and ownership management.

From a broader perspective, the objective of this paper is to improve the functioning of family firms by providing effective practices, insights and principles about the process of developing an owner strategy and the benefit of creating it in cooperation with the next generation.

I will answer the research question stated above by examining how the owner strategy is perceived to benefit the business-owning family and the family firm by eight family business owners. The data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with representatives from four Finnish multigenerational family-owned companies. The data will further be analyzed alongside relevant literature on the topic. As failure to plan the succession process is listed as one of the largest threats to business continuity, and as the current recommendation regarding owner strategy is to include both the current and next generation of owners of a family business in the owner strategy development process (PwC Family Business Survey, 2016) this study takes an intergenerational perspective on the topic of owner strategy. To capture an intergenerational perspective, I will interview a representative from both the current as well as the next generation of owners from each of the four family-owned firms studied for this paper.

As the prevalent recommendation in family business best practice literature (Ward, 1988; Carlock & Ward, 2001) is to engage in strategic planning and consequently create an owner strategy, my assumption in this thesis is that the creation and existence of an owner strategy benefits the business-owning family and thereby the family firm as well.

1.2 Scope of research

The scope of this paper is Finnish multigenerational, family-owned firms that have reached a Sibling Partnership or Cousin Consortium stage of ownership development (Gersick et al., 1997). The companies in this study have an ownership structure of 4-25 owners. As this paper takes an intergenerational perspective on the concept of owner strategy the purposeful sample for this study consists solely of companies that have created or alternatively are in the process of creating their owner strategy in collaboration by both the current and next generation owners in the family firm. All companies are privately-owned and members of the Finnish Family Firms Association. The companies chosen for this study represent a variety of industries.

1.3 Key concepts

Family firm:

There is a variety of definitions of what constitutes a “family business” in the family business literature. For the purpose of this study a family business is defined as a firm where the majority voting rights are held by a natural person, his or her spouse or other member of his family. The majority of voting rights are direct or indirect and at least one member of the same family, or his legal representative, has to be part of the management or the governance of the firm. Listed companies fulfill the definition of a family firm, if the one who acquired the capital stock, or his family, has 25 % of voting rights brought by the acquired shares (translated from www.perheyritystenliitto.fi) This definition is provided by the Finnish Family Firms Association and will be the one used in this paper.

Owner strategy:

The owner strategy (fin: omistajastrategia, sve: ägarstrategi) as a concept is discussed in family business literature using many different terms, such as the owners’ plan (Poza et al. 2014), owner strategy, family’s handbook (Elo-Pärssinen, 2012) and family plan (Gersick et al, 1997; Carlock & Ward, 2001), to name a few. Nevertheless, the different wordings all encompass the same concept, namely the process of setting guidelines for family ownership and communicating within the business-owning family about the different elements that ownership entails. The owner strategy should encompass, e.g. a continuity plan, a shared owners’ vision, the mission and values for the family and the business, as well as the family’s goals for the family firm and in regards to ownership, for instance the risk profile and dividend policy and plan for financing. The roles of different family members and how to organize the family and the family firm in terms of family governance and corporate governance are also important aspects of an owner strategy. This thesis uses the term owner strategy for describing the above described concept as it is a descriptive term often used by families, practitioners and also found in literature (Lainema, 1998; May, 2008). The owner strategy is described in further detail in chapter 2.3.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This paper is divided into six sections and the remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Chapter two provides the theoretical framework for this study by presenting relevant literature on the topic of owner strategy. The literature review will start by describing the unique characteristics of family firms (2.1) and why strategic planning is important in family firms (2.2) before in chapter 2.3 providing a thorough overview of what an owner strategy entails. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology for the conducted research. In chapter four the empirical results from the four family-owned companies is presented. In chapter 5 the findings from the study and their connection to previous literature is analyzed and the main findings are presented. Finally, in chapter 6, I will discuss my research and main conclusions before concluding with discussing the limitations of the paper and giving suggestions for future research that might further contribute to increasing the knowledge on the importance of owner strategies in family firms and consequently improve the functioning of family firms.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter presents the theoretical framework for this research paper based on a literature review of family business literature relevant for the topic of this thesis. The unique characteristics that family businesses possess are first described in chapter 2.1, including the most central theories that aim to explain the distinctive features of family ownership. This chapter additionally examines different aspects of strategic planning in family-owned companies (2.2) before providing in chapter 2.3 a thorough overview of what the owner strategy as a tool for ownership management and strategic planning entails.

2.1 The unique characteristics of family firms and family ownership

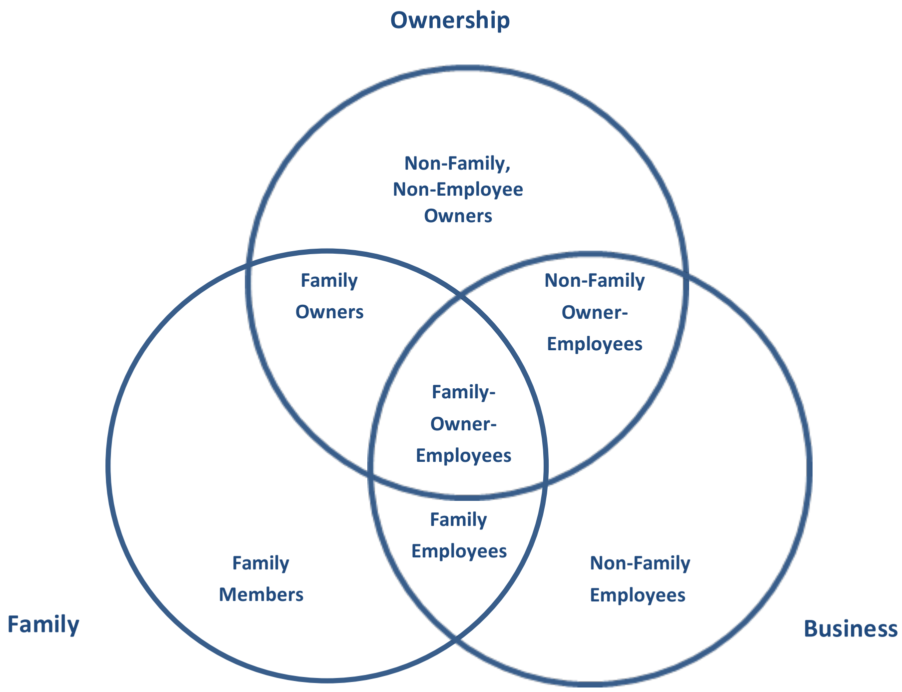
Family-owned or family-controlled firms have many unique characteristics that make them distinctive from other forms of enterprises. The presence of the family is the essential, and most obvious characteristic that set family businesses apart from non-family firms. It is only recently however that researchers have started to acknowledge the presence of the owning family and family dynamics as a fundamental variable in their research and consequently started to study the influences of the family on the businesses they own. By understanding how family ownership and family control affects the firm, its needs, and how it operates one can better understand why ownership management and strategic planning is important in family firms and consequently why the development of an owner strategy is essential for both the business-owning family and the family firm.

2.1.1 The different dimensions of family firms

One of the first conceptual models that was introduced by scholars trying to explain what makes family-owned firms such a distinctive form of enterprise was a model describing family businesses as systems. The model was an illustration of two overlapping circles proposing that family businesses are made up of two subsystems; the family and the business. These subsystems have their own norms, values, membership rules and organizational structures. They overlap in a family business and problems then arise from conflicting pressure from the family and the business on individuals in the middle of the model when the same individuals have different roles and obligations to fulfill in both subsystems. The main challenge for family-owned businesses was therefore identified as finding strategies that satisfy both subsystems; the family and the business. (Gersick et al., 1997)

Tagiuri and Davis (1982) are among some of the most renowned scholars to have researched the distinctive characteristics that family firms possess. In order to further elaborate on the topic of distinctive characteristics of family firms they introduced in 1982 the renowned *Three-Circle Model of Family Business*. The Three-Circle Model of Family Business is based on the systems theory of family business but elaborates on the traditional two-circle model by making a distinction between ownership and management in the business circle of the model in family firms and thus adding ownership as a third circle and subsystem to the model. The model proposes that depending on where a stakeholder is in the system composed of the three independent but overlapping subsystems – family, management and ownership – their perspective on issues central to the family firm will be different. The overlapping circles illustrating the different subsystems form seven sectors that any individual in a family firm can be placed in. The Three-Circle Model of Family Business, thus, illustrates how different family members' memberships in these three different groups and different sectors will affect the dynamics of family firms and how they function. The model has been found highly useful by both scholars and family business practitioners alike as specifying the different roles and subsystems that individuals of a family firm are part of helps better understand the complexities within family businesses and the interaction between different individuals. A graphic representation of this model explaining the dynamic interaction between family, ownership and management is displayed in Figure 1.

Figure 1 **The Three-Circle Model of Family Business**



Source: Tagiuri & Davis, 1982.

The Three-Circle Model of family business and systems theory that it represents is highly relevant for my study as it highlights the importance of better understanding the dynamic interaction between owners and family members with different roles in the family business. By better understanding the dynamic relationship between the different subsystems and how it affects the actions and motivations of different individuals in a family firm one can better understand the importance of implementing effective ownership management practices as a means to handle and prevent interpersonal conflicts, role dilemmas, and set priorities and boundaries in a family firm.

Gersick et. al (1997) however point out that this model provides a useful overview of a family business in a particular point in time but in order to understand the full complexities of family ownership one needs to include time as a dimension to the analysis of family businesses. They explain further that the most important dilemmas that family firms encounter are often the result of the passage of time and consequently the movement of different individuals inside the subsystems between the seven different sectors presented in the Three-Circle Model (figure 1). This movement often stimulates a reaction in the whole system. The addition of time as a dimension in the Three-Circle Model resulted in a model named the *Three-dimensional developmental model* of family business developed by Gersick et al. in 1997 (see figure 2). For each of the three subsystems; family, ownership and management, they added an axis to describe the development over time of each of the subsystems which are illustrated by a separate developmental dimension that go through different sequences of stages. As in the three-circle model, the movements through the different developmental stages influence each other while still being independent from one another.

The Ownership Developmental Dimension is based on previous literature by Ward (1994) who was one of the first scholars to study the development of ownership in family firms. Gersick et al. (1997) found that even though there is a complex array of different forms of family ownership the categorization of family ownership into the three stages captures the most essential aspects and variations of ownership development over time. The stages of ownership development start with companies controlled by single owners named the Controlling Owner companies, these firms then evolve to Sibling partnerships which as the name implies are controlled by siblings. The last stage of the ownership developmental model is the development into Cousin Consortium companies where the control is mutually shared by a group of cousins. Here it is worth noting that the stages of ownership do not always follow this path as the distribution of shares in the family can vary. Other scholars have further developed the developmental model by for instance adding a fifth stage of ownership development named family dynasty (May, 2008)

The Controlling Founder stage is defined by ownership control being consolidated in one individual. If there are other owners at this stage they do not exercise significant ownership authority. Key challenges for this stage include securing capital, balancing autonomous control with input from key stakeholders and devising an ownership structure for the next generation. As this study does not focus on companies in this ownership development stage but rather on companies in a sibling partnership or cousin consortium I will not describe this stage in more detail but continue to the following stages on the ownership developmental axis.

The second stage on the ownership developmental axe is the sibling partnership. This stage is defined by ownership control being shared by two or more siblings, who may or may not be active in the family business. At this stage ownership may be shared with other individuals as well (from either of the parent's generation or children of the siblings) but they do not exercise significant ownership influence. As the ownership structure becomes more dispersed, so do the key challenges for the business. It becomes important to develop a process of shared control among owners and defining the role of the non-employed owners. In terms of capital the focus has shifted to balancing priorities between reinvestment and dividends among the shareholders. Another key challenge listed by Gersick et al. (1997) that is characteristic for the Sibling Partnership stage is controlling the different family branches. As the individuals in a sibling partnership age and the next generation grows older it is typical for the siblings to feel pressure to protect the interest of their own children and begin acting as they are representing their whole family branch and hence move away from thinking in the best interest of the company or the shareholder group as a whole.

Gersick et al. (1997) also emphasize the influence that in-laws have on to the family business and their effect on the shareholder group. They point out that they are an important determinant in whether sibling partnerships will be effective and harmonious.

The final Cousin Consortium stage is defined by Gersick et al. (1997) as the most complex ownership stage. At this stage cousins share ownership control in a group of ten or more owners while none of the different sibling branches have enough voting shares to control decisions. Some of the key challenges distinctive for this stage include managing the complexity of the family and the shareholder group which puts special emphasis on the importance of developing effective ownership management practices at this stage. Another key challenge of this stage is to define the requirements of responsible ownership, which further argues for the need for an owner strategy in this ownership development phase. At this stage, the deep personal connections and the strong commitment for the company which were defining for the earlier stages in the ownership developmental model are most often diluted. The next generation is additionally one generation further away from the founding generation which also increases the complexities of shared ownership. Gersick et al. (1997) also found it important to create a shared identity outside of the business through different activities and communication that emphasize family instead of business. It was also found beneficial to create a family business capital market for family members that wish to sell their shares.

The second axis in the Three-Dimensional Developmental Model, The Family Developmental Dimension, captures the structural and interpersonal development of the family and is based on both individual and family development as well as family lifecycles researched in psychology. This axis consists of four subgroups named the Young Business Family (YBF), Entering the Business (EB), Working Together (WT) and Passing the Baton (PB). The division of families into the different stages is done based on the ages of the members of each generation active in the business and each stage faces different dilemmas.

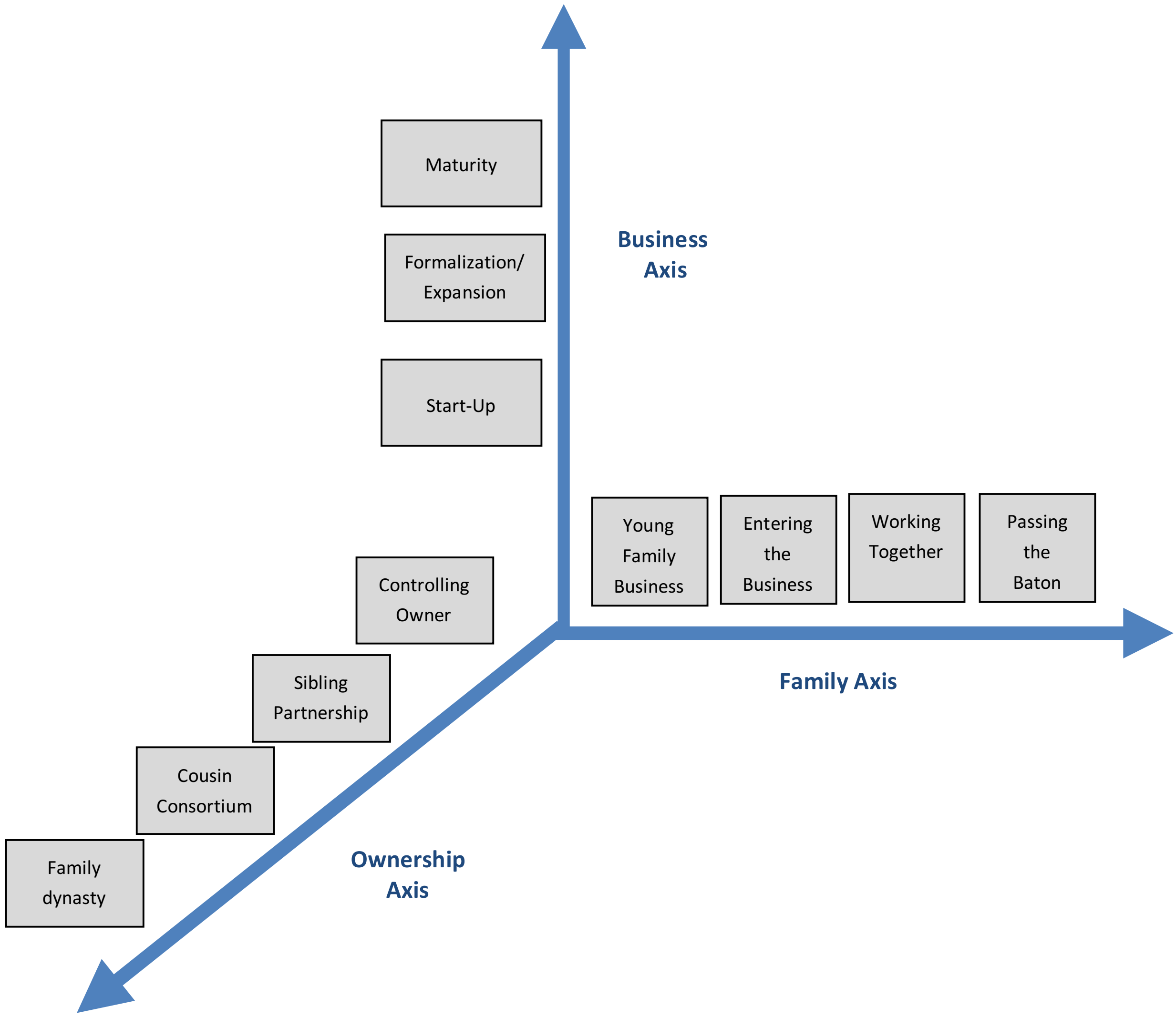
The YB stage is described as a period of intense activity including important decisions such as defining a marital partnership, deciding on whether or not to have offspring, committing to a family role and a career etc. In the EB stage on the other hand each generation is approximately ten to fifteen years older and the challenges are again somewhat different. These families need to create entry criteria and plan for career paths for the next generation in the family business while simultaneously managing other familial issues associated with midlife transitions as well as defining the role as the middle of three adult generations.

In the WT stage Gersick et al. (1997) explain that the parental generation moves through the decade of its fifties while the younger generation is in its twenties and thirties. This stage is defined by families attempting to manage complex relations of parents, siblings, spouses and in-laws, cousins and children of different ages. In this stage it becomes increasingly important to set up guidelines for ownership so that the business system in the model and its capacity is in line with the needs of the quickly growing family. The main reasons for this is that the expanding family's income and lifestyle needs are different at this stage than in the earlier stages in the developmental model and the size of the business cannot necessarily support the financial needs or provide career opportunities for everyone, which is why the business-owning family needs to have a unified understanding of the expectations and demands for the business. Family communication and clear operating procedures are stressed by Gersick et al. (1997) as being vital at this stage. Gersick et al. (1997) found the division of business families into developmental subgroups as particularly useful as business families could through the family developmental model learn about the challenges that could await them in the following developmental stages and hence proactively prepare for the future.

The PB stage is characterized by a preoccupation on succession and transition by everyone involved. This stage encompasses different aspects of strategic planning taking into account the different subsystems as well as individual and family goals. Succession and the lack of succession planning in family firms is considered one of the most stressing issues that family firms deal with today. The issue of succession will be discussed in further detail in chapter 2.2.3.

The Business Developmental Dimension is based on theories on business life cycles as it describes the development of the business over time. Gersick et al. (1997) found that the stage of development for the business often has a profound effect on decisions regarding sales of family shares to outsiders or succession for example. In the developmental model the stages of the business lifecycle are divided into three stages. First, the Start-up stage (SU), covering the founding of the company and its early years before moving into the Expansion/Formalization stage (E/F) which encompasses the majority of family firms. It starts when the companies have established themselves in the market and have stabilized routines until organizational change and growth drastically declines. At this stage, the biggest issues for families is to find the structures that work for their family and their family business also in regard to the evolving ownership group and the other developmental axes in the model. The final stage is named Maturity and is strongly influenced by a declining market and unsustainable competitive dynamics resulting in unprofitable business. The only successful ways out of this stage is to renew the organization in various ways.

Figure 2 **The Three-Dimensional Developmental Model**



Source: Adapted from Gersick et al., 1997; May, 2008

The three-dimensional developmental model of family business is highly relevant for my study since a family business and its characteristics change as it moves through the different developmental stages on the different axes and different structures and plans for guiding the development are thus needed. When a family business as well as the family change over time and the individuals in the firm and the family take on new roles it becomes increasingly important to have effective ownership management practices in place and an owner strategy to set the guidelines for the future for both the family and the business. Understanding this model is essential for understanding why the viewpoints of the different companies and between the different generations in this study differ.

2.1.2 Competitive advantages and disadvantages of family firms

There is much controversy in academic literature as to whether the unique characteristics of family firms are the source of great competitive advantages or actually the opposite, leading to disadvantages for the firm (Poza, Hanlon & Kishida, 2004). Scholars have, however, found that many of the distinctive features of family firms can be both a competitive advantage or disadvantage depending on how well these attributes are managed (Tagiuri & Davis, 1982).

Tagiuri and Davis (1982) introduced alongside the *Three-Circle Model of Family Business* the concept of *bivalent attributes*. They define the concept of bivalent attributes of the family company as the unique, inherent features of family firms that are the source of both advantages and disadvantages of this type of organization. Family firms are explained to possess several of these inherent features as bivalent attributes are directly derived from the overlap of memberships in the three groups; family, ownership and management. The bivalent attributes are explained to contribute either to a competitive advantage or disadvantage for the organization depending on how well they are managed. Tagiuri and Davis (1982) recognized in their research seven bivalent attributes that are of most significance to family firms. These were named: simultaneous roles, shared identity, lifelong common history, emotional involvement and ambivalence, private language, mutual awareness and privacy, as well as meaning of the family company.

As many of the distinctive attributes of family firms can be either a competitive advantage or disadvantage depending on how well these attributes are managed, it is of major importance to implement proper managerial and governance practices in a family firm to ensure that these attributes yield competitive advantages for the firm and not the opposite. Proper management of these unique characteristics is in addition to being beneficial for the family firm also explained to affect the family in many ways, ranging from the well-being of the family to benefitting the family's relationship with the employees as well as with the greater community in general (Tagiuri & Davis, 1982).

As explained above, scholars have found that many of the features distinctive to family firms can be either a competitive advantage or a disadvantage depending on how well these attributes are managed. In addition to the bivalent attributes discussed above family firms also possess other competitive advantages and disadvantages characteristic to this organisational form. Different theoretical perspectives analyse the firm from somewhat different perspectives and thus also regard family firms and the characteristics distinctive to these firms from varying viewpoints.

Organization theory was for a long time predominated by agency theory. It gained ground in the 1970's as a result of the separation of ownership and control in many organizations and the multifaceted principal-agent relationship that arose as a result. According to agency theory the divergence of interests between the agent and principal will ultimately give rise to the principal-agent problem, which consequently gives rise to agency costs for the principal when the agent, given the opportunity and the rational nature of the individual, will maximize their own utility at the expense of the principal. (Jensen & Meckling, 1976)

In family firms one of the competitive advantages often associated with family ownership is the reduced agency costs due to the often overlapping principal-agent relationship. The overlapping principal-agent relationship occurs in family firms e.g. when the owner is also in control of the management of the company or the management is closely intertwined with the owning family. This overlap has been found to lead to faster decision making, a decrease in the need of formal supervision, reduced financial reporting, reduced regulatory requirements and consequently lower administrative costs. (Davis, Schoorman & Donaldson, 1997)

Another organisational theory often utilized to analyse the family firm is stewardship theory. Ward (1997) proposed that one should not exclusively rely on agency theory as it does not capture the full complexities of organizational life. Stewardship theory was introduced as an alternative explaining many complex situations from a psychological and situational viewpoint, hence capturing many behavioral premises not explained by agency theorists. He suggested that stewardship theory and agency theory can fit in one theoretic landscape without a need to undermine and compete with each other. In regard to family firms a stewardship perspective claims that the founding-family members view their family firm as an extension of themselves and the continuing health of the enterprise is thus perceived to be connected with their own personal well-being (Poza, 2014)

In addition to analysing family firm characteristics from an agency or stewardship perspective the resource-based view is often also considered in family business literature (Habbershon & Williams, 1999; Pearson, Carr & Shaw, 2008). By looking at the organization from this theoretical perspective one is looking to find if the interaction between the family and the business represent a unique set of resources that can be turned into a competitive advantage by the family firm. Moreover, the firm is examined for specific, complex, dynamic, both tangible and intangible resources that are unique to it (Poza, 2014). The resources that are distinctive to a firm as a result of family involvement are identified by Habbershon and Williams (1999) as the "familiness" of the firm. The familiness of the family firm is a concept much studied in family business literature.

From the Resource Based View family and social capital can be regarded as resources that business-owning families are uniquely positioned to capitalize on. The firm-family relationship can, thus, be seen as a source of competitive advantage for the family firms, in addition to firm specific resources. Customer-intense relationships, ownership commitment, patient capital and taking a long-term perspective are other competitive advantages often associated with family ownership. (Poza et al, 2004)

Although family businesses possess many named competitive advantages due to the distinctive form of ownership, family ownership or control has also been recognized to foster negative side effects. Some of the disadvantages of family ownership are due to psychological characteristics of the family such as lack of trust and lack of communication resulting in family conflict while other disadvantages characteristic to the family firm relate to unstructured governance and a lack of succession planning, which has proven to be the biggest risk to business continuity governance (PwC Family Business Survey, 2016).

Some other recognized drawbacks of family ownership include nepotism, self-dealing, entrenched management, and utility maximization by the family to the disadvantage of corporate profits and other shareholders (Poza et al, 2014). Evidence shows that as the family business gets older, grows and the ownership structure becomes more dispersed it becomes harder to exercise control over the business. Family influence can thus have detrimental effects for the business and for the family as a group.

In order to avoid and tackle the many challenges that the overlap of subsystems can entail and to support bringing forth the positive advantages of the owner-family-business interaction it is important that the shareholder-firm relationship is effectively managed with clearly structured ownership management and family governance tools, such as the owner strategy.

2.1.3 Family psychological characteristics

Another distinctive characteristic of family-owned firms is that ownership is held by members of a kin-related group bonded by kinship ties, norms and altruism (Astrachan, 2010). These characteristics are explained by Astrachan (2010) to have a likely effect on the strategy process. Families are also characterized by long-term relationships and trust which can additionally affect the business and the strategy process in many ways.

Other psychological characteristics related to the family, such as family unity, commitment and cohesion also affect the business (Habberschon & Astrachan, 1997; Zahra, Hayton, Neubaum, Dibrell & Craig, 2008). Collaborative families, where family members work well together and are mutually supportive have for instance been found to more effectively transfer the business to the next generation while high cohesion in the family along with adaptability are associated with effective communication and healthier family relationships (Lansberg & Astrachan, 1994).

Family unity is another psychological characteristic that has in research been found to not only be beneficial for the family but also have a positive effect on the family business. A high degree of family unity has been recognized as a resource for competitive advantage and sustained business performance (Poza, 2014; Habbershon & Astrachan, 1997). This is largely as it can be perceived as the main factor leading to ownership commitment and patient capital, two major competitive advantages held by family firms. (Poza, 2014). Their findings demonstrate that investing in the family's health and harmony via guidelines for employment of family members, clear standards and processes for succession and ownership transfer, and promoting cooperation and positive relations among family members is beneficial for the firm. Systematic communication and planning practices in the family and the firm can thus be deemed useful practices, which in turn advocates for the creation and implementation of an owner strategy for family firms.

Habbershon and Astrachan (1997) also stress the importance of family unity, in particular the positive effect that family meetings can have on the feeling of unity about goals, desires, and actions. Consequently, this sense of unity is explained to become the basis for positive outcomes for the family business itself. Their research, however, found that it is the mere perception of group unity among family members rather than the actual level of group unity that predicts and motivates coordinated collective action that in turn may lead to better performance and an improved succession process. These positive outcomes derived from a feeling of group unity leading to coordinated family action, entail that the new information from the family meetings is continually reassessed and that the thinking is modified accordingly. It is the action of assessing and reassessing one's individual beliefs about family and business issues in family meetings (also referred to as "collective encounters") together with the family that leads to reframing and renegotiation of shared beliefs, which in turn then leads to renewed collective action. Habbershon and Astrachan (1997) also found in their research that it is the frequency of the collective reassessment of family beliefs that is of most importance whereas, surprisingly, the content and actual level of agreement about the shared beliefs is secondary.

The importance of family meetings is also stressed by Ward (1997) as he states family meetings as the most important "best practice" for long-term family business growth. He explains that the process of holding family meetings should define the family purpose and mission, family values, and the motivations and rationale for continued business ownership. By finding a consensus on these matters the foundations for long-term growth are set.

Despite the many benefits that some psychological characteristics of the family can provide, Carlock & Ward (2001) point out that the same kind of family intimacy that many family companies can draw strength from can also work against the company. They mention that it can have negative effects on the professionalism of the company and executive behavior as authority may be harder to exercise with relatives. Lifelong histories and family dynamics can also affect the family firm in a negative way by intruding on business relationships. Furthermore, as explained in previous chapters the roles in the family and in the business can become confused.

When family relationships and family dynamics are burdened by unresolved or reoccurring conflicts communication and trust in the family is diminished, which consequently makes it more difficult for family members to share ideas, discuss issues or make decisions effectively Scholars hence advocate for working together as a family as it intensifies interaction and can relieve family problems and rivalries between siblings or between generations. (Gersick et al., 1997; Carlock & Ward, 2001).

Being sensitive to family psychological characteristics and their effect on the family firm and family dynamics is important also in regard to the concept of legal and psychological ownership. Sund et al. (2015) explain that the distinction between legal and psychological ownership is especially important in family businesses as legal and psychological ownership often is combined in family firms. The former refers to the traditional view on ownership constituting to firm shareholding, in other words something one *has*, whilst the latter relates to the "feeling of ownership nested within the owner" (Sund et al., 2015) and relates ownership to something one instead *does*. They stress that this distinction is especially important to remember in ownership successions.

The effect of family psychological characteristics is discussed as it is relevant to understand the importance of effective ownership management in family firms aiming to hold a cohesive and united group of owners.

2.2 Strategic planning in family firms

The world is changing more rapidly than ever before and for businesses to stay resilient and focused in this ever-changing landscape it is of outmost importance to have a strategic plan in place linking the current state of the business to its long-term objectives and future vision. In family firms, long-term strategic planning is strongly intertwined with the owning-family's vision for the company (Ward, 1988). Developing an owner strategy is thus an essential part of strategic planning in family firms alongside the development of a business strategy (Carlock &Ward, 2001; May, 2008). This division into both owner strategy and company strategy is a relatively new approach when discussing strategic management and planning in conventional management theory but has gained ground among family business scholars (May, 2008). The following subsections will hence discuss the elements of strategic planning that are distinctive to family ownership, namely, the importance of coordinated strategic planning between the owners and the business, the structure of corporate governance and family governance as an element of strategic planning as well as how succession planning poses an critical subset of the strategy process. The owner strategy will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.3 as it is an essential part of strategic planning in family firms and as such is the focus of this thesis. It is worth noting that the different elements discussed in this section and further in the subsections are essential elements of the owner strategy in a family firm.

2.2.1 Coordinated strategic planning between the business and the owners

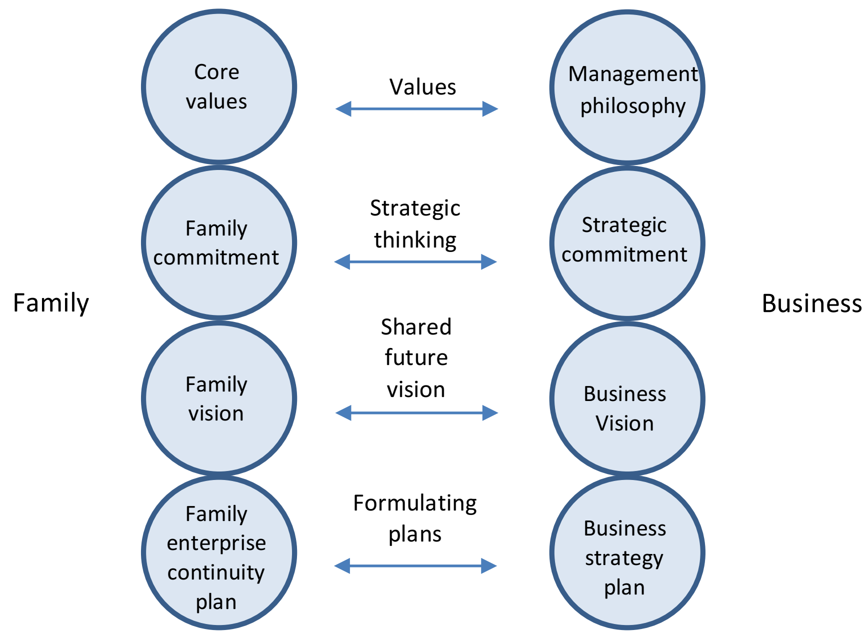
Coordinated strategic planning between the owners, the board of directors, and the management has been identified as best practice in family business literature and as a source of competitive advantage distinctive to family firms (Poza, 2004). In the context of family firms, the term best practices refer to identified lessons learned from successful, long lasting family businesses that can be put to use also in other family firms (Dana & Smyrnios, 2010). A coordinated parallel planning process of this nature is possible in family-held firms as the shareholder base often is smaller and more unified than in firms with other ownership structures.

The results from PwC's Family Business Survey (2016) display that 69 % of respondents feel that their business and family strategies are aligned. However, the Family Business Survey Report points out that this number can be misleading as their experience in the field of working with family firms has shown that this perception of alignment often is embedded primarily with the controlling owner. The process of aligning the business strategy with the owner and family strategy should, therefore, be viewed as a continuous process of clear and comprehensive communicating within the whole family of current and future owners.

Due to the many distinctive features of family firms it is essential to develop a planning process that guide and coordinate both company and family actions. Carlock & Ward (2001) stress the importance of creating a culture in the family business where as many family members and non-family members as possible are involved in the shaping and focus of the business. They further propose a business model for the modern family business that is based on shared power and ownership and propose that family businesses gather the personal, financial and strategic priorities of both family and business and integrate them into a single strategic planning strategy for the family business. In other words, the idea is to undertake a planning process with the goal to identify family and business plans that mutually support the other's needs and goals. Based on this notion they developed a tool for integrating and balancing family and business thinking and action. They call this the Parallel Planning Process (PPP) and consider it essential for family firms as the family and business systems are interdependent, meaning that an action in either system affects the other. (Carlock & Ward, 2001)

In practice, the PPP can be divided into two separate planning processes, the first consisting of developing a plan for the family while the second section is concerned with developing a plan for the business strategy. The family plan has many similarities to an owner strategy as the plan for the family entails determining the core values, family commitment, the shared family vision, as well as developing a plan for the continuity of the family business. However, the outcome and focus of the PPP as a whole is a viable business strategy and proposes that the management and the family simultaneously explore the family and business systems. The focus in an owner strategy is however not on the business strategy but rather on functioning as an ownership management tool for the owners and their benefit whilst, nonetheless, also functioning as an interface between the owners and the business, and thus, as in the PPP enabling coordinated strategic planning. Nevertheless, the similarities of the PPP and the owner strategy are distinct and can thus be deemed useful also for describing the owner strategy creation process. The parallel planning process is illustrated in figure 3 below.

Figure 3 The parallel planning process



Source: Adapted from Carlock and Ward, 2001

2.2.2 *Succession planning as a subset of the strategy process*

In many family firms, long-term coordinated strategic planning between the owners and the business also involves planning for business continuity. It hence becomes important to include succession planning as a subset in developing a long term strategic plan in family firms. Succession planning is especially important as failure to plan for this process effectively has been recognized as the most significant risk to business continuity (Ward, 1988). It has been found that only 13 % of family firms survive the transition to the 3rd generation of family ownership while no more than 3 % of family businesses make it past four generations. The reason for many family firms not making it through these transitions can in many cases be traced back to a lack of effective succession planning. In family-owned businesses long-term strategic planning, thus, relates strongly to having an effective succession plan in place. (Ward, 1988).

Effective succession planning means developing, implementing and communicating a strong and well-thought out succession plan, well in time before the definite handover of the business from the current generation of owners to the next generation. An effective succession plan should, thus, through communication between the current owners and the family, ensure that the aims of the owners and the family are aligned with the objectives of the firm. (Poza, 2014)

Nevertheless, the results from PwC’s Family Business Survey (2016) show that 43 % of family firms do not have a plan for succession and only 4 % of over 100 Finnish family firms surveyed for PwC’s Family Business Survey (2016) have a robust, documented and communicated succession plan in place. These percentages are particularly alarming as, many business-owning families state business continuity as an important long term ambition with the goal to hand off the business to the next generation as more prosperous than when the previous ownership transition was made (PwC Family Business Survey 2016).

Effective communication within the business family and between the generations seems to be one of the main fallbacks in the succession process as scholars have found that there is an extensive communication gap between the generations that are part of the succession process (Sharma, Chrisman& Chua, 2003). There is thus a pressing need to align the perceptions between these stakeholders, in order to increase the probability of a satisfactory succession. Sharma et al. (2003) found in their study a misalignment of perception regarding both the incumbent's and the successor's perception of the willingness of the successor to take over the family business as well as the incumbent's propensity to step aside. These misaligned perceptions of the other's attitude were found to affect that particular stakeholder's satisfaction with the succession process. Additionally, as a result of their findings they emphasize the need to analyze issues regarding the succession process from more than one stakeholder group's point of view.

The concern regarding the evident communication gap within many business families is also raised in the Family Business Survey Report conducted by PwC (2016). In the report, PwC reports that a lack of regular and open communication can often be found in families regarding issues such as wealth and ownership. They point out that not communicating on important issues, such as ownership and how to manage the family's wealth, will inevitably lead to family members having varying expectations and perceptions on these matters which in turn can give rise to potential conflict. Thus, in order to preserve the family harmony, business continuity and facilitate the succession planning process families should start the process of open communication regarding ownership and family strategy.

Cooperation and communication among the stakeholders in the family business is important also as other stakeholders than the incumbent and successor (who often are considered the key stakeholders in the succession process) play a vital role in ensuring a successful succession process. Sharma et al. (2003) explain that these other family members affect the process through their combined power, legitimacy and urgency. They can influence the succession process primarily through their agreement to maintain family involvement in the business and through their acceptance of roles related to the business. Sharma et al. (2003) explain further that if the other family members are not committed to the goal of succession and there is not an agreement in place regarding their future relationships with the successor, the succession process including the redistribution of company shares, assets and power is more likely to get undermined by the other family members than without this discordance between the stakeholders. It is therefore of utmost importance that the views of multiple stakeholders are considered in the succession process and that these views are integrated in the process of intergenerational succession.

Morris, Williams. Allen, Jeffrey & Avila (1997) also advocate for cooperating with the next generation in order to ensure a successful succession process, as they propose three sets of determinants for successful family business transitions: namely the preparation level of the heirs, the nature of relationships among family members, and planning and control activities engaged in by the management of the family business.

In addition to succession planning being essential for safeguarding the continuity of the family business it is also a highly relevant matter since we are currently living in a period of transition as the large age groups are soon to retire and consequently pass on their businesses and wealth. In Finland, the size of the age group older than the current retirement age is one of the largest in Europe, as every fifth person is now at least 65 years old (Statistics Finland, 2016). Since shares in family-owned businesses often are transferred to the next generation, the coming intergenerational transfer of wealth will likely be one of the biggest our modern economy has experienced. Hence, to ensure business continuity and safeguard the economy, effective ownership management and preparing for the coming transitions of ownership should be a top priority for the whole family business sector.

2.2.3 Corporate Governance and Family Governance in family firms

How to organize and structure the different controlling mechanisms in an organization is an important part of strategic planning in any company. Corporate governance of this sort is essential also in family businesses but differs to some extent in a family firm as the family's involvement in ownership, governance and management are what essentially makes family businesses different from non-family businesses. Corporate governance in family firms is, thus, often characterized by the involvement of the owners in the management and controlling structures. (May, 2008)

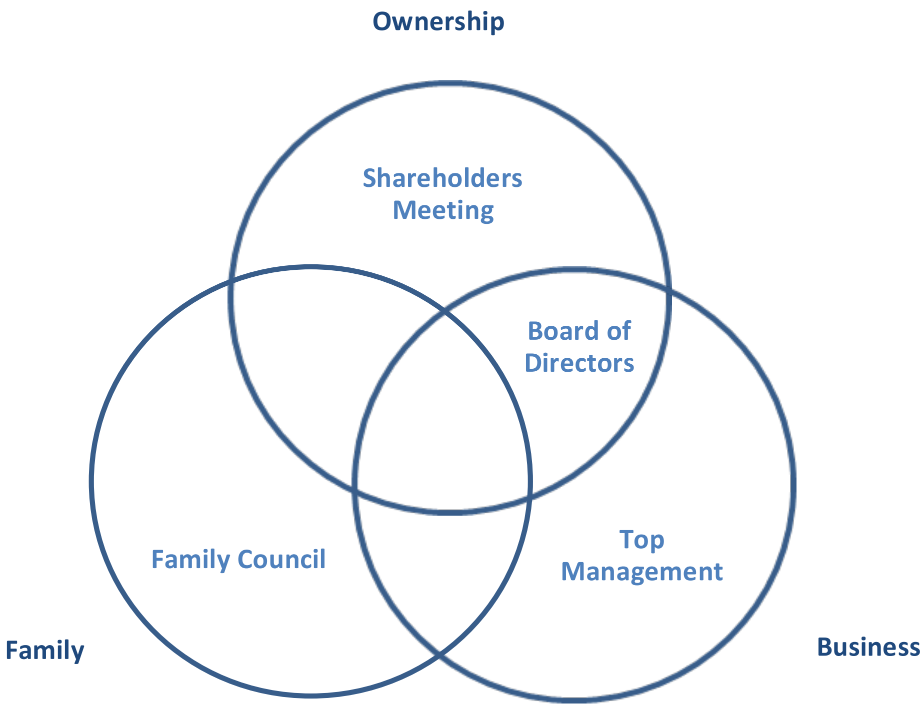
However, as family businesses grow and evolve over time the number of shareholders often increases and ownership becomes dispersed. As a result, it often becomes difficult or ineffective to include all the owners in the management or in the board of directors (Gersick et al., 1997). If the owners are not involved in the governance or management of their family firm the only way for them to exercise their voting power is through the annual general meeting. Thus, when the ownership structure in a family firm grows and becomes more complex the family often face a need to implement more structured and formalised mechanisms and forums to deal with the different interests and views held by shareholders. In family business literature, these types of structures are often categorized under the term family governance.

Family governance has been defined by Poza (2014) as "*a system of joint decision making by family and business leaders that helps the owner family govern its relationship with its business and wealth*". The aim of developing effective family governance is hence to develop and sustain rational economic and socioemotional decision making that is not overwhelmed by traditional family dynamics. In other words, family governance efforts help control and manage the nature of the relationship between family members, shareholders, and managers so that the business prospers and the family sustains and promotes its unity (Poza, 2014). Professionalizing the family in this sense entails a clearer division of roles and responsibilities as well as the establishment of more formalized structures such as a family council e.g. (Gersick et al., 1997). The importance of having a clear and powerful vision, clarifying roles and responsibilities of family members, helping them to develop the specific capabilities needed with regards to the future, as well as building a unifying structure to connect family is also emphasized in family business best practice literature by Jaffe and Braden (2003), who have researched best practices in family business, specifically in regard to the governance of family business. (Jaffe & Braden, 2003).

In addition to the many benefits that professionalizing the business family can yield to the business, the development of family governance measures has been found to additionally promote communication within the business-owning family and enhance the family members' emotional commitment and investment in the business (Suess-Reyes, 2016). Zahra et al. (2008) also found that a culture that values involvement of their family members in its decision-making benefits the family firm by having a positive impact on the strategic flexibility of these firms, which further is a major contributing factor to business survival and success in family firms.

In summary, one could describe family governance as ways of organizing the business-owning family while corporate governance is related to how the family firm is governed. The owner strategy on the other hand functions as the interface between the owners and the family firm by incorporating the views of the entire family group and thus providing the board with the answer to the question: What do the owners expect from their investment? (Poza, 2014). The governance structures in the family business are depicted below in figure 4.

Figure 4 **Governance structures in the family business**



Source: Adapted from Davis (2001).

2.3 The owner strategy

The owner strategy has in family business best practice literature been recognized as a tool for effective ownership management and strategic planning in family firms (Ward, 1997; Lainema, 1998; Poza, 2014; Carlock & Ward, 2001; Gersick et al, 1997). The owner strategy functions as an ownership management tool by optimizing family interaction both within the family as well as with the family business while it additionally functions as a strategic planning tool in family firms helping to organize the business-owning family's values and interests for the company so that they can be further communicated to the board of directors and from there to the management.

The objective of an owners' strategy is to set objectives, rules and guidelines for the family regarding ownership and the different elements it entails. An owner strategy is in practice a clearly formulated written document, jointly developed within the family, often with an outside third party acting as facilitator for the discussion and co-creation process. The owner strategy helps the business owning family effectively communicate the shareholders' expectations, needs and wants into a single coherent voice that can clearly be communicated to concerned parties, most often to the board of directors and management. An owner strategy should convey to the board of directors the vision, values, mission, goals and needs of the shareholders as well as their goals regarding the family firm, and in this way, contribute to better alignment between the interests of the owning family and those of the company and its management. An owner strategy encompasses in addition to listing values, goals and aims for the family and the company also the existing rules and preconditions that need to be met and respected when working towards the set objectives. (Lainema, 1998)

An owner strategy should also entail what the role of the family is in the development of the company and how this role will evolve over time (Lainema, 1998). With a clear owner strategy that lays out the ambitions and wants of the owners as well as the ultimate goal for the business, the board of directors can better ensure that the management performs in a way that is satisfactory for the owners both from a financial point of view as well as regarding the owners' other principles. Also Tagiuri and Davis (1992) emphasize the importance of making explicit goals and communicating them to all the owners, family members and managers. It is the responsibility of the shareholders to a company to define the owning family's strategy and clearly communicate the owning family's values and priorities so that the management can make the necessary decisions, both regarding the economic and non-economic considerations of the family. This means in other words that when an owner strategy is used effectively it can function as a tool for the family and the board to conduct parallel strategic planning for the benefit of the business and the shareholders. This kind of coordinated strategic planning between the owners and the business also involves succession planning as succession planning is an important subset of the strategy process in family firms. Thus, as previously mentioned, when making long term business strategies the succession plan should also be considered. The importance of aligning the business strategy with the owner and family strategy is not only important with regards to effective succession planning but also when it comes to addressing important decisions such as financing growth for example. If the needs and priorities are divided between dependent shareholders the possibilities to drive forward change in the company are limited (Lainema, 1998).

Gersick et al. (1997), the developers of the Three-Dimensional Developmental Model for family businesses, also emphasize the importance of having structures and plans in a family business. The different structures and plans are described as essential to guide the development of the different dimensions in a family firm through the various developmental stages.

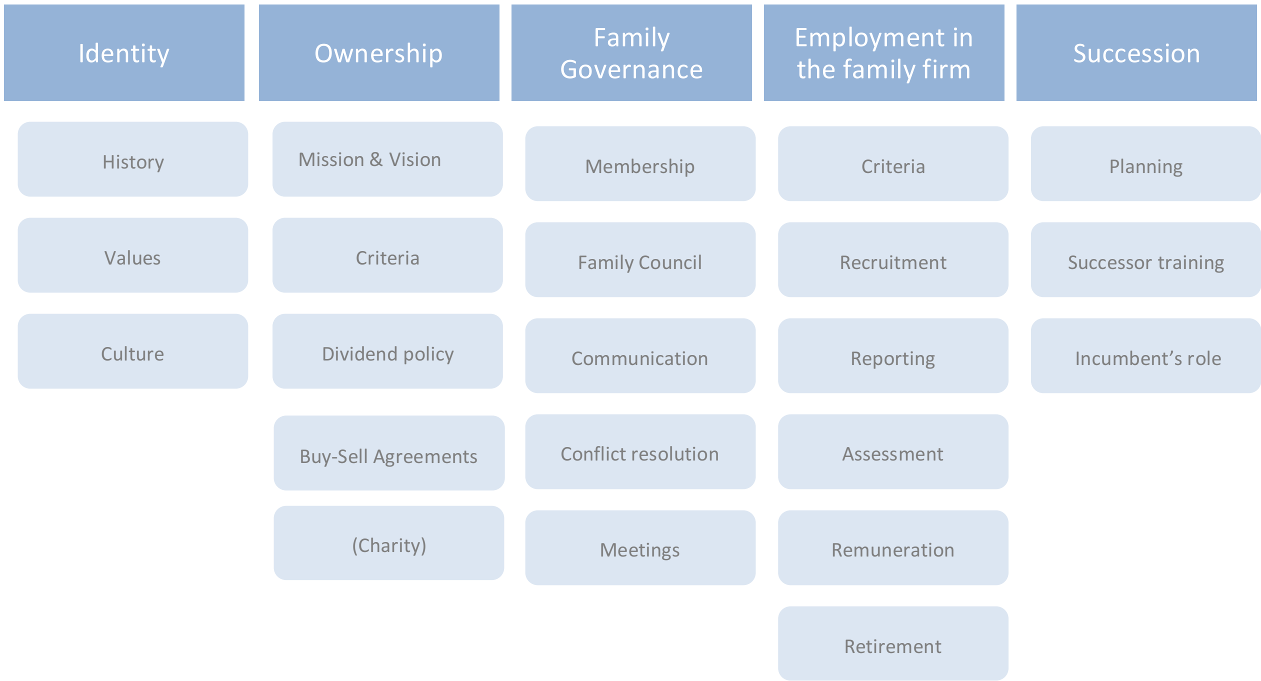
Carlock & Ward (2001) are also strong advocates for developing an owner strategy in family firms. They explain that due to interdependent systems of family and business it is essential for family firms to balance evenly family demands with the requirements of the business. Balanced business and family systems are explained to create trust, commitment, business effectiveness and family harmony. To accomplish this balance business families need to engage in family-business planning and establish plans and policies for addressing five essential issues. The first one is the issue of control and it encompasses establishing fair decision-making policies in the family, in management and in ownership of the family business. The second variable, careers, sets guidelines for various family members regarding the possibility of pursuing careers or taking on other roles in the company. The following, third, issue addresses capital in the family firm and the creation of systems and agreements making it possible for family members to reinvest, harvest or sell their investment without damage to other family members' interests. The fourth variable is about addressing conflicts that business-owning families face as a result of work and personal lives intersecting so closely. The final issue that Carlock & Ward list as important to address is about how family business culture represents enacted family values and how these values are used in developing plans and actions. Carlock & Ward further suggest asking questions such as: Who will own in the future? What are the family's core values? What is the family's vision of their relationship to each other and the business? What is the Family Business Philosophy? What is the family's level of commitment to business ownership? Is the family willing to participate actively in supporting the business? How will the family prepare family members for management and leadership roles?

Lainema (1998) further stresses the importance of having an owner strategy in place in family firms. He emphasizes that it is not solely an ownership management tool for large family businesses with dispersed ownership structures, but as important of a tool for family firms that have more concentrated ownership structures. He explains that the owner strategy should take a stance on the following eight issues. Firstly (1), the owner strategy should set guidelines for the continuity of ownership in the family. This means that the family should discuss if non-family owners are allowed, and if so, to what extent. The second (2), topic is to discuss ownership and management in the family firm. This includes questions such as: What is the policy on employment of family members and what prerequisites are needed to advance to management positions? How are family members who are not involved in the daily business trained for ownership? What is the rate of non-family vs. family members in management and the board? How are the family's shared goals and views coordinated outside the business (family council e.g.? The third (3) section to include in the owner strategy involves the family's shared vision for developing the business, including goals in regard to growth, competitiveness, diversification, internationalization, profitability e.g. also need to be included. The remaining five sections of the owner's strategy entail fiscal decisions such as setting the risk profile for the owners and consequently for the company as well as agreeing on a dividend policy. It is also part of the owners' responsibility to decide on the equity structure in the company and discuss how growth is financed and what the degree of solidity should be for instance. Furthermore, the owner strategy should entail a plan and policy that enables and sets a structure for how a shareholder can sell their shares and how the shares should be valuated. The owners of the family business also need to take a stance remuneration policy in the firm.

The Finnish Family Firms Association (Elo-Pärssinen, 2012) discuss in a publication about the Family Council the importance of creating a handbook for the family. The family council is explained by Carlock & Ward (2001) to often function as the forum where the owner strategy is developed. As mentioned earlier in this thesis the terms used for discussing the concept of owner strategy varies and as the family's handbook discussed in the publication holds a similar definition and contents as an owner strategy the term family's handbook and the recommendations given in regards to it will be held equivalent in this thesis with that of the owner strategy.

According to the Finnish Family Firms association the family's handbook should encompass the family's wants, the owners' needs and the requirements set by the business. The Finnish Family Firms Association has divided the recommendation regarding the handbook into five themes; Identity, ownership, family governance, family members' employment in the business and succession. A graphic representation of what the different categories entail is provided in figure 5.

Figure 5 Themes in the family handbook



Source: Adapted from Elo-Pärssinen (2012)

2.4 Table summarizing main literature in relation to the research topic

A table presenting a summary of the main literature presented in the theoretical framework of this paper, alongside questions that the theories can provide answers to in relation the topic of this research is provided in table 1.

Table 1 Summary of the main literature in relation to the research topic

UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILY FIRMS AND FAMILY OWNERSHIP		
• Gersick et. al. (1997) • Taiguri & Davis (1982)	Family firms as systems	How do the developmental stage of ownership, family and business affect the perceived importance and benefits of the owner strategy?
• Tagiuri & Davis (1982) • Habbershon & Williams (1999) • Poza et al. (2004)	Competitive advantages and disadvantages of family firms	How does the owner strategy affect the competitive advantages and disadvantages of family firms?
• Habbershon & Astrachan (1997) • Zahra et al. (2008) • Suess-Reyes (2016)	Family Psychological characteristics	How does the owner strategy affect different psychological characteristics of the family such as family unity and trust e.g.? How does the psychological characteristics of the family affect the family firm?
STRATEGIC PLANNING IN FAMILY FIRMS		
• Carlock & Ward. (2001) • Ward (1988)	Coordinated strategic planning between the owners and the business	Did the owner strategy enable or facilitate coordinated strategic planning in the family firms?
• Sharma et al. (2003) • Sund et al. (2015)	Succession planning as a subset of the strategy process	How does the owner strategy affect the succession process?
• Poza (2014) • Davis (2001) • Elo-Pärssinen (2012)	Corporate Governance and Family Governance	The relationship between the owner strategy and corporate and family governance?
THE OWNER STRATEGY		
• Lainema (1998) • Carlock & Ward (2001) • May (2008) • Finnish Family Firms Association (2012)	The owner strategy, what it entails, and best practices	What are the different elements that should be included in the owner strategy according to literature? Do the family firms in the sample include these aspects? What do they find as most important?

3 METHODOLOGY

The following methodology section discusses the chosen research approach for this study and describes how the research was conducted. Firstly, I will describe my selected research method and explain why it is suitable for this study. I will continue on to describe my data collection, sampling and respondents as well as explain how the collected data will be analyzed.

3.1 Research method and approach

Research is most often divided into either quantitative or qualitative research depending on how the research problem is defined (Patel & Davidson, 1940). In quantitative research the focus is on generating generalizable findings that are statistically significant, often by using numerical data. The focus in qualitative research is on the other hand on providing in depth and contextually sensitive findings while using verbal methods for analysis (Patton, 2002).

This thesis studies how the creation of an owner strategy is perceived by family business owners to benefit both the business-owning family and the family firm. Furthermore, the concept of owner strategy is approached from an intergenerational perspective and the study thus provides insight into the viewpoints of both the current and next generation of owners in a family firm regarding the owner strategy. Hence, to answer the research question for this study a qualitative research method using semi structured open ended interviews as its data collection method was chosen.

The qualitative research method was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, the in-depth nature of qualitative methods, such as interviews, allow the respondents to express their feelings and experiences in their own words (Drever, 1995). Qualitative research can, thus, help understand people and their multifaceted motivations, reasons and actions as well as the broader context within which they work and live. Furthermore, qualitative research methods are preferred when one wants to capture the many cultural and social aspects of organizations (Liamputtong, 2013). These social and cultural contexts of an organization are especially important to understand when studying family firms since many of the distinctive features of family firms and family ownership are related to the dynamic relationship that exists between the family and with the business and thus, tied to the context that these firms operate in. The issues that an owner strategy aims to solve for business-owning families and their family firms alike are most often complex and unquantifiable, which is another reason for choosing a qualitative research method.

When conducting research one should, furthermore, decide on whether a deductive or inductive research approach is most appropriate. One can also combine research approaches within the same research. Saunders et al. (2009) explain that the deductive research approach involves the development of theory and hypotheses that are subjected to a rigorous test. The inductive research approach on the other hand involves collecting data and developing theory as a result of the conducted data analysis (Saunders et al. 2009). This study uses both an inductive and deductive research approach albeit this study is primarily inductive. An inductive research approach was found most suitable as this study can be categorized as exploratory as owner strategy has not been extensively researched and empirical data covering the perceptions regarding the creation of an owner strategy by both senior and next generation family business owners is novel. This study can therefore generate new explanations, results and possibly contribute to new theories on the topic of creating an owner strategy in family firms by discovering patterns, themes and categories in the data. Induction was further found most suitable for this study as an inductive approach emphasizes the understanding of the research context, which in my study refers to the individual family firms in the sample and the unique characteristics they possess. Induction also emphasizes gaining an understanding of the meanings humans attach to different events and situations which is important for this study as the perceptions of family business-owners regarding the benefit of creating an owner strategy is studied. This study is however also considered deductive as the data collected for this study is further analyzed in relation to the prevailing theories on family firms and the distinctive characteristics of family ownership while also comparing the empirical results to the guidelines found in literature regarding the creation of an owner strategy in family firms. (Saunders et al., 2009)

3.2 Data collection

To gain an in-depth understanding of the importance of creating an owner strategy in family firms this study uses semi-structured open-ended interviews with selected respondents as its data collection technique. Interviewing is a well-suited technique for data collection for my study as interviewing helps understand the meanings, interpretations and subjective experiences of individuals (Liamputtong, 2013). Patton

(2015) describes the purpose of interviewing as to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. As this study takes an intergenerational perspective on the topic of owner strategy this description further advocates for the choice of using interviews as the method for data collection.

Semi-structured interviewing is a flexible interview technique, in which the general topic and structure of the interview, as well as the main questions are decided in advance. However, the detailed structure is resolved only during the interview, thus, enabling an open discussion and providing the interviewee with the possibility to direct and decide what the most important topics to concentrate on are and hence more freely and in their own words express their personal views and experiences on the research topic (Drever, 1995; Liamputtong, 2013). This method for data collection was found most suitable for this study in order to gain an in-depth, individualized and contextually sensitive understanding of the owner strategy in family firms.

Despite the many benefits associated with collecting data through interviews, as with all data collection methods, there are some errors linked to it. Personal bias is one of the main issues associated with interviewing. There are also other weaknesses linked to interviewing such as e.g. using loaded interview questions and getting biased or untrue responses (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, the researcher may for instance react to the respondent's responses, encouraging or discouraging the dialogue in a certain direction. Moreover, the researcher must be careful not to ask leading questions as this can affect the results. (Drever, 1995)

The aim of the data collection is to answer my main research question: How does the creation of an owner strategy benefit the family firm and to the business-owning family? My aim is further to provide an owner's viewpoint from an intergenerational perspective on this question and thus elaborate on the importance of creating an owner strategy. In addition to answering my primary research question the data collection will provide effective practices, insights and principles regarding the process of creating an owner strategy in collaboration with the next generation.

The interviews were conducted face to face with each respondent in March and April 2017. The interviews were conducted in Finnish or Swedish and the time spent interviewing each respondent ranged from 39 minutes to 1 hour 7 minutes. The interviews were guided by an interview guide with open questions. To facilitate comparability, three main areas were covered in all interviews. First, the interviews needed to cover general aspects about the respondent and the firm (generation, age, ownership structure etc.). Second, it was essential to gain information about the owner strategy they had created and how it has been perceived by each of the interviewees to add value to the business and the business-owning family. The third section of the interview covered the process of creating the owner strategy. The third part included both general aspects about the process, as well as questions about the distinctive characteristic of the process of co-creating it in collaboration with the next generation of owners. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim.

3.3 Sampling

The sampling approaches when conducting qualitative research differ to a large extent to the sampling techniques most often used when conducting quantitative research. Sampling in quantitative research has its foundation in statistical probability theory with the aim to choose a random and statistically representative sample that allows to make generalizations from the probability-based sample to a larger population. The sampling approach in qualitative research on the other hand follows a different logic and focuses on selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study that yield insight and comprehensive understanding of the research topic rather than empirical generalizations. Patton (2015) deems case selection as the foundation of qualitative inquiry. He explains that as the findings in a qualitative research will be determined by the cases one studies it is important that the type of sample one selects should follow from and support inquiry into the questions one is asking. The sampling approach preferred in qualitative research is thus named *purposeful sampling* and is also the sampling approach found most suitable for this study. The cases selected for the purposeful sample should be chosen with care so that they are strategically in alignment with the study's purpose, its primary questions, and data being collected. The purposeful sampling strategy used for this study can be classified as theoretical sampling since when using a theoretical sampling strategy the chosen sample is based on the theoretical framework for the study. (Patton, 2015)

The purposeful sample selected for this study consists of four Finnish privately held and family-owned businesses from which two respondents from each company were interviewed. In order to provide an intergenerational perspective on the topic of owner strategy in family firms two respondents from each of the four business-owning families were chosen to participate in the study, one respondent representing the current or senior generation of owners while the second respondent represented the next generation of owners in the family business. All the eight respondents surveyed were owners in their family business, although to varying extents, and all the companies had thus transferred some shares of ownership to the next generation. None of the respondents held currently an operative position in their family company.

The Finnish companies selected for this study represent a variety of industries. The companies selected for the purposeful sample had to fulfil three criteria to ensure that they will illuminate the questions under study. The first and primary criteria for choosing the respondents for the sample was that the companies selected have developed, or are in the process of developing, an owner strategy in collaboration with the next generation of owners in the family firm. The selection of companies was further based on the ownership developmental phase that the companies are in, with the criteria being that they have reached a sibling partnership stage or cousin consortium stage of ownership. The third criteria for the sample was additionally that the business-owning family holds the characteristics of a family in the Working Together stage of the Family Developmental Dimension in the Three-Dimensional Model for family businesses described in the theoretical framework in chapter 2.1. Characteristic for this stage is that the parental generation moves through the decade of its fifties while the younger generation is in its twenties and thirties. This stage is additionally defined by families attempting to manage complex relations of parents, siblings, spouses and in-laws, as well as cousins and children of different ages, which makes it an especially interesting stage of family development to study in regards to the owner strategy as it becomes increasingly important to set up guidelines for ownership at this point. To maintain anonymity the studied firms are called Company 1 (C1), Company 2 (C2), Company 3 (C3) and Company 4 (C4) and the respondents are referred to as Respondent 1 (R2), Respondent 2 (R2) etc. A summary of the data collection can be found in the table 2 below. The companies and the respondents will be presented in more detail in the empirical results section.

Table 2 Respondents, duration and time of data collection

RESPONDENTS	*COMPANY*	*GENERATION*	*ROLE IN COMPANY*	*DURATION*	*DATE*
Respondent 1	*1*	*Senior, 3rd*	*Owner, Chairman BoD*	*45 min*	*28.3.2017*
Respondent 2	*1*	*Next, 4th*	*Owner, board member*	*32 min*	*31.3.2017*
Respondent 3	*2*	*Senior, 2nd*	*Owner, board member*	*1h 7 min*	*29.3.2017*
Respondent 4	*2*	*Next, 3rd*	*Owner*	*40 min*	*11.4.2017*
Respondent 5	*3*	*Senior, 2nd*	*Owner, Chairman BoD*	*52 min*	*31.3.2017*
Respondent 6	*3*	*Next, 3rd*	*Owner, board member*	*40 min*	*31.2.2017*
Respondent 7	*4*	*Senior, 4th*	*Owner, board member*	*42 min*	*20.4.2017*
Respondent 8	*4*	*Next, 5th*	*Owner*	*46 min*	*20.4.2017*

3.4 Analysis of collected data

There are varying ways to perform qualitative analysis. As previously mentioned, this study uses primarily inductive analysis which by Patton (2015) is defined as “searching the qualitative data for patterns and themes without entering the analysis with preconceived analytical categories”. Induction is thus well-suited for generating new concepts, explanations, results, and /or theories from the collected data for a study. A qualitative deductive analysis would on the other hand focus on determining to what extent the collected data for a study support the prevailing conceptualizations, explanations, results and/or theories (Patton, 2015). As previously mentioned the analysis approach is also partly deductive and the empirical results will hence be analyzed by relating my findings from the interviews to literature presented in my theoretical framework.

For my data analysis I will analyze and interpret the gathered data firstly, by dividing the data into categories through identifying underlying messages, themes, recurring patterns, and other important parts of the data (Saunders et al., 2009). Consequently, through this extensive analysis, I aim to come to trustworthy findings and conclusions. In order to facilitate the categorization and interpretation of the data all the interviews are transcribed. The data gathered from the interviews will be presented in my results section and an analysis will be given in the fifth section of this paper. The findings from my study are discussed in chapter six alongside my conclusions.

4 EMPIRICAL RESULTS

This chapter presents the empirical results that emerged from the data collection. The results from each of the companies in my sample are presented under separate sub-headings. The empirical results are presented in accordance with the themes in the interview guide and thus, some general findings about the companies and the respondents are first described. Thereafter, the owner strategy is examined in detail, focusing on the respondents' views on how the creation of an owner strategy has been beneficial for their family and their family firm are presented. This study also inquired about the process of creating an owner strategy in collaboration with the next generation and the findings regarding the roles of the different parties involved will be presented for each of the companies.

As the method for data collection in this qualitative study was semi-structured interviewing the interview guide merely functioned as a guide for the interviews while the interviews in practice did not follow that specific detailed structure. The interview guide was divided into three sections to facilitate comparability. The first part of the interview focused on general aspects about the individual respondent and their family company including questions about their role, age, and generation as well as inquiry about the ownership structure of the firm. This named information is presented in the first section of each of the sub-headings in this chapter, which focuses on describing the respondents and companies selected for the sample of this study. The second part of the interview focused on forming an understanding of what the term owner strategy in its essence means for the respondent, what the respondent perceived to be important in their owner strategy and how they perceived it to benefit the family and the family firm. This section also aimed at retrieving information about the contents of the owner strategy that the respondent had been part of creating. The third and final section in the interview guide inquired about the process of creating the owner strategy. The focus of this section was to understand the different roles of the people that were took part in the owner strategy process, what they contributed and what the respondents had learned as well as found surprising during the process. The primary aim was to understand how the process affected both the family and the family firm. The interview guide presenting the interview questions and their anchoring to the literature can be viewed in Appendix 1.

Below I will present the empirical results in more detail. To maintain anonymity the description of the companies will focus on the relevant aspects for this study, namely the ownership structures of the firms and the roles of the respondents. The citations from the respondents are presented in English and have been translated by the author in order to facilitate comparability and comprehensibility for all readers. The citations in their original language, Finnish or Swedish, can be viewed in Appendix 2.

4.1 Company 1

4.1.1 The family firm and the respondents

Company 1 (C1) of this study is a well-established family firm, currently with an annual turnover of 150M euros. The ownership structure is divided equally between four owners of which three are part of the next generation in the family business. The owner in the senior generation represents the third generation of owners in the family firm and is in their sixties while the next generation are in their late twenties and consequently represents the fourth generation. The next generation of owners in C1 are all members of the board and hold the majority of ownership shares in the company. C1 is family controlled but not family-managed as they have an outside CEO and no family members in management positions. C1 is currently in a sibling partnership stage of ownership, however, with influence from the sole owner of the senior generation. Respondent 1 (R1) represents the senior generation of owners and holds currently the same amount of ownership shares as the other co-owners. She functions as Chairman of the Board in their family firm. Respondent 2 (R2) is part of the next generation of owners and currently, with her siblings, holds the majority of ownership shares in their family firm. She is also a member of the board of directors in their family firm.

4.1.2 The owner strategy in C1

C1 initiated the process of creating the owner strategy 2-3 years ago, primarily as the next generation of owners had been shareholders for some time and had started to take an increasingly more active role as owners and as board members. The initiation of the owner strategy process was hence explained by the respondents to be strongly intertwined with the succession process in C1. The respondents also explained that there had been some extensive organizational changes in the company during recent years and the strategic direction as well as the owner strategy needed to be reviewed as a result.

In C 1 the outside board members had been part of initiating the owner strategy process and part of discussing possible future strategic endeavors and directions for the company with the owners. They had helped in formulating different strategic scenarios and helped the owners in analyzing the different scenarios. The owner strategy process in C1 also entailed a timeline of 5, 10 and 20 years, which was constructed through extensive communication between the generations about various aspects regarding the vision for the industry, the family and ownership. Issues such as the owners' personal commitment to the family firm and possible employment in the company were e.g. discussed. Respondent 2 explained that this work of constructing the scenarios and thoroughly analyzing them from both a strategic as well as ownership point of view was an important part of their owner strategy and it helped in clarifying one's individual thoughts about the family firm and especially ownership. She explained further that the thought process that goes into the process is extensive and the process should hence be given enough time. One of the three outside board members of Company 1 then acted as facilitator in the discussion also further on in the process.

Both respondents from C1 emphasized establishing a unified owners' vision as the most important task of the owner strategy. Respondent 1 stated that she now as a result of the clear and open communication between the current and future owners has a much clearer view of what they as a group of owners want for the company and in regards of the family's ownership in the future.

> *The owner strategy clarified the direction where we want to go, where we don't want to go, what the concrete guidelines are for where we are going. It also shed light upon some differences of opinion between generations. It also clarified for everyone involved where we are now and why. [R1, C1]*

R2 explained that communicating openly within the family about everyone's personal thoughts, wants and needs for the future and through starting the process well in time before any major decisions needed to be made was essential in the owner strategy process. She explained further that the owner strategy should be the starting point for everything in the family firm.

The development of a clearly structured and communicated unified owners' vision had had many benefits for C1. Respondent 2 emphasized the positive effect the creation of the owner strategy had had regarding their decision-making abilities as a group. She explained that their decision-making is faster and easier since they now can communicate as one owner instead of four. She explained further that this has had positive effects also in their work as board members and consequently added value for the family firm.

> *Every decision that has to be made in the board has become much easier to make since the groundwork regarding our owner's vision is done. All the decision that I as an owner have to make have become easier as I can mirror them to something concrete, in this case our shared owner strategy, which is written on paper and that you when needed can refer to. [R2, C1]*

Respondent 2 further explained that the many structural changes that were made in their company during recent years required the owners to make big and impactful decisions. Having developed a clear owner strategy was essential in being able to make these decisions as fast as they had to be made.

> *The most important thing is that it entails a shared vision for the future for the company. In our case there has been a lot happening in the company during recent years which has required fast decision-making. At those times it has been essential to have an owner strategy that we can follow. [R2, C1]*

In company 1 the creation of an owner strategy had resulted in the strategic decision to sell a part of the business based on discussions held with the next generation of owners about the vision regarding the industry and family ownership that developed as a result of the creation of the owner strategy.

In addition to the owner strategy functioning as a tool for developing a unified owners' voice, Respondent 1 explained further that the owner strategy should also determine the spirit of the company as well as specify in addition to the vision, mission and values also some precise measures that are important for the owners such as fiscal goals e.g. These guidelines should show the management how the company should be steered. Respondent 1 emphasized the value the owner strategy had for the management team and highlighted the importance of not viewing the owner strategy as solely an ownership management tool but also as a tool for communicating the owners' wants and needs to the management and to the board of directors so that they can act accordingly.

> *This process was extremely important also for the management. I could clearly notice that when we had presented our owner strategy and owner's vision for them a lot of things were clarified. Now they know that this is how we want to do things and they can make decisions and take action based on the owner strategy. [R1, C1]*

Both the respondents from C1 emphasized the importance of involving the next generation in the family firm in order to increase their knowledge and involvement so that they are able to make informed decisions.

> *It is important to increase discussion and knowledge about the family firm so that the next generation is able to make the decision if they want to be involved and how. [R1, C1]*

Respondent 2 explained that being part of the board had increased her knowledge and understanding about their company and their industry and provided her over the years with a kind of silent knowledge that would have been difficult to acquire any other way. This information has been essential in being able to formulate her own owners' voice in the owner strategy process where it was then discussed further with the fellow owners.

Respondent 1 experienced that the next generation took more responsibility and showed more commitment than before to their role as owners and she noticed that it clearly motivated the younger owners as they felt their views were taken into consideration and that they actually had an impact on the company and the strategic decisions made.

> *The next generation took on more responsibility than ever before. The process surely motivated all of the next generation owners since I believe that they felt that their viewpoints and wants matter and are of significance, and that the company is managed in accordance with those views. [R1, C1]*

The next generation expressed that it is important that the current generation of owners gives space for new ideas without being judgmental. Respondent 2, a representative of the next generation of owners, stated that the older generation's role should be to provide their thoughts, guidance and advice but avoid trying to steer the conversation and the thoughts of the next generation. She states that the decisions about the future should come from the ones who will be in charge in the future, namely the next generation. This viewpoint was shared by the respondent from the older generation. R2 stated that without the involvement of the next generation of owners in the process the owner strategy would not have reflected their views at all.

> *It was important for the older generation to hear what we (the next generation) want so that the company can be formed in accordance with that. If the younger generation wouldn't have been involved in the owner strategy process it wouldn't reflect us at all. [R2, C1]*

C1 discussed the value of creating the owner strategy in written format in order to prevent and avoid misunderstandings. They also expressed the importance of giving the process the necessary time it needed in order for everyone to form their thoughts and for the thoughts to develop after discussing them with the family.

> *The discussions are essential to be able to form one's individual viewpoints and vision as an owner but it also requires a lot of personal thought and time. [R2, C1]*

4.2 Company 2

4.2.1 The family firm and the respondents

Company 2 (C2) is the youngest of the family companies in my sample and currently holds an annual turnover of about 100M euros. The family firm was founded by two brothers but the ownership is, however, divided also to the founding brothers' parents and to the founders' other siblings, as well as to the next generation. There are hence currently 17 owners in the family firm and the company. None of the family members currently hold any management positions but many, also from the next generation, are part of the board of the parent company while some also sit at the boards of the subsidiary companies. R3 is an owner and representative of the older generation and a board member while R4 is an owner in the next generation and currently a member of the board in three of their companies.

4.2.2 The owner strategy in C2

C2 initiated the process of creating their owner strategy primarily for two reasons. Firstly, as the business was growing and the family firm started making investments outside of the business without having had any clear structures for the new investment strategy. A need to set up proper guidelines and organizational structures for these investments became apparent.

Secondly, the family was growing in the next generation and ownership shares had been already transferred to both the next generation of owners as well as the children of the next generation and it had become evident that there needs to be guidelines and rules for ownership succession.

The creation of an owner strategy was also strongly intertwined with the succession process in the company as ownership shares had been transferred to members in the next generation and they were starting to take a more active role. R3 explained that the next generation had started to show increasing amounts of interest towards the family business and had expressed that there needs to be a forum for discussing the family firms and ownership as these discussions were not held at home. The decision to include the next generation in the owner strategy creation process was also made as the older generation felt that it was important to include the next generation as they are the ones who will be making the decisions and living with them in the future.

> *We initially thought about these things in a sibling forum but soon noticed that there wasn't a clear view on what we want to be going further, or what everyone thinks, including the kids. We had a vague understanding but none of us had really thought deeply about these things before, or thought about what ownership actually means. The founders felt that they couldn't be the ones steering the process as they were the ones who had founded the company but couldn't be the ones deciding what happens in the future as it needs to come from the ones in the next generation. They felt that they can't decide for them, if they want to be part of the business and if they want to own. We understood that we need to ask the next generation about these things. [R3,C2]*

Co-creating the owner strategy together with the next generation had for C2 led to major strategic decisions in the form of deciding to sell an important part of the business. In C2 the decision to sell a part of their family firm was strongly influenced by the owner strategy as it became clear in their owner strategy development process that no one from the next generation felt passionate about developing that particular part of the business and additionally did not feel that they could contribute with their skillsets to it. C2 had also, based on their owner strategy, made significant changes regarding key persons in management positions, as they felt that some of the former key managers did not operate in line with the values and other guidelines set in the owner strategy.

> *It (the owner strategy) functions as a concrete tool and manual about how we as a family think about things. The owner strategy guides our acitivity, not just ownership. For example, if we are going to enter some new business it needs to be in line with what the owners think. That is way it is important to clearly communicate the owner strategy and the owner's vision to the board and to the ones making decisions that affect the business. [R3, C2]*

In addition to having had strategic implications for the family firm, Respondent 3 emphasized the role that the owner strategy has in unifying the family, clarifying roles and in increasing the understanding of what family ownership is today and what is should be in the future.

R4 explained that the fact that they as the next generation have been given power in the company and had the chance to be actively involved in the decision-making and consequently have had to think about issues regarding ownership and the family firm has substantially increased her interest and commitment to their family firm. She feels that she as a result of the active involvement has more confidence in her role as an owner which consequently has improved her decision-making abilities.

> *It has increased my commitment to the family business, the fact that we've got the opportunity to be actively involved, that's what sparked my interest, when I've had to thoroughly think about these things. [R4, C2]*

R4 explained further that without her active involvement in the family company before the owner strategy process it would have been difficult to form an opinion on the matters discussed.

> *It would have been difficult to provide an opinion or form a viewpoint if I wouldn't have been involved before. Like what are the owner values if you don't even know what the company does. In the owner strategy process you really had to think profoundly about these things and in some way know the company. It's probably difficult to get involved in any other way than through working operatively or in the board. [R4, C2]*

Another major benefit of creating the owner strategy, emphasized by C2, was that the owner strategy initiated communication within the family. Respondent 3 stated that the increased communication between the generations has noticeably improved the self-confidence for the next generation regarding their role in the company.

> *The interaction and communication has improved and we understood that we need to get to know each other, not just because we're related, but because we are also co-owners and in order for us to make decisions and avoid conflicts we need to know each other better. These things were not self-evident before the owner strategy process. [R3, C2]*

The owner strategy's role in initiating communication within the business-owning family was perceived by both respondents in C2 as the most important task of the owner strategy. R4 explained that communication was essential for being able to form a unified owners' vision but it was also essential for the development of one's one thoughts on the matters discussed. The increased communication also increased the feeling of family unity.

The importance of communicating clearly and openly and giving the process enough time was further emphasized. Respondent 3 had noticed this especially while listing the company's and the family's values in the owner strategy. She was surprised how difficult the discussion on values and the choice of which ones to include was for them. She quickly noticed in the owner strategy process that different people understand the meaning of different words and values very differently and it was therefore essential for them to thoroughly discuss and examine the meaning of the different wordings they choice to include in their owner strategy.

> *Everyone understands the things discussed in a different way, for some people the things are newer than for someone else and it's therefore really important to thoroughly go through what everything that's being discussed means and what it means for each and every one. For example, when discussing values, do we understand them the same way? The question about values was especially difficult in our owner strategy process because it was challenging to get everyone to understand the values chosen in the same way. When there were disagreements we then just needed to communicate even more and in a clearer way. [R3, C2]*

4.3 Company 3

4.3.1 The family firm and the respondents

Company 3 (C3) is a well-established company with an annual turnover of 65 million euros. The ownership structure is divided between the second, third and fourth generation in the family firm. The majority of ownership shares and control are currently held by three brothers in the third generation who are all in their late fifties and sixties. One of the brothers currently operates as the CEO of the company. The next generation of owners consist of ten cousins. None of the owners in the next generation are operatively active or board members but they are part of the established owners' council. R5 is part of the third generation of owners and currently the Chairman of the Board in their family firm. He has previously functioned as the CEO for the company. R6 is a part of the fourth generation of owners and represents the next generation of family business owners in their family company.

4.3.2 The owner strategy in C3

The owner strategy process was initiated in company C3 as a means to promote communication among the owners and establish unified guidelines for the family regarding ownership. One of the aims of the owner strategy was also to increase the knowledge and involvement of the next generation. The older generation also emphasized the operative implications of creating an owner strategy and pointed out the importance of setting the appropriate risk profile.

> *The owner strategy entails determining risk-taking and ambitions, so that everyone agrees. Having the right risk-profile is very important. A good owner strategy provides guidelines for the risk-taking in the firm and should function as a guide for the operative decisions, for example regarding what projects to choose. [R 6, C3]*

Respondent 6 of the next generation stated that the goal of the owner strategy was for them to mainly open a dialogue between the generations and the owners and discuss the often difficult topics discussed in an owner strategy without necessarily writing everything on paper.

> *The goal of creating an owner strategy was not to necessarily get everything written down on paper but to discuss these topics and open the discussion and dialogue. [R5, C3]*

The relational and social aspects of the owner strategy process were also discussed and R6 explained that getting to know their cousins, who also are owners, and how they think can help prevent conflicts in the future as they potentially will be working together at some point in the family firm.

> *Through initiating the owner strategy process I've become closer with my cousins and I started to understand how they think. We haven't grown up in the same household so I didn't really know how they think about different things. When you know how someone thinks it's easier to work together. That's why I feel that this process can function as a sort of preventive measure for the future. [R6, C3]*

The process of including all the owners in the process of creating an owner strategy was viewed as important both for the individual as well as for the family. R5 stated that the feeling of involvement and family unity is important and something that collaboratively creating an owner strategy can improve and help sustain.

> *The owner strategy is implemented by involving all the owners. The most important thing is that everyone can be included in the process. If you're included you feel involved and you can have an impact and make an*

> *influence, which feels good. You might not be able to make decisions yet, but that's not what's most important. When we're old and not operatively active I hope that they (the next generation) also include us. [R5, C3]*

The older generation emphasized further that it is important to involve the next generation in the family business as it can function as a type of education into responsible

> *The process with our owner strategy and our meetings where the next generation is involved provides insight and understanding for them and functions as a sort of education. If you're not involved it becomes really difficult. That's why we've already for a long time had a system in which the generation above me also is involved as well as the next generation. The next generation, that haven't turned 30 yet have already been involved for ten years in something that provides engagement with the family firm. We have a system where we meet every three months and have some kind of meeting that involves the younger generation, for instance a schooling, a review of our financial statement or a summer get together. Also informal meetings to get to know each other better are important. [R5, C3]*

Both respondents also emphasized the important role that the owner strategy process has in initiating communication about ownership and the family firm within the business-owning family. They also mentioned the importance of involving other family members than owners, e.g. spouses in certain discussions about the family firm as a means to promote family unity. Due to the owner strategy process communication among the owners and the spouses had improved further as the next generation had as a result of discussions on how to modernize their ways to work created an intranet for sharing information about the company.

It was emphasized that the role of the older generation is to initiate change by involving the next generation in the family business. Both respondents felt that the older generation should support the next generation and be open to new ideas.

> *It becomes really difficult if the generation currently in control holding the responsibility doesn't initiate change. It's therefore according to me the older generation's job to take the initiative to projects such as the owner strategy and give it space. The older generation should be open and support the next generation. [R5, C3]*

4.4 Company 4

4.4.1 The family firm and the respondents

Company 4 (C4) is the oldest and largest of the family firms in my sample with an annual turnover of 310M euros. The ownership structure of the company is dispersed between 27 owners. The generation of owners currently in control is in the fourth generation and consists of four cousins. The company is currently in a cousin consortium stage of ownership. The next generation represents the fifth generation of family business owners and consists of members in their twenties, thirties and forties.

Respondent 7 is a member of the fourth generation of owners in C4 and has held many operational roles in the company for most of his career. However, he is currently serving as member of the board without any operative role. Respondent 8 is part of the fifth generation of owners in C4 and represents the next generation. He holds an active owner's role.

4.4.2 The owner strategy in C4

The creation of the owner strategy was initiated and organized by the next generation in C4. The process started with the development of a forum for the next generation to discuss ownership and the family business. The next generation met by themselves for about a year before they decided that they wanted to make the meetings more formalized and consequently developed the next generation team into an owner's council where the meetings were held together with the other owners. The owner strategy was then created in the owner council meetings. The older generation explained that the need to structure and organize the owners and ownership in the family company has only recently become relevant as the group of owners had grown, which consequently has led to not everyone being able to take part in the on-going decision-making in the company.

As a result of the owner strategy the owners also decided to create an unofficial investment committee into which some owners where chosen as members in order to form an investment strategy for the family and the family firm and decide how and where investments should be made outside of the company.

The most important tasks of the owner strategy are according to R8 to firstly, initiate communication within the business-owning family and to get the business-owning family to collaboratively reflect upon ownership and the family firm. During the owner strategy creation process R8 noticed that there were a lot of preconceptions about the other owners' thoughts and it was hence valuable to get everyone's thoughts out in the open and collaboratively discuss and determine what the owners individually and as a group think and where they stand on certain issues. R8 experienced the process as clarifying for both one's individual thoughts as well as for the whole owner group.

The second most important task of the owner strategy was by R8 perceived to be the creation of a concrete document that can be handed to the independent directors on the board and consequently function as a guideline for them that communicates a unified owners' vision for the company.

> *Ideally we could give a document to the board of directors and by reading it they would get a good and comprehensive picture of how they should steer the company. We have started the process, but we're not there yet. There is so much silent knowledge that needs to be made concrete. The owner strategy therefore entails how we want out family firm to be run so that the board know what's expected of them. [R8, C4]*

The respondents in C4 both explained that an owner strategy should provide guidelines for ownership and entail the decision on how and what they as a family want to own in the long-term. One should further make the distinction between active and passive owners and the owners should decide on what kind of owners they are going to be. R7 emphasized the role of the owner strategy in having set guidelines for how the shares in the company are valuated and how, if someone decides to sell their shares, this can be organized.

> *The most important thing when talking about owner strategy is to discuss who wants to be an owner and in what way. Then when you've come so far you need to structure it in a way so that the ones who don't want to be involved have a fair way to sell. Then it's also important to determine how the ones who want to be involved have a fair way to influence the company. At least in some way through some structure, may it be the board of directors, through the owner's council or in some other way but it is important that there is a possibility to have an influence. [R7, C4]*

Furthermore, both respondents in C4 emphasized the role of the owner strategy as a means to prevent possible conflicts and misunderstandings in the future. R7 explained further that it should be done at a time when everyone gets along and that the process should be initiated well in time before any major decisions need to be made as the thought process that goes into creating an owner strategy takes time. The most time-consuming part in the owner strategy was perceived by R7 to get everyone to commit to it and to get all the owners to reflect upon their role as owners and make informed decisions.

> *You start small and it takes some time to first even figure out what you want. Few can even provide an answer for that. Especially in a situation when there's a long tradition of family ownership, that's when the majority think that that's how it should automatically continue, without even thinking about it. That's what is time consuming in the owner strategy process; to get everyone to commit to the decisions that are being made and to get people to actually make decisions and form an opinion. [R7, C4]*

The respondents in C4 also emphasized the importance of treating all the owners in the family company equally and in a fair way. This was explained to be the base for maintaining family unity and preventing conflicts and consequently something that the owner strategy enabled, as minority owners and owners who are not actively involved in the operative business had the chance to get their voice heard.

In C4 the owners had some outside experts to help with providing structure and ideas for the creation of the owner strategy. R8 found it to be very important to get the help of outsiders in the process and in afterthought says he would bring in experts in the process at an earlier stage, partly, so that the owners who had difficulties in committing to the process would have had to do so in a more serious manner.

Both respondents in C4 feel like it is the next generation's role to be the driving force in the owner strategy process. R8 says that he learned that one cannot expect the older generation to suddenly change their thinking and their ways so it is up to the next generation to initiate the owner strategy process and hence drive forward a new way of functioning as owners. In the owner strategy process it also became evident that there are differing views in the older generation on how much decision-power the next generation should have.

For R8 from the next generation the creation of an owner strategy provided a sense of involvement in the family firm and increased the knowledge about the family company.

> *The biggest benefit for me is that I know feel like I'm part of the family company. Not many years ago I would have described the family firm in a way that it is They who do something, whilst now I say that We do something. Now I feel involved and as a part of the firm even though I don't hold an operational role. [R8, C4]*

The deeper relationships with the cousins and the other owners that developed as a result was also stated by R8 as an important contribution of the process. R7 had also experienced the owner strategy process to have a positive impact on the feeling of family unity and explained that the owner strategy process was important as a means to get the fifth generation of owners to spend time together and get to know each other, as they have not been as close as the earlier generations. In C4 they had noticed that when ownership becomes more dispersed it becomes increasingly more difficult to manage the owner group and ownership. This requires structures and effort.

> *The good things is that everyone gets to know each other better when they need to work together in the owner strategy process. Especiallly the fifth generation, because we (the fourth generation) have been so close and know each other very well. From the fith generation onwards the ownership disperses quite radically and now the next step has become to even hold the owners aware of the other owners. It's important that they meet and discuss and eventually agree on different outcomes that everyone can be happy with. [R7, C4]*

Currently the C4 was not perceived by the respondents to have had an operative or strategic impact on the company. However, the organizational structure had been re-constructed as a result. R8 also emphasized that despite the fact that the owner strategy still has not had a strategic impact he believes that it will be very important already after five years and most certainly in the long run. The creation of the owner strategy had also affected the constellation of the board as the board previously had been very operative and as a result of owner strategy now has been developed towards a board with more outside directors where the owners who serve as board members now represent the business-owning family as a whole.

The owner strategy of C4 is currently formed as an owner's handbook but R7 emphasized that the process still continues and the owner strategy will develop over time.

> *The process will continue and it will develop and live on. We now have the main guidelines and have created an owner's handbook where we have listed most of the things that are agreed upon. But it's clear that the owner strategy will develop and change over time. [R7, C4]*

5 ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will analyze the collected data in relation to the theoretical framework for this paper as well as present the main findings from this study. This analysis will first (5.1.), based on a categorization of reoccurring patterns in the data, present the main themes that emerged from the conducted interviews. The aim of the interviews and the specific questions that were asked was to collect data that enables the author to answer the research question presented for this paper, namely: How does developing an owner strategy benefit the business-owning family and the family firm? As the research question consists of both the business family and the family firm aspect this results section will follow a similar division. The analysis will thus be presented under two main sub-headings: (5.2) How does the creation of an owner strategy benefit the business-owning family? and (5.3) How does the creation of an owner strategy benefit the family firm? In section 5.4 I will compare results between companies and between generations and present the main findings from these comparisons. In chapter 5.5 the main conclusions and findings from the analysis will be presented.

5.1 Main themes that emerged from the interviews

The main themes that emerged from the data collection can be divided into four different categories for each of this study's primary research questions. As previously mentioned, the research questions for this study are: (1) How does the creation of an owner strategy benefit the business-owning family, and (2) How does the creation of an owner strategy benefit the family firm? The empirical results, thus, suggest eight overall benefits for the business-owning family and the family firm from developing an owner strategy. The found benefits for the business-owning family were categorized as follows. Firstly, the owner strategy improved communication and interaction within the family. Secondly, it increased the knowledge about the family business (primarily among the next generation) and provided a sense of commitment and involvement that was considered meaningful. The third perceived benefit of the owner strategy for the business-owning family was categorized as an improved feeling of family unity due to the owner strategy process. The fourth found benefit that emerged from my data was the positive effect the owner strategy has on preventing conflicts and misunderstandings within the family both now and in the future. The results also suggested four main ways that the owner strategy benefits the family firm. Firstly, the creation of an owner strategy defines and communicates a shared owners' vision to the company, primarily through the board of directors. The creation of an owner strategy also improved the decision-making in the family firm by making it both faster and more consistent as there were clear guidelines to follow. The third benefit for the family firm was found to be the positive effect it had on initiating and facilitating the succession process, which is found to be the primary threat for continuity in family firms. The owner strategy also had concrete strategic implications for many of the family firms and was found valuable for the management as it clarified the owners' vision for the company.

Based on the reviewed literature and the data collected for this study the benefits can be categorized further into three all-encompassing categories. First, developing the owner strategy, in collaboration with the next generation of owners, can be viewed as (1) a way to prevent and manage the challenges of shared ownership in family firms. The most pressing challenges connected to shared ownership in a family firm can be identified as a lack of communication within the family about various aspects regarding ownership as well as difficulties in developing a unified owners' voice. Second, (2) the owner strategy benefits the business by enabling coordinated strategic planning between the owners and business, more specifically with the board of directors and the management. There are many recognized benefits from coordinated strategic planning (Carlock & Ward, 2001) of which the main one can according to my results be singled out as the alignment of the wants and needs of the owners (both of the current and next generation) with the business strategy, in order to ensure that the shareholders' value is maximized both from an economic and non-economic perspective. Third, the owner strategy is, very much intertwined with effective succession planning and can function as (3) a way for the family to prepare and facilitate the succession process by involving the next generation in the process and thus collaboratively planning for the future.

In the following sub-chapters I will describe the main themes from the interviews in more detail and describe their relation to the theoretical framework.

5.2 How does creating an owner strategy benefit the business family?

5.2.1 Improved communication and interaction within the family

A viewpoint emphasized by all the respondents was the positive effect the creation of the owner strategy had on interaction and communication within the family. The owner strategy's role as a means for initiating communication within the business-owning family can be singled out as the most important benefit of the owner strategy. For many business-owning families this process was the first time when there was an open conversation about e.g. what ownership means and entails for each owner, how the different families and generations feel about continuity, what the needs and wants of each owner regarding ownership and the business are and how the current and next generation of owners view their future role in the family firm. Many owners had not thought about these things thoroughly before, and the owner strategy process hence initiated the individual thought process needed to form a shared owner's vision.

This communication gap that seems to exist within business-owning families regarding ownership issues has also been recognized in previous research (PwC Family Business Survey, 2016; Sharma et al., 2003). The creation of the owner strategy initiated and improved communication between generations and one can hence conclude that the owner strategy has a positive impact on reducing the communication gap reported in literature and functions as a way to initiate and improve communication with the business-owning family. Open communication within the business-owning family is moreover deemed in literature as essential for ensuring a successful succession process.

5.2.2 Increased knowledge and commitment to the family firm

It was a common viewpoint among all the respondents representing the older generation that it is important to increase the knowledge of the next generation of owners and involve them in the business somehow. Co-creating the owner strategy together with the next generation functioned as a way to do precisely that. The next generation of owners had an active role in the development of the owner strategy in all of the companies that were interviewed and their involvement was experienced to have solely positive effects both for the company and for both generations.

The viewpoint about the importance of involving the next generation was shared by the next generation of owners themselves. All the respondents representing the younger generation emphasized the importance of understanding what the company does, how it functions and what ownership and being an owner essentially means in order to be able to make impactful decisions.

From the conducted interviews it also emerged that the extent to which the next generation was involved and included in the family business before the creation of the owner strategy seemed to impact the next generation's role in the process to a large extent. The more they knew about the business and the more they had been involved before, the easier it was for the next generation to formulate their own wants and needs as owners and thus contribute to making decisions about the future direction of the company.

An increased understanding of the family firm consequently increased the feeling of commitment and involvement to the family firm among the next generation. The effect of family governance measures as a means to enhance family members' emotional investment in the family firm is also emphasized in literature (Suess-Reyes, 2016). Commitment and emotional investment to the family firm is especially important in regard to ensuring a successful succession process. The improved understanding of the family firm and the increased sense of involvement that the owner strategy provided for the next generation also contributed to undertaking a more confident role as next generation owner.

5.2.3 Improved the feeling of family unity

It was found that the majority of respondents felt that the process of creating an owner strategy, and especially in collaboration by different generations, improved the feeling of family unity. Especially the next generation of owners emphasized the social and psychological benefits of the owner strategy process, partly as they felt that the meetings for discussing the owner strategy provided them with the opportunity to get to know their cousins and fellow co-owners better.

The social and psychological benefits of creating an owner strategy are important also as the psychological characteristics of the family are found by scholars to have a significant impact on the firm. Family unity, for instance, has in academic research been recognized as a source of value that can be translated into competitive advantage (Poza et al. 2014). Astrachan and Haberschon (1999) are among scholars that have researched family unity and the nature of the interaction between family and business extensively and consequently have advocated for the importance of holding family meetings as a means to promote communication and the feeling of family unity. Some of the competitive advantages distinctive for family firms such as long-term planning horizons and patient capital have been found in literature to stem from family unity whilst other features, such as emotional involvement can be seen to be a direct consequence of the dynamic interaction between the three subsystems family, ownership and management.

Based on my findings and literature describing the link between the family's different psychological characteristics and the family firms one can conclude that owner strategy process improves relationships with the other co-owners in the family business and increases a sense of family unity, which consequently, as stated in the theoretical framework, has positive effects for the family business.

5.2.4 Prevented conflicts and misunderstandings in the family

The literature review of this paper examined the unique characteristics of family firms and family ownership. From the literature review it became evident that due to the unique characteristics of family ownership, family firms encounter many challenges distinctive to this type of organizational form. Some of the challenges that family firms often face include ensuring continuity of the business across generations, managing business and ownership with family dynamics, as well as ensuring unity within the family. My results from the data collection suggest that the creation of an owner strategy can function as a tool for taking a proactive approach to dealing with and preventing these named challenges often associated with family ownership.

In addition to the challenges distinctive to family ownership named above, many of the respondents strongly emphasized the difficulties in managing the many family members and owners of the business-owning family. It was found important to organize the family in a way so that the different owners are provided with enough information about the firm to be able to make decisions and function as active, responsible owners. There was a clear pattern in my results suggesting that ownership management becomes increasingly important as the ownership structure becomes more dispersed and the natural social ties between the co-owners become weaker. My findings from the study, thus, suggest a strong need to professionalize the business and the business family as the number of shareholders grows. The family firms in my study that had reached the Cousin Consortium stage of ownership development all mentioned that it had become clear for them that there was a need to organize the owners and the family in some way as ownership became dispersed.

One can thus conclude that, in accordance with literature, the need to implement an owner strategy and manage the family grows as the ownership evolves into a cousin consortium stage. The owner strategy can further function as a way to manage the owners and consequently prevent and manage conflicts and misunderstandings within the business-owning family. Some of the respondents also highlighted the importance of the owner strategy as a concrete piece of paper that all the owners have agreed on and consequently signed. Having the owner strategy on a piece of paper was explained to reduce misunderstandings and was viewed as a way to avoid potential conflicts.

5.3 How does creating an owner strategy benefit the family firm?

5.3.1 Defines and communicates a shared owners' vision

All the respondents listed defining and communicating the owners' wants and needs regarding both ownership and the company as a unified and shared vision (sve: ägarvilja, fin: omistajien tahtotila) as a most important task of the owner strategy. This was viewed as essential both for the business-owning family as well as for the company. Developing a shared owner's vision is recognized as best practice in family business literature (Jaffe & Braden, 2003) primarily as it enables coordinated strategic planning between the business and the family.

All the companies had given the development of the owner strategy at least a year. The respondents felt that it was necessary to give the process the time it needed in order for all the owners to have time to thoroughly assess, learn and think about the topics discussed and formulate their own views during the process. One can conclude that it is essential to give the owner strategy enough time so that the thought processes can evolve and develop. It is also important to remember that the owner strategy is not solely about creating a written document but about communicating and initiating discussion within the business-owning family.

5.3.2 Improved decision-making

In addition to improving communication within the family the respondents also felt that the owner strategy process improved the family's decision-making abilities. The respondents stated that the process of creating an owner strategy had had concrete positive effects in their family firms by making the decision-making faster and more coherent. This was mainly due to the unified owners' vision that was created. When ownership becomes dispersed the interaction within the owning family and with the business often becomes more complex, which can create problems within the family and consequently in the family business as it can hinder effective decision-making among the owners. The development of structures to facilitate discussion and plans to guide the decision-making is therefore essential. One can conclude that forming a unified shared vision in the owner strategy process will have a positive impact on the decision-making in the company as the owner strategy enables the decision-makers to follow clear guidelines set collaboratively by the owners

5.3.3 Initiated and facilitated the succession process

For many respondents the choice to create, and especially co-create, the owner strategy was strongly influenced by a need expressed by both the older and younger generation to involve the next generation of owners in the discussions about ownership and the future vision for the company. In all of the companies interviewed the majority of the next generation was in their twenties and had expressed and increasing interest in the company. Ownership shares of each company that participated in my study had already been transferred to the next generation to varying extents.

Some of the representatives from the current generation of owners expressed that the process of co-creating an owner strategy and increasing the involvement of the next generation was done specifically with the succession process in mind. They felt that it is essential for the next generation to be actively involved in making the decisions that shape the future of the company since they are the ones who will be majority shareholders in the future. These thoughts expressed by the family-business owners suggest a strong link between the creation of an owner strategy and succession planning.

Effective succession planning is described in literature (Poza, 2014) as developing, implementing and communicating a strong and well-thought out succession plan, well in time before the definite handover of the business from the incumbent generation to the next one. An effective succession plan should furthermore through communication between the current owners and the next generation ensure that the aims of the current and future owners of the business are aligned with the objectives of the firm. One can thus conclude that the creation of a well-thought out and clearly communicated owner strategy can be described as an important tool for the family to use in order to ensure this alignment of family and business objectives and, furthermore, as a means to initiate and prepare for the succession process. This is especially important as vast research on the topic of succession planning alarmingly states that family companies all too often avoid planning the succession process which often leads to grave consequences for the firm (Gersick et al., 1997).

The need to involve and increase the information and knowledge of the next generation was also viewed as an important preparatory requirement to fulfil in regards to the succession process in each company. The owner strategy was by many viewed as a tool to involve the next generation in the business and get their thoughts on the future direction of the company. My results thus further emphasize the importance of planning for the integration of the younger generation into the firm and involving the next generation in the family business in different ways. This can further be linked to the concept of psychological and legal ownership as integrating the views of multiple stakeholders and generations in the succession plan and consequently in the owner strategy is important also in regard to the concept of psychological ownership discussed by Sund et al (2015).

5.3.4 Concrete strategic implications and value for the management

Literature suggests that the owner strategy yields the greatest benefit for the family firm and the business owning family when the family's owner strategy is aligned with the business strategy (PwC Family Business Survey, 2016). It has also been found that the best circumstances for successful succession arise when the ownership and family strategy are aligned with the business strategy (Carlock & Ward, 2001).

All the respondents also emphasized the strategic impact that the owner strategy has had on their business. It is however worth noting that the owner strategy had had varying degrees of impact on the strategic decisions made in the family firms in my sample. Moreover, the value of having an owner strategy in place when difficult strategic decisions need to be made was emphasized as it functioned as a guideline for the owners and as something concrete that they could refer to.

In two of the family firms that were studied the owner strategy had had concrete strategic implications for the business and was strongly intertwined with the business strategy. The strategic implications of the owner strategy involved changes in the organizational structure by either selling parts of the business and/or acquiring new business ventures. In one of the firms the owner strategy had also affected the recruitment process of key employees and managers as family and business values were emphasized to a greater extent than before when recruiting.

However, even if only two companies recognized concrete strategic implications for the business due to the owner strategy, three of the family firms had at least made changes in their organizational structure as a result of the owner strategy. The respondents in the family firm who had not experienced concrete strategic implications from the creation of the owner strategy did nonetheless state that they believe that it will have affect in the future when they as cousins need to start working together.

It is also important to point out that the fact that the owner strategy was created in collaboration with the next generation of owners was an essential part of the strategic decisions that were made as they reflected the wants of the next generation and their vision for the future. The more the next generation knew about the family business, both in terms of being family business owners and in regard to the operative business, and the more they were involved in the family business, e.g. through working as board members, the better equipped they were to form their own vision as owners and formulate what they want and need from the business now and in the future.

One can thus conclude from my findings that including and involving the next generation of owners in the family firm in different ways and increasing their knowledge of what ownership entails and how the business functions is important to ensure a most valuable owner strategy process.

5.4 Comparison of results within and between companies

Throughout the interviews a clear pattern emerged suggesting that there are generational differences between the perceived benefits of the owner strategy. The results also varied to some extent between the companies. The main reason for the differences found can be linked to both the developmental phase that the family was in and the ownership stage of the family.

The general view on what an owner strategy entails was shared by the respondents, however, there was some variation when asked what the term owner strategy meant to each respondent and what its most important tasks are. For all of the respondents the owner strategy related in various ways to defining the guidelines for ownership for all the shareholders. Especially for the younger generation this meant focusing on creating a unified owners' vision and discussing what the family's ownership and the company will look like in the future and how the owners will own together. Some respondents, especially representatives from the current generation of owners, highlighted the owner strategy as a tool to communicate the owners' voice to the operative management and to the board of directors. The importance of clearly communicating the owner's vision was highlighted but also the value of conveying the owners' risk profile as well as strategic guidelines for the company were emphasized.

The answers to the questions about the owner strategies most important tasks were quite similar when comparing answers given by the respondents from the same family firm but varied somewhat when comparing results between the different companies. This variance would indicate that the perceived benefits of the owner strategy are connected to the unique situation of each family firm which can further be linked to the different developmental phases (presented in the Three-Dimensional Developmental Model) that the family and the firm goes through. The companies that had reached or were in the process of entering into the cousin consortium stage of ownership, and thus had a more dispersed ownership, structure all highlighted the role of the owner strategy in managing the many owners, whereas the family firm currently in a sibling partnership stage of ownership focused more on the concrete strategic implications that the development of a unified owner's vision had for the management and the firm's strategy.

This variance in answers can also be seen as being linked to the different roles that the respondents hold as it throughout the interviews became clear from that the distinctive roles that the respondents had in their family firm and in their family influenced their viewpoints. The difference in perception as a result of the different roles held by the respondents is also something that is emphasized strongly in family business literature and theorized in the Three-Circle Model of family businesses developed by Tagiuri and Davis (1982).

Furthermore, the family firms in my sample displayed differences concerning the degree of next-generation involvement in strategic decisions regarding the family firm and its future. It emerged from the interviews that two of the family firms had made impactful strategic decisions to sell parts of their family business based on the discussions held with the next generation while collaboratively working on their owner strategy. However, these types of strategic decisions were made only in the companies where the next generation held board seats and had been actively involved as board members and owners during a longer period of time.

In addition to finding similarities between the answers provided by the respondents belonging to the same family firm there was also similarities between the answers given by different generations. The next generation of owners emphasized the social aspect of creating an owner strategy and found it to be a beneficial experience partly because it helped them get to know their cousins better and initiated a discussion on important aspects regarding viewpoints on ownership that had not been held before. This was deemed important also in regard to the future as the next generation expressed that they found it important to know how the other co-owners think about different things as they might be working together in the future. The older generation on the other hand emphasized the importance of the strategic implications of the owner strategy to a larger extent than the next generation. This was however not a surprising finding since the strategic and operational knowledge about the business varied substantially between the generations.

One can conclude that different generations perceive the owner strategy to benefit the family and the family firm in somewhat different ways and that the variations are mainly due to the different developmental phases of ownership that the different generations represent.

5.5 Main findings

In this thesis, building on evidence from four cases and reviewed literature on the topic, my main findings are as follows. Firstly, this study suggests that the owner strategy benefits the business-owning family and the family firm in eight main ways. The benefits of creating an owner strategy can be divided into four categories for each of the primary research questions for this paper: (1) How does developing an owner strategy benefit the business-owning family? and (2) How does developing an owner strategy benefit the family firm? The findings suggest that the four main ways that developing an owner strategy benefits the family are (1) that it improves communication and interaction within the family, (2) it increases the knowledge and feeling of commitment among family members, (3) improves the feeling of family unity and (4) prevents conflicts and misunderstandings within the family. The four main ways that the owner strategy was found to benefit the family firm was through (1) unifying the owners' wants and needs into a single coherent owners' vision, (2) improving the decision-making, (3) initiating and facilitating the succession process and finally (4) through having concrete strategic implications in the family firm and being valuable for management.

These named eight benefits of the creation of an owner strategy that emerged from the data analysis can further be divided into three all-encompassing categories. One can thus conclude that, firstly, as most of the challenges distinctive to family firms are tied to the family and its relationship with the business the owner strategy can be described as a tool for preventing and managing the challenges of shared ownership in family firms. Some of the identified challenges connected to shared ownership is a lack of communication within the family, a need to professionalise the business and the business family as the number of shareholders grows, challenging family dynamics and planning for business continuity.

Second, the owner strategy benefits the business by enabling coordinated strategic planning between the owners, the board of directors and the management. Coordinated strategic planning between the owners and the business is an important part of developing a long term strategic plan in family firms. There are many recognized benefits from coordinated strategic planning of which the main one can be singled out from my results as the alignment of the wants and needs of the owners with the business strategy in order to ensure that the shareholders' value is maximized both from an economic and non-economic perspective.

Third, the owner's strategy is, very much intertwined with effective succession planning and can function as a way for the family to prepare and facilitate the succession process. Furthermore, as the owner strategy helps govern the relationship between the family and the business it also contributes to fostering responsible ownership.

In addition to these main findings relating to my research questions, this study provided some additional findings. Based on the data collected for this study it is strongly recommended to involve the next generation of owners in the creation of the owner strategy. The role of the next generation in the owner strategy creation process was significant in all the companies studied and even had concrete strategic implications for some of the firms. The development of the owner strategy in collaboration with the next generation can also have positive social and psychological implications for the family in terms of improved communication and cohesiveness within the business-owning family, which consequently can be beneficial for the firm (Zahra et al., 2008). The involvement of the next generation is also advocated for in literature as Zahra et al. (2008) found that a culture that values involvement of their family members in its decision-making benefits the family firm by having a positive impact on the strategic flexibility and agility of these firms. A high level of strategic flexibility is furthermore a major contributing factor to business survival and success in family firms.

My findings also showed that the next generation regarded the process of creating the owner strategy as a valuable learning experience, which furthermore helped in becoming more confident in the role as an owner and increased the interest and commitment to their family firm. As the creation of the owner strategy increased both the knowledge and feeling of commitment and involvement in regard to the family business among the next generation owners, one can conclude that the involvement of the next generation can facilitate the succession process. Since the owner strategy includes discussing and planning for the future it can be viewed as an important component of succession planning.

My study also found that the roles that the different generations had in the process of creating an owner strategy differed. The current generation of owners explained that the next generation of owners provided new and modern ideas both in regards to ownership as well as the business. The younger generation viewed their role in the process in a similar manner as the older generation had experienced it. The respondents representing the younger generation described the younger generation's role in the process as being responsible for "thinking outside the box", coming up with new ideas, to challenge and question existing ways to function as well to provide their views and wants regarding ownership and the direction of the company for the future. Both the respondents from the next generation as well as the respondents from the current generation of owners listed the ability of the older generation to hand over responsibility to the next generation as one of the most important tasks of the older generation in the process of creating an owner strategy. The role of the current generation in control was also to pass on knowledge and experience. One can conclude that the respondents representing the current generation of owners all experienced that the next generation of owners added value to the development of their owner strategy. The involvement of someone outside of the business-owning family to help as a facilitator for the owner strategy process was also deemed as valuable and beneficial as it structured the process and facilitated communication.

6 DISCUSSION

This chapter will discuss and reflect upon the findings from this study as well as present a summary of the conducted study and the main conclusions. Furthermore, the implications of this study are discussed alongside its limitations and, finally, suggestions for future research are provided.

6.1 Summary of the research

As it stands today, the owner strategy in family firms has not been extensively researched or described. The aim of this study was thus to broaden the understanding of why creating a clearly structured and communicated owner strategy is of importance in family firms by examining how the creation of an owner strategy is perceived by both the current and next generation of owners to benefit the business-owning family and the family firm. Since research on strategic planning in family firms rarely examines how strategic planning is practiced in the family firms nor what the role of owner-family interests and considerations are in this process (Nordqvist & Melin, 2010) this research took on to study these issues and to further provide an intergenerational owners' perspective on the importance of creating an owner strategy in family firms. The qualitative data collected for this study represents the views of eight family business owners from four Finnish multigenerational family companies. By taking an intergenerational owners' perspective the ambition was to provide valuable insights about the multifaceted process of strategic planning in family firms and consequently help form a better understanding about the various aspects and dimensions of the owner strategy in family firms and what benefit the process of collaboratively creating it by the current and next generation can yield to the business-owning family and the business.

6.2 Main conclusions and discussion

The results from the conducted study suggest eight main benefits of creating an owner strategy. The owner strategy was found to benefit the family by initiating and improving communication, by increasing the knowledge and commitment of the next generation, by improving the feeling of family unity, and by preventing conflicts and misunderstandings. The creation of an owner strategy was found to further benefit the family firm by defining a shared owner's vision, facilitating decision-making, initiating the succession process as well by having concrete strategic implications.

One can conclude from my findings that the primary benefit of the owner strategy, both to the business-owning family and the family firm, is that the owner strategy initiates and improves communication within the business-owning family and between generations. Communication can be singled out as the primary benefit of the owner strategy since it strongly affects many of the other named benefits in this study. Through the creation of the owner strategy business-owning families start discussing ownership and the different elements it entails and begin forming their individual owner's voice. For many business-owning families the owner strategy process was the first time that these topics had been discussed within the family. The improved communication and interaction between the owners was also viewed as having a positive impact on possibly preventing conflicts and misunderstandings in the future. Through the thought process required to form an owner strategy every individual owner needs to think about their own views and form a personal opinion about the topics under scrutiny. By further discussing with the other owners, the business-owning family can then start to form a shared owner's vision for the family and for the family firm. A unified owner's vision consequently provides valuable guidance for the board of directors and to the management and can have a strong impact on the strategic decisions of the company.

As explained in the literature review (chapter 2) and as became evident from my empirical results, the unique characteristics of family firms and family ownership make ownership management especially important in family-owned-firms. This is mainly due to the dynamic relationship between the different subsystems that interact in a family firm, namely; family, business and ownership. As these subsystems develop over time it becomes essential to have appropriate structures and plans in place to guide the development. My results suggest, in accordance with literature, that the creation of an owner strategy becomes increasingly important as ownership becomes more dispersed. However, based on my empirical findings and the many benefits found of creating an owner strategy, one can conclude that the creation of an owner strategy is beneficial already in family firms in a sibling partnership with a more concentrated ownership structure.

Moreover, the results from this study strongly argue for family firms to engage in a collaborative owner strategy creation process between the different generations. The involvement of the next generation in the owner strategy process proved beneficial for both the business-owning family as well as for the family firm for the companies in my sample. The involvement in the process provided the next generation of owners with an increased sense on involvement in the company and increased their knowledge about the family firm. They felt more committed to the company and more confident in their role as next generation owners after the process. It was interesting to notice that the next generation had had a concrete impact on many decisions taken as a result of the owner strategy process. The degree of next-generation involvement in the family business prior to the creation of the owner strategy, however, strongly influenced the ability of the next generation to form an owner's viewpoint and take part in the decision making. With the many benefits of collaboratively creating an owner strategy in mind, and in regard to the significant and valuable role that the next generation of owners played in the creation of an owner strategy, one can conclude that it is beneficial for the business-owning family and for the family firm to collaboratively create the owner strategy with the current and next-generation of owners.

Based on family business literature and on empirical findings from this study the owner strategy can be described as an essential part of strategic planning in family firms and furthermore as an ownership management tool that can function as the interface between the family and the firm and consequently enable parallel strategic planning between the family and the business, facilitate and often initiate the succession process as well as help manage the complexities of shared ownership. The findings from this study also highlight the fact that the family and business systems in a family firm function as interdependent entities where both subsystems affect each other. This interdependency entails that the benefits of creating an owner strategy should not be viewed as tied solely to either the business-owning family or the family firm but rather as interconnected.

6.3 Implications

This research provides an in-depth, holistic, contextually sensitive understanding of how the owner strategy benefits the business-owning family and the family firm, and thus furthers our understanding of the importance of creating an owner strategy in family firms. By answering the research question for this paper this thesis contributes to literature in many ways. Firstly, this study contributes to the family business literature by addressing both strategic planning in family firms as well as effective ownership management. The intergenerational perspective of this study provides further an original angle on the topic of owner strategy, by describing how a co-created owner strategy is perceived to benefit the family and the family firm in practice by both the next generation and the current generation of owners in a family firm. As the creation of an owner strategy can function as a way for the family to facilitate and prepare the succession process, and thus often is strongly intertwined with succession in family firms, this study also contributes to the succession planning literature.

Furthermore, the findings that emerged from the family firms studied in this thesis will offer insight into effective practices regarding the creation and implementation of an owner strategy. As the overall research and theory is limited in designing systems, processes and procedures for reliable operation of family businesses this paper additionally contributes to the family business literature by providing information on what processes and procedures in regard to the owner strategy are effective in family businesses from an owner's perspective.

From a practical point of view the empirical findings from this study can provide both practitioners and business-owning families alike with an increased understanding of the beneficial impact that the creation of an owner strategy can have on both the family firm and on the business-owning family. This study offers families many arguments in convincing them to begin an owner strategy process in their own family firms and furthermore argues for involving the next generation of owners in the process.

6.4 Limitations

The study had some limitations. Firstly, as family businesses are as individualistic and unique as the families that control them the methods that work and have proven to be successful in one family might not be transferable as such to another (Dana & Smyrnios, 2010). This study can, thus, be limited in terms of the generalizability of the findings. Secondly, due to the owner strategies confidential content this study relies solely on the information provided by the respondents. More data in form of observations of the owner strategy process or analysis of the written owner strategies could strengthen the findings. Third, the firms studied in this sample are middle sized and large family firms. The benefits of creating an owner strategy in small companies, that have reached the same developmental stages can thus differ.

Despite its limitations, this study highlights the importance of developing and implementing an owner strategy in family firms and underscores the role of the next generation of owners in the owner strategy development process

6.5 Suggestions for future research

This study has focused on how the current and next generation of owners perceive the owner strategy to benefit the business-owning family and the family firm. With regard to the owner strategy in family businesses, future research could elaborate on how the perceived benefits, in particular how the owner strategy's role in preparing and facilitating the succession process effects the succession in family firms. A longitudinal in-depth case study focused on the owner strategy's effect on succession would therefore be recommended.

Furthermore, information on the prevalence of owner strategies in family firms is inadequate, especially on owner strategies that are collaboratively created by the current and next generation of owners. It would hence be useful for future researchers to study to what extent family firms globally as well as nationally create owner strategies and if the next generation is included in the creation process.

As previously mentioned, the division of the strategy process in family firms into two processes, consisting of both the creation of an owner strategy and a business strategy is still a relatively new approach in traditional management theory. The findings from this study support the notion of including the owner strategy as an essential part of strategic planning in family firms and argue for further exploration of the multifaceted strategy process in family firms.

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APPENDIX 1. INTERVIEW GUIDE

QUESTIONS
BACKGROUND
What is your role in your family company?
What is your age and your generation of family ownership?
Can you describe the ownership structure in your family firm? (Both in regard to shareholding and how its divided across generations)
OWNER STRATEGY IN FAMILY FIRMS
What does the term “owner strategy” mean to you?
What is included in your owner strategy?
What are the most important tasks of an owner strategy?
What did you personally gain from creating an owner strategy?
Did the business-owning family benefit from the creation of an owner strategy? If yes, how?
Did the family firm benefit from the creation of an owner strategy? If yes, how?
THE OWNER STRATEGY CREATION PROCESS
Could you describe the owner strategy development process?
Who were part of creating the owner strategy?
What were and/or should the different roles of the people involved be? (The next generation, the senior generation, and an outside third-party
Who took the initiative to co-create the owner strategy?
Why did you choose to develop the owner strategy in collaboration with both the next generation and current generation of owners?
Where there some disagreements? If yes, how did you solve them?
Did the co-creation process add value to the business-owning family and/or the family firm? If yes, how?
How was the owner strategy implemented?

APPENDIX 2. CITATIONS IN ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

Citations from company 1:

Se selkeytti ja toi esille ajattelueroja tämän sukupolven ja seuraavan sukupolven välillä, kehityssuuntia, mihin halutaan mennä, minne ei, mitkä ovat niitä konkreettisia osviittoja minne halutaan mennä. Selkeytti kaikkien ajatuksia nykytilasta, siitä mitä me tehdään sekä minne ollaan menossa. [R1, C1]

Varenda beslut som måste fattas i styrelsearbetet har blivit mycket lättare att ta i och med att grund jobbet gällande vår ägarvilja är gjort. Alla beslut som jag som en ägare måste fatta är lättare för man kan spegla det mot något konkret, i detta fall vår gemensamma ägarstrategi som finns på papper och som man då alltid kan hänvisa till. [R2, C1]

Det viktigaste är att den innehåller en gemensam vision för framtiden för företagets del. I vårt fall har det hänt så mycket i företaget under de senaste åren och besluten har fattats snabbt, då har det varit ytterst viktigt att ha en ägarstrategi som vi har kunnat följa. [R2, C1]

Tämä prosessi oli äärimmäisen tärkeä myös operatiiviselle johdolle. Heistä näki selvästi että kun omistajastrategia ja omistajien tahtotila oli esitetty operatiiviselle johdolle heille selkeni moni asia. Nyt he tietävät, että näin mennään, ja tämän (omistajastrategian) mukaan se tarkoittaa että me tehdään näin ja näin. [R1, C1]

Keskustelu ja tiedon lisääminen yrityksestä ja omistamisesta on tärkeätä niin että nuoret voivat ylipäätänsä tehdä sen päätöksen jos he haluavat olla mukana ja miten. [R1, C1]

He (nuorempi sukupolvi) ottivat enemmän vastuuta. Esittivät enemmän sitoutumista yrityksen asioihin kuin ikinä ennen. Prosessi varmasti motivoi kaikkia nuoria, sillä uskon että he kokivat että heidän tahtotilallaan on vaikutusta ja heidän näkemyksillään on merkitystä. Ja että yritystä johdetaan heidän tahtotilojen myötä. Selkeytti kaikkien ajatuksia nykytilasta, siitä mitä me tehdään sekä minne ollaan menossa. [R1, C1]

Det var viktigt för den äldre generationen att höra vad vi vill så att företaget kan formas enligt det. Om den yngre generationen inte hade varit med och göra ägarstrategin skulle den inte överhuvudtaget reflektera oss. [R2, C1]

Diskussionerna är väsentliga för att kunna bilda sin egna ägarvilja men det krävs också mycket personligt tankearbete och tid. [R2, C1]

Citations from company 2

Mietimme näitä asioita ensin sisarusfoorumissa jossa huomasimme ettei ollut yhtä selvää näkemystä mitä me haluamme olla jatkossa ja mitä kukin ajattelee omistamisesta ja mitä lapset ajattelee. Oli hämyinen kuva enkä usko että kukaan meistä oli mitenkään syvällisesti ennen pohtinutkaan näitä asioita ja miettinyt mitä omistaminen tarkoittaa. He (Pääomistajat) kokivat etteivät he voineet olla mukana vetävänä voimana tässä prosessia sillä he olivat ne jotka olivat luoneet tämän yrityksen mutta he eivät voi määrittää sitä mitä tapahtuu tulevaisuudessa vaan sen pitää tulla niistä nuorista jotka ovat se seuraava sukupolvi. He kokivat että he eivät voi päättää heidän puolestaan että haluavatko he olla liiketoiminnassamme mukana ja haluavatko he omistaa. Ymmärrettiin että näitä asioita pitää kysyä heiltä. [R3,C2]

Se toimii konkreettisena työkaluna ja ohjekirjana siitä miten me asioista perheenä ajatellaan. Omistajastrategia ohjaa myös meidän toimintaa, ei vain omistajuutta. Esimerkiksi jos lähdemme johonkin tiettyyn liiketoimintaan mukaan sen pitää olla linjassa sen kanssa mitä omistajat ajattelevat. Omistajastrategia ja omistajien tahtotila pitää siksi kommunikoida selvästi hallitukselle ja heille jotka tekevät liiketoimintaan vaikuttavia päätöksiä. [R3, C2]

Se on lisännyt sitoutumista, se että on päässyt tekemään niin siitä se kiinnostus on tullut kun on oikeasti joutunut miettimään niitä asioita. Ja sit kun siitä on saanut tehdä oman näköisen. [R4, C2]

Olisi ollut vaikeata antaa mitään mielipidettä ja näkemystä jos ei olisi ollut mukana. Myös siitä että mitkä ne omistaja arvot on jos ei eded tiedä mitä meidän yritys tekee. Siinä joutui miettimään tosi syvällisesti näitä asioita. Jollain tavalla pitää tuntea yritys. Ja varmasti vaikea mennä mitenkään muuten kuin hallitustyöskentelyn tai operatiivisen toiminnan kautta mukaan. [R4, C2]

Vuorovaikutus ja kommunikointi on parantunut ja ymmärsimme että meidän täytyy oppia tuntemaan toisemme, emme vain siksi että olemme sukulaisia, vaan siksi että olet serkkuni ja yksi pääomistajista yhtiössämme niin että pystymme tekemään päätöksiä ja välttymään konflikteilta. Nämä asiat eivät olleet itsestään selviä meille ennen tätä prosessia. [R3, C2]

Jokainen ymmärtää asiat vähän eri tavalla ja jollekin asiat on uudempia kuin toiselle niin on erityisen tärkeätä käydä läpi, että mitä eri asiat josta puhutaan tarkoittaa ja mitä ne tarkoittaa omalla kohdalla. Vaikka kun puhutaan arvoista, niin ymmärrämmekö ne samalla tavalla? Arvo-kysymys oli juuri meillä se vaikein juuri sen takia että meillä oli hyvin vaikea saada kaikki ymmärtämään nämä valitsemamme arvot samalla tavalla. Kun synty erimielisyyksiä niin yritettiin sitten vain kommunikoida vielä enemmän ja vielä selvemmin. [R3, C2]

Citations from company 3:

Ägarstrategi innebär det att man samstämmer risktagning och ambitioner, så att alla är överens. Att ha rätt riskprofil är väldigt viktigt i företag. En bra ägarstrategi ger riktlinjer för företagets risktagning och ska fungera som guide för de operativa besluten t.ex. gällande vilka projekt som väljs. [R 6, C3]

Målet med att göra vår ägarstrategi är inte nödvändigtvis att få allt på papper utan att tala om dessa ämnen och öppna diskussionen. [R5, C3]

Man kom närmare sina kusiner och man började förstå hur de tänker. Vi har ju inte vuxit upp i samma familj med kusinerna så man vet inte riktigt hur de tänker om saker och ting. Då man vet hur de andra tänker är det lättare att i framtiden förstå hur man ska jobba ihop. Jag anser därmed att den här processen är ganska förebyggande med tanke på framtiden. [R6, C3]

Ägarstrategin implementeras genom att involvera och inkludera alla ägare. Det viktigaste är att alla får vara med. Om du är inblandad och delaktig och om du får påverka så känns det bra. Du kanske inte ännu kan fatta beslut men det är inte det viktigaste. Hoppeligen så sen när vi är gamla och inte operativt med så inkluderar de även oss. [R5, C3]

Processen med vår ägarstrategi och våra möten där de unga involveras ger insikt och förståelse för de unga och fungerar som en slags utbildning. Om man inte är involverad blir det jättejobbigt. Vi har därmed redan länge haft ett system där generationen före mig är med och likaså den kommande generationen. Den nästa generationen, de som inte ännu fyllt trettio, har redan i 10 år varit med i något som ger engagemang i företaget. Vi har en årsklocka som vi följer, ett system där vi var tredje månad vid varje kvartal har någon träff som involverar den yngre generationen t.ex. i form av genomgång av bokslutet, skolning, sommarträff. Också informella träffar för att lära känna varandra är viktiga. [R5, C3]

Det är jättejobbigt om den generation som bär ansvaret inte initierar förändring. Då blir det jättejobbigt. Den äldre generationens jobb är därför enligt mig att ta initiativ till ett projekt som ägarstrategi och ge utrymme för det. Man ska vara öppen och stöda den yngre generationen. [R5, C3]

Citations from company 4:

Idealt skulle vara att vi kunde ge ett dokument till styrelsen och genom läsa det skulle de få en bra uppfattning om hur dom ska styra bolaget. Nog har vi börjat jobba på det men inte är vi där ännu. Det finns så mycket tyst information som borde konkretiseras. Ägarstrategi är därmed det där som kan ges vidare som innefattar hur vi vill att vårt familjeföretag ska ledas så styrelsen vet vad doms uppgift är. [R8, C4]

Det viktigaste då man talar om ägarstrategi är det att vem vill vara ägare och på vilket sätt. Det är det första. Sen när man har kommit så långt så måste man strukturera det så att de som inte vill vara me har ett rättvist sätt att hoppa ur. Sen så klart så att de som vill bli kvar har en proportionellt sett rättvis väg att påverka bolaget. Åtminstone i någon skede i frågan om att via någon organ. Är det sen styrelsen, eller ägarråd eller hur det går men så att man kan påverka. [R7, C4]

Man börjar smått och de tar en ganska lång tid att först ens fundera vad man vill. Det är ju inte ens många som kan svara på det. Speciellt i en situation då man har en ganska lång tradition ren av att det är familjeägt så tycker ju de flesta att så ska de vara, bara automatiskt utan att fundera på det. De e ju de som e de långa i den här processen, att få människorna att kommitta sig till besluten som görs o få människor att göra beslut. [R7, C4]

Det största fördelen är enligt mig att man känner att man är en del av de (familjeföretaget). Int e de så många år sen som jag beskrev de som att de är Dom som gör någo medan jag nuförtiden beskriver det som att Vi gör någo. Nu känner jag att jag är en del av det fast jag inte på det sätter har någon aktiv roll operativt. [R8, C4]

Det goda är att alla lär och känna varandra bättre då de hamnar jobba ihop, främst den femte generationen för vi fjärde har varit så nära och vi känner varandra bra. Men från den femte framåt så sprids det ganska radikalt och nu sen följande steg gör att det är ett jobb redan att hålla ägarna medvetna om vem de andra är. Det är viktigt att de träffas och diskuterar och sist kommer till en slutsats som alla kan vara nöjda med. [R7, C4]

Det kommer att fortsätta och det kommer att leva. Vi har nu huvudlinjerna och vi har fått till stånd en ägarhandbok där de mesta sakerna är överenskomna. Men det är klart att den kommer att leva hela tiden. [R7, C4]