Article Critique

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Abstract

This paper aims to critique Dieleman and Koning's research on articulating values through identity work and advancing family business ethics research. This article critique is designed to give the reader a clearer understanding of ethical leadership theory, arguments, bias, and reasoning fallacies in the study that examined identity work, and religion, by examining a single case study of a Malaysian business. The aim is to generalize the author's insights from one family business case into exploratory frameworks that can inform and re-direct family business research. The case study clearly shows that the power of projection and articulating of internal values by a leader, which is then linked to the organization, can support a strong connection between the personal spiritual beliefs of the leader and the organizational culture. The paper also examines the weaknesses and provides critical insight into how the research could have dived deeper to explore the research question, mainly where leadership is more contested and where personal and organizational identities are distinct.

Keywords: family business, ethics, business ethics, religion and family business, family values and business, Kotter's eight-step model for change

Article Critique

Scripture gives Christian's advice on ethical leadership. First, it reasons that we should not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, we present our requests to God with thanksgiving. By doing so, the peace of God will transcend our understanding and guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Furthermore, whatever is proper, noble, and pure, scripture advises us to think about such things (*New International Version*, 2011, Philippians 4:6-8). This paper aims to critique Dieleman and Koning's (2020) research on articulating values through identity work and advancing family business ethics research.

The single case study design allowed the authors to explore an organizational change to generalize insights from one family business case into an exploratory framework that can inform and re-direct family business ethics research (Dieleman & Koning 2020). Organizational change is intriguing because this author is well versed in this discipline as it is influenced by Kotter's (2012) eight-step design and this author's ownership of a family business. This study argues that family leader narratives are essential ethical identity carriers for organizations. The research explores how these values are authored through a family business leader (Dieleman & Koning 2020).

Study Purpose

The area of study in identity work pertinent to business ethics is religion. The authors argue that religious values can represent convictions and influence decision-making (Dieleman & Koning 2020). The scant research on religion in the family business and how it can connect a leader's values and organizational culture was the reason for the undertaking of the study. The authors argue that identity work is now a leading perspective in organizational studies, but it has

not yet been applied to family business ethics research; thereby, it is the purpose of this study (Dieleman & Koning 2020).

The researchers knew that religion could be a source of moral norms affecting practical experience and ethical authority, but the research is unclear if religious values in a family business can shape executive and strategic leadership (Lam and Hung 2005; as cited in Dieleman & Koning 2020). Further, the authors postulate that religion, leadership, and business ethics feed into each other in a family business is unexplored terrain (Dieleman & Koning 2020). One of the few studies available indicates that family influence plays a role in fostering religious and spiritual expression in business, which warranted further research (Paterson et al. 2013; as cited in Dieleman & Koning 2020).

Research Methods

The research design was a single case study of a Malaysian business that attempts to explore organizational change (Dieleman & Koning 2020). The aim is to generalize the author's insights from one family business case into exploratory frameworks that can inform and re-direct family business research. The authors used 89 speeches and 199 media excerpts by Francis Yeoh from 1993 to 2016 (Dieleman & Koning 2020). They used these historical narratives to investigate how business leaders "promote conceptions of identity likely to resonate with audiences" (Dieleman & Koning 2020, p 678).

The data analysis followed Bryman's (2008; as cited in Dieleman & Koning 2020) for qualitative research: section, reduction, visualization, explanation, and theoretical generalization. This was carried out in four stages. Stage one was exploratory; stage two highlighted themes and searched for the keywords of 'faith' and 'God' for religion and 'ethnic,' 'family' and 'responsibility' in the Yeoh narratives (Dieleman & Koning 2020). Stage three delved deeper

into the content and context of the data using a narrative lens, whereas stage four moved to an explanatory process (Dieleman & Koning 2020). Finally, after the four stages were complete, labeling was conducted to develop a theoretical contribution of different identity word modalities (Dieleman & Koning 2020).

Findings

This study aligns with the theoretical contributions to family business ethics literature, even though it adopted identity work theories as a novel approach demonstrating that family leaders strategically tap into multiple layers of identity to articulate family business ethics (Dieleman & Koning 2020). Enter the single case study, which is the impact of Francis Yeoh as a business leader and company owner in the 1970s and 1980s, that was the successor of a family business in Malaysia that started in the 1950s. The case study used was to examine how he incorporated ethnic Chinese family business values, including hard work, the importance of education, trust in business, joint decision making, and passing on the family wealth (Dieleman, & Koning 2020). As a result, the line between personal faith and the organization's identity blurred, and Yeoh's faith became an integral part of the family business identity (Dieleman & Koning 2020). The authors argue ethnic Chinese values became a "moral compass" that peaked in the early-2000s and that religious identity increased as biblical lessons were referenced and used to justify the business as an ethical company (Dieleman & Koning 2020).

Moreover, the study found that business ethics, as articulated by business leaders, are multi-layered. It stems from different courses, straddling boundaries between personal, family, and corporate identity (Dieleman & Koning 2020). Also, the research found that with these religious values firmly in place in the Yeoh business, it could justify the ethical principles the company was trying to instill. The case study clearly shows that the power of projection and

articulating of internal values by a leader, which is then linked to the organization, can support a strong connection between the personal spiritual beliefs of the leader and the organizational culture (Dieleman & Koning 2020).

Power of projection and strong connections align with the Kotter (2012) process where organizational development is so important. Kotter argues that change is a slow process, and this author asserts that a family business can be a perfect incubator to institute positive change in an organization. Kotter (2012) argues that successful transformations are based on one fundamental insight: significant change will not happen quickly. Change can stall for various reasons such as inwardly focused cultures, paralyzing bureaucracy, parochial politics, low level of trust, lack of teamwork, arrogant attitudes, a lack of leadership, and fear of the unknown (Kotter, 2012). Partnering with the findings from Dieleman and Koning (2020) and the importance of the religious values in Astrachan et al. (2020) it will show that family values can play a role in advancing the ethical foundation of family businesses because a commitment by the organization can be served to keep change moving forward. Following Dieleman and Koning's (2020) and Kotter's (2012) findings, it will allow the organization to grow and evolve and continue to progress.

Original Insight/Criticism and Implication

The study shows that the researcher's work has great potential for advancing family business ethics research. The study provides a basis for future work, but that is also the critique of this article. This author has been researching the family business literature since he started the Doctor of Strategic Leadership program. Every article states the same concern: the literature is lacking in family business research, and the field is a large set of interrelated subfields that are

bound together with the recognition that families can have a unique influence on a wide variety of business outcomes (Neubaum, 2018, p. 259).

The implications of this study are broad. First, the researchers find that business leaders "need not be imprisoned by historically embedded beliefs" and instead tap into multiple sources of family business values and ethics that can be put into place when the circumstances call for it (Dieleman & Koning, 2020, p. 685). The moral underpinnings of a family business are based on solid values. Still, the study shows that these are flexible and not just connect the family business to the past but also encourage it to aspire to a better future (Dieleman & Koning 2020). This is particularly relevant when strong Christian values come into play in the business. Such beliefs are often rooted in the founder's religious convictions and are then conveyed through generations, permeating the business and shaping organizational culture, values, and individual behavior (Astrachan et al., 2020).

Moreover, another critique is that the authors recognize that there are many cases where leadership is more contested and where personal and organizational identities are distinct (Dieleman & Koning 2020). This author's position is that this statement is the exacting reason why this study should have dove deeper. This author understands it should not be a researcher's position to answer broad questions in their original research. Still, they should not leave important questions unanswered related to their research questions. The researchers suggest that scholars could explore the relationship between family business leadership and the relegation of values into shared values in more depth (Dieleman & Koning 2020). Further empirical work capturing different circumstances and outcomes can lead to a more comprehensive new theory on the unique aspects of identity work in family businesses which could advance the

understanding of family values systems and the critical interplay between the stakeholders

(Dieleman & Koning 2020).

      Lastly, there is significant room for future research. For example, studies using

experimental designs, which are particularly useful to control extraneous variables that are often

the case in family businesses, could be a great way to further the research regarding ethical

leadership (Neubaum, 2018). Further, since this author's research interest is in transgenerational

succession, additional work emphasizing the transmission of the values in business families is

particularly interesting, especially when the family is seen as a "perpetrator of religious values

across successive generations" (Astrachan et al. 2020, p. 639).

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